

STEPHEN R. PHINNEY

TRUST NOBODY

The Trilogy Of The Great Exchange

BUT HIM

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Trust Nobody but Him

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But Him!

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TRUSTING NOBODY

My wife has said for many years, "I am certain that the older I get – the less I know." I cannot tell you how many times those words have rung my bell! I have been a born-again indwelt Christian since I was 16 years of age. I have fought my way through the jungle of deception and worldly fables for over 50 years and I still ask questions like:

How could a righteous God allow such an evil world?

How could a loving God allow the enemy to torture His children with despair and emotional suffocation?

Why do righteous people suffer, when they diligently worked to seek His divine will?

Why does God allow the ungodly to prosper?

My utmost favorite is: are adversity and affliction a sign that a suffering Christian has unconfessed sin?

After discipling others in the message of the Exchanged Life for 30+ years, I have discovered something rather simple, but profound. The Exchanged Life does not rid us of suffering, but rather invites it all the more.

Like many (if not most) Christians, I have suffered my own measurement of troubles – the type of troubles that bring heartache, physical challenges, and emotional ramifications. The most difficult of all suffering has been the constant unmerciful criticizing from fellow Body members. When fronted with a near terminal ailment, some Christians had the audacity to conclude that there must be some kind of sin in my life. They pushed and peddled the worldly thought that all suffering is always the result of sin; therefore, simplistically teaching that if I (we) simply repent of this "unknown sin," that the momentary light affliction would somehow disappear. Even though we know the error of this dogmatism, we fall into this dark place of treating repentance

like “a pill” – “a pill” that will somehow deliver us from our moments of despair and emotional suffocation.

When is the last time you had a mounting of perpetual circumstances thrown in your face at such a rate that you oftentimes felt you couldn't surface long enough to take a deep breath? The feeling of suffocation, in my opinion, is one of the worst kinds of suffering. Several years ago, when I first contracted an infection in my heart that ultimately led to heart failure, I had severe problems with my breathing. At first, we thought it was from a head cold. The doctor gave me medication to fight the viral infection. It only made things worse. Next in line was the thought my “childhood asthma” was returning. Treatment was applied, which of course made it worse. In fact, it was adding to the liquid building up in my lungs. Then it got to the point that I was only able to lay back, forget laying down, for several minutes at a time. Due to only getting 15 minutes of sleep a day, they thought I was developing sleep apnea. In reality, I was suffocating. By the time I was admitted to the ER, one lung was completely filled and the second was at its “half full” mark. I cannot tell you the horrid feelings this suffocation brought on. In fact, at one point in the ER, they were frantically working to “bring me back.” Once arresting the crisis, I was placed in a care unit to begin my healing process. While there, I was visited by an array of “friends” and family. Some visitors came to confess their sins of offense against me, they left, and I never heard from them again. Others came to visit to offer true and respectable comfort. Then, there were some who came as representatives of a “group of friends” to confront me about the “sin” in my life. One “old friend” in particular asked if I thought that God was putting this on me due to some type of sin in my life.

Now, I am a firm believer in declaring that afflictions sometimes do come from God in order to purify us and that this, in no way, indicates that God is unloving. It is only His way of leading us back to a dependent “talk and walk” relationship to Himself - kind of like a father would discipline a child. Even though I know that suffering instructs us in righteousness and prevents us from sinning, it doesn't make the journey any easier. It certainly puts us in the position of determining if we are going to question God's sovereignty or accuse Him of hurting His children. This all leads to the biggest question of all: Will we humbly submit ourselves to God's will?

I don't know about you, but I find God's will at times to be quite painful. I am NOT saying He doesn't provide comfort, healing, and guidance; but I am saying that the walk, for the most part,

is retentively daunting. To be straightforward, I find that God does not choose to answer most of my penetrating questions. Instead, He overwhelms me with a panoramic view of His creative power and perfect Divine wisdom. In fact, I usually get reprimanded for attempting to figure out the reason for my pain and suffering. This is the sin that gets me in trouble the most. I can't tell you how many times I have walked away from a conversation with God where I felt humbled and a bit foolish for implying that God owes me some type of explanation. Since I will never be big enough to canvas my own world, how would I ever presume to tell God how to run His world?

