

and we are given the benefits of, but also we have a fellowship with his sufferings and He uses us in some way to advance His purposes in the world.

If we truly belong to Christ everything in our lives is under God's direction and we can ~~we enjoy~~ rejoice when we enjoy something of experiencing the sufferings of Christ.

I had a letter from a mannot long ago who had been quite active in a group of Christians. Then he became disillusioned and he decided there were many things they did he didn't like and he wrote me just a brief word on a Christmas card and said he got into an entirely different group and said, Oh it's wonderful to be with people who are so refreshingly Christian. And I was inclined to send him a note and say I thought it was wonderful too that he was having such a happy experience, but I being quite a bit older than he is can assure him that wherever he goes he will find people are still human. Wherever he goes. And when you join with a new group of Christians you haven't been with before you see all the wonderful qualities in their lives and have a glorious fellowship and it is perfectly grand how refreshingly Christian they are.

But when you are with them long enough to begin to see below the surface and begin to see some of the disagreements and different viewpoints and different attitudes and some of the criticisms of one another. And while some are busy trying to advance the work of God, others are standing on the sidelines picking little points with them and trying to criticize them. When you see this a little bit you decide maybe you'd better move on to another group to find what is refreshingly Christian. But we find our joy, if we are real Christians, not in other Christians, but in the Lord Jesus Christ. The standard of Christians is way above the standard of the world. Through our lives we will get great blessing from our contact with Christians, but we will find they differ among themselves just as much as people of the world do and we will find that they all come very very far short of the standard that Christ has set before us which we will reach in His wonderful time but hardly in this life.

Sometimes I think that the wicked person of the earth is about as far above absolute wickedness as the bottom of this platform perhaps, and the rest of us are maybe four inches higher up than that and we can look way down on him. But if we want to look up at God's standard of right, it is way up there! And most of us --we look down at that and say, Isn't it wonderful I'm way up so far above him, I'm so much better than he is. Then we look at other Christians who are 5 inches above us, and instead of comparing them with ourselves we compare them with the ceiling and say, Oh look at the faults in them.

God wants us to judge ourselves most mercilessly, to see the faults in ourselves and seek the power of His resurrection to remedy them. But he wants us to look at others to see if they truly believe in Christ to try to have some of the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ and see how we can be helpful to them, how we can help them grow rather than criticizing them, accusing them of not reaching the standard up there that we have imagined that we have