



Churches Of God Outreach Ministries
People working together to proclaim the Gospel

"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"

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What Do You Expect From God?

**All too many Christians have a distorted understanding of what they can expect from God.
How much of His direct intervention can we count on in our daily life?**

by James McBride

Young Tim was, decidedly, a Christian. In early life he had committed himself to the service of Jesus Christ. He was always on the go - preaching, serving, helping God's people and everyone in need. His life was a sparkling example to all.

But in private moments he was often despondent about his health. His bustling activity concealed a persistent recurring illness which struck often and inconveniently.

Why did not God simply heal him? Wouldn't He be better served in a strong and healthy body?

Then there was that large body of Christians who for years were, with their non-Christian neighbors, strangled by famine. Further, because of their beliefs, they were isolated, refused employment. Relief came only from the occasional food parcel from abroad. Couldn't God have positively answered their cries for dramatic change of weather?

And what about the preacher who suffered under an intolerant regime for decades? Imprisoned for his teachings, whipped, starved, nearly drowned, kept under house arrest for a time. And yet a man half blind.

In each of these cases, it seemed God stood idly by!

Does God Fail Us?

These three accounts are true. You can read about Timothy, the Christians in Jerusalem and the apostle Paul in the New Testament. But the time frame could well have been the late 20th century.

Many Christians assume such circumstances will never befall them. As the people of God, they assume they have divine protection. But can we expect God *always* to heal us? Will we be spared accidents, for example, simply because we are Christians?

The apostle Paul suffered more than most. In his own words, here's what went through:

"Five times I have taken thirty-nine lashes from the Jews, three times I have been beaten by the Romans, once I was pelted with stones: three times I have been shipwrecked, and once I have spent a day and a night adrift at sea. I have served Him on frequent journeys. in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own people, dangers from the heathen, dangers in the city, in the desert, at sea, dangers from false brothers, through toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, through hunger and thirst, through many a fasting season, poorly clad and exposed to cold" (II Corinthians 11:23-27).

How many Christians undergo such agony in our day? Did God fail Paul? Or did Paul blame God for his misfortunes?

Again, in his own words: "I most happily boast about my weaknesses, so that the strength of Christ may overshadow me. That is why I take such pleasure in weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions and difficulties, which I endure for Christ's sake, for it is when I am consciously weak that I am really strong" (12:10).

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No Charmed Life

The blood-stained record of the first Christians, then, squashes any idea of a “charmed” life for the people of God. Incident upon incident reveals Christians are often subject to massive pressures in some form. Many church leaders apostles, even - were executed. There was severe persecution, illness, robbery, looting, hunger, and poverty. Some were dragged through the courts by rich and oppressive landlords. There was opposition from the state, from heathen neighbors - even from religious leaders, family and friends.

And...all died from one cause or another - just like every human being before and since.

So far, then, we Christians don't seem to have much going for us! As Paul sums up: “If for this life only we Christians have set our hopes in Christ, we are the most pitiable people in the world” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

In other words, not only do we suffer the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” in common with all mankind, but we have the “extras” of persecution for our desire to follow God's way.

Why Become a Christian?

Quite a bleak picture. So why become a Christian?

For many, Christianity is seen as a path to financial success. Or freedom from illness and pain. Others look at the prophetic warnings about the awful times that lie ahead for mankind if he persists in his present course. And they see Christianity as an ark of safety. Indeed, various Christian groups cling to a notion of a “place of safety” from the coming tribulation. This is even the initial attraction for some.

Simply follow God (or a particular leader) and you will prosper, ease off your financial problems, have security of employment, be healed, escape the tribulation, and, it seems, all but live forever in an earthly paradise.

But, as we have seen, *it never has been quite like that*. Said Jesus, “If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind: he must take up his cross and come with me. *Whoever cares for his own safety is lost*; but if a man will let himself be lost for

my sake, he will find his true self. What will a man gain by winning the whole world, at the cost of his true self?” (Matthew 16:24-26).

Personal safety, worldly achievement, wealth, acclaim - none of these perhaps worthy ends reflects the true essence of real Christianity. In sum, we are called by our heavenly Father to face and to share trials and difficulties.

We are very much a part of the human race!

Why become a Christian? Because that is the purpose of our existence. God - who is love - seeks to share His being with His creation, both in this life and for all eternity following our resurrection into His Kingdom.

We now ask, is there a difference between the child of God and a child of this world in regard to suffering and pain and sorrow and struggle?

God's Monitor

Indeed there is. For Christians don't face life alone.

The apostle Paul explains: “So far you have faced no trial beyond what man can bear. God keeps faith, and He will not allow you to be tested above your powers, but when the test comes He will at the same time provide a way out, by enabling you to sustain it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Here we begin to focus on the vital difference between one in whom dwells the Spirit of God and the individual who hasn't yet made the change necessary (i.e., repentance Acts 5:32) to receive that Spirit.

Notice two linked aspects in Paul's words. First, we won't have to endure a trial beyond our ability to cope. An second, God will provide the inner strength that *enables us to cope* with such trials as we encounter them.

