

The Christian Temper, Supernatural and Divine

by A.B. Simpson

The Christian temper is a supernatural and divine quality that comes from a heavenly source and is possible only after the natural has died out and the resurrection life of Christ has taken its place.

Scripture: Philippians 3:10

Topics: "Supernatural Transformation", "Fellowship in Suffering"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the necessity of a supernatural temper in Christians, which is cultivated through a deep relationship with Christ and the power of His resurrection. He explains that true Christian character requires the renunciation of both sin and self-righteousness, leading to a profound union with Christ, including sharing in His sufferings. Simpson illustrates that this transformation is not merely about enduring hardships but involves a joyful surrender to God's will, inspired by the hope of resurrection. He encourages believers to embrace their identity in Christ, which allows them to experience true life and victory over suffering. Ultimately, he calls for a life that reflects the glory of God, shaped by love and the promise of eternal life.

Transcript

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3: 10, 11).

The temper of which we have been speaking is not natural but supernatural. This delicate plant is not indigenous to the soil of time, but must be transplanted from heavenly soil and grow from a supernatural seed. We talk about innocent babies, angelic maidens, and lovely dispositions, but these things all disappear when the real test comes, and we find ourselves like one sitting down on a beautiful mossy bank covered with verdure and bloom, and suddenly seeing the poisonous asp glide from beneath our seat. The life described in this heavenly picture must come from a heavenly source, and is possible only after the natural has died out and the resurrection life of Christ has taken its place.

In our text the Apostle describes by a reference to his own experience the evolution of the Christian temper.

1. There is such a thing as natural virtue. There are moral differences in human nature, and God does not disparage or depreciate whatever goodness still remains after the wreck of the fall. Paul acknowledges

that even he had been possessed of many qualities of virtue and morality. If any man had cause to have confidence in himself, surely he had. He gives a list of his virtues, and moral and religious advantages. He was strictly orthodox, born of Hebrew blood, circumcised according to the rigid ritual of Judaism, a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," a Pharisee of the Pharisees, blameless so far as outward righteousness was concerned, and intensely earnest so far as religious zeal could go. Yet all this he renounces and disclaims with one emphatic sentence, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."

2. In order to receive the righteousness of Christ we must renounce all our own righteousness. The surrender which Christianity demands is not the abandoning of evil, but the renouncing of even that which is good for the sake of God's better and best. All his own righteousness and all his own rights Paul gladly surrendered. He had counted them loss. He had suffered their loss and then he had not allowed one lingering regret, one reluctant thought, but counted them as refuse, not worthy to speak about in comparison with the excellence of the knowledge and the glory of the righteousness of his precious Lord. He had accepted a new righteousness by faith from Christ, and it was all divine. He does not mean by this merely his justification from past sin through the imputed righteousness of Christ; but he means that he had accepted from his Lord an interior, intrinsic and personal righteousness, that his inward character and whole nature henceforth were not the result of self-culture but the infusion of the very life and spirit of his blessed Master.

3. But there is a deeper place of surrender than the renunciation of our righteousness. "That I may know him, . . . and the fellowship of his sufferings." Merely to die to our sinfulness or our righteousness is but a preliminary of holy character. The essence of it is to enter into the most profound and perfect union with the Lord Jesus even to the extent of longing to be made partakers of His very sufferings.

I knew a Christian friend once who offered this singular prayer for a loved one, and I know nothing that ever impressed me more. "Lord," she said, "I ask Thee that Thou wilt lay on me all the burdens, sufferings, trials, and needs of my friend. I do not ask to share the joys, but I do ask if there be pain, pressure, danger, that I can bear, to lay it upon me in sympathy, fellowship, prayer, and the power to lift and help so that the life for which I suffer may be the more free to serve and work for Thee." Love always longs to bear another's pain, and so the heart of the Apostle intensely longed to share the sufferings of Christ. There is a sense in which this may be done if we live near enough to His heart.

There are some sufferings which we cannot call the sufferings of Christ. They are our own. The sufferings which we bring upon ourselves by sin or folly we have no right to call His sufferings. The sufferings that come to us even through sickness we may lay on Him, for He has already borne them, and He does not ask us to bear them again if we are walking in His will and trusting in His Word. The reproaches and persecutions, as we call them, which we bring upon ourselves by indiscretion or wrongdoing -- these are not the sufferings of Christ, although He lovingly helps us in the trials which we needlessly endure.

