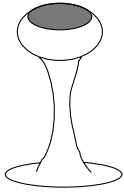


perversity, and the unfathomable suffering for our sins. He therefore completed His request of God by saying, “*yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.*” Such was His total and unequivocal trust in God His Father.

Christ's Cup



- separation from the Father
- submersion into the filth of humanity's sins
- subjection to the Father's wrath

A TIME FOR SUFFERING

Though we will not be called upon to sweat blood, we will be called to partake of the wilderness program. It will be the most difficult phase of our Christian life. It will be a time of suffering, hardship, and distress to the very limit of our faith. And while the carnal believers are out partying and entertaining themselves through motivation seminars and old-fashioned camp meetings led by charismatic and personable preachers, the Orbit 8 believer is fighting for his spiritual life. But there is a reason for everything God does.

We were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God ... (2 Cor. 1: 8-9)

Paul gets to the heart of the Christian bearing excessive burdens and the suffering that follows with the words that “*we should not trust in ourselves, but in God.*” Self-trust and reliance are the issues that we must deal with here. We who have been born and raised into Satan's cosmic system are taught self-reliance, self-help, self-this and that. Yet, the gospel message preaches trust in God and God alone.

We as human beings are in the midst of a great struggle within God's administration. The struggle is for control of our souls with a definite finale. The two combatants are Satan and the Lord Jesus Christ—each vies for our affection and devotion. Satan seeks our allegiance through craft and deception by appealing to our lusts, while Christ Jesus has made the ultimate sacrifice of love for us, death upon the cross. Each promise peace and joy. But whom do we believe? And who can ultimately deliver? We, as Christians, believe the lord Jesus Christ,

and reject Satan and his belief systems, which encourage self-love and selfish ambition. Focus upon self is like an addiction. We are gripped and held by the concepts of self-fulfillment and self-determination. Turn to any dictionary and look up all the words with the prefix “*self*”. We are a people obsessed with self. Practically every word I found indicated a rebellious and arrogant attitude which God hates and despises (Pr. 8:13). One exception I did find was the word “self-sacrifice.” And as already noted, this was Christ's example to us through His deeds (laying down His life for us, John 10:11,17) and His words found in John 15:13, which states, “*greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*”

But unfortunately, since we are born into this world as the offspring of Satan, obsession with self affects everyone of us to one degree or another, Christian or not. (It is the man-based, lust driven mindset I spoke of earlier). Obsession with self is like an addiction. And like most addictions, which seek to destroy the addict, self-reliance will have devastating results in terms of our spiritual welfare. Therefore, God's method to wholly turn our reliance from self to Christ is the wilderness test. Through this series of tests, we will experience the withdrawal pains of self-obsession and self-reliance. These products of our past need to be dealt with if we are to reach Orbit 9.

I see now that one might wonder, “Why is the wilderness necessary to deal with self-reliance? Wasn't turning from self to Christ a prerequisite for salvation? Didn't one already make the decision to trust in Christ? Does he need to be reborn again?”

Let's look at an analogy of an alcoholic. Before he can begin his restoration, he must first make the decision he wants treatment. And making such a decision, he enters a treatment center. Upon treatment, he is instructed about his addiction, what it is doing to his mind and body, and what steps he must take to cleanse his system from the toxic substances of which it suffers, and lastly, to regain control over his life. Yet, during all this time, his cravings remain. But because he desires to be set free from his addiction, he must undergo the painful experience of withdrawal, or the termination of whatever substance he was abusing. This has both a physiological and psychological effect which can be excruciatingly painful. So it is with the new-born Christian, who after deciding for Christ, must now undergo his own withdrawal from self-reliance and be “*fixed upon Christ,*” 1 John 3:3, the *great physician*.

So there is, and will be, suffering. And when we suffer, we hurt, and desire deliverance. And it is at that point we must make a decision: will we continue to trust in God for deliverance or will we seek to escape the burdens and flee to Egypt (comfort in the secular realm using its belief systems)? The wise decision is to endure. The foolish decision is to give up. To those who turn their back on God, He has some strong words.

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord. (Is. 31:1)

Or Jeremiah puts it this way: “*Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord,*” Jer. 17:5. To those who turn from God, they “*will not see when prosperity comes ... but blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord ... he will be like a tree planted by the water .. and will not fear when the heat [tests and trials] comes ... nor cease to yield fruit,*” Jer. 17:6,7,8.