I think most indwelt Christians have embraced the fact that Jesus shed His blood to deliver us from our sins, but how many of us have really embraced the full Exchanged Life? Now, think about it – if we actually exchange our lives for His, doesn't it mean that in the exchange comes all of what comes with His life – like suffering?

“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:3).

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him” (Romans 8:16-17).

“For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29).

If you are like most of us fair weathered Christians, you don't mind the positive attributes of Christ in the great Exchange; but elements that are not so positive, like the “fellowship of His sufferings, well – that is a different story.

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship

of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11, emphasis mine).

In this Exchanged Life Series, I will be sharing the profound but difficult Truths associated with our exchange with the Life of Christ – with a particular emphasis on permissible suffering. I hope you join me in counting all things to be loss in view of the surpassing Truths of knowing our great Exchange in Christ Jesus, our Lord. This might be a difficult path to explore, but if you hang on the cross long enough, I think you will experience the great reward with doing so.

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EXCHANGING SUFFERING FOR PAIN

Was there ever a time in your Christian life when you could really say that you were righteous in most of your ways, while at the same time experiencing little affliction? I have many fond memories of those days...then came God’s “permissible affliction.” Even though I have wrestled with the “theology” of the purpose of “bad things happening to good people,” in my older years I have come to understand that Satan is the force behind all the calamities that come upon us. Keep in mind that I didn’t say “reason,” but the “force.” Personally, I believe this is one of THE most important elements for Christians to understand and believe.

When I prayed the *Selfer’s Prayer* (see below), back in 1979, I thought Exchanging my life for His would minimally reduce my pain and suffering; but little did I expect that it would actually offer me more. Right around that same time, I asked God to grant me half the measurement of wisdom and understanding He gave Solomon, primarily because I “felt” so stupid. After several years of exchanging suffering for more pain, the Lord led me to this passage:

“Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain” (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

At first, this passage raised more questions than it answered. From what I have learned from the Holy Scriptures, Satan actually needs permission from the Father in order to do his afflictions.

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.’ The LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.’ Then Satan answered the LORD, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.’ Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.’ So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD” (Job 1:6-12).

There are many theological elements contained within this passage. One that tends to glare at me the most is “permissible affliction.” This passage reveals that Satan works to trap and ensnare God’s people, with the deception that it is God’s fault and He is “out to get us.”

Several other significant doctrinal issues present themselves here. First, we find that Satan had to approach God and get in line with the rest of the “sons of God” – angels. Once Satan was at the bench of God, the two of them had this unique dialogue. God first asked Satan where he came from. This suggests that God didn’t know where he was or what he was doing. The truth of the matter is that God knew *exactly* who he was and what he was up to. God, by proof of most of His dialogues, reveals the prerogative of being the One who asks the questions – not man or spiritual beings. Next, we see God bringing up the opportunity to persecute Job before Satan could open his mouth to suggest it (v. 8). It’s almost like God set the stage of prospering Job in order to offer Satan this opportunity. Did God desire to bring hurt and destruction upon His beloved servant? Did God have this hidden curiosity to test Job to see if he would be attacked, tempted, drawn into sin, or become ensnared by the devil? No – He was confident in the investment He had made in Job up to this point in His Divine design. God clearly knew there was none like him on the face of the earth. Since God knows and watches

every thought and footprint of man, He knew that no man has been able to withstand a full-on attack of Satan since the days of Noah. He had confidence in this!

Personally, I believe Satan completely understood the level of character Job radiated. He obviously knew that he couldn't charge Job with any sin, because he (Satan) was the author of it. Just as God knew He was confident in Job's obedience to the Word, Satan knew of Job's confidence of disobedience to Satan's words. What we have is the great standoff, duel per se, between the confidence of God versus the confidence of Satan.

