

## CAKE AND ICE CREAM CHRISTIANITY

**T**here is a general idea in the church in the U.S. that when you become a Christian, your troubles are over. You will never have to struggle with anything again. There was even a teaching going around for a while that said that if you were sick or if you were not "prospering", that it was because you were not spiritual enough or you were living in sin. People were told that they should never engage in any "negative confessions". They were only to believe positive things. This heresy caused a lot of people great harm and pain because their walk with God was judged by the size of their bank account. You wonder what Bible these people were reading. I hope that we can look at this as it really is instead of some glamorous fairy tale.

As we examine this subject, let us see what Jesus said becoming a Christian would be like. In Luke 6:22-23 Jesus said, "***Blessed are you when men hate you and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.***" Remember that the next time you ask God to bless you. Again; in John 15:18+19 He said, "***If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.***" Not only did Jesus say that people in the world would hate you but He said, "***Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way they used to treat the false prophets.***" (Luke 6:26). And we know that Jesus didn't have a place of His own to lay His head. (Mat. 8:20). There is simply no way that people can get the idea from Jesus that the Christian life would be a life of popularity or ease.

What about the apostles? Did they live a charmed life, exempted from the woes that fall to the ungodly? All of the apostles died a martyr's death except for John. But he is still considered a martyr. The account of his death is recorded in Foxe's Book of Martyrs as follows; "**Being at Ephesus, he was ordered by the Emperor Domitian to be sent bound to Rome, where he was condemned to be cast into a caldron of boiling oil. But here a**

miracle was wrought in his favor; the oil did him no injury, and Domitian, not being able to put him to death, banished him to Patmos, to labor in the mines. A.D. 73. He was, however, recalled by Nerva, who succeeded Domitian, but was deemed a martyr on account of his having undergone an execution, though it did not take effect. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death, and lived the longest of any, he being nearly 100 years of age at the time of his death." The Apostle Paul gives us some idea about what it was like for him to be a Christian. We find it in II Corinthians 11:23-29 as follows, "***Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been in frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?"***" Paul knew what he was getting into before he started. We read in Acts 9:15+16 (The Lord is speaking to Ananias about Paul) "***But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.'***" Somehow I don't get the idea that the apostles lived a sheltered life; protected from all of the problems that came along.

What about the early church? Were they treated with kid gloves? We know from history that the Romans used them for sport. They were made to fight with beasts in the arenas. They were dipped in hot tar and fastened to poles along the streets and set on fire to light the streets. Foxe's Book of Martyrs lists 380 pages of martyrs from 162-1866 AD, and these are only the more notable ones. In the book of The Revelation, the letters to the seven churches contained only two that were totally positive; they were written to the churches

at Philadelphia, and Smyrna. He said to the church at Philadelphia; ***"Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth."*** (Rev. 3:10) To Smyrna He said; ***"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."*** (Rev. 2:10) The pastor of the church at Smyrna was a man by the name of Polycarp. What happened to the church at Smyrna is recorded in Foxe's Book of Martyrs as follows; **"Germanicus, a young Christian, being delivered to the beasts on account of his faith, behaved with such courage, that several pagans became converts to the faith which inspired such fortitude. This so enraged others, that they cried he merited death, as they did also of Polycarp, the venerable Bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp, hearing that persons were seeking to apprehend him, escaped, but was discovered by a child. From this circumstance, and having dreamed that his bed suddenly became on fire, and was consumed in a moment, he concluded that it was God's will he should suffer martyrdom. He therefore did not attempt to make a second escape. Those who apprehended him were amazed at his serene countenance and gravity. After feasting them, he desired an hour for prayer, which being allowed, he prayed with such fervency, that his guards repented that they had been instrumental in taking him. He was, however, carried before the pro-consul, condemned, and conducted to the market-place. Wood being provided, the holy man earnestly prayed to Heaven, after being bound to the stake; and as the flames grew vehement, the executioners gave way on each side, the heat becoming intolerable. In the mean time the Bishop sang praises to God in the midst of the flames, but remained unconsumed. Determined, however, to put an end to his life, the guards struck spears into his body, when the quantity of blood that issued from the wounds extinguished the flames. After considerable attempts, they put him to death, and burnt his body. Twelve other Christians who had been intimate with Polycarp were soon after martyred."** We are told why God spared the Church at Philadelphia from persecution, but

why didn't He spare the church at Smyrna as well? The answer is simple; because He decided not to and the reason is none of our business nor is it any of theirs. God is sovereign and need not give an account to anyone. Why do we automatically assume that when bad things happen to people, it is because they did something wrong? We will come back to this subject later.

What about today? Do Christians still become martyrs today? It is estimated that about 280,000 Christians were killed for their faith in Christ in 1996. Some were missionaries, but the vast majority of them were just plain Christians who loved their Lord more than life. The numbers are down from about 340,000 per year during the hay day of communism. That is almost 1,000 per day. Today many of the martyrs are in China, Cuba, and other communist countries, as well as Muslim countries in the middle east, Africa, and Indonesia. There are also martyrs in some Catholic countries in South America. Will we see martyrdom in the U.S.? I think the signs are pointing toward that.

There seems to be a fundamental misunderstanding of our relationship with Christ. He calls us not to a Sunday School picnic, but to a war, to a battle, where He is the supreme commander and we are the soldiers. We are promised wounds here but rewards later when we get Home. The Scriptures that demonstrate this truth are too numerous to list but consider these few. In II Cor. 10:3+4 Paul writes, ***"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."*** In II Timothy 2:3+4 we read, ***"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier."*** Paul writes in II Tim. 4:7+8, ***"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."*** In this portion we observe the delayed reward aspect of our life here as we see also in Hebrews 10:34-36, ***"For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has***

***a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.*** In the army, a soldier does what he is told, he has no right to have an explanation of why he is to do what he is told. The same is true of us as soldiers of Christ. He has bought us with His own blood and He owns us and has every right to do with us what He will. He owes us nothing! That He loves us and is merciful toward us is His gift to us, but we don't deserve it. He holds us accountable, we do not hold Him accountable.

Another relationship that we have with God is as sons. As sons of God we need to be raised with discipline. When children are very young, there is little reasoning with them and discipline needs to be different than when they mature. The same thing is true with Gods children. In Hebrews 12:5-8 we read ***"and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons."***

No matter what metaphor we use we will suffer in this life. I never met anyone who was a powerful Christian who had not suffered greatly. There is a good reason for that; because the selfishness in us must be dealt with before God can trust us with His power. The object is not to analyze the reason for our suffering, but to get the most out of it. The American church is so weak. I once asked a Russian Christian if he thought it was possible for the church to be a powerful force for God without persecution. He looked at me thoughtfully for a moment and said, "I don't think so." I believe he was right. I will let the apostle Peter sum it up. I Pet. 4:12-19 says ***"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or***

***evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the Godless man and the sinner? Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."***

I hope that this convinces you that difficulty is a natural part of a Christians life, just as it is of anyone's. Do not try to read too much into it. Don't worry about why it is happening to you. It may be that it has a simple and natural reason. If you have a car accident, for example, it is probably because there is a natural law that two cars cannot occupy the same space at the same time, and you violated that law. Everyone gets sick, everyone dies, everyone has disappointments, and everyone is a disappointment to someone at some time. Learn to lean on Him and cast all your burdens upon Him and He will see you through.

Don't forget that God has many characteristics, and we get heresy when we focus on one of them to the exclusion of the others. God is loving but also just, He is forgiving but also holds us accountable, He disciplines us but He also comforts us. Just trust Him and you will not be disappointed.

Paul Ziegler