

Suffering Loss

John R Gavazzoni

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him....."

What caused this loss in Paul's life, this loss of everything that, in the context of the law, would be interpreted as being morally and spiritually meritorious for Paul before God? It seems to be commonly understood that both his initial and ongoing loss(es) are to be attributed to the man's superior piety, his superior willingness that got him over the top and caused him to value the knowledge of Christ, the "gaining" of Christ, so much more highly than anything that was gain to him.

The Spirit of God, very recently, came at the subject quite differently with me while I was experiencing some things most precious to me slipping through my fingers as I watched in agony; things which could be viewed as matters of spiritual gain, things that might be attributed to my diligence and adding to my reputation.

The Spirit's emphasis was not about Paul's or my willingness to let go of gainful things in favor of Christ, but of Father's decision to take them away.

That's really why we suffer such loss. Our Father says, "You can't have this any more (whatever the particular thing might be). I'm taking it from you and depriving you of it. I may return it to you at some point, but it will be different then; it will be part of gaining Christ and will no longer be a thing you can boast in, that stands in competition with my grace in your life."

It is a most important work of God to bring us--and it is all His doing--to an acceptance of, and even a rejoicing in our loss, but let it not be misunderstood; whatever loss is incurred is because God decided to

strip you of that thing. Oh how cruel and unfeeling He seems during that season.

We protest, maneuver, argue, demand fairness, do everything we possibly can to regain what has been lost, carry on endless and fruitless dialogue in our heads, and generally raise a stink before Him and any others who are involved. Wow, what a clear case of the hostility between flesh and spirit. Calmly, with a voice barely above a whisper, the Lord would remind me that this was His doing in spite of what seemed to me to be very apparent injustice on the part of human vessels who owed me better treatment.

The life of Christ in me keeps yielding and glorying in the tribulation, while my flesh tries to do everything it can to escape this trial of faith. I'm still in the throes of it. I feel as if I've been cold-cocked, sucker punched, hit up side the head by a baseball bat when I wasn't looking. It's true, our Lord is a jealous God who will not forever indulge our inordinate flirtations with things and persons who compete with Him for our devotion.

It's so exhausting trying to keep what God is taking away. He'll outlast you, dear brother and sister. Finally, you'll let go and discover that the pain was in trying to hang on. What you can't keep will come back to you in the same or in another form, but with an entirely new constitution. It will be constituted by grace. It will be His gift to you and part of your relationship with Him. It will no longer be anything you can, or would want to boast in.

By the way, I meant it when I said I am still in the throes of it. It's emotionally depressing and debilitating. I'll tell you, I'm not clicking my heels and singing, "I've Got the World on a String, Sitting on a Rainbow." I have precious moments of respite, but the misery still creeps in leaving me without any surface happiness at all. I feel like I want to find a little corner somewhere where I can suck my thumb and have a good old religious pity party.

Thank God for the certain victory which we have in Christ. That's all I have to say. Thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph in Christ.

I have that little sliver of light that breaks through in my heart making me remember how utterly faithful He has always been to this child of His, and how He has always brought me through. Jesus, many times, took to Himself the "I AM" of Deity. One of the most precious to me is found in His promise, "Lo, I AM with you always....."

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