What is up with this satanic statement of **"Does Job fear God for nothing?"** (v. 9). The implication here is that Satan thinks Job "fears" God, NOT because of love, but because of the perception that God spoils him with riches, healthy children, and the prosperity assigned. He is under direct belief that Job would "curse God" and be done with Him if he had these "blessings" or luxuries taken away from him – thus proving that Job's fear was simply outward and hypocritical. Satan clearly knows how man's flesh functions – he does to get. After all, Satan developed the demonic reward system of "doing to get." The bottom line: Satan was convinced that Job was afraid of being punished by God if he didn't "jump through the hoops" that God set before him.

The second and less primal issue Satan throws God's way is the issue of protection. Satan now tempts God with the twisted truth that Job is righteous because he lives in a bubble, a protection, a shield of sorts that God formed around him. The truth of the matter is we can't function righteously without the almighty protection of God; but Satan is hinging Job's life upon this one principle. Yes, God did border Job's life and all that was entrusted to him with angels (hedge) to encamp about him. This passage reveals clear evidence that Satan is a pouty big bully who likes picking on the little guy. He basically is saying that if Job didn't have a big brother protecting him, Job would lose the fight. Well, duh! Satan never picks on someone his own size, although a day is coming when he picks a fight with SOMEONE who is truly going to "clean his clock." Typical bully – always thinking he is "the man," all the while suffering with "little man syndrome." Hmm – maybe that is what this is all about.

Allow me to do some immediacy here. Satan believes that Job breaths freely because he is in the protective bubble that God provided for him. Satan is suggesting having God remove this

bubble and allowing him to suffocate Job by way hellish and demonic circumstances; then, Job is surely to curse God to His face. The second point of immediacy is that Satan knows he can't do a blasted thing without God "putting forth His hand and touching all that he has." It is what we call in counseling a covert confession of impotence. Satan NEVER comes out and openly admits he is impotent, but manipulates in such a way that a covert confession spills out. This is a classic way of confession for bullies.

The Lord's response to this not so clever form of manipulation appeared to be in Satan's favor. With God saying, "Behold, all that he has (externally) is in your power (strength), only do not put forth your hand on him" (v. 12, parentheses mine), sends him off most assuredly living out his deception. It always amazes me how God will not dialogue, prove, or interact with Satan (or man) over their manipulative and stupid ways. He gives man, and beast, the appearance of "having their own way" in order for them to learn from the consequences of those ways. What a loving and respectful God we have.

The "Godological" statement here is rather critical for believers to see and embrace. God is *not* angry and displeased with Job, nor does He want to get some kind of thrill out of hurting him, nor is He gratifying Satan; but he does want Satan to face the doom of his own deception once again, while He (God) ultimately enjoys more glory. The truest form of stupidity is picking a fight with someone who has full and complete control over the universe. This passage shows us how stupid Satan really is. Secondly, it shows us that when "bad things" happen to good people, it does not mean that God is angry, disappointed, or "out to get us." God just has a thing about purifying the Bride of Christ for His Son and rubbing Satan's face in his own confusion. These are the two primary reasons for the existence of God's creation – to gain a Bride for His beloved Son and provide a place of torment and punishment for Satan. Humans can deluge their minds with other reasons, but these are the simple facts.

"Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.' So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD" (Job 1:12).

With this, the Lord sends a restrained Satan off to accomplish the mission of God, with Satan thinking it is all about his own mission. That is the beauty of this story; God proves the stupidity that deception forms when mixed with pride. Satan is nothing but a tool God uses to advance

His Kingdom. Why doesn't Satan figure this out? Simply, because sin makes us stupid. Satan's limited authority isn't even his – it belongs to God. All authority is owned by the One who imparts it.

“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Rom 13:1).

Any human or spiritual being who stretches their imagination to think they have ownership of anything, particularly authority, is suffering with the same deception of Satan himself. Any authority managed is authority assigned. Therefore, God is in sovereign charge of all things, including those who think they are in charge of anything.

The believer's emotions are in need of being exchanged just as our mind and will. God has blessed us with the positive emotions of Christ Himself; love, joy, cheerfulness, excitement, kindness, peace, and many others. What many of us don't realize is that when we make this great Exchange, we also inherit His not so positive emotions: sorrow, grief, misery, moaning, dejection, confusion – for God only knows how long this list is. It is in the back side of Christ's emotions that Satan feeds into. If He, our Lord and Savior, suffered such affliction – then in our Exchange, we should also be willing to fellowship in those same sufferings. We should be willing to exchange our sufferings for more of His pain. Ouch – now that hurts!