Yes, the heat must come, but we must not become embittered, give up or lose our focus. These are some of the lessons taught by Christ from the premier of all parables, the parable of the Sower and the Seed (Luke 8:5-15). In this parable, one did become embittered and turned from Christ and reverted back to his old way of life, as represented by the seed “*beside the way.*” Another, under the stress of testing, broke down and gave up as represented by the seed “*on rocky soil.*” And lastly, one lost his focus and got involved with other pursuits as represented by the seed “*among the thorns.*” What we must do during our testing time is to *take hold and hold fast*, and all the while keeping a gracious attitude. And if we do, we will bear much fruit unto the glory of God and receive His blessings. “*And the seed in the good ground, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance,*” Luke 8:15.

So to better appreciate the Obedience Training Program, let's first look at some of the characteristics of the wilderness, and its purpose and results. Well begin with the characteristics of the wilderness, or desert as it is sometimes called. When we do a study of these words from the bible, we come across such terms as a “*howling waste,*” a place of “*wandering,*” a land which is “*withered and parched.*”

From the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, we learn that the wilderness is a vast and frightening environment. The desert is a “*great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground,*” Dt. 8:15. The wilderness by its very nature is inhospitable, discomfoting, and highly stressful. This wilderness or wasteland can best be described from the Hebrew word “tohu” meaning formlessness, confusion, unreality, emptiness, futility, chaos, and desolation. Harsh words for a harsh environment. Or, consider it as a separation from that which we desire—from the very desires God has placed in our heart. We must mentally and emotionally go through the “tohu” to reach our heart's desires. There is a reason we must first experience the absence of our desires before we in reality receive them. God must test to see if Christ Jesus is *above* the desires of our heart. The temptation will be to fill the absence of our heart's desires with lustful pursuits, rather than intimacy with Christ Jesus. If we do succumb to such temptation, this will only delay, and put us in danger of never receiving that which God desires to give us. Patience is called for. We must wait for God as He awaits upon our maturity, Is. 30:18.

So let me say right off, Christians will suffer. As a matter of fact, we are called to it. “*You have been called for this purpose [suffering] since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow,*” 1 Peter 2:21. Therefore, suffering should come as no surprise to you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Suffering is part of the growth process which is inherently difficult.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing .. it is with difficulty that the righteous [Sphere of Faith believer] is saved [in soul]. (1 Peter 4:12,18)

WILDERNESS PURPOSE

Now that we have touched upon the characteristics of the wilderness and that we as Christians must go through it, let us now proceed to its purpose. Its purpose is twofold. The first aspect of the wilderness is to get the believer to fully abdicate self-rule and turn from his self-reliant mind-set and turn to Christ and become God-reliant. The Bible refers to this abdication of self as “humility,” or to be “humble.” This is the first step in breaking the back of the man-based, lust driven mode of thinking and becoming God-based, love given.

Humility, or the lack of selfish ambition, is one of the most important characteristics a man or woman can possess and guarantees a quality

(content) life, both now and forever. I believe one of the most powerful scriptures dealing with humility, or the desire to put God's interests first, is found in the book of Isaiah. In the 58th chapter, beginning at the 13th verse, we have a direct quote from the Lord God.

If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob (Is. 58:13-14)

From the above scripture, God is speaking from the principle of being God-reliant using the figure of the Sabbath as a focal point. The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word “shabath” meaning “to cease, desist, rest.” And we see this defined in this verse. God tells us to desist from our way, pleasure, and word, and submit to His way, pleasure, and word. This is how we then “take delight in God.” “*Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart [the glory blessings]*” Ps. 37:4. So think of the Sabbath not simply as a day to go to church, but as a metaphor for resting in God, totally reliant upon Him each and every day for our well-being. And this is how we come to know God our Father, by letting God be God in our lives—to “stand and see” what our Father will do in our behalf. “*Cease striving and know I am Lord,*” Ps.46:10. It is the humble man who has *let go* so as to *let God* be God. We must not say to ourselves, “My will be done,” in order to create our personal kingdom upon the earth. This was not what Christ taught us. He taught that it was the Father's kingdom we were to seek by accomplishing His will (Mt. 6: 9-13). Remember Christ's prayer? Therefore, we must cease from our own ambitions, and seek out what God would have of us. And when this revelation (calling) becomes clear, God's desire for us will become ours as well. However, we must be careful not to seek detours, quick fixes, or other means to carry out God's will. We cannot, by the energy of the flesh (work which is uninspired by the Holy Spirit), bring about God's plan one moment earlier than His appointed time. And even if we could accomplish great things for ourselves outside of God's plan, it could not begin to compare with what God can accomplish in our behalf. God blesses far beyond all that we could imagine.

Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him. (1 Cor. 2.9)

So if there is any one principle that God's Word constantly brings to our attention is that He exalts the humble and shames the proud. He opposes the proud and gives grace (blessings) to the humble. So let go and let God. God wants to be God in our lives if only we will let Him.

