

WHY I BELIEVE

God Directs the Suffering of Christians

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Suffering comes to every man whether Christian or non-Christian and it is no respecter of persons. The advantage of the Christian is that he understands that behind his suffering is a loving, merciful and gracious God who has all things under control.
- B. The believer has the promises of a sovereign God to claim and rest in when suffering comes. The Bible never says that the Christian will not go through trials, problems, crises and suffering, but it gives him promises to cope with the sufferings. Sometimes Christians suffer more than the non-Christians. The Christian has the promises that all things work together for good (Rom.8:28) and that nothing can separate him from the love of God (Rom.8:29).

II. SUFFERING BECAUSE OF SIN: One reason Christians suffer is because of their rebellion to the will of God. If they disobey Christ, then they must be willing to suffer the consequences of their sin. God directly brings discipline to His wayward children. His discipline is always done in love and for the Christian's own good (Heb. 12:5-11).

III. SUFFERING BECAUSE OF DIVINE TESTING: Much of the suffering a Christian experiences is not the result of sin but of divine testing. A distinction must be made between a divine testing, which is sovereignly brought by God to strengthen one's faith and divine discipline which is brought by God to curb the Christian's sin and bring him back into fellowship with God. NOTE: How can one determine whether he is undergoing divine discipline or divine testing seeing both have similar effects? When one is under divine discipline, he has an inward conviction that he has wronged the Lord by his rebellion and failure to do God's will. When one undergoes divine testing, he has a confidence that he is in fellowship with the Lord but external circumstances are somewhat frustrating.

- A. Suffering to Fulfill God's Plan (Phil. 1:29; I Pet. 4:19): God, in the eternal plan, has ordained that all Christians should suffer and these sufferings are all under the sovereign control of God. For reasons we

do not always comprehend, suffering is part and parcel of God's purpose for the child of God. No Christian will ever go through life without some suffering and many will suffer much. NOTE: Suffering is not just physical suffering such as loss of job, income, clothing, loved ones, sickness, etc., but far more, it is spiritual suffering as the Christian seeks to grow in Christ Jesus and bear the gospel to the ends of the earth (II Tim. 3:11-12; I Pet. 3:13-17; John 15:19). NOTE: While the Christian may not understand why he is suffering, he must believe that it is under God's control and for a purpose, or he will become totally frustrated and bitter with life.

- B. Suffering to Develop Faith (I Pet. 1:6-7): This context is about suffering for the gospel but it includes "various kinds of trials." Christians should rejoice when in the midst of mental and physical suffering for they realize it is only for a short time and that there is a purpose behind it. Through various kinds of sufferings (testings) the Christian knows that these trials are brought to try or test the believer's faith so his faith will be shown to be genuine and he will mature in his Christian life. These testings are more precious than gold which perishes because they prove the believer's faith to be genuine and eternal which ultimately leads to the final salvation of the soul. The Christian's faith will be tried by fire (pressures of life) but these are allowed to refine his faith, develop his personality and produce holiness of life.
- C. Suffering to Release the Power of Christ (II Cor. 6:6-11): God has shined in the Christian's heart the light of the glory of God in Christ. The Christian has Christ contained within his earthen vessel (his body) and this is a great treasure. How then can this life of Christ be manifested in the life of the believer? God brings trials into the life which teaches the Christian his own inadequacy and his utter need of Jesus Christ. Thus the Christian is moved to trust Christ more. If God is going to use the Christian's earthen vessel then He must first crack the pot so the glorious life of Christ can be manifested through the Christian. Every Christian must be a cracked pot before He can be a shining light. NOTE: God sometimes brings us to the place where we will either trust Him or lose our minds (I Cor. 10:13).
- D. Suffering to Teach Patience (James 1:2-3): Suffering comes to teach the Christian to rest in God and to wait upon Him (Rom. 5:3-5; Isa. 40:31). NOTE: One of the toughest things a Christian must learn is to wait on God.
- E. Suffering to Teach Humility and God's Sufficiency (II Cor. 12:7-10): Paul asked the Lord three times to take away his physical illness (probably an eye disease) but the Lord refused to do so. This was

Paul's thorn in the flesh to keep down his pride and to teach him humility. The Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

- F. Suffering in Order to Produce Maturity (I Pet. 5:10): Maturity often comes through "hard knocks."
- G. Suffering to Prepare for the Kingdom of God (II Thess. 1:4-5): Sufferings in this life are to make ready, prepare or make fit the Christian for the future earthly kingdom of which he will be a part. Sufferings now fit one to enjoy the kingdom later (Acts 14:22).
- H. Suffering to Glorify God (Job 1:1-2:13): Job was a prosperous believer who pleased the Lord. He had done no sin. God challenged Satan as to the loyalty of Job to God. Satan felt that the reason Job loved God was because of the many blessings God had granted him. So God took away Job's family, possessions and health to prove that Job would trust Him still. This suffering was to glorify God and Job knew nothing about God's challenge to Satan. All Job knew was that through it all he would trust the Lord. In Job 42:12-16, after the suffering, God doubled Job's prosperity, gave him back a family and gave him good health again.

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. The Christian can cope with suffering in his life because he knows the plan of God and the God of the plan. He realizes that God loves him and has a wonderful plan for his life. He has assurance that whatever suffering he is going through it is under God's control and is for God's glory.
- B. Only those who know the sovereign God of heaven and earth can give thanks for everything (I Thess. 5:18) and rejoice evermore (I Thess. 5:16).

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