



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net
Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

The Fellowship of His Sufferings (1938)

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Jul-Aug 1938, Vol. 16-4.

"That I may know Him and... the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10).

"I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ... for His body's sake, which is the church." (Col. 1:24).

"...to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10).

"...He Himself hath suffered being tempted." (Heb. 2:18).

"...if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable (grace) with God."

"For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered... leaving you an example..." "When He suffered He threatened not." (1 Pet. 2:20,21,23).

"Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourselves also with the same mind."

"...insomuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings..." (1 Pet. 4:1,12,13)

The phrase - "the sufferings of Christ" is a comprehensive one, and goes far beyond anything of which we know. It embraces a whole realm of suffering in which we have no share. We are not called to be partners in the atoning suffering of Christ. This we should recognise and settle once for all. So often the adversary seeks to relate in our minds our sufferings and our sins, and thereby to undermine the work of Christ in our hearts. In a very dangerous and evil book which is being circulated in various languages the writer makes the statement with emphasis that we must all atone for our sin, even after we have become Christians. This is a lie of Satan. There is all the difference between the chastening (child-training) of the Father in love, and judgment under condemnation for sin. Let it be realised that "a full atonement He hath made", and we have no place or share in the sufferings which were endured in that work.

But there is another realm of His sufferings in which we may participate, not for our salvation, but in

our vocation. These sufferings have numerous forms and aspects, and we can only touch upon a very few here. We will divide them into two, the inward and the outward.

The Inward and Hidden Sufferings of Christ

In the passage quoted above (Heb. 2:18) we are told that "he himself... suffered being tempted." So that we are given to understand that being tempted was one line along which Christ suffered.

Some of those temptations are patent, but the suffering was deeper than we can know because there was so much more involved for Him than can ever be for us. And yet we may know *something* of this.

For example, how persistently was our Lord tempted to order His conduct in self-interest. From the ordeal in the wilderness to the last moments on the Cross it was "save thyself". The quick road, the easy road, the popular road; this was the way into which He was ever being pressed. The way of the Father's will was other than this. It was the way of patience, of difficulty, of loneliness. The very nature of the purpose which governed Him ran entirely counter to Adam's quick and cheap-success way with its snare of a lost Divine destiny. He had come to reverse in man that way and that propensity. There was a terrific atmosphere against that Divine way, and the antagonism, loneliness, and universal insensibility to the heavenly nature of things pressed in upon Him so terribly that no merely passive attitude was possible. He had to fight through the pressure of suggestion and coercion. "He suffered... being tempted."

He was tempted to avoid personal inconvenience; to disarm misunderstanding and offence; to compromise so that unnecessary (?) alienation of sympathy would be eliminated. It was no moral suffering to Him to meet this kind of temptation, but the temptation so often came through channels that made it very painful for Him. One of the inner company, a most intimate disciple and friend, would in these things misunderstand Him so utterly and "mind the things which be of men, and not the things which are of God", thus serving Satan to turn Him subtly and "lovingly" from the path of suffering set before Him.

It *is* suffering when the nearest on earth, failing to understand the demands of devotion to the Father, uses the persuasion of human love and solicitude to effect an alternative course!

He was tempted to further His cause by world means and methods. A descent from a high eminence into the midst of the crowd would make a great impression. It would draw attention. It would be a sensation. It would be like coming out of heaven. The people would be captured and His position would be established. That such suggestions - which doubtless returned at other times of possible success - should have been made to one who was here for God's pleasure was in itself pain. There was no need for there to be anything in Him which responded to such suggestions. The suggestions themselves were things of moral and spiritual pain, and to be in an atmosphere where they abounded was to Him horrible.

He was tempted to make policy a governing factor; what the religious world would think and say. What was the accepted thing; the thing that was done? This was impressed upon Him by His own brethren (see John 7).

Well, He came into our temptations; "tempted in all points like as we", and in some way which we do not understand, it was suffering to Him.

There are sufferings which are peculiarly and most deeply the lot of those who have paid a great price in their abandonment to a Divinely given vision and purpose. The pain of this kind of trial was, and is, suffered most in secret. We turn to a more outward aspect.

The Outward Sufferings of Christ

As God's Son and the heavenly seed, Christ was a marked man. There was, therefore, an antagonism to Him in the very air, where the "prince of the power of the air" has his seat. Men became involved and were influenced in spite of themselves.

So far as they were concerned it was so often unreasonable and undeserved. As someone has put it, they were just the Devil's catapults. He just *could not* be right, whatever He said or did. At one time He was too humble, only the carpenter's son. At another time He was too great and superior. His good was misunderstood and distorted. It would seem that He was not going to be given a chance of being right. If at any time one who had taken on the popular prejudice did really make some honest inquiry the whole thing was exploded and revealed to be fake. "He was reviled", "He suffered".

Many more ways are recognisable as parts of this hostility. Let us remember that all who are Christ's will suffer in this way. They are marked people because they are of "the seed royal", and back of all reason and human good sense there is that which makes the best amongst men almost irresponsible for their words and deeds. It is "the fellowship of his sufferings".

But let us remember that "he was made perfect through sufferings." He *was* perfect in nature, but that nature was brought out to perfect fulness through sufferings. We, through suffering with Him, will be perfected into His likeness, conformed to His image.