

The way of the Lord

In both the Old and New Testaments, there are references to *'the way of the Lord'*. Put quite simply, the writers are referring to the way that God behaves. Paul explains this conduct in his letter to the Philippians. The apostle said that although Jesus existed in the form of God, He 'did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself taking the form of a bondservant'. When we are grasping equality, needing to be equal and needing to be valid, we are not in the *way of the Lord*.

Jesus lost nothing when He left His station as an equal member of the Godhead. Although He was made lower than the angels, He was still God the Son. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus could have called for a legion of angels to help Him, but as the Messiah, He chose not to exercise that prerogative. God is the most humble being in the universe because He knows who He is!

Having humbled Himself, Jesus said, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart'. Our English translations also say, 'I am meek and lowly'. 'Meekness' implies a soft personality, suggesting that some people are naturally meeker than others. But through His conduct and example, Jesus was modelling humility for us. He said, 'Take My yoke upon you. I am humble and lowly.' He was telling us to take the yoke that He had taken upon Himself. We should constrain and measure ourselves to that yoke. So how did Jesus conduct Himself? The apostle Peter writes in his second letter, 'While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously'.

References:

Php 2:6-7 Col 2:12
Mat 26:53 Mat 11:29
1Pe 2:23 Joh 13:15
Luk 10:39-42

Further Study

Heb 2

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 1

Equipped with God's humility

We read in the Old King James version of the Bible that Moses was the meekest man who ever lived.

We find that 'meekness' literally means '*humble*', not '*weak*'. Moses did not give way under pressure when he was being severely disciplined by the Lord for forty years in the wilderness. However, he did take the yoke of humility upon himself during this time of testing. In the Psalms, we read the words of Moses. 'Make us glad according to the days that You have afflicted us, and the years we have seen evil.' In this verse, '*afflicted*' means '*to be bowed down or humbled*'. The humility of Yahweh empowered Moses to do the task that he was asked to do; to bring the nation of Israel up out of Egypt. Humility allowed Moses to become a mighty man of God; to become a deacon or servant of His Covenant with Abraham. Moses was able to step forward as a deliverer with an adequacy that was not his own. He became an apostle to his generation, which simply means he was sent by God.

Likewise, the humility of Yahweh equipped David in his kingly apostleship toward the nation of Israel. David wrote, 'He trains my hands for battle, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have also given me the shield of Your salvation, and *Your humility makes me great.*' He continued, 'He makes my feet like hinds' feet' on the high places. King David was declaring that God's humility made him adequate for the task and allowed him to maintain stability when negotiating difficult terrain.

References:

Num 12:3 Psa 90:15
Mat 5:5 2Co 10:1
2Co 3:5-6
Psa 18:33-35

Further Study

1Pe 3

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 2

Apostles and prophets - first and least

King David declared, 'Your right *hand* upholds me and Your humility makes me great'. John wrote in his Gospel that the Father had committed all things into the *hands* of Christ. Throughout church history, the Lord Jesus has committed the authority of His right hand to apostles and prophets.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, 'God has appointed in the church, *first* apostles, second prophets, third teachers'. Apostles and prophets are not only *first* because of their authority. '*First*' also implies a priority of experience. Therefore, we can conclude that the apostle and prophet are to model a manner of conduct and experience that is an example for those who follow.

The Lord Jesus exalts apostles and prophets to make them *first*, but then afflicts them so they become *the least*. In Zechariah's vision, we learn that fresh oil streams from the fruit of the two olives when they are crushed by the hands which form the bowl above the lampstand. The apostle and prophet are the two 'anointed ones', literally translated 'sons of fresh oil', who stand by the Lord of the whole earth. They are evident in every age and generation of the church.

It is clear from the Scripture that the word of God grows and multiplies when the apostle and prophet are afflicted. Paul declared, 'So death works in us, but life in you'. He learnt humility through affliction having suffered beatings, imprisonment, tumult and hunger. He knew how to abound and be abased. Apostolic humility comes from a self-knowledge, which is unthreatened and is inclusive without allowing mixture. The apostle knows how to be the first and the least.

References:

Joh 13:3
Zec 6:13
2Co 4:8-12
Php 4:12

1Co 12:28
Act 12:24
Zec 4:12-14
2Co 11:5

Further Study

2Co 6

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 3

The Lord has regard for the humble

David declared, 'Though Yahweh is exalted, yet He regards the humble'. Isaiah proclaimed, 'To this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit'. The apostle James wrote, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble'. And Mary, the mother of Jesus, confessed, 'He has regard for the humble state of His bond slave'. In the Old Testament, 'humility' is often translated as 'affliction'. Isaiah prophesied, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted [or humble].'

