

Captive's Corner



"Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"

2 Corinthians 10:5

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The Harder the Training the Stronger the Soldier

(Sickness & Adversity results in a more mature believer and more sons in glory, further resolving the angelic conflict)

In light of the fact that the believer has been created by God, purchased by the blood of Christ, and given unsearchable riches in Christ, his chief aim and purpose is to glorify God in all he does, all he has (including time, resources, and talent), and

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in every lot of his life (Isaiah 43:7; Rom 1:21; 11:33, 36; 12:1-2 ; 1 Cor 6:19-20; 10:31). For the believer, sickness and other adversity is an opportunity to glorify God in several ways because of its relation to how God is currently resolving the angelic conflict which began with the angel Lucifer coveting the glory of God. Lucifer's desire for self glory resulted in his fall with a third of the angels. The earth is his domain now, which means a present aspect of the conflict is being worked out on the earth beginning apparently in the garden of Eden. Thus, the church is now involved in this conflict because it is the body of Christ on earth. Christ's

conflict is now our conflict because we are in union with him. This conflict in its future earthly aspect culminates near Jerusalem after the millennial reign of Christ (Is 14:13-15; John 10:10; Eph 3:8-10; Rev 20:7-10; 1 Pet 1:10-12).

Satan suffers loss in the angelic conflict in the fact that sickness and other adversity in the believer results in a more mature, stronger believer who depends on and glorifies the Lord in a greater way. Christ is much more formed in and manifest out of the believer who increasingly looks to the Lord's strength to be perfected in Him when he is weak (2 Cor 4:9-11; Gal 4:19; 2 Chron 16:9). The believer is more hardened or strengthened against the temptations that accompany adversity in life, including attacks from Satan, the flesh, and the world. The more mature believer has learned in trials to use the armor of God (Eph 6:10-18). The more he matures the more he overcomes the evil one and, therefore, is manifesting Christ's victory all the more for the angels to view (1 John 2:13-14). A brother often says, "The harder the training the stronger the soldier." God has promised to transform us into the likeness of his Son Jesus, completing the good work He began in us when we first believed. Adversity, including and in large part illness, is a catalyst for much spiritual growth in the believer's life. Without adversity we would remain babes in Christ instead of growing into spiritual men (1 Cor 3:1-2; Gal 6:1). God does not waste anything in our life in His purpose to transform us. "God works all things ... for good" for the believer. The "good" is defined in the next verse as being transformed into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:28-29). Let's not let the "good" be redefined to be the

temporary material health and wealth of this world. Typically, the norm in Scripture is that earthly, material prosperity does not lead to godliness but worldliness. Israel proved this time and time again. In my life, as well as with every believer, I believe we can see clearly that the majority of our spiritual growth has and still does occur in times of adversity (including sickness). Even that which is meant for evil by Satan, sin, and the world, God uses for His purpose and glory (Gen 50:20). In fact, in the big picture of the ages revealed in Scripture it becomes clear that God's three enemies (Satan, this world system, and the flesh) are merely, in a very real sense, instruments of opportunity for God to reveal to the invisible and visible creation the true knowledge of Himself. Some time ago, as I noticed I was more humble, more loving to others, and that my flesh (sin within) seemed somewhat less able to use my members (especially my tongue because I did not feel like talking) when I was ill, I remarked more than once, "If only I would remain ill, I would sin less, love my brothers more, bring more glory to God, and be more useful to Him." God has not seen fit to do this yet, and if not for knowing that He knows best (in sickness or health, lack or abundance) I would say it is my loss. It is here in weakness that we learn to depend on the Lord. We would not know His sustaining strength if never weak or His peace if never in the midst of "chaos." Nor would we know the fellowship of His suffering if entirely shielded from

It is in weakness that we learn to depend on the Lord. We would not know His sustaining strength if never weak, nor His peace if never in the midst of "chaos", nor would we know the fellowship of His suffering if entirely shielded from the world's persecution. The trials of life press us into the mold of dependence on God. Thus, we experience more of Him Who is eternal life. It is in adversity that we decrease and He increases.

the world's persecution. The trials of life press us into the mold of dependence on God and, therefore, experiencing Him who is eternal life. Paul said he continually counted all things loss so that he may know the fellowship of Jesus' suffering (Phil 3:10). The believer experiences Christ when he suffers because it is Christ Who is his sustaining sustenance through the suffering. The believer is called to suffer because Christ suffered for us and set the example for us to follow (1 Pet 2:21). It is in adversity here that we decrease and He increases. Sinning less and doing His will all the more results from believers suffering (1 Peter 4:1-2). Job had learned this spiritual lesson

through his adversity. He said, "Behold, I am insignificant" and "I know that Thou can do all things, and no purpose of Thine can be thwarted." These deep confessions of his heart did not come before or after his adversity but in the midst of it. Job learned in the midst of adversity that his righteousness had its source in God (new life from above) not himself. [In a past age, Satan's sin was that in pride he began to think that he himself was the source of his beauty and, therefore, he thought himself deserving of glory meant for God. Therefore, God cast him from His presence. Away from the

light of God's glory he was no longer beautiful (Job 40:4a; 42:2; Ez 28:11-19)]. Further, we have a record in the Bible of some of the most godly men in history learning the value of adversity. John the Baptist said, "I must decrease and He (Jesus) must increase." He would have done well to remember this when he was locked up in

