



Robert T. Barrett, *The Apostle Paul*

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## *Suffering for the Savior’s Sake*

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The scriptures teach that all the creations under heaven are eternally indebted to the Savior. King Benjamin illustrated this point when he taught the Nephites, “He doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:24). The Atonement of Jesus Christ gives life and purpose to all of God’s creations. Remove Christ and his Atonement, and we are nothing. We can never repay the Father and the Son for the Atonement and the blessings that flow from it. Therefore, unlike the typical debtor-creditor relationship, no amount of righteousness, good deeds, or holiness can ever settle our account with the Savior. Rather, the more we attempt to credit our account with the Savior, the more indebted we become.

Yet, in seeming tension with our inability to repay the Savior is the scriptures’ exhortation to suffer for his sake. At least eight times in the Bible, the Saints are told they will suffer for his sake, and they are told at least thirteen times they will suffer for his *name’s* sake. For example, the Apostle Paul says, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him,

but also to suffer for *his sake*” (Philippians 1:29; emphasis added). Of course, suffering for his sake does not settle our debts with the Savior, because the Atonement is a gift to all mankind that infinitely keeps giving. Because we cannot settle our accounts with Christ, there must be another meaning of “suffer for his sake.”

Examining Philippians 1:29 in Greek helps us understand how we suffer for Christ’s sake. The word “sake” is a translation of the Greek word “ὑπέρ,”<sup>1</sup> which means “on behalf of” or “in support of.”<sup>2</sup> This renders the translation as “suffer on behalf of Christ” or “suffer in support of Christ.” This suggests that through suffering we act as a proxy for the Savior to further his work and name.

### Preaching the Gospel May Lead to Suffering

We may suffer to support Christ as we spread his message, despite persecutions and afflictions that may follow. Christ’s message is most powerfully spread through ambassadors who know through experience something of his redeeming power. Experiences with the Atonement can originate from trials and opposition or through the process of becoming sanctified and holy.

For instance, missionaries are not sent out simply to convey information; anybody can get that from a book or the Internet. Missionaries are sent out because of who they are and what they have become. They are firsthand witnesses of God’s interactions with men and the power of the Atonement. Extraordinary missionaries are found in humble disciples who use their own lives as a model to bear pure, personal testimony of the power the Atonement. Such missionaries produce an environment where investigators not only hear the gospel but also see it and feel it.

The Lord commanded that the gospel be preached by the Comforter and not by some other way (see D&C 50:17–20). As a disciple uses the power of the Atonement, he or she has a greater capacity to bear testimony of that power. In an article directed toward future missionaries, President James E. Faust taught, “You cannot convert people beyond your own conversion.”<sup>3</sup> Conversion is the process of transforming the natural man into a man of holiness. It requires great mental exertion to harmonize our motives and will with his through faith and repentance. In such environments, the natural man suffers and the spirit is enhanced with light and experience. Thus suffering for Christ’s sake is not always physical suffering but the suffering of the natural man’s appetites in the conversion process.

Saul of Tarsus’s life demonstrates how both physical suffering and the suffering of the natural man empower a missionary. Saul began his ministry as a Pharisee who used persuasion and deception to gain followers. Then an angelic visit initiated a change in Paul that was accompanied with years of obedience and sacrifice. Both Paul’s physical suffering and putting off of the natural man converted him from a teacher founded on secular knowledge into Paul the leader who taught with the Spirit and not men’s philosophies.

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians illustrates this change: “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:1–2). Saul renounced his past habits and crafty methods to become a renewed and cleansed Paul. He no longer desired the praise of men but rather the praise of God (see 1 Thessalonians 2:4–6). He put off selfish intentions and motives and aligned his mind with Christ. Paul declared, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for *Jesus’ sake*. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:5–6; emphasis added). Through both physical suffering and great mental exertion, Paul successfully submitted his will to God’s. His teaching became more enriched because of who he had become and what he stood for despite the great affliction that accompanied him. Thus Paul taught for “Jesus’ sake” not only by suffering persecution but also by suffering internally as he mentally struggled to discipline his will.

Paul radiated the light of Christ and became a living testimony and proxy for the Savior. He continued to labor in behalf of the Master of the vineyard, planting the seed of Christ in the hearts of all those who would receive it. Through Paul and other missionaries, the voice of Christ was not hushed after the grave but grew exponentially as converts hearkened to the Savior’s plea, “Come, follow me.”

Similarly, members of the Church are required to take his name upon themselves and become “ambassadors for Christ” to the entire world (2 Corinthians 5:20). Such ambassadors must become converted by removing the cloak of secularism from their spirit and becoming a light set on a hill. At times, physical suffering will accompany this journey, but the natural man will always be our companion in mortality and will nag at us to take an opposing course. It is overcoming this internal struggle of carnal appetites

that is central in representing Christ and his doctrine. As we do so, Christ is resurrected anew in the lives of those with whom we come in contact.

