

Doctrine of Suffering

Introduction

There are many reasons why believers suffer mentally and physically. The following list is given to help the hearts of God's people evaluate themselves when a meaning for tribulation is sought. Not all pain and suffering is meant to punish though some is. Much suffering is designed to correct character, guide the heart or teach the lessons of life God would have known. This means it is safe to say that some pain and suffering could be avoided as per 1 Corinthians 11:31. *"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."* But if and when we are judged there is another principle to keep in mind. Every form of discipline and every cursing is designed by God to be a source of blessing according to 1 Corinthians 11:32 and Romans 8:28. *"But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world....And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* Therefore consider the following reasons why Christians suffer.

1. Christians suffer when they engage in a frantic search for happiness in an inappropriate way. The book of *Ecclesiastes* establishes this principle through the life of Solomon. Solomon engaged in a frantic search for happiness and then concluded in sorrow *"all is vanity and a vexation of spirit"* (*Ecclesiastes 1:14*).
2. Christians suffer from a guilty conscience.
 - *1 Timothy 1:5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: 6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling;*
3. Christians suffer from the suppression of sin in the self-consciousness of the soul. When inappropriate attitude and actions are engaged in and then justified ecclesiastical judgment is a real possibility. The apostle Paul delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan for physical and mental abuse to teach them to learn not to blaspheme. The story is told in 1 Timothy 1:19-20. God wants His children to keep the truth in a holy vessel and with a pure conscience.
 - *1 Timothy 1:19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: 20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.*
 - *1 Timothy 3:9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*
 - *1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
4. Christians suffer because the *Word of God* is rejected. In 2 Kings 17:13-14 the prophet of God explains why there was going to be war with the nation of Assyria and Israel is going to lose the contest.

- *2 Kings 17:13 Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. 14 Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God.*
5. Christians suffer and inflict emotional and physical pain on others when particular acts of sin are not isolated and mortified or put to death.
 - *Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;*
 6. Christians suffer when divinely established authority is rejected reflected in the story of Dathan and Abiram as recorded in Numbers 16:1-35; Deuteronomy 11:6; Psalm 106:17.
 7. Christians suffer pain and sorrow by marrying the wrong person.
 - *Ezekiel 16: 1 Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, 3 And say, Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite.*
 8. Christians suffer because they are interrelated to others in the body of Christ who hurt (1 Corinthians 12:26). There are several great metaphors of the Church in the *New Testament* and each one illustrates the essential unity of believers to one another and to Christ. Romans 14:7 explains. “*For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself*”.
 9. Christians suffer from divine discipline.
 - *Proverbs 3:11 My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: 12 For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.*
 10. Christians suffer as part of the angelic conflict. Test the emotion in your heart lest you be subject to demonic suggestion as Ananias.
 - *Job 2:3 And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? And still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. 4 And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. 5 But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. 6 And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. 7 So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.*

- *Acts 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?*

11. Suffering is designed to demonstrate the power and grace of God.

- *John 9:2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? 3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*

12. Some suffering is designed to cause the believer to learn the value of the Word and will of God.

- *Psalms 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.*
- *Psalms 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

13. Christians suffer in order to have patience produced in the life.

- *James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. 5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*

14. Christians suffer from bad political decisions of rulers. Jesus predicted a period of great tribulation for the nation of Israel. In the summer of AD 66 Jewish leaders encouraged a revolt against Rome. Soldiers marched against the city. Many Christians were caught up in this national calamity.

- *Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. 15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) 16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: 17 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: 18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. 19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! 20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: 21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*

15. Christians suffer when their own standards of morality are violated.

- *2 Timothy 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4 Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. 6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, 7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

16. Christians suffer from the ravages of war.

- *Matthew 24:6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.*

17. Christians suffer by not knowing or not remembering the promises of God.

- *John 20:9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. 11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, 12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.*

18. Christians suffer in the process of dying as a result of the fall.

- *Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*

19. Christians suffer when the Lord's Supper is taken in an inappropriate manner.

- *1 Corinthians 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*

20. Christians suffer because they exercise their spiritual gift.

- *2 Corinthians 11:24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? 30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

21. Christians suffer due to religious jealousies.

- *Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*

22. Christians suffer because they love Christ more than family or friends.

- *Matthew 10:36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*

23. Christians may suffer in order to be kept from more sin.

- *Matthew 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

24. Christians suffer in order to empathize with others.

- *Galatians 6:2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

25. Christians suffer in order to preserve the life of others. *Genesis 45:5 [And Joseph said unto his brethren] Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.*

26. Christians suffer to demonstrate the theological truth that God is the sovereign Ruler of the universe and can dispose of it as He pleases.

- *Exodus 4:11 And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?*

27. Christian can give thanks to God for the privilege of suffering.

- *Acts 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*

28. Christians are to thank God even in their sickness and sufferings if not for their sickness and sufferings.

- *1 Thessalonians 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

29. But the time might come when thanksgiving can come for the sickness and pain and sufferings of life.

- *Psalms 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.*
- *Romans 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;*

30. No suffering and no sickness can come into the life of the believe apart from the sovereign will of God for He works all things after the counsel of His own will.

- *Exodus 4:11 And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?*
- *Ephesians 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

31. God ordained the following people to suffer or to be sick.

- God ordained that Adam and Eve suffer sorrow in childbirth and death. *Genesis 3:16 Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*
- God willed that Job suffer satanically induced sickness in order to test his faithfulness. *Job 2:4-8 And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. 5 But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. 6 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. 7 So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. 8 And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.*
- God ordained that a man be born blind and suffer many years in life in order to demonstrate the power of His Son. *John 9:2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? 3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. 4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*
- God ordained that Jacob should be touched in his thigh so that he limped for many years in life in order to learn to lean upon the Lord. *Genesis 32:25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. 26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. 27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.*

28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. 29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. 30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. 31 And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. 32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank.

- Christ ordained that His disciples be beaten and hurt knowing that disease and sickness would accompany these ordeals.

Mark 13:9 But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them. 10 And the gospel must first be published among all nations. 11 But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. 12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. 13 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

- God ordained that Paul should be sick and to suffer in order to humble him and demonstrate His own divine faithfulness.

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

- God