

## Partakers of the Nature of God

The essential nature of the believer is different than the essential nature of the non-believer as the nature of a tree is different than the nature of a rock. An intrinsic change has taken place.

Jesus said, *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit”* (John 3:6). It is not that the flesh has been replaced by the Spirit—that we have no more to do with the flesh—but, rather that the empty shell of our earthly vessel has been filled with the substantive presence of the Spirit of Christ. With His presence, there has been an essential change. He is like a catalyst, that produces a chemical reaction (perhaps more accurately, electrochemical reaction).

The ultimate consequence of the coming of the Spirit into our spirit, is that we are made partakers of the nature of God. So Peter tells us, in his second epistle (1:4). We are actually made “partakers of the nature of God.” The Greek word for nature is *phuseos*, which means, “the inner essence of being.” We are not, of course, little Gods. But we are, in a certain sense, extensions of His Being. In His intercessory prayer, recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed four times, that His people might be one with the Father, “even as He and the Father were one.” This is almost staggering in magnitude, but it reveals the deepest meaning of life, as God intended it. Herein is answered the most penetrating question ever asked by mankind—What is life all about? And its corollary—Where is the universe headed? What is the ultimate end of all things?

When the Spirit of Christ enters us, then, we become spirit beings, like God. However, as with Jesus, we are, for a time, confined to earth. *“As He is, so are we in this world”* (I John 4:17). Life on this earth is our humiliation, as it was Jesus’ humiliation. *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 2:5). The earthly sojourn must be a process of bringing to death, the flesh. This is not done by self-styled asceticism. In fact, religious exercises, designed to prove our piety, may only feed the human ego. True humiliation can only be wrought by God. The more we try to engineer our own humiliation the more we tend to lose it. The expression Jesus used with His disciples was, “Take up your cross daily.” The analogy must be in the cross of Christ. Remember, Jesus did not make His own cross—it was made for Him. But, if the Romans made it, the religious leaders ordered it, and God allowed it. The cross was the ultimate step in the humiliation of Jesus. It branded Him (though undeserved) a sinner, worthy of death. If we have not come, ourselves, to that judgement—that we are, by nature, worthy of death, the process of our humiliation has not been complete. The expression by Jesus—“Deny yourselves,” did not mean to give up earthly pleasures, but rather to give up the notion of self-importance. (The opposite of today’s conventional human wisdom).

It is in this process of humiliation that we must gain our perspective on the meaning of suffering in the world, and hence the correct perception of the entire issue of deliverance from earthly affliction. It is so easy to see things from a fleshly perspective—“Please don’t make me suffer.” And yet, it is so contrary to the Spirit of Jesus—“You will, indeed, drink from the cup that I drink from.”

It is assumed, in many quarters of Christendom, that the more “spiritual” one is, the more worthy to be delivered from suffering. (Deliverance, thus, would be expected in proportion to one’s performance and piety). Paul, on the other hand

did not guarantee deliverance from suffering. Rather, he saw suffering as a necessary corollary to fellowship with Christ. “If we would reign with Him we must also suffer with Him.” And Paul’s plea—*“that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, having been made conformable to His death”* (Philippians 3:10). To the Philippians, He said that suffering is a “gracious gift” (so the Greek). *“It has been given unto you [as a gracious gift], on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer on His behalf”* (Philippians 1:29).

Earthy trials and distresses, then, are part of the normal process of the believer. It is not that there is no deliverance on earth, but rather, that the lack of deliverance from a particular distress, does not signal God’s disfavor. It may, in fact, demonstrate His confidence in one’s stability. We are always at liberty to pray for deliverance; we will often have deliverance; but we should never be discouraged over lack of deliverance, nor should we ever use lack of deliverance as a gauge of faith. If God desires to deliver, He will provide also the faith to appropriate the deliverance. It might further be added, that for God to withhold deliverance in the necessities of life, as a means of punishment, would be as unconscionable, as for parents to withhold food or medication from a child, as a means of penalty.

This entire discussion of deliverance is based upon the premise that we are spirit beings, by nature, and are only clothed in the flesh, as a temporary expedient. Only those who understand this will understand the problem of suffering in the world. God did not send His Son into the world to make people happy, or to make it a better place to live in. He came to deliver the spirit from the prison house of the flesh.

Perhaps sufferings are not, so much, a test of the Spirit, as they are a triumph of the Spirit. To see a meaning in life, beyond the distresses of the “cosmic sandbox”; to remain steadfast in perspective and priority in the midst of the constant pull and pressure of the world; is to enjoy the greatest release of all. If one is only steadfast when there is deliverance from suffering, one remains hostage to the flesh, and its Tormentor—the god of this world. Remember, it is the object of art within the mold that is important, and not the mold itself. The mold may be, outwardly, plain and unattractive, but that is incidental to the beauty of the object of art within. Just so, the circumstances of our own lives on the earth, may be very distressing, and unattractive, but the spirit within is being shaped by the divine craftsman.

The grandest truth of all is that we have become partakers of the spirit-nature of God, and hence are beyond the reach of Satan. He may buffet our flesh, and bring distress for our minds, but he cannot have our spirits, because they are a part of God.

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