Then He had sufferings which we cannot share. His vicarious suffering as our Substitute and Sacrifice for sin, we can never endure and never need to. Once for all He has appeared to "take away sin by the sacrifice of himself," and "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin."

But there are sufferings which we may share with Him. There was His voluntary self-sacrifice for the world's salvation into which we may enter as we give ourselves for others and sacrifice the pleasures of the world that we may walk with Him. There is again the misunderstanding and loneliness, persecution and distress which will come to all who live godly in Christ Jesus in every age, and which we may joyfully

accept, counting it a privilege that we are esteemed worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. And deeper than all, there is the spirit of sympathy with the suffering around us, the tempted and tried, the sorrows and even the sins of a lost world. This is the deepest element in the priesthood of Christ which His disciples may share. "He is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and the Christlike life will enter with Him into His deep sense of the needs of others, into the ministry of prayer and agony for the sins and sorrows of men, and into His deepest thoughts and tenderest solicitude for a lost world. Paul tells us in his epistles of the burdens, care and griefs that came upon him constantly for the cause of His Master and the condition of his brethren.

Now in his letter to the Colossians he tells us, "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" (1 :24). That is to say, Christ has left certain sufferings for His body, the Church, to finish, and Paul rejoiced in being partaker of these sufferings. Writing to the Philippians he says of this very thing, "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause do ye also joy and rejoice with me." It was his joy and glory to be a living sacrifice for his beloved brethren, and he expected them to respond in the same spirit, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." And accordingly in one of his letters to the Corinthians, he exclaims, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Cor. 11 :29, 28).

4. There is one step more. "Being made conformable unto his death." The difference between suffering and death is that there is no suffering after death. The dead man is one whom the suffering has ceased to hurt, and when we are truly conformable unto Christ's death, we are in that happy place where the promise of Jeremiah is true, "He shall not see when heat cometh, neither be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." The people that are always talking about their deadness are not yet dead. The people who are fond of dwelling on their sufferings have not yet been made conformable unto His death. To be dead with Christ is to be as if we were not, and to so recognize ourselves in Him that we shall not know our old selves, and shall even think and speak of ourselves as Paul when he said, "I knew a man in Christ fourteen years ago." It was as if it were another, and not himself. It is not to die with Christ that the Apostle is speaking of, but it is TO BE DEAD with Christ. This everlasting dying is not deadness, but it is aliveness. Many are like the cowardly Nero, who when pursued by his enemies, stabbed himself in a score of places, but was careful every time to avoid the fatal part. The place of victory and rest is where we are really dead, and so dead that we have even ceased to be conscious of it, and are conscious only of Christ and the resurrection life which has come to us through Him.

5. But now we come to something far more important than this; namely, the spiritual resurrection by which we are able to enter into the sufferings and death of our Lord. Now this whole passage is a perfect paradox, and runs directly contrary to the natural order of logical thought. In such an order we would expect the death to come first and the resurrection afterwards, but here it is quite different. It is "the power of his resurrection" first, then the "fellowship of his sufferings" and the conformity to His death. The explanation of this leads us to the deepest spiritual truths. We can never truly suffer or die with Christ by mere will power or in stern, cold, dead surrender. We can never do it truly until we have first entered into His life, and are enabled for it by the power of life, hope, and love. The reason the Lord Jesus was able to stoop to the very grave and lay down all His rights and honors was because He had so much above and beyond all this in His Father's love and His own eternal glory, that the sacrifice and surrender could not really harm or impoverish Him. His life was not in the things He laid down but in the things He could not

lose, and it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame. The power of an endless life was filling all His being and gave Him strength to make the mighty sacrifice and go down among the dead, because just before Him He saw the brightness of the resurrection, the glory of the ascension, and the Kingdom of the coming Age. And so His people must know the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His glory, before they can in any true spirit enter into the fellowship of His sufferings and the partnership of His death.

How was it that the patriarch Abraham was able to sacrifice on the altar of Moriah, him in whom all his hopes, as well as affections, were bound up, and with whom all the promise of God's covenant were inseparably connected? It was only because of the power of His resurrection which he had already felt and seen. In commenting on this scene the Apostle explains to the Hebrews that he esteemed that "God was able even to raise [Isaac] up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." This makes it certain that he confidently expected Isaac's resurrection before he offered him up to death.