Jesus Christ appoints apostles and prophets to be the messengers of the covenant and the stewards of the mysteries of God. Through suffering, those who are appointed first are made to be the least. Paul was ordained with the words, 'I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake'. The apostle was given a thorn in the flesh to stop him from becoming puffed up on account of his great revelation. When Paul pleaded for the thorn to be removed, God said, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness'. When Zechariah enquired about the two olives in his vision of the lampstand, he was told, 'This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit", says the Lord of hosts'. Zechariah observed that golden oil streamed from the *ears*, or hands, of the two olives. Through the affliction of the apostle and prophet, the oil of the word and Spirit of Christ is made available to the lampstand church.

References:

Psa 138:6
Jas 4:6
Isa 61:1
Act 9:16

Isa 66:2
Luk 1:48
1Co 4:1
Zec 4:6, 12

Further Study

2Co 12

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 4

Signs of a true apostle

Apostles have been exalted to be the model for everything that transpires in the church. By their example, a true apostle shows us how to empty ourselves; how to pour ourselves out. Paul encouraged the churches to imitate him, just as he imitated Jesus Christ who emptied Himself to become a bonds slave and was obedient to the point of death.

Apostles are bonds slaves of Christ, but they are also our slaves. Paul said that he was an apostle according to the will or commandment of God. Apostles have been 'approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel'. In Zechariah's vision, they are the *anointed ones* who produce and empty the oil of God's word through an administration of pipes to the lamps.

Apostles are not men-pleasers but are only interested in pleasing God. They do not assert their own authority. Paul said, 'We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. For we have fond affection for you. We were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel but also our very own lives.'

Apostles have the fragrance of Christ; a sweet odour to those who are being saved, but an aroma of death to those who were perishing. 'The fragrance of Christ' is a reference to 'the anointing oil' which was poured over the priests to ordain them for service in the Old Testament tabernacle.

Apostles are called, tried, approved and appointed as deacons by God. They are the custodians of the covenant and, therefore, the olive. Paul said that apostles were 'condemned to death'. Through affliction, they are crushed to produce the golden oil for the lampstand church.

References:

2Ti 4:6
1Co 1:1
2Co 2:15
1Ti 1:1
Zec 4:2-6, 12-14

Further Study

1Co 4

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 5

An apostolic company

Unlike the twelve disciples, not all apostles were apostles of the Lamb in the early church. We read in the book of Ephesians that Jesus gave gifts to men when He ascended on high. 'He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.' Jesus Christ gave these ministries as gifts to the church.

The apostle Paul walked in the model that Jesus established when He sent His disciples out to preach, two by two. The apostle and prophet always work together. While the apostle is the custodian of the word, the prophet is the deacon or servant to the apostle's stewardship. Barnabas and Silas were evidently prophets who were co-workers with Paul.

There were others who laboured in various churches on Paul's behalf. They were called 'apostles' because they were 'sent' by Paul, but they were not ascension-gift apostles. Apollos, Timothy, Titus, Jude, Epaphras, Tychicus and Demas fall into this category. We might refer to them as 'an apostolic company' who serve the apostle and prophet. Clearly, Timothy and Titus were servants to Paul. When Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus, he gave him a clear mandate. He told the younger man to commit what he had learned to faithful men and to stop others teaching strange doctrines. In the same way, Paul gave Titus clear instructions in Crete. He was told to set things in order and to ordain elders in every city according to Paul's direction. Evidently, these elders had already been identified by the apostle and prophet. From these accounts, we can conclude that an apostolic company is sent by an apostle to be co-workers with overseers and deacons, who are not yet able to put an administration of pipes in place.

References:

Mar 6:7
Zec 4:2
Eph 4:8, 11-12

Further Study

Act 15

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 8

Who is adequate?

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul posed the question, 'Who is adequate for these things?' He goes on to say that our adequacy does not come from ourselves but from God who 'made us adequate servants [deacons] of a new covenant.' Paul said that the inspired Scripture can make the man of God adequate, equipped for every good work. He prayed that the Colossians might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work, pleasing Him in all respects and strengthened with all power according to His glorious might. Paul declared that the Father had qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. Clearly, He can make us adequate to receive an inheritance.

