

July 2018

Dear Brethren:

A very warm greeting to all of you brethren around the world whom God has called during this most troubled time.

Can you count it all joy when you fall into various trials? Those of us in God's church understand that we are called by God (2 Peter 1:10). But we did not just "volunteer" for suffering when God called us, so we need to understand the role that suffering is meant to play in the lives of those who are called.

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:19–25, *New King James Version*).

The thought that we are called to suffer does not sit well with some. It upsets us that sometimes we have to suffer, even for the good things we do, because others are sinning against us! Christ suffered and the Scripture says that we are to follow His example:

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Hebrews 5:7–9, *King James Version* throughout unless otherwise mentioned).

Remember that Jesus had no sins of His own for which He had to suffer. He only suffered for others' sins. But He learned firsthand how badly sin affects us, and He suffered from the sins of others just as we do today. Many might assume that an all-knowing God

would not need to live in the flesh to experience personally the consequences of sin. But the Scripture says that Jesus learned throughout His life. Christ experienced firsthand the consequences of others' sin—and at His life's end, He took upon Himself all of mankind's sins. Though He committed no sin, He suffered for all sins. Unlike Christ, we have sinned. But like Christ, we must experience firsthand that sin is awful, and that the need for obedience to God is everything. We must come to hate sin so much that we will never sin again—forever.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren (James 1:13–16).

We are "wired" to be tempted. But Christ had the same problems that we have.

Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Hebrews 2:17–18).

Christ suffered the pulls of human nature as we do: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Christ had to overcome (resist) sin exactly the same way that we do! Having successfully done so, He now can be a successful High Priest—an intercessor with God the Father. He knows not only how bad sin is, but also how hard it is not to sin in this human flesh! He can turn to God the Father with our desperate pleas for help, because as the saying goes, "He has been there and done that." He can aid us because of His very intense and personal experience! So we need to remember Jesus Christ's experience when we pray. As our High Priest, He need not be reminded of how hard overcoming is. We can use His power and rely on His intercession so that we can overcome as He did. He overcame, and we can too (Revelation 3:21).

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name

of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:12–19).

As James wrote: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations" (James 1:2).

The Apostles Peter and James did not shy away from suffering. They wrote that in response to suffering and temptation, we should "rejoice" and count it all "joy" when we are required to suffer for righteousness (Matthew 5:10–12; 1 Peter 3:14). They welcomed the opportunity and understood that it would benefit them as Christians (1 Peter 4:16).

Of equal importance, we find in Paul's words the first explanation of a second reason for our suffering. Scripture clearly presents the analogy of burning up the worthless parts of our character:

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire (1 Corinthians 3:11–15).

The hay and stubble will burn. Gold, silver and precious stones will not. So if, in spite of our genuine Christian commitment, we are in some areas building the wrong kind of character (the burnable kind), we will suffer the loss in that "Day" of which Paul wrote. We will still be saved, yet so as by fire! It will not "feel good," but this suffering will yield holy, righteous character.

Surely, you might think, God could have found a way to build holy and righteous character in us without all these sufferings. But Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong repeatedly

said that the one thing God does not do is instantly create righteous and godly character. God saw this firsthand when He watched Lucifer rebel and become Satan. With the creation of human beings, God made a different plan in which those He creates must choose between God's way and Satan's way. Of course, He wants us to choose life, and He tells us so (Deuteronomy 30:19).

To help us cement into our character the lessons of sin versus righteousness, He allows us to experience all of the sufferings that sin creates. We are chastened by the consequences of our sins, by the consequences of others' sins, and also by God directly if necessary.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (Hebrews 12:9–11).

God knows that this suffering is painful to us. But if we are trained by this cooperative creation, it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. With this "big picture" in mind, Paul calls all of this a "light affliction" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Of course, it is often hard to have that perspective when we are in the midst of suffering!

God has clearly explained what He is trying to accomplish through our suffering. He is using it to teach us that we need to follow His plan of salvation and build His holy and righteous character! He hopes that our suffering from sin will cause us to stop doing it! We are His children:

And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation [including humankind] was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within

ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:17–23, *New King James Version*).

Can we thus see God's purpose for our suffering? Suffering from our sins, and the sins of others, should teach us the painful consequences of sin and motivate us to quit sinning (1 Peter 4:1).

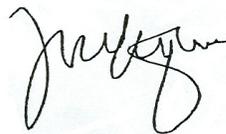
Christians are indeed called to suffer (1 Peter 2:21). But we must remember that God is called "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3).

How can we reconcile that God is merciful, yet allows the suffering, corrections and trials we have discussed? The Scripture explains:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God earnestly desires to save us, not destroy us! "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:56). He is perfectly aware when we are suffering. And He knows that suffering—first Christ's and now ours—is absolutely necessary for salvation! When trials come, we can be comforted that God is using those trials to prepare us for an eternal place in His Family. With that understanding, we should be able to "count it all joy" and thank God for all His blessings—even for the blessing of suffering.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mario Roque', written in a cursive style.

Mario Roque