

The Patience of Fellowship

By Bob Larsen

Sometimes, we may have trials, problems, and tribulations that require a great deal of patience to overcome. Sometimes, those trials may come through those who are close to us and who are people we consider to be believers. I have recently been in contact with people who are reeling from abusive treatment and painful experiences that were caused by some who claim to be believers, including some who claim to be ministers of the gospel. Often in this life, we endure a great deal of pain, and we struggle with temptations to be bitter about it, but we should remember to keep our struggles in the perspective of the Word of God, or we can so easily lose our footing.

Let us consider what fellow believer Paul endured when he recounts his own struggles in 2 Corinthians 11:26: *“I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren....”* All of these things, including the “false brethren,” did not deter Paul from continuing on with Jesus. Jesus did tell us that we would have *“tribulation in this world”* (John 16:33). We expect persecution from those who do not claim to know Him, but it is so much more painful when the tribulation comes from those claiming to be believers. Keep in mind, though, Jesus is still perfect, and He is still willing to live in our hearts and provide us with love, joy, peace, forgiveness, and all the many other things that are benefits of the Christian life. If our trials in life come as a result of abuse by someone who claims to be a believer or someone who is family, we need to let persecution draw us into a closer relationship with Jesus rather than let it damage us. Trials are what make us grow. *“We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience”* (Romans 5:3). I know that it is painful when those trials come through alleged brethren, but God uses all trials to bring us closer to Him. When we are going through any trial, we often are faced with a distinct choice: we can become bitter and drift away, or like Job, Paul, Peter, and so many others, we can patiently allow the trials to draw us to a closer relationship with God.

I am grieved when I find that some of my acquaintances are no longer in regular fellowship with other believers because they have been hurt by “false brethren.” It is difficult to live a Christian life without the fellowship of the Body of Christ. Above all, we should keep in mind that we all go through trials. We need to patiently endure the trials as they work in our lives to bring us closer to the One who died for us and offers us the free gift of eternal life.