Now the second part of the purpose of the wilderness is to test the God-reliant attitude of the humble man with “pain, suffering, opposition and delay” to see whether or not we will remain loyal to Him. We learn of this from scripture. “In *the wilderness ... that He might humble you and that He might test you....*” Dt. 8:16. The objective of the wilderness test, therefore, is to learn humility and remain humble as we undergo various obstacles. The obstacles are necessary because true testing does not come in a non-challenging environment. It is easy to have faith when everything is going smoothly. But it is a far different matter to act righteously when our world and all that we hold precious to our well-being comes crashing down. Now, I cannot tell you what your testing might involve. Not even the Bible spells out for us the specifics of what each of us might have to endure. It does suggest, however, that we will be tested to the degree of our acquisition and accumulation of God’s wisdom. (“*Every word of God is tested,*” Pr. 30:5.) And to that degree I can tell you that God has custom-designed and individualized an Obedience Training Program for you and for each resident in the Sphere of Faith. And I can further state that it WILL have its maximum effect upon you and every faithful follower of Christ.

If any person not filled with the Spirit thinks he is undergoing the wilderness test because things aren’t going well, he is mistaken. More than likely, however, he is experiencing either God’s curse, if he is a non-believer, or God’s discipline-up to cursing-if he is a carnal believer. These do not promote spiritual growth for the soul, but are designed to get the individual's focus off the Kingdom of Satan where self is promoted and onto the Kingdom of God where Christ is Lord and spiritual growth can occur.

Let’s sum up at this point. The great and terrible wilderness symbolizes our training ground and it comes complete with all the difficulties and dangers of any respectable wilderness. But keep in mind we are speaking about a spiritual wilderness where man's natural strengths and intellect has little or no consequence. It is an environment where survival is dependent upon supernatural help. This is why we must become God-reliant. The wilderness gives us first hand experience in spiritual warfare —our true fight and struggle—

the results of which yield everlasting results. Therefore, let us expend our energy and resources towards the spiritual forces of darkness.

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly [spiritual realm] places.
(Eph. 6:12)*

From the above scripture, the Apostle Paul is telling us who our true enemy is. In his day, he could have said his enemy was Rome, religion, or secular philosophy. But these were not his true enemies any more than communism, liberal thought, drugs, or pornography are ours today. These are simply idols, or masks which Satan's subordinates hide their hideous faces. Idols are Satan's tools to deceive and ensnare our lustful nature into submission to him. It should be no surprise that Satan's greatest idols in religion, money, and sex.

All men are subject to Satan's cosmos—a system which *rapes man's soul*, leaving it bare and one's emotions laid to waste. It is a system which chews us up and spits us out like a piece of gum which has lost its flavor. Yet, for the Christian, now delivered from Satan's eternal grasp, the wilderness is that realm where he must deal with the devil and his legions head on. His weapons are well defined in Ephesians 6:10-17. So we must stand firm, determined not to quit, or turn back, remaining ever alert for our adversary. *“Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour,”* 1 Peter 5:8.

In the spiritual wilderness we are no match for Satan and his demons, any more than we are a match for a lion, a poisonous-creature, or a waterless environment. Survival in Satan's cosmos and in the testing ground of the wilderness is dependent upon divine wisdom and acting upon it and then trusting in God for deliverance. Therefore, we must develop a taste for God's intimate counsel. And the wilderness is designed, among other things, to make us thirsty for the sweet drink of IC. God therefore *“Let[s] you be hungry ... that He might make you understand that man does not live on bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord,”* (Dt. 8:3).

It is in the wilderness that we are tested to apply the knowledge we gained in our Righteousness Training Program. We are to put to use God's Word in a wise and prudent manner. Christ, Himself, when tested by Satan, countered each temptation with God's Word. He was

succinct and to the point, applying the right word at the right time, not twisting nor torturing it. So must we.

Christ was not unlike us. He was subject to temptation. Yet, we must be like Him, and resist it. We must resist it, for our eternal well being is at stake. We may draw the following conclusions from Christ's resistance to Satan's temptations.

- our spiritual health is vital to our overall health and well-being
- absolute trust and reliance upon God and God alone is required
- proper application of His Wisdom is necessary to maintain our well-being

Man is more than a physical being. As stated earlier, man is created in the image of God; therefore, he is a spiritual being. So as we need food to nourish our bodies, we need spiritual nourishment to transform our thinking into the mind of Christ that we might "*overcome the world,*" 1 Jn. 5:4. And in such spiritual confrontations, we need encouragement and support. God's Wisdom gives us this (Rm. 15:4), so that during difficult times we might continue to "go forward" and not "look back."