We can see this plainly even in the Old Testament narrative, when he said to the attendant, "Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." He certainly expected to return with Isaac, and it was this blessed hope and this triumphant faith that took the sting from his sorrow, and gave life and victory to his awful sacrifice.

And so we must have the spring of divine joy and victorious faith before we can stoop to a true surrender. It is not yielding to blind fate; it is not giving up in dark despair; but it is simply entering the dark tunnel, knowing that the light of home is on the farther side, and that we have a hope and a certainty which even death itself cannot destroy.

Indeed, beloved friends, we cannot yield in anything acceptably to God, unless we have the life and strength of God within us to make it possible and real. We are not even able to consecrate ourselves in our own strength. We must take His life for all even for the surrender, and through the power of His resurrection enter into His death and share the fellowship of His sufferings. This takes the spirit of asceticism out of Christian life, and crowns our very sacrifice with all the joy and the glory of victorious faith. It is faith that works by love and overcomes the world and even the grave. Be assured, beloved brethren, that this is the deepest secret of spiritual life. There is no merit in enforced suffering or unwilling sacrifice. God asks no sacrifice from you until it is such joy that it has ceased to be a sacrifice. He wants no tears of reluctance on His altar, but He wants our hearts to come with willing, joyful yieldedness, and count it a privilege and honor that He will condescend to take us, own us, and make the best of our worthless lives. The spirit of the New Testament is this, radiant and bright with the light of love and promise, "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."

6. Once more, we have not only the light of faith, but the still more radiant light of hope, as the inspiration of this glad surrender: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection [from among] the dead." There can be no doubt about the application of this passage to the resurrection of God's prepared people, who are to rise and meet the Bridegroom at His glorious coming. It is not a general resurrection of all the dead, but it is a select resurrection and an elect company who are taken from among the rest of the dead. It is the resurrection described in the twentieth chapter of Revelation where the crowned ones come forth to sit on the millennial throne with their regent Lord, "but the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand

years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." This was the hope which inspired the Apostle to let all else go, and rise in the present life to the highest and holiest possibilities of Christian experience and communion with his Lord. For this he counted all but loss, and said he was still striving for something unto which he had not yet fully attained. It is very solemn to hear this extraordinary man, even at this ripe stage of his life, speaking of the blessed hope of the first resurrection as something to which he had not yet surely attained. Later, in his second epistle to Timothy, it is different. He speaks of it there as a crown that is laid up for him, a fight that is fought, a race that is run, a course that is finished, and a prize that is sure. But in this chapter he is still pressing on to gain it, and it is the inspiration of his glorious career. Shall it be the inspiration of our lives?

Beloved, is it not true even in the nature of things that our inward character takes on its appropriate outward form? It is part of the law of the fitness of things that the coarse and groveling nature of the swine should be embodied in the gross form of the hog; that the deep and subtle cunning serpent should take shape in the slimy, crawling reptile; and that the gentleness of the dove should be expressed in its downy bosom and its gentle, lovely form. Do we not see this in human character? Do we not find character express itself in the personal appearance? Does not the criminal become stereotyped with the lines of cruelty, hardness and coarseness in his very visage? Does not purity, gentleness and nobility stamp its effect on the brow of the good, and cover the sweet and verable face of some aged saint with a beauty and glory that shine from the sacred holy of holies within? Have we not all looked upon faces that were an absolute reflection of the transparent life that we knew was there behind the lovely countenance, and have we not looked upon countenances that were but the outward photograph of the dark, deep, dreadful hell that was raging in the heart beneath? And if this be in so great a measure true in this imperfect state, how much more will it be realized in that world where the law of the fitness of things shall be absolute and eternal. There Judas shall not only find his own place, but be clothed with his own form. There the wicked shall come creeping forth from their dark tombs with all the meanness, malignity and terror of their past lives and their future doom expressed in their terrific personality; and there the holy and the good shall rise with every feature beaming, and every movement telling of the gladness within and the glory that is to come.

Yes, beloved, we are forging our crowns day by day. We are weaving our triumphal robes. We are making our eternal destiny. We are settling into our final place, and the glory which the Master is preparing for each of us, He is working into us now in the firstfruits of the Spirit, who is "the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." "Grant" cried the mother of two disciples, "that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom." The Master did not refuse her behest, but He told them very solemnly that it was largely in their own hands, and that these places of honor were to be given to those for whom they were prepared by the Father. He also showed very plainly what this preparation meant by the question: "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Thus alone could they enter into His glory, "For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him."

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