

Everyone wants to go to Heaven, but no one wants to die

We all want to go to Heaven, but none of us wants to die. As Christians, we all want to become like Christ, but most of us do everything we can to avoid the kind of suffering, rejection and death that Christ experienced on our behalf. Well, I've got news for you. You can't have one without the other. Christ told us that in order for a seed to reproduce, it first must be planted and die. The seed Christ spoke about is not some external object. It is us. Jesus said that if we would be following Him wherever He goes, we will find ourselves on a path that leads to a cross of suffering. It is ironic that the things we most seek to avoid in our lives are the very things that in the long run create spiritual abundance and happiness.

A secular example of this principle is the need hard work as a means of achieving our financial goals. Sure, in the short term, we experience hardship, but in the end our lives are made better.

The refining fires of God's judgments are painful, but the result is a burning off of the dross and a refinement into pure gold. Pain and suffering are not inflicted by God, but they are used by God to mold us into the likeness of Christ.

But, you may ask, what good can possibly come from the horrible sufferings and evils that must be endured by the mass of humanity, most of whom have no direct connection with God? Here is my answer.

The only way to experience the sacrificial (agape) love of God is to find oneself in need of it. The principal way that God expresses His love for us is through human interactions. The more dire the circumstance, the greater the opportunity for us to express love to one another by offering not only our prayers and sympathy, but also a helping hand. Yes, for many unfortunate souls in this world, life really does stink. But, it will be over soon enough, and they will eventually experience comfort and relief. Those who were forced to endure the greatest hardship and suffering will, by contrast, experience the greatest comfort and relief in heaven. Those who were successful in avoiding discomfort in this life, will by comparison, experience less comfort in the next life.

2 Cor. 4:17 *"For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!"*

2 Cor. 1:4 *"He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us."*

The parable Jesus told about the rich man and poor man, and His story about the separation of the sheep from the goats, had nothing at all to do with theological correctness. Jesus was simply pointing out that in the next life the tables are turned. Poor people and outcasts are comforted, and the rich and callous are sent off to age-during chastisement. Most of us find ourselves somewhere in between those two extremes. Modern, evangelical theology has deteriorated to the

point where it is mostly about theological correctness, and less about actually following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Here is my advice to those of you who complain and agonize over the existence of suffering and evil in this world:

(1) **STOP BLAMING GOD FOR NOT STEPPING IN.** He has stepped in. We, as the body of Christ, are the hands and feet that God uses to alleviate human suffering and announce to the world the Good News of the real Gospel of Jesus Christ. God indwells every human being on this planet. He is well acquainted with our grief. He suffers right along with us. When we offer comfort and aid to those in need, we are actually doing it to Christ.

(2) **START DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT.** The more you involve yourself in ministry to those in need, the less frustration and bitterness you will feel. You say you want to love and serve God? Put your time and money where your mouth is, and you will feel so much better. Don't just give to the Church. Give directly to those in need. And remember, people need more than just money. They need your love and comfort, as well. There are so many things you can do that don't cost any money at all.