When the psalmist wrote, 'He trained my hands for battle so that my arm can bend a bow of bronze', he was confessing that the Lord had made him completely adequate for warfare. David declared, 'Your gentleness [humility] makes me great. You enlarge my steps under me, and my feet have not slipped. I pursued my enemies and destroyed them.' God's humility enabled David to succeed. We read that David's enemies fell under his feet. The humility of God will also cause Satan to be crushed under our feet.

Jesus instructed His disciples to 'take My yoke upon you and learn from Me for I am gentle and humble'. We take *His* yoke of humility upon ourselves. It is not human humility that we find for ourselves. Paul said, 'We have such confidence through Christ towards God but our adequacy is not from ourselves'. Adequacy is produced and found in the humility of Yahweh. The Lord wants to make us adequate so we can do His will and fulfil His purpose for our lives.

References:

2Co 2:16 2Co 3:4-6
2Ti 3:17 Col 1:10-13
Mat 11:29 2Co 9:8

Further Study

Psa 18

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 9

Imitate me as I imitate Christ

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, 'Imitate me as I imitate Christ'. He likewise urged the Philippians to follow his example. He instructed them to 'observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us'. Paul was not telling them to copy what he was doing. He was asking them to imitate the way he conducted himself in all circumstances.

He addressed the Ephesian elders saying, 'You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time'. This verse literally reads, 'You know how I conducted myself the whole time as a slave of the Lord with humility and with tears and with temptations that came upon me from the plots of the Jews'. Paul was referring to his conduct as an apostle. We can conclude that he was tempted to deviate away from the model of humility because of his adverse circumstances. Paul did not shrink from declaring anything that was profitable, teaching publically and house to house. In fact, we know he declared the whole counsel of God in Ephesus.

Paul was crushed by the things that came against him, causing oil to be produced. He imitated Christ who lived among them as the Olive of the Covenant for three and a half years and was finally 'crushed for our iniquities'. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ would be given as the 'Covenant to the people'. From the upper room to Gethsemane, a process began. 'Gethsemane' means 'oil press'. When Jesus went down into Gethsemane, the Olive of the Covenant was crushed so that the life of the covenant could be made available to a lampstand church.

References:

1Co 11:1
Isa 53:5
Act 20:18-19, 27

Further Study

Isa 49

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 10

A pattern for us to follow

In the same way that apostles imitate Christ, we are to imitate them. In all their circumstances, they provide a model or pattern for us to follow. In the letter to the Philippians, we read that Jesus emptied Himself and Paul was poured out. We are to imitate true apostles who walk with patience and humility. They do not overpower us because they are unthreatened and know who they are. The apostle Paul talked about his 'proud confidence' and the testimony of his conscience. He said, 'In holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward you'.

Apostles and prophets are 'servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God'. They are custodians of His word and they lay a foundation upon which others can build. In laying that foundation, the apostle's conduct appears to be of equal importance to his doctrine. Humility is the means by which the foundation is laid. Paul did not derive any personal benefit from the churches, but emptied himself to become both God's slave and their slave.

The temple of God is built with living stones. The apostle models for us a mode of living; a way of achieving success when God's power is effective in our lives. However, we do not model their moral self-righteousness, as if it were in some way superior to our own. We imitate true disciples, spiritual men and women, who have been taught by following another's faith and example. The writer to the Hebrews said, 'Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct'. We imitate those who model apostolic humility for us. It is their faith we follow.

References:

Php 3:17 1Co 4:1
Eph 2:20 1Th 2:14
Eph 5:1 1Co 11:1
Php 2:7-8, 17

Further Study

Heb 13

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 11

The seal of Paul's apostleship

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, saying, 'If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.' There were obviously ones who did not accept Paul. So he asserted that all those who heard and received him, imitated his example and lived by the life of the oil that he brought, were the proof and the substance of his effective apostleship. To the Thessalonians, Paul said, 'We were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives'. Through his example, the apostle imparted a model of humility whereby affliction produced life. The more Paul was crushed, the more oil flowed out. His finest work was accomplished in a prison, not standing in front of a large crowd.

