

Message Five

Knowing the Fellowship of Christ's Sufferings and Being Conformed to His Death

Scripture Reading: Phil. 3:7-10; John 11:25; Eph. 1:19-20; Col. 1:24

I. Paul aspired to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings—Phil. 3:10:

- A. With Christ, the sufferings and death came first, followed by the resurrection; with us, the power of His resurrection comes first, followed by the participation in His sufferings and conformity to His death—v. 10.
- B. We first receive the power of His resurrection; then by this power we are enabled to participate in His sufferings and live a crucified life in conformity to His death.
- C. Christ's sufferings are of two categories: those for accomplishing redemption, which were completed by Christ Himself, and those for producing and building the church, which need to be filled up by the apostles and the believers—Col. 1:24:
 1. We cannot participate in Christ's sufferings for redemption, but we must take part in the sufferings of Christ for the producing and building up of the Body—cf. Rev. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Cor. 1:5-6; 4:12; 6:8-11.
 2. Christ as the Lamb of God suffered for redemption (John 1:29); Christ as the grain of wheat suffered for reproducing and building (12:24):
 - a. The Lord, as a grain of wheat that fell into the ground, lost His soul-life through death so that He might release His eternal life in resurrection to the many grains—10:11, 15, 17-18.
 - b. The one grain did not complete all the sufferings that are needed for the building up of the Body; as the many grains, we must suffer in the same way the one grain suffered—12:24-26:
 - (1) As the many grains, we also must lose our soul-life through death that we may enjoy eternal life in resurrection—v. 25.
 - (2) This is to follow Him that we may serve Him and walk with Him on this way, the way of losing our soul-life and living in His resurrection—v. 26.
 - (3) The way for the church to come into being and to increase is not by human glory; it is by the death of the cross—vv. 20-24.
- D. There is a difference between the sufferings that are for our transformation and the sufferings that are for the Body—2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24:
 1. Paul's word in Philippians 3:10 does not refer to sufferings for transformation.
 2. If we compare 3:10 with Colossians 1:24, we will see that the sufferings about which Paul was speaking in Philippians 3:10 are those that make up the lack of Christ's afflictions for the Body.
 3. In Colossians 1:24 Paul regarded his own sufferings as the filling up of what is lacking of Christ's sufferings for His Body.
 4. The sufferings of Christ for His Body are still going on, and we need to share in them—Phil. 3:10; cf. Acts 9:4-5.

5. It is when we suffer for the Body that we experience the power of Christ's resurrection—Col. 1:24; Phil. 3:10.

II. In Philippians 3:10 Paul spoke of “being conformed to His death”; this expression indicates that Paul desired to take Christ's death as the mold of his life:

- A. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ, counting all things as loss, gaining Christ, being found in Him, knowing Him, knowing the power of His resurrection, and knowing the fellowship of His sufferings all issue in one thing—being conformed to Christ's death—vv. 7-10.
- B. Being conformed to Christ's death indicates that His death is a mold—v. 10:
 1. The center of Philippians 3 is the matter of being conformed to the mold of Christ's death—vv. 7, 9, 12-16.
 2. We have been placed into this mold of death, and now we need to be conformed to this mold—Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:3-5.
 3. The power of the resurrection life of Christ in us leads us, carries us, bears us, and places us into the mold of Christ's death—John 11:25; Eph. 1:19-20.
- C. The mold of Christ's death refers to Christ's experience of continually putting to death His human life that He might live by the life of God—John 6:57a:
 1. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He lived a crucified life; by living a crucified life He was alive to God and lived Him—Gal. 2:20; 3:1; 5:24.
 2. He always put His human life to death so that the divine life within Him could flow out—John 10:10b-11, 17.
 3. As He was living, He was also dying—dying to the old creation in order to live a life in the new creation; this is the meaning of “His death” in Philippians 3:10.
- D. To be conformed to Christ's death is to take Christ's death as the mold of our life—v. 10:
 1. Christ's death is a mold to which we are conformed in much the same way that dough is put into a cake mold and conformed to it.
 2. God has put us into the mold of Christ's death, and day by day God is molding us to conform us to this death—Rom. 6:3-4.
 3. Our life should be conformed to such a mold—dying to our human life in order to live the divine life—Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 4:10-11.
 4. If we put to death our natural life, we will have the consciousness that we have another life, the divine life, within us; this life will be released, and then in our experience we will be conformed to Christ's death—John 10:10b; 1 John 5:11-12.
 5. In the mold of Christ's death the natural man is killed, the old man is crucified, and the self is nullified—2 Cor. 4:16; Rom. 6:6; Matt. 16:24.
 6. If we allow our circumstances to press us into this mold, our daily life will be molded into the form of Christ's death—Rom. 8:28-29.
- E. The only way to glorify God is to be conformed to Christ's death; the more we are conformed to Christ's death, the more we glorify the Father—John 12:28; 13:31.