

FOR LOVE OF GOD



it may be shortened; but in the midst of suffering he rises above his distress with a holy joy and a psalm of praise.

How is this possible?

The apostle says that though you give your body to be burned and have not love, your suffering would be in vain.

Only the glowing warmth of love can fuse intense suffering and exalted joy into a song of praise unto God.

The question then is this: Do you suffer *for love of God*? Suffer so, that you are drawn nearer to Him? Becoming even more His, and He yours? Are you, as it were, tearing your way through the thorns and thistles of life toward the gate of the Kingdom to meet Him, your God?

Such love does not originate within us.

“Love is of God.” It is shed forth into our hearts only through the Holy Spirit whom He has sent.

IV

A Strength of the Spirit

PATIENCE is not submissiveness; nor is it resignation to fate; nor is it stoical apathy.

What then is the nature of patience? What is the secret of patience in the new life of a Christian?

We would describe it thus: Patience is a strength of spirit, engendered within the heart of God's children by the Holy Spirit, which enables them to remain standing, unshaken and undaunted, in spite of all the forces that would tear them from the Kingdom of God.

It is *strength*; it is *endurance*.

The child of God has a new life, a life not of this world, a life supernaturally implanted within him by a mighty act of God. And he lives that new life, though he himself does not understand it, by the strength of the Holy Spirit who, having instilled it, also sustains and preserves it.

Because this new life within the Christian is of God, it is opposed to Satan, sin, and the world. Therefore Satan cannot and does not let it grow unhindered. In self-defense and in hatred against God he attacks God's children, striving to crush that new life lest it crush and undermine his power. That is why he attacks the freeborn of the Lord so zealously, now with cunning and slyness, often openly, and always without quarter. Sometimes he uses wily temptation as a weapon. Sometimes he works through the secret deep-seated sins of character. Sometimes he throws our once-forgiven sins into our faces. At times he pours over us a veritable flood of adversity and spiritual agony.

A STRENGTH OF THE SPIRIT



Thus the life of a Christian becomes a struggle, a constant struggle to remain standing against the onslaughts of Satan.

And the strength which enables a child of God to come through the terrible fray unharmed, to stand fast without giving way an inch, is called *patience*, or *endurance*.

The Greek word which the apostle uses literally means: *to remain in the position in which one is placed*. That is, to stay at one's post, to stand fast.

Again and again the apostles used the contest of the arena to illustrate the Christian's life in the world. These contests, especially the Olympic games, were regarded as the noblest test of a man's honor and strength. To be crowned a victor in the Olympic games was the highest distinction a Greek could win. And the whole populace praised and extolled the hero, with highest enthusiasm.

Thus it is no wonder that Paul frequently speaks of the games. "Brethren, I count not myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And again, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but also unto all them that have loved his appearing."

To the Corinthians he writes, "Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run as not uncertainly; so fight I as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and bring it to bondage. . . ."

THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS



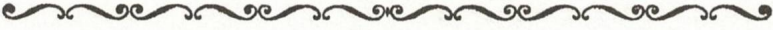
In these Olympic games there was a contest for runners, a race-track for horses drawing handsome three-wheelers, and an arena where man wrestled with man. Such an arena Paul has in mind when he says (Romans 5), "Tribulation worketh steadfastness"—that is, *endurance, or patience*.

Since the Olympic games were tournaments of honor, no one was permitted to take part without first submitting to a two-fold examination: his reputation in society, and his physical health must be approved. To ascertain the first, a crier was sent through the streets, calling upon anyone who might have a charge against him to speak up, for the honor of Greece. If a man was found to be in debt, or a slave, or guilty of some misdeed, all this was made public to his shame, and he was barred from the arena. But if he was a freeman, and his record was clear, the crier would lead him through the streets with honor and so admit him to the arena.

Paul, in the afore-mentioned chapter, glories in the fact that we, children of God, have not been denied admission to the arena. Our debts have been paid and we have been cleared of all accusations, through faith in Jesus Christ whose blood has made us freemen. "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This same Jesus, who as "Crier" has gone before us, leads us into the arena. For Paul says, "Through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace, . . ." i.e. access to the glorious arena, "wherein we stand." We have taken our position, in readiness for the fight, and "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God"—that is, in the prospect of wearing the crown with which the judge of the contest shall crown us.

A man who has thus taken his position in the arena is disappointed if there is no one to do battle with him. He

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literally rejoices when an opponent appears with whom he may come to grips.

Therefore the apostle goes on to say, "And not only so," not only have we taken our stand in the arena, "but we rejoice in our tribulations." That is, we are glad to face an opponent; we would not be left standing in the center of the arena like fools, vainly waiting for someone to come. For to wrestle was our purpose. I Because we know, so Paul concludes, "that tribulation worketh endurance, approvedness; and approvedness, hope; and hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us."

When we are attacked, when our opponent takes hold and attempts to throw us, only then does our strength appear. Then every muscle is strained; each fierce attack inspires more determined resistance; we exert ourselves to the utmost, putting forth all our strength to remain standing. And thus endurance is born.

When the first assailant slinks away, having failed to triumph over us, we have confidence to enter a second bout, and with an even stronger opponent. We have tested our strength; by enduring, we have proved our ability to endure. Thus *endurance worketh approvedness*. The tribulation of struggle called forth strength to endure; the endurance produced the confidence of approvedness; and with that new confidence hope waxes stronger—the hope of *never* being overcome by an assailant, the hope of eventually winning the crown.

Thus the child of God, struggling against the forces of evil in and around him, discovers within himself a God-given strength which enables him to *endure* all assault triumphantly.