In the Psalms, David proclaimed, 'God girds me with strength and makes my way blameless'. How does our way become blameless? Paul said to the Ephesians, 'You know how I was among you'. He was referring to his way or manner of conduct. In the early church, the Christian life was called 'the Way'. It is a way of living and thinking that allows us to be effective in life. But it is not the way of the world. In the world, we elevate ourselves. The apostle Peter wrote, 'Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time'. He gives grace to the humble. He regards the lowly. When we walk in humility, He exalts us to our individual sonship. We don't have to go one bit lower or one bit higher than the reality of the name He has given us.

References:

1Co 9:2
Psa 18:31
Act 9:2
Psa 138:6

1Th 2:8
Act 20:18
1Pe 5:5-6
Luk 1:48

Further Study

1Th 4

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 12

Death in us – life in you

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, 'I think that God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death. We have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honour.'

Can we recognise the process at work? Paul is giving us a précis of his life and the apostolic company who travelled with him. Because they conducted themselves in true apostleship, they became fools so the rest of the believers could become wise. And because they were weak, others were made strong. Paul is not mocking Christians who are not apostles. He is simply describing a process; a cycle of being humbled and exalted. As apostles are cast down, we are raised up. And as they are raised up, we are cast down. In submitting to the word of the apostle and prophet, we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. When apostles and prophets are raised up, their fruit is multiplied. As they are cast down, the oil of His word begins to flow. And when it flows, we are raised up or exalted toward our name and work. We are cast down again, as the word begins to try us. Paul went on to say that they were hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated and homeless. He and his apostolic company had become the scum and dregs of the world. They had become nothing. Isn't that an amazing thought? Although apostles are first, He has made them least.

References:

1Pe 5:6
1Co 4:9-13
Act 14:19
2Co 1:8

Further Study

2Co 11

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 15

Slaves in His house

The Scripture accounts that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Our carnality caused us to sin, and the wages of sin was death. Jesus said that He 'came to give His life a ransom for many'. And the apostle Paul explained that having been freed from sin, we are now enslaved to God. We are slaves in the Master's house. In his letters, Paul introduced himself as a slave of Jesus Christ who was appointed as an apostle. He said that he was 'an apostle by the will of God'. Peter, likewise, called himself a slave and an apostle. Paul and Peter were slaves before they became apostles. Slave apostles are firstly 'called'. They are then 'tried', 'approved' and, finally, 'appointed' as deacons of the word. They are the faithful and sensible slaves who the master puts 'in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time'. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul called apostles, 'Your bondslaves for Jesus' sake'. This is the reverse of what we might imagine in terms of human slavery. We would think that we should be the slaves to the apostles.

There is a mystery to our slavehood. As we continue to humble ourselves, God keeps exalting us. Firstly, He places you in His house as a slave. And then He exalts you toward the work and character of your sonship in His house. When others are exalted above us, it is actually because we were in their place. Such was the case for John the Baptist. John said of Jesus, 'He must increase, but I must decrease'. This was a man who knew who he was!

References:

Eph 2:1.
Rom1:1
2Pe 1:1
Joh 3:30
Rom 6:22-23

Further Study

Luk 19

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 16

Take My yoke

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul wrote, 'God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers'. Because apostles have been appointed first, they are the first ones to experience the gospel process. We are, therefore, instructed to follow their faith and example. In the Scripture, we observe that apostles are constantly delivered over to death. This process brings them to weakness, which in turn produces a submission to the yoke of humility. Jesus said, 'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'

The yoke of humility makes the apostle a co-slave and co-worker with Jesus Christ. This yoke represents the 'sentence of death' that was on Christ. The sentence of death means a decree has been passed, a mode has been established and a definition has been granted. Obviously, we are not comfortable with that because it is contrary to life itself.

Describing his affliction in Asia, Paul wrote, 'We were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead'. Paul always carried about in his body the dying of Jesus. He said, 'So death works in us, but life in you'. Throughout his ministry, the apostle was constantly in danger. He declared, 'I die daily'.

References:

1Co 12:28 2Co 4:10-12
2Co 1:8-9 1Co 15:31
Luk 24:20 1Co 4:9
1Co 11:26
Mat 11:29-30

Further Study

Php 3

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 17

The sentence of death

Apostles live with a 'sentence of death' upon them. They model a process of being humbled and crushed so the oil of God's word can be produced. In the first case, apostles are not afflicted because of their sin; although affliction does cause us to cease from sin. Jeremiah was instrumental in the Jews going into exile but he faced great opposition from his countrymen. The prophet said, 'I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know that they had devised plots against me saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more".' The apostle Paul, likewise, spoke of the trials that came upon him 'through the plots of the Jews'. Affliction produced humility in both these men.

