

## The Ministry of Suffering

"And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, ...or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." II Corinthians 1:6

Although the various translations differ in how to verbalize this verse, the sense of what Paul says remains essentially the same: "Whether we be afflicted, it is for your good, or whether we be comforted it is for your good." You partake both of Christ's affliction and of His consolation. Suffering is never an end in itself. Pain does not produce holiness. It is suffering for Christ, in a Christ-like manner that is connected with sanctification. Thus your affliction will contribute to the consolation and salvation of others, in at least three ways:

**First, the sorrows of Christ are repeated in the believer.** "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with."<sup>1</sup> Your commonality with brothers and sisters in Christ includes both affliction and consolation, which helps you to empathize and bond with them.

**Second, you share in the pain of others** in the same sense that "whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it."<sup>2</sup> It is the nature of union that all parts of the body share both the joys and hurts of life--a phenomenon made possible by the presence of Christ in each believer's life.

**Third, when you suffer for Christ, you "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church."**<sup>3</sup> In a mystical, hard to understand way, you suffer on behalf of Christ's Body, much the same way that to protect the rest of the body the hand absorbs the blow of a missile.

This is why suffering and consolation go together; when you suffer for Christ you are consoled by Christ, even when you suffer vicariously and in empathy for fellow-soldiers in Christ. This comfort does not work of itself, but is made to work by God who bestows it.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 20:23 <sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 12:26 <sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:24