The Selfer's Prayer

I hereby surrender everything that I am, and have, and ever will be. I take my hands off of my life and release every relationship to You: every habit, every goal, my health, my wealth, and everything that means anything. I surrender it ALL to You. By faith I take my place at the Cross, believing that when the Lord Jesus was crucified, according to Your Word, I was crucified with Him; when He was buried, I was buried; when He was raised from the dead, I was raised with Him. I deny myself the right to rule and reign in my own life and I take up the Cross believing that I was raised from the dead and seated at Your right hand.

I thank You for saving me from my sins and myself. From this moment on I am trusting You to live Your life in me and through me, instead of me, to do what I can't do, quit what

I can't quit, start what I can't start, and--most of all--to be what I can't be. I am trusting you to renew my mind and heal damaged emotions in Your time. I thank You now by faith for accepting me in the Lord Jesus, for giving me Your grace, Your freedom, Your joy, Your victory and Your righteousness as my inheritance. Even if I don't feel anything, I know that Your Word is true; I am counting on Your Spirit to do what Your Word says-- to set me free from myself, that Your resurrection life may be lived out through me, and that You may receive all the glory.

I thank You and praise You for victory right now in Jesus' name, Amen.

EXCHANGING ME FOR NOBODY

Have you ever had rapid succession of affliction to the point of not being able to catch your breath between afflictions? This is a classic technique used by the enemy. It is a way of wearing us down to the point of cursing something or someone. This is the very technique Satan used on Job and his wife as they were reclining one particular evening. The first wave arrives: the Sabean attack and Job loses his oxen, donkeys, and first group of servants. Then while the servant was delivering this horrid news, wave two comes in: a fire broke out and consumed the sheep and servants on another part of their ranch. While listening to the pathetic news of the second servant, wave three arrives: the Chaldeans attack another part of the ranch, take the camels, and kill more servants. Before this servant could finish, the worst news is delivered: Job's sons and daughters were reclining at the eldest brother's house, a great wind came, destroyed the house, and all died – every man, woman, and beast dead - except for Job, his wife, and four messengers (see Job 1:13-19).

Can you imagine the amount of pain and suffering the two of them must have gone through? Usually when one has succession affliction, the overwhelming feeling of suffocation usually follows. In many cases, it literally affects the breathing. Some faint, some have panic attacks, and others just sink into despair. What did Job do? It says in Job 1:20 that Job shaved his head/beard (a sign of mourning), tore his robe (symbolizing the death of a loved one), fell to the ground, and began worshipping God, saying:

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

Since the day of my Salvation 40 years ago, for the most part, I have embraced affliction as God has allowed it – until these past few years. I am not saying the afflictions He assigned to me throughout my days were easy or lighthearted. But I am saying that I have never experienced this level of suffering - the type of suffering that produced physical, emotional, and spiritual suffocation – the kind that would stretch my Exchanged life with Christ like never before. In fact, read what my wife wrote in her journal after one of my many moments of permissible suffocation.

I had never seen him in this state in 34 years of knowing him. My earthly “rock” had been broken physically and now soulically (i.e. mind, will, and emotions). Help him Lord, to embrace your love fully and completely. Let him feel your compassion and kindness. He feels so misunderstood, so kicked in the teeth, so alone, so wanting to die. He is so pessimistic about people’s intentions because of hurt. No trust – but suspicious and expectant of betrayal. He has been beaten down by too many, for too long and he is without hope, joy, and strength.