This was the lesson to be learned from the 40-year trek of the Israelites. They had no water or bread, but God supernaturally provided "water from the rock" and "bread from heaven called manna." Both the water and bread represent the "*mind of Christ,*" or God's Wisdom, or as I call it, IC, which is spiritual food by which our soul is built. And it is from the application of IC, rather than human wisdom, that we might overcome the wilderness and proceed into the Promised Land.

As we come to understand these things, we will be better equipped to resist Satan and submit to God, who alone can lead us out of the wilderness. But before we find our way out, we have some difficult times that lie ahead. As said before, the wilderness by its very nature is inhospitable, discomfoting, and a place of affliction and fiery trials. Its fire is designed to stretch the believer's faith to a point of distress—to the very breaking point—that it may prove to be true or false, genuine or counterfeit. For it is through difficulties that the true man of God emerges. So says God in Dt. 8:2. The wilderness is to "*humble you, [for] testing you, to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.*" Peter speaks of the wilderness test this way:

Even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of

your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ ... obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1.-6,7,9)

And though we may be *stretched to distress*, God will not allow those who continue in difficult and trying circumstances to be broken or snapped. Hear God's promise.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able [your breaking point] but with the temptation [testing] will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it, 1 Cor. 10:13.

God's provision for escape is His wisdom and intimate counsel. And if we act upon God's IC, and continue in His Word, we will be able to endure the difficult times, and proceed on to the great blessings which he before us. "... *the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete [and ready to graduate into Orbit 9] lacking in nothing,*" Jms. 1:3-4.

And that leads us to the result of wilderness testing, which is spiritual maturity. He who can endure God's tests and trials, who can persist and remain constant in faith despite the obstacles, and if indeed he can withstand hardship and duress, he has come of age and is said to be mature in his thinking. To say it another way, the perfect result of the wilderness test is that it completes and matures the soul. It does this by adding *spiritual muscle* to the *spiritual backbone* acquired from the Righteousness Training Program in Orbit 7. Therefore, the believer is complete, whole, and mature.

And from this wilderness testing program, we have the following survival techniques which we must ever apply to our day-to-day existence in Satan's cosmic system. These techniques are concentration, preparedness, and alertness—to be alert for anything. These techniques will keep us from the schemes of Satan which will poison the spirit of the unaware. "*Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life,*" Pr. 4:23.

Another very important point about the wilderness test is that it gets the believer's mind off the comforts of this temporary existence and

onto the business of preparing for eternal life. (Yes, I believe God wants us to enjoy our life here in the earth, but certainly not to the exclusion of our primary work, sowing righteousness.) The believer will learn that conformity to God's Wisdom, not to satanic system of rationalism, empiricism, and occultic practices is the source of his power. And because God deals with us on the basis of objectivity and commitment, the believer must learn to overcome his *feeling* orientation, which the world promotes through emotionalism, sentimentality, and subjectivism. And we as Christians must seek to “*see Jesus*” through IC, rather than seek the experiences of miracles, visions, and dreams, as too many do today. Supernatural phenomena will not promote growth for the soul; in fact, if this is all we seek, we will not advance in God's administration, nor rule and reign with Him in the City of God.

And lastly, one of the marvelous facets of the wilderness is its *beauty* in the midst of its harshness. Its sunsets, its flowers, and its inhabitants, which seem to defy nature, all have a beauty uniquely their own. But the beauty the believer will find in his wilderness experience is an intimacy with Christ that he could not achieve by any other means, especially through gimmicks, occultism, legalism, or religion. Again, it is at the moment of our distresses, when we are “at [our] *wit's* end” that Christ will come to our side and still the storm (Ps. 107:27,28; Mk. 4:38-39).

Perhaps now we will better understand the spiritual adolescents testing, and why he must undergo this difficult and trying experience. Such experiences will prove whether his relationship is on solid ground or shifting sand. And our relationship with Christ must be tested. And if we can remain faithful and obedient during suffering, we will be found worthy to advance to Orbit 9. David sums up the testing period quite well in this Psalm.

For thou hast tried us, O God, Thou hast refined us as silver is refined We went through the fire and through the water [over our heads]; Yet Thou didst bring us out into a place of abundance. (Ps. 66:10,12)

Yes, the wilderness test *is* for our good. You must understand that the wilderness is an OPPORTUNITY. Perhaps you never heard your high school teacher or college professor tell you his tests were opportunities, but they were. They were opportunities for advancement. For if you studied hard and your learning progressed, you were in an excellent position to apply your education towards your career goals.