### Suffering for the Value of Christ

With the gospel's restoration, true followers could once again take his name upon themselves and labor on his behalf by proclaiming the good news. However, with the Restoration came renewed persecution and suffering. Such has always been the case for the followers of the Savior. In the words of Paul, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). By necessity the Saints must suffer to take righteousness upon themselves. "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one" (2 Nephi 2:11).

For anything to qualify as being righteous, there must be something opposing it. Therefore, it would also seem that the greater the opposition to that righteousness, the more righteous it becomes. Trials, temptation, and suffering create an environment where we can qualify as righteous. If our purpose is to be like God, we should not be surprised that this involves opposition.

The Savior taught the blessings of suffering for his sake in the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, *for my sake*" (Matthew 5:10–11; emphasis added). In the LDS King James Version of the Bible, a Greek footnote is attached on the phrase "for my sake" and renders the translation as "on account of me."

The Greek word translated as "sake" can also be translated "value." If "value" is used in place of "sake," it seems the Savior is saying, "You suffer persecution for my value." There are two implications with this interpretation. First, as Saints endure afflictions, the value of the Savior's name and ministry increases in their lives and those around them. Second, as the Atonement is applied, the value of Christ and his sacrifice grows in glory and honor.

### Suffering Transforms Us

The more opposition a person is willing to suffer for the name of Christ, the more worth and significance his name and ministry has to him or her. The Apostle Peter says, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye;

for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, *but on your part he is glorified*" (1 Peter 4:14; emphasis added). Suffering is a catalyst in the spiritual metabolic process. It can induce the proper environment for us to reach the design of our creation, thus glorifying the Creator.

However, the concept of suffering can be misunderstood. For example, Medieval Christian monks would inflict pain on themselves to rid evil from their body, all done in the name of Christ. This practice completely overlooked the meaning of suffering for his sake. The actual suffering does not glorify God; rather, it is the transformation induced by the suffering that glorifies God. Suffering can draw us closer to eternal truths. Suffering provides an opportunity to stand as a witness of Christ by sacrificing the natural man and transforming oneself into a being of righteousness. God is not interested in how much pain has been tolerated, but rather how much the suffering has placed his image into your countenance. Paul taught, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1–2).

Every day the natural man and the spirit struggle to place the other on the altar of sacrifice. This offering has the potential to be a sweet savor to the Lord or a foul stench. Either the natural man's heart is broken and filled with the light of the Atonement or the spirit is filled with selfishness and doubt. This sacrificial experience reveals our true character and what we value and love most. If the natural man is sacrificed, doubt and selfishness are burned from the soul and replaced with faith and charity.

Becoming like Christ requires tremendous effort. It is the amount of sacrifice put into that effort that gives value to the experience. For example, when missionaries return home, they often claim that their mission was the best time of their lives and yet also the hardest. They treat their mission as an experience of the highest value or, in other words, a sacred experience. It was not the call alone that made the experience sacred, but the effort put into it. The more the missionary sacrificed and worked, the more memorable and valuable their mission became. If eternal life is the greatest experience one can achieve, why should we expect it to come without any effort?

The Apostle Paul demonstrated the value of the Savior in his life by consecrating everything to the Lord, even to the point of death. Each time the

spirit won the struggle over the natural man, Paul's conviction grew and the life of Christ was made manifest through him, "for we which live are always delivered unto death for *Jesus' sake*, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:11; emphasis added). Through Paul's sacrifice and obedience, the Savior's credibility became amplified in his life and the lives of those whom he taught.

### Suffering Strengthens the Power of Testimony

The false perception exists that Christ always removes challenges, weaknesses, and trials from our lives. Even Paul petitioned the Lord three times to remove "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7), a request that was never granted. Many times trials are not removed; rather, there comes a further empowerment of faith and capacity to bear those burdens. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, "Healing blessings come in many ways, each suited to our individual needs, as known to Him who loves us best. Sometimes a 'healing' cures our illness or lifts our burden. But sometimes we are 'healed' by being given strength or understanding or patience to bear the burdens placed upon us."<sup>4</sup> It is only by opposition that we come to recognize and feel the power of the Atonement in our lives. After all, it is only because of hunger that we can fully know the power and pleasure of food. If all opposition were removed, how could anyone exercise their faith in Christ and come to know the power of the Atonement?

The Apostle Peter also explains that suffering is not a strange phenomenon among Christians. He teaches that there is a union of suffering and blessings: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are *partakers of Christ's sufferings*; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but *on your part he is glorified*" (1 Peter 4:12–14; emphasis added).