Sickness and other adversity in the believer's life also has a corporate affect on the body of Christ and beyond in God's purpose and His victory over Satan. I'm speaking of the fact that a more mature believer is able to build up the body of Christ and disciple others in a greater way (causing growth) because Christ is now more manifest in his life and the flesh less manifest (Eph 4:16; Gal 4:19). The result is that God's purpose of having many sons in glory is more fulfilled (Heb. 2:10).

prison later hoping Jesus would work a miracle to get him out (John 3:30; Matt 11:2-3). David said, "Before I was afflicted (with the Lord's discipline in this case) I went astray but now I keep your Word" (Psalm 119:67). Paul said, "We also glory in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance character" (Romans 5:3-4) and "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong" by God's strength (2 Cor 12:5, 9, 10). Whenever you meet a believer who has really learned in suffering to find satisfaction in the Lord and nowhere else, you realize that in his life something has been broken or crushed

and the sweet odor of Christ is manifest like the odor of the perfume that filled the room at Bethany when Mary broke the flask to anoint Jesus' feet. So, as a result of sickness (and all adversity) in the believer's life, the character and life of Christ (Satan's Conqueror) is more manifest on the earth (Satan's domain). Satan's character, which the flesh mimics, is less manifest in the believer's life and on the earth as he learns in adversity that the flesh profits nothing and that Christ is his ALL in ALL, thus yielding his members to God and not the flesh. This must really "burn" Satan up and further remind him of his future burn in the Lake of Fire. The angels view it all as God's wisdom and marvel at their Creator. No wonder we see the angels in Scripture so occupied with and concerned with the worship, glory, and honor of God since they have observed Him working out this conflict since its inception in ages past with such wisdom, power, and victory.

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moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Look away my friend, look away from this temporary world to your glorified Lord in heaven. Your life is there in Him. May your soul pant for Him as the deer pants for the water (instead of for that which is passing and material) (Psalm 42:1). A familiar hymn reads, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." "Taste and see that the Lord is good" Psalm 34:8.

A couple of modern day examples of this principle are Joni Eareckson Tada and David Ring. Joni was paralyzed by an accident and yet hundreds of thousands have come to know the Lord through God using her testimony of His grace being

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sufficient to sustain her in an abundant, full life of joy and peace despite her tremendous physical handicap. David has Cerebral Palsy. Yet, in the Lord's strength he goes about bountifully sowing the gospel seed unto a great harvest. Her handicap and his illness mean many more for the kingdom of God plucked out of the kingdom of Satan. God meant it for good, to save many people. Are you beginning to see the value of suffering in the economy of God's kingdom (which every believer is a part of) and in this present angelic conflict? The examples of those who continue pouring their life out into the lives of others despite their adversities are many, and some we know personally. Paul said in Phil. 2:17, "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all." As death works in the dependent disciple, life works in

those he disciples. God means it for good, to bring about this present result, to save many people! The glory is His and He shall have it!

My personal testimony is that God has made me very spiritually fruitful in my affliction. Job said to the Lord, "I have heard of thee... but now I see thee" (Job 42:5-6). As a result of my illnesses and daily adversities in life I have learned experientially (yet have much more to learn) that the Lord is more than sufficient. The lesson and fruit it bears is priceless, incomparable to the "cost" of the trial. I have found Him to be my All in All. I had heard but now I see clearer than ever that He is and always has been Beautiful Beyond Description. He is more beautiful than any of us know Him to be today. He perfectly satisfies and completes me. Now I love the truth and know it experientially instead of simply inwardly. In light of this, God is more glorified through me and Satan proved the loser as a result of my affliction. Adversity is therefore not a toil but a joy. Christ is now my life, and as death works in me life works in others. To God be the glory! He is victorious and true! (Gen 41:51-52; Jas 1:2).

I hope these thoughts will help you to have a true Biblical perspective regarding sickness and adversity so that God's victory over the evil one will be proclaimed through your life and God alone glorified as men and angels observe your life through the many trials to come. Remember, "God is good and does good" Psalm 119:68.

P. S. Two other Captive's Corners give further ways God is working out the angelic conflict through believers' sickness and adversity. Their titles are "Resurrection Life" and "Sickness and Adversity." At least five other reasons for believers' sicknesses besides God's purpose in resolving the angelic conflict are given in the Captive's Corner "Why Believers Get Sick And Die." For more information on the angels' interest in the church and God's glory you can read "To God Be the Glory."

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