You have probably seen in action the TV director's batten of monitors each bearing an image cabled from a different camera. Usually, one image at a time is selected for screening. Yet the director has before him a panoramic and comprehensive view of all the action.

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The Christians trials. too. are monitored! They are monitored by a loving God - our Father in heaven - who envisages an exciting future for each of His sons and daughters. Monitored by Him to ensure, as much as may be in His power, that we receive “a perfect inheritance beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 Peter 1:4).

And, the apostle adds, “In the meantime you are guarded by the power of God operating through your faith till you enter fully into salvation” (verse 5).

To better fit us for this salvation. for our responsibilities in the Kingdom of God, He uses *experience* - carefully monitored experience - as part of our training program. Every circumstance of the Christian’s life is under the benign scrutiny of a loving heavenly Father. Spoke the prophet Hanani, “The eyes of the Lord range through the whole earth, to bring aid and comfort to all those whose hearts are loyal to him” (11 Chronicles 16:9).

No Escape

If there is a drought, the Christian thirsts. Our home, along with those of our neighbors, may disintegrate to match wood under the hammer blow of a tornado or “quake.” If there is food shortage, or war, or mass unemployment, the Christian suffers with his neighbor.

But there is a difference!

Should the “camera image” from a Christian reflect a circumstance that’s overwhelming for him in his spiritual life, God provides a way out. To again quote Paul: “...But when the test comes He will at the same time provide a way out, by enabling you to sustain it” (I Corinthians 10:13).

Notice. The Christian doesn’t always escape the catastrophe or the illness or the general economic depression or whatever. *But he is given the inner spiritual strength to see it through.*

Grace to Help

Look again at the example of the apostle Paul. “I was given a sharp pain in my body,” he says: “...Three times I begged the Lord to rid me of it, but His answer was: ‘My grace is all you need; power comes to its full strength in weaknesses’” (I Corinthians 12:7-9).

God’s grace sustained him in his trial!

Paul drew upon the inexhaustible supply of spiritual strength available to him through his relationship with Jesus. By faith he trusted God to sustain him.

Are you, then, suffering privation. or bereavement, or persistent illness, or torturing pain? Are the pressures of life burdening you? Do you feel the prisoner of circumstance? Do you feel unable to cope with your lot?

Whatever oppresses you, as a Christian - a member of the very Family of God - remember that *you are different from others!* God knows your problem. And He will take care of you.

Wrote the apostle Peter to a group of Christians undergoing severe trials: “Humble yourselves then under God’s mighty hand, and He will lift you up in due time. Cast all your cares upon him, for you are His charge” (1 Peter 5:6, 7). As the King James version puts it “...for he cares for you”.

Individual Christians with severe disability have (perhaps over many, many years) proved this truth. Despite agonizing pain, or despite severe paralysis, they have experienced Jesus’ power to sustain them in radiance.

And what a witness they are of the power of God!

Of course, this doesn’t mean that God does not heal in this day and age. He does - and mightily! Out of His deep mercy and in response to childlike trust He often intervenes to deliver from sickness or distress.

But. whatever God’s apparent response, the Christian knows with certainty that “underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27). He responds to the invitation of Jesus: “Come to me. all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy; and I will give you relief. Bend your necks to my yoke, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humblehearted: and your souls will find relief. For my yoke is good to bear, my load is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

God’s Legacy

What, then, should the Christian expect from God?

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Simply this: In response to faith *He gives the unbelievable legacy of eternal Life!* All else in life is overshadowed by that gift. Mortal man is to be raised from the dunghill of mortality and clothed with unlimited existence as a glorified Son of God.

Right now we may smart under trials of many kinds, but, adds the apostle Peter. "Even gold passes through the assayer's fire, and more precious than perishable gold is faith which has stood the test. These trials come so that your faith may prove itself worthy of all praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:6, 7).

Life with its joys and its sorrows, its pleasures and its pains, its ups and its downs - all our accumulated experience - is known and fully understood by our Father.

Such experiences are the fibers from which we weave a spiritual tapestry that will clothe us for all eternity.

In that day - when the graves are opened and all God's people burst from the manacles of death - in that day when Jesus Christ appears in splendour in our atmosphere, then each traumatic experience endured in this life will be *an occasion for praise!*

For then we will clearly regard it as did the apostle Paul: "For I reckon that the sufferings we now endure bear no comparison with the splendour, as yet unrevealed, which is in store for us. For the created universe waits with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed... Up to the present, we know, the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth. Not only so, but even we to whom the Spirit is given as firstfruits of the harvest to come [i.e., we Christians] are groaning inwardly while we wait for God to make us His sons" (Romans 8:18-25).

A young child has complete trust that his parents will wrap him in total care. So let us express that same faith, that same trust, in our omnipotent yet all-loving Father - no matter what our circumstances may be.

You are invited to write for the free booklet, *When Tragedy Strikes*. It discusses in depth further aspects of this important topic. Also the study outline *In Search of the Will of God*. And if you wish to share a personal challenge with any of our brethren feel free to contact us here.

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