Here is a poem that touched me deeply during one of my many times of suffering:

Hopeless – by Jane Phinney

Completely numb

I cannot feel

Pain shreds my heart

I doubt what’s REAL

The things I know

Have failed the test

I grieve my life

I yearn for REST

The people I love

Have turned on me

*Lies bind my mind
My eyes cannot SEE*

*I pour myself out
But what's it all for?
Self-serving takers
Come back for MORE*

*You told me up front
This new life held dread
Now battle wounding
Has rendered me DEAD*

*Shattered dreams
Ooze from my heart
My life blood gone
Time to DEPART*

*I am undone
Woe is me!
In hopeless despair
I'll never be FREE*

*"Redeemed" You call me
Your promise wane
Doubt and unbelief
Feed my REFRAIN*

*"I'm Yours, Lord save me!"
My gut rending cry
Devoid of Your hope
I'm asking "WHY?"*

Over the past several years, Job's prayer of desperation and great Exchange has found new meaning in my heart of hearts. Looking back, I literally came into this world naked, dependent, and very sick – living in an oxygen tent the first five years of my life. I grew up shamed, embarrassed, and incompetent in almost everything I said and did. My entire childhood was filled with being hated, despised, and made fun of by family and "friends" - all for the sake of accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior at 16 years of age. Then shortly after learning to read at the age of 22, God graced me with one of my favorite passages in the Bible:

"Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me-- to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody" (2 Cor. 12:7-11).

Thanks to God, I learned to journal my thoughts in prayer early on. Please keep in mind that these entries are not replacing the Word of God – not one bit. They are personal writings of thoughts that I believe God put in my mind to help me understand the Word. Here is what I recorded shortly after being blessed with this passage:

Stephen, because of your willingness to embrace My Truth and speak it as I reveal it to you, I will be granting you affliction throughout your life in order for you to NOT exalt yourself. You will often cry out to Me for relief and I shall grant you comfort, but not necessarily circumstantial deliverance. Stephen, it is through your afflictions and weaknesses that you will discover the power of My grace. As you take this new journey, you will struggle with pride, arrogance, and boasting. I am calling you to boast only in this – that you came into this world weak and dependent and you will leave it in the same manner. When you were born, you were dependent on man and independent of Me. When you depart from this wicked world, you will be independent of man and completely dependent on Me. When I am finished with you, you will be

able to embrace your weaknesses and handle insults, stress, and imparted hatred with the power of Grace. In the end, you will shine for your acute ability to hear Me, understand the deeper Life, and lead others into like-minded Truth – even though in the world’s eyes, you will be a nobody. Stephen, do you have ears to listen?

Well – when the Lord revealed this to me, I had no clue as to how much suffering was ahead of me. For 40 years, my life has been filled with many external hardships, but I must say the toughest has been the rejection from so-called “Christians.” The portion of the passage that I didn’t give a second thought to at the time - became my worst struggle in life.

“I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles...” (Job 1:11).

I totally expect the unbelieving world to hate me because of Christ. What surprised me was the level of backstabbing, kissing on the cheek, and rejection from the “body of Christ.” For most of my adult Christian life I fought this and was compellingly confused by it. In my naive way of living out my Christian life, I thought the body of Christ would be the first to build me up, patch up my wounds, and send me back into battle. It was a bit shocking to discover this was not the case. This soul shaking reality was what God used to open the door to my final days of ministry – ministering to a broken church that is neither hot, nor cold, but rather lukewarm - like the church of Laodicea. It became evident to me that this so-called “body of Christ” that I was so repelled by, was filled with members who were not true Body members of Christ. These non-members act like real Christians, but in actuality are as fake as a bowl of plastic fruit – looks real but is filled with the hollowness of self-deception. It also became evident to me that this “group” was to be my “thorn in the flesh” – personally assigned to me by God. Little did I realize that their grievous ways were not by chance, but were by Divine appointment. These “ways” were designed to rid me of the pride of men and to assist me in making the true and full Exchanged Life with Christ Jesus, even with Satan’s hand being at the root of these afflictions.

I have come to realize that the power of the Cross has a significant impact on my emotions. The hard and sobering lesson here for me is that after the Cross made this impact, Christ’s life in me expects the emotions to no longer be an obstruction, but rather to be cooperative with the Spirit of Life that indwells my mortal body – for the purpose of embracing the full exchange. You

see, the fact that I died with Christ on His Cross gives me the freedom to claim the death of my emotional reactions as to why I am hanging on it. Once I can experientially digest this, then my emotions can be renewed along with my mind and thus, provide a pathway for the Spirit to express the emotions of Christ through me.

Dr. Stephen Phinney's Bio:

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