Bearing His reproach

by Robert Filos

It takes being put in a hard situation for one to step out in faith and trust God. I can recall being placed alone in a jail cell with nothing but my undershorts for three days after one particular rescue. I had no other clothes, no mattress, no blanket, no Bible, and no contact with anyone during this whole time. That is, except with God. And I want to tell you I talked to Him a lot, more than I ever had before. I am sure there are many others who could relate similar stories of how they grew closer to God through what seemed like the worst circumstances. I would never trade those three days for anything.

Robert Filos being carried away from abortion mill door.

But despite that experience of mine and the similar experiences of many others involved in the ministry of "rescue," it seems that many in the pro-life movement and in the church have a limited understanding of the blessings and benefits which we receive as we suffer trials and persecutions for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, there are some within the church who feel that suffering, for Christians, is contrary to God's plans for His people. This clearly is not the case.

2 Tim. 3:12 states, "In fact everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Phil. 1:29 reads, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him." Finally, 1 Peter 1:12 states, "Dear friends, do not be surprised by the painful trial you are now suffering, as though something strange were happening to you."

Until we understand and accept the teaching that sufferings will come our way we will not be prepared for the struggles and blessings which persecution brings. It is extremely important that we realize that our trials for Christ's sake bring us great joy even amidst our adversity.

One of the benefits we receive through suffering is the verification of our faith. Peter writes in his first Epistle, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These had to come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine."

Our willingness to suffer persecution for our unborn neighbors is proof that we truly do believe and trust in God. Without the testing of our faith we can not know that our faith is genuine. But when our faith is tested and we pass the test, it brings us great joy. There is nothing more valuable than this life-giving faith.

Peter also mentions that these trials must come. This sentiment is repeated again in Romans 8:17ff, "Now if we are children, then we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory." There seems to be a direct correlation between our sufferings with Christ and our future glorification with Him. These sufferings are a necessary part of God's plan of salvation and glorification for us, therefore all the more reason for our rejoicing.

I have observed a second blessing in God's word: that persecutions and sufferings produce godly character. James writes, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you suffer trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1:2-4,cf also Romans 5:3ff). Here again we find the necessity of our suffering for the gospel. "Perseverance" James says, "must finish its work" lest we remain immature or not fully developed in our Christian faith. We have all probably heard someone describe the Christian faith as a growing process. Perseverance through trials is a part of that growing process that produces godly character which is as important to the growth of our faith as puberty is in growing toward physical maturity.

Thirdly, our sufferings are cause for rejoicing, for they bring us to a closer relationship with Christ. There is a mystical bond which develops between Him and us when we begin to share in the sufferings of Christ.

Here we find one of the most amazing things about suffering as a Christian. Almost every verse we read about suffering as a Christian talks about rejoicing. This would seem to be a perfect contradiction. Suffering is pain. Suffering hurts.

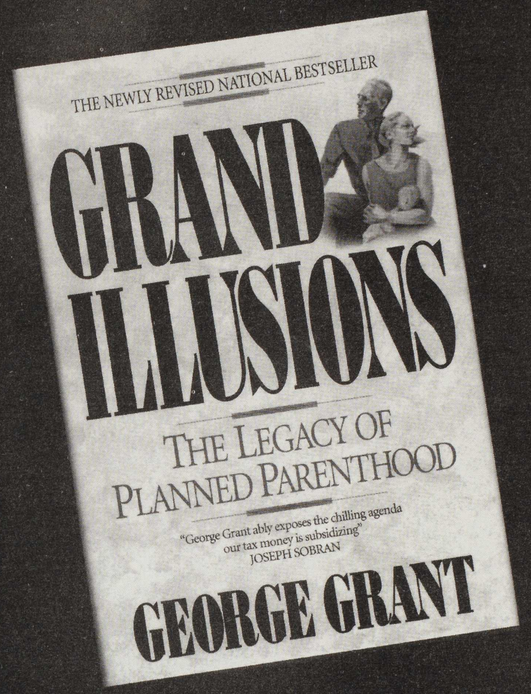
However, when we persevere in the face of persecution and suffering, our faith is made complete and proved genuine, and when this occurs we are able to rejoice. In fact, we are unable to do anything else but rejoice, and praise God. The more we step out in faith and trust God, the closer our relationship with Him becomes.

Finally we have the assurance of a great reward in heaven.

Matthew 5:11-12 states, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven." This goes along with all of the other things we have found out about suffering, and adds to them. Not only do we receive benefits while we live here in the world, but we have great rewards waiting for us in Heaven, specifically because we have suffered persecution on behalf of Christ. What a great and wonderful God we have who is storing up in Heaven rewards for us for only doing what is our reasonable duty.

There is so much that could be written on this subject but for now I want to encourage you with what I and many others have found by following Christ to the abortion mill doors and then into jail. Namely, that true blessings come through our suffering for Christ. The building and ultimate completion of our faith, the proof and knowledge that our faith is genuine, and also the assurance of great reward in Heaven, bring a peace that comes from God which allows us to rejoice in all circumstances (Philippians 4:4-7).

If we stand firm and do not shrink back from the possibility of suffering, we will receive these blessings and come to a greater knowledge of God through Christ Jesus. ■



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