The joining of afflictions and blessings is illustrated in the ordinance of marriage, in which the problems and blessings of different parties are merged. Two individuals figuratively become one entity with one name. In such marriage covenants, we do not think it strange that the problems of one become the problems of the other; on the contrary, we expect it. We know a marriage will never reach its full potential unless both parties are selfless and willing

to support the other. Marriage strengthens both individuals and brings far greater happiness than if they were left to their own efforts. Together their burdens become lighter as each is empowered by the other with the tenacity to carry on. However, such relationships are fully ripe only after a period of testing in which each partner demonstrates true love for the other.

This marriage covenant is not much different than the covenant made at baptism to bear the name of Christ. Baptism is a ceremony in which one receives the name of the Bridegroom (see Matthew 25:1–13). As this relationship develops, the concerns of one become the concerns of the other. When the relationship has truly matured, both parties will have developed a unity of purpose. They each stand as a witness for the other and glorify each other. Because of our baptismal covenant with Christ, he bears the burden of being a witness for us before the Father, and we bear the burden of becoming witnesses of Christ to our fellowmen.

Can we stand as witnesses for someone if we don't have the slightest idea about what that individual went through? A judge would disregard the testimony of any witness who did not have some form of experience with the event. In fact, the strength of a witness's testimony is dependent upon his or her experience. The more active role a witness has in an experience, the more weight their testimony will carry. Christ has asked that we be witnesses of him and yet the climax of his life is found in Gethsemane to the Garden Tomb. In spite of this, people continually plead to have the tiniest afflictions removed, or they flee from any form of persecution. A true witness of Christ experiences a minute part of what the Lord went through by spending time in their own personal Gethsemane. Consequently, the individual gains further experience of Christ's redemptive power and thus enhances the power of their testimony. Those who endure such challenges with faith prove stronger witnesses of Christ because they are firsthand participants of his life and Atonement.

As testimonies become stronger and more numerous, the evidence of a living Christ becomes greater. Those who hear these testimonies are persuaded to investigate, and many are converted. Thus, through the development of testimony, we suffer so that we may come to know him and further glorify him by bringing others to him.

### Suffering Edifies the Body of Christ

The Prophet Joseph Smith and other Church leaders suffered for Christ's sake, which strengthened the members' faith. They set examples of how a

disciple should be willing to endure for Christ. Joseph lost five children; he was tarred and feathered, imprisoned, and eventually martyred. However, his story is not necessarily peculiar among the prophets. All of them suffered for Christ's sake. James says, "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience" (James 5:10). It might seem peculiar that such righteous men have had to suffer so much. Yet when we look back on their lives, we gain a greater measure of hope and faith. The triumphal suffering of the prophets builds a reservoir of faith from which Church members can draw to give them faith to endure their own trials.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul explains why he endured being imprisoned, beaten, and ridiculed: "I Paul am made a minister; who now rejoice in my sufferings *for you*, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for *his body's sake*, which is the church" (Colossians 1:23–24; emphasis added). Paul did not endure affliction for his own instruction but to tutor the Saints in discipleship.

In Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, he further teaches that members become unified in one body by compensating for each other's weaknesses, "that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:25–26). This single body resembles a Zion society where all members benefit one another and behave as one entity.

In this kind of relationship, the problems and the trials of one become the problems of the whole body; thus if one member needs strengthening, it is up to the stronger members to strengthen him or her. Paul says, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1). A perfect example of bearing infirmities for the weak is the Savior. He did not suffer for mankind's sins to please himself but acted out of pure love for the Father and for us. He is the strongest member of God's family, yet he took an infinite burden for our sake. He could have gained salvation without us, but instead he endured an infinite punishment to provide us with strength, faith, and ability. It is reasonable that his followers would be asked to go and do likewise. Among his followers, prophets, in their unique role, often experience trials not for their own benefit but for the strengthening of other members. These prophets' commitment and sacrifice allows them to stand as models for all the Saints to follow.

A true leader cannot ask anything of someone that he himself is not willing to do. Joseph Smith could not stand at the head of this dispensation and expect others to follow him if he had not taken the lead, not only in responsibility but also in enduring persecution. By dying as a martyr, he exemplified the ultimate price of discipleship. He did not deny his teachings or his ministry even when death was imminent. Joseph's death sealed not only his own testimony but also the testimony of the entire Restoration. It gives authenticity to the truth spoken by all the Saints who were, are, and will be martyred for the truth. Without the death of the founder, the credibility and strength of all the martyrs' testimonies would be weakened.