The Lord allows apostles to be afflicted at the hands of godless men, so that the sentence of death is working in His messengers. In this way, the experience of the apostle becomes the model for the prophet, for the lamp, and for the whole lampstand church; which is able then to grow in affliction. We are reminded of the Israelites in Egypt. 'The more they were afflicted, the more they grew and multiplied.'

When we join the fellowship of the word, we are joining the fellowship of affliction. If we imitate the apostle and prophet, who imitate Christ, we will be delivered over to death. Jesus emptied Himself to an end point. He humbled Himself all the way down to death on the cross, trusting that He would be raised again. If He was not rescued by Eternal Spirit, there would be no coming back. It is the same for us.

References:

1Pe 4:1
Act 20:19
Php 3:8-9
Exo 1:12

Further Study

1Th 1

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 18

Receiving the word in affliction

The apostle Paul commended the Thessalonians saying, ‘You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia’.

Paul is describing the apostolic model that we are to follow. We either receive God’s word in the midst of difficulty, or His word results in affliction when it tries us. Affliction produces humility. It enables us to humbly receive a word the first time it is spoken. When that word comes a second time, He exalts us and we become an example to others, like the Thessalonians.

Humility allows us to know ourselves. Before we are afflicted, we are confused and lack understanding of who we are before God. But after we have suffered, we gain knowledge of our sonship; our name, place, and work. Clearly, we will not feel adequate for these things. But He will pour out His grace to make us adequate. He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

We know that power is perfected in weakness. If we are exalted, we know that He will also make us the least. When He makes us great, He will make us the slave of all. Jesus said, ‘He who would be first among you must be a slave. He who would be great among you must be the deacon of all.’ When He exalts us, He is simply making us effective in the place where He has appointed us. But as soon as we become effective in our place, we can expect tribulation and affliction because the word of our sonship is always tried.

References:

1Th 1:6-7 Psa 119:67
Mar 10:44 Mar 9:35
2Co 12:9-12

Further Study

Psa 119:49-88

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 19

The thorn in Paul's flesh

Some might say that Paul's Jewish opponents were the sign that God was not *with him*. But actually, they were the sign that God *was with* the apostle. Those who afflicted Paul caused him to keep humbling himself. And, therefore, the Lord had regard for him. And the more Paul humbled himself, the more he was crushed.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul wrote, 'See that you walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, in every respect bearing fruit'. What is this 'manner' that is worthy of the Lord? It is the way of *humility*. Paul walked in a worthy manner, bearing the fruit of the olive tree, as instructed by the prophet Jeremiah. But was glory and blessing the outcome for Paul? It certainly didn't appear to be! The fruit of the apostle's life was *crushed*, and the pure oil of the olive flowed out. It flowed *down* to the people of God as the word grew and multiplied.

Paul told the Ephesian elders, 'I was a slave of the Lord with all *humility, with tears and trials which came upon me*'. And how did these trials come upon him? Paul explained that they came through 'the plots of the Jews'. Wherever Paul went, the Jews hindered him. This severe opposition from the Jews was most likely 'the thorn' in his flesh. Paul explained, 'Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness".'

References:

Col 1:10
Jer 11:16
Act 20:19
2Co 12:7-9

Further Study

Act 17

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 22

The God of all comfort

Whenever Paul was afflicted, he humbled himself to a state of weakness. Had he not done so, he would have become bitter. Because he exercised humility, Paul was able to say, 'I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation'. In his letter to the Corinthians, he had previously written, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.'

Paul explained that the over-abundance of his affliction produced the oil which would be their comfort and would become the comfort of others through them! Paul said that the Thessalonians had imitated him because they had 'received the word in much tribulation'. Like the apostle, they had been afflicted *because* of the word. Paul received the word by sovereign revelation. He didn't ask for it. And what happened next? Affliction followed the word! Paul wrote, 'I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men'. It would not have mattered what Paul did. The apostle was always going to receive the word in tribulation. He was always going to be afflicted. Paul was imprisoned. He was shipwrecked on three occasions. He had been beaten with rods, stones and whips. He had suffered hunger, thirst and exposure. The apostle lived in constant danger. Nevertheless, the word grows and multiplies through affliction.

