

suffering that we UNDERSTAND GOD'S WORD. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes" (Psalm 119:72). Second, by means of suffering we learn the joy of obedience. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word..." (Psalm 119:67). The Lord Jesus Himself "...learned... obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). Any time a Christian says no to sin it involves suffering -- "...he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1). The world, the flesh and the devil pull hard against us to cause us to yield to the broad pathway of sin. But the wise Christian knows that the way that seems right, is the way that leads to death, destruction and ruin (Proverbs 14:12, Ephesians 2:1-5).

ETERNAL BENEFITS: It has been said, "the test of a man's character is how long he can wait between achievement and reward". It is significant that the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 "...all died in faith, not having received the promises but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). Jesus encouraged His disciples, to lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 7:19). God promises: "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" Romans 8:18). Many eternal treasures are promised to Christians. But these treasures are only for those who have faithfully obeyed Christ and those who have been willing to suffer reproach with Him. (1 Timothy 2:12, 4:6-8, Matthew 25:21, 2 Peter 1:8-11).

THE KEY TO A CORRECT RESPONSE TO SUFFERING: One of the first steps a man takes away from God leading him to all kinds of moral degradation is an "ungrateful spirit" (Romans 1:21-32). The key verse to notice in this chapter is verse twenty-one: "Because when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, NEITHER WERE THEY THANKFUL..." The sodomy and reprobation listed at the end of this chapter began with an "ungrateful spirit". The key to discovering God's peace and joy in the midst of suffering is revealed in Philipians 4:6,7: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING, let your requests be made known unto God, And the PEACE OF GOD, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Christians are to give God thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18). If I cannot thank God for the pressures in my life, chances are great that I have a bitterness towards God. Bitterness must be promptly confessed and forsaken! Because Esau let a root of bitterness continue in his life unresolved; it led to fornication and worldliness (Hebrews 12:15-17). A simple prayer of gratefulness demonstrates to God our confidence that we believe our loving heavenly Father has allowed trials to come our way for OUR GOOD and His glory (Romans 8:28).

THE CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL ANSWERS TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT

SUFFERING



Greenwich Baptist Church

P.O. BOX 52

GREENWICH, NEW JERSEY 08323

"Wisdom" is being able to see life from God's perspective! "Understanding" is knowing how to respond to life from God's perspective (Proverbs 4:7)! Suffering must be viewed from God's perspective if we are to have the proper response to it. The same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay. The same circumstances that make some people bitter and resentful towards God, causes others to deepen their love and devotion to God. When a lady sews together a piece of needlework, the top side contains a beautiful design, but underneath are unraveled ends that appear to have no purpose or design. When viewed from our limited human reasoning, our suffering appears to have no purposeful good. When viewed through the lens of God's Word -- God makes everything "...beautiful in its time..." (Ecclesiastes 3:11), and "...works all things together for good to them that love God..." (Romans 8:28).

THE WEAVER: My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me,
I cannot choose the colors he worketh steadily,
Oft times He weaveth sorrow and I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper and I the underside.
The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned
Not till the loom is silent and the shuttle cease to fly
Shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why.

THE REALITY OF SUFFERING : Jesus was asked by His disciples about the signs of His second coming. His answer reveals a vital insight concerning suffering in the fallen world in which we live. (Matthew 24:3-14). Jesus revealed that until He returns at His second coming, there will be wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. Furthermore, he states that these are just the "beginning of sorrows" (24:8). A Christians must face the reality of suffering that He will face throughout his lifetime. Someone has said that all of nature is singing in a minor key. Why? Because we live in a sin cursed world (Genesis 3:14-19). The Lord Jesus has already delivered us from the PENALTY of sin, and is daily delivering us from the POWER of sin, but we are waiting for that glorious day when we will be delivered from the very PRESENCE of sin. According to Romans 8:23, we "groan" "...within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our body". There is coming a day when God shall "...wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain..." (Revelation 21:4). But that day awaits the glorious return of our Saviour, "Who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like his glorious body..." (Philippians 3:20).

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND SUFFERING : There is no such thing as luck or chance. God rules and reigns supreme in the affairs of men (Daniel 4:35). Any suffering that He bids come our way comes from our loving heavenly Father who keeps us as the apple of His eye (Deut. 32:10). For instance, the Bible clearly reveals that before Satan could bring suffering upon Job, he had to first receive permission from God (Job 1:6-12). God affirms to Moses that He is the one who allows the dumb, the blind, and the deaf to be born (Exodus 4:10). He is not powerless in preventing their condition, but He has a higher purpose than man's limited perspective. The disciples brought a blind man to Jesus. They thought the reason for his blindness was either his sin or his parents' sin. But Jesus reveals that this man's blindness was allowed so that "...the works of God could be made manifest in Him" (John 9:1-7). Much of our suffering is caused by our sin (1 Cor. 11:29-32), but only God knows for sure when that suffering has been caused by a sin problem.

Therefore He instructs us, "...judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor. 4:5). When we hear of some tragedy occurring, we need to remember the truths of Luke 13:1-5. In this account, 18 people were killed when a tower fell on them. Some people reasoned that God allowed this tragic event to happen because of their sin. But Jesus rebukes this thinking and warns these folks that all men are sinners in the sight of God and deserving of His wrath and judgment. In fact, it is only because of God's mercy that we are not consumed (Lamentations 3:22). We all should remember that any good God allows to come our way is purely and only His mercy upon the deserving sinners (Romans 6:23).

GOD'S AWARENESS OF SUFFERING: God gives us the story of the disciples at sea in the midst of a storm to teach us all an important lesson (Mark 4:35-40). Jesus was asleep in the boat. The disciples in panic finally approached Him and said, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (4:38). This is our response many times in our suffering -- "God, are you really there?", "Do you really care?", "Are you really aware of what I am going through?" The affirmative answer from God is, "...He who keepeth Israel [Christians] shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:4). The Israelites who were under intense oppression in Egypt were not forgotten by God. He says to Moses, "...I HAVE SURELY SEEN THE AFFLICTION OF MY PEOPLE..." (Exodus 3:7). Why then did God not immediately deliver them? He waited until the Pharaoh had suffered through ten plagues before He rescued His people from bondage. The answer is found in Psalms 105:37. When God delivered His people there was not "ONE FEEBLE PERSON AMONG THEIR TRIBES". What made them so strong? The greater the suffering they endured, the stronger they became in serving God. The more they were afflicted by the Egyptians, the more they multiplied and grew (Exodus 1:12). You and I can be sure that in our moment of trial and weakness, God's strength is made perfect (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

GOD'S COMFORT IN SUFFERING God's answer to our suffering is to look to Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is our source of encouragement and strength. Jesus said "LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED: ye believe in God, BELIEVE ALSO IN ME (John 14:1).

We look to Him as our "example in suffering". There should never be in our room left for complaint as we consider what agony our Lord endured for us. "...Consider Him that endureth such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (Hebrews 12:3). God has given us the ordinance of communion so that we on a regular basis will remember the Lord Jesus Christ and His sufferings for us (1 Corinthians 11:23-32). If we will take time to remember the cup of suffering He had to drink, we will have a different perspective on the cup of sorrow God has given us to drink (Mark 10:35-45).

We look to Him who can "sympathize with our suffering". We are told to come boldly to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:15,16). Why? Because there at the throne of grace is one who knows our deepest woe. One who himself was obedient unto God even unto the cruel suffering of death by crucifixion (Philippians 2:8). "For we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was IN ALL POINTS tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

GOD'S BENEFITS IN SUFFERING**TEMPORAL BENEFITS:** The Psalmist reveals two important benefits from our suffering. First, it is through our