A founder is the spring of strength and direction from which all followers draw. Joseph suffered for Christ's sake so that he might be a model and a source of comfort for those who would follow him. Just as Christ died to establish his Church, it would require the death of his servant to reestablish his Church. This meant it had to be built on a foundation of strengthened apostles and prophets. If such a foundation were not laid, it would be like a steel frame on sandstone footings. A strong storm would rip the columns from the foundation and the structure would fail. The walls and appendages of the Church cannot bear a larger load than the foundation can tolerate. The testimony and commitment of members cannot rest on a frail slab. The foundation of the Church must be built on unyielding leaders, with Christ as the chief cornerstone to support those who would follow.

To the extent that members are willing to give their life for Jesus Christ, they amplify his name. His name has greater meaning and purpose to all who hear it because they see Christ in the lives of his followers. C. S. Lewis put it this way: "He works on us through each other. Men are mirrors, or 'carriers' of Christ to other men . . . usually it is those who know Him that bring him to others. That is why the Church, the whole body of Christians showing Him to one another is so important."<sup>5</sup> Thus, any Saint who suffers tribulation for the body of Christ fortifies the members by demonstrating the power of the Atonement. As different members recognize this power, faith is reinforced and the whole body of Christ grows a little closer to reaching its full potential as a Zion society.

### Suffering Further Glorifies God

"Sake" can also be translated as "value." In this context, the more the Atonement is applied, the more Christ's sacrifice is infused with glory, joy, and honor. The

Atonement is like an infinite account that we can draw upon. However, the great irony of this account is that the more it is used, the more it appreciates. As the Atonement is applied, Christ's sacrifice augments in glory and in honor because more souls are brought back to the Father. Thus, the Atonement increases in value at an ever-increasing rate as more and more people use this gift.

During Christmas, many people put great thought and effort into finding a perfect gift that will bring a loved one great joy. They spend hours running to different stores, flipping through catalogs, and conversing with others. On Christmas Day their sacrifice creates feelings of joy when the receiver looks up with the smile of pure delight, love, and appreciation. This feeling increases as the giver sees the gift being used. However, not all gifts are received in this way. They may end up in an old storage closet, never to be looked at again, or in the garbage can with the torn wrapping paper. When the giver discovers his gift was neglected, his heart aches. The gift represented the giver's love demonstrated by sacrifice in time and money. The greater the sacrifice of the giver, the more it hurts to see the gift esteemed as something of naught.

Similarly, Christ gave all of us a perfect gift. Just as the rejection of a Christmas gift brings tears to the giver, so does the rejection of Christ cause the Father to weep (see Moses 7:28–33). But the opposite is also true; the Lord receives joy and glory by seeing his children receive the gift of his Son. The more that receive this gift, the more the value it has. “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift” (D&C 88:33). What does it profit the Father and Christ if their gift was never used; it would be as if their sacrifice were in vain. As we use the Atonement and its sanctifying power in our lives, Christ and the Father receive greater glory for their sacrifice.

## Conclusion

When Jacob records his testimony of the Savior on the gold plates, he mentions that it is for Christ's sake: “And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, *for Christ's sake*, and for the sake of our people” (Jacob 1:4; emphasis added). Jacob and his people “labored diligently . . . that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world” (Jacob 1:7–8). Jacob, his people, and those who would follow

thereafter would echo a common theme of captivity and deliverance through their Savior. These tangible testimonies of faith and suffering would eventually be compiled into a book that would bring millions of people into the light of the Atonement. The sufferings recorded in scripture not only converted and sanctified the people but also became an inspiration to us to further his work and glory for future generations.

Similarly, the scriptures continue to be written today in the lives of those who take his name upon themselves and suffer for his sake. Whether that suffering is an actual affliction or the challenge of changing the natural man into a Saint, the life and mission of Jesus Christ is expanded through those individuals. They become a living testimony that the Savior lives and that his ministry continues among God's children today. Perhaps this is another interpretation of what John meant when he said, “There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). Everyone writes their interactions with God in their own Book of Life. Some individuals write hundreds of pages filled with tremendous stories of faith, and others may only write a few words because of their neglect. Yet all the accomplished books bear a miraculous and common theme of change—redemption and love.

Collectively these accounts further Christ's purpose and role as the Savior by inviting more souls to come unto him and be saved. Thus the evidence of Christ continually grows as more come to know their Creator “till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”<sup>6</sup> **RE**

## Notes

1. Richard J. Goodrich and Albert L. Lukaszewski, eds. *A Reader's Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 424.
2. Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), s.v. “ὑπέρ,” 638–39.
3. James E. Faust, “Ten Things to Know Before You Go,” *New Era*, July 2002, 4.
4. Dallin H. Oaks, “He Heals the Heavy Laden,” *Liabona*, November 2006, 8.
5. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 120.
6. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 4:540.