References:

2Co 1:4-5 2Co 7:4
1Th 1:6 1Co 4:9
2Co 11:23-28

Further Study

2Co 1

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 23

Humbled and exalted

The Lord is doing a cyclical work in us and it will be this way until the day we go to be with Him. He exalts us and then He humbles us. Yet we are no more when we are raised up and no less when we are humbled. God uses affliction to purge our sin.

The psalmist wrote, 'We have been consumed by Your anger and by Your wrath we have been dismayed. You have placed our iniquities before You. Our secret sins are in the light of Your presence.' Affliction brings our secret sins to the surface so that 'everything is laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do'. He brings our sin into the light to purge it away. God is never intending to humiliate us. But sometimes, we make a poor response during a trial which causes us to feel humiliated. We cease to humble ourselves because we get overwhelmed by our affliction, by its injustice or the cause by which it came. Rising up in self-defence, we refuse to come to the humble state. Therefore, the Lord has no regard for us. We know 'He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble'.

Like Job, we need to bow our heads and close our mouths during our 'days of affliction'. He uses difficult circumstances to produce humility. Furthermore, we are afflicted in the area of our calling; in the area of our slavehood. And when we are afflicted, Paul says that we are filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

References:

Luk 1:48, 52 Luk 18:14
1Pe 5:5-6 Psa 90:7
Heb 4:13 1Jn1:7
Jas 4:6 Col 1:4
Job 30:16, 27

Further Study

Job 42

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 24

Workers of death

God the Father is at work in our lives to refine our sonship; but often, the catalyst for that trial is what the Scripture calls the ‘workers of iniquity’, ‘evil workers’, and ‘godless men’. The Gospel of Mathew accounts that the chief priests laid their hands on Jesus. The ‘workers of iniquity’ came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. They appointed Him to death, handing Him over to be crucified by the hands of godless men. Under whose authority did they do this? It was under the authority of Caiaphas, the high priest. They took the authority of the hand of Yahweh in priesthood and appointed Him to death. They were doing the work of the destroyer!

Jesus said, ‘Take My yoke upon you’. It is the yoke of His slavehood and His priesthood. He said, ‘Take it upon you for I Am *humble*’. That was His model. It was also Paul’s model. The apostle wrote, ‘I was with you in Asia in *all humility* with tears, in trials, because of the Jews’. To both Jesus and Paul, the Jews were the workers of death. They were the means by which the sentence of death was imposed. Through his humility, Paul was actually destroying the works of death because the crushing of affliction upon him was producing the oil of God’s word and grace. The more Paul was afflicted, the more the word grew and multiplied. Those who afflicted him were working death in Paul so that he could confess, ‘Death works in us but life in you’. We can be assured that when Paul’s obedience was complete, his afflictors were judged.

References:

Isa 31:10 Php 3:2
 Act 2:23 Mat 26:50
 Act 20:19 2Co 4:12

Further Study

Mat 26

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 25

Why did Paul have to die?

Under the fifth seal in the book of Revelation, the slaves of Christ positioned under the altar, were waiting for the blood to flow of those fellow-slaves who were yet to be killed. Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that they would fill up 'the measure of the guilt' of their fathers who had killed the prophets. The only way they could do this was to shed the blood of the innocent righteous. Why did Paul finally have to be martyred? He had run his race and finished the course. He declared, 'There is henceforth a crown laid up for me'. His blood had to be shed to fill up the guilt of the fathers. This is the judgement of blood.

There is a quota of blood to be shed because 'precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints'. Paul had to die the martyr's death. He said, 'I am heading down to Jerusalem where bonds and chains await me'. This had been ordained for him as part his slavehood of Jesus Christ. Certainly, we would have to say that Peter and Paul's blood had to be shed. They were to fill up that which was lacking in the afflictions of Christ in their lives.

Of course, not every believer is appointed to die a martyr's death. Nevertheless, we are still being delivered over to the process of death in our lives, so that the life of Christ is manifested in our mortal bodies. If we are not living in faith, then we will feel humiliated, downcast and depressed whenever the process of death is at work in us. We need to follow the example of Paul. He was not only content with the process of death; he learnt to rejoice in it! He understood that if we die with Christ, then death cannot hold us. Death is swallowed up in victory.

References:

Mat 23:32 Rev 6:9-11
 2Ti 4:8 Psa 116:15
 Act 20:22-23 1Co 1:24
 1Co 15:54 2Co 4:11

Further Study

2Co 5

Daily Proverb

Proverbs 26