

WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: SECTION TWO

Three Promises That Encourage the Hurting – Promise Two/Good from Bad

So often Romans 8:28 is quoted without the mention of verse 29, where the “good” that God promises to produce in our lives, in the midst of bad times, is specifically described. The *profit of the promise*, the only guaranteed benefit, is that during the adversities of life, God will take that negative time and use it to make the Christian more like their Savior and Lord. Other goals may be accomplished. Other benefits may be realized. Yet they are secondary and not an explicit part of the promise. The word “conformed” refers to the possession of a similar form and speaks of an inward rather than a merely outward conformance. The word “image” in the Greek is the source from which we derive the English word “icon.” It has been traditionally used to refer to a religious object of devotion. Yet the emphasis here is not physical but spiritual. The practical profit of the promise consists of God using suffering in the life of the Christian to develop an inner resemblance to the likeness of His Son. Adversity actually becomes the key ingredient in developing a Christ-like character within the believer. Ironically, as this takes place, Jesus increasingly becomes the object of our devotion. Paul makes personal reference to this process in Philippians 3:10, where he writes the following –

“ . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death . . . ”

In this beautiful statement of devotion, Paul reveals that it is not only the power of God, but His power at work in conjunction with the beneficial effect of our own personal sufferings, which produces this conformance that God desires to see in us. You may wonder if this conformance is possible without going through adversity. It is, but only to a point. Once that point is reached, for any further Christ-like development to occur, the Christian must enter into what is commonly referred to as “the furnace of affliction.” This is why Peter compares our faith to gold in 1 Peter 1:6-7. Just as gold can only be refined to the purest level by being melted down, so must our faith. As we go through fiery trials, God’s goal is that we emerge from such a meltdown with a more refined and developed inner character. The passage of Scripture which removes all doubt as to the necessity of adversity in spiritual development is Hebrews 5:8 –

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”

As God incarnate, during His earthly life, Jesus Christ was a sinless human being. Yet this amazing statement tells us that even He needed to encounter negative and hurtful circumstances in order to develop His human character to the fullest extent possible. If that was necessary for the sinless Son of God, how much more so for sinners like us? The profit of the promise is so critical in understanding the promise itself, that we will continue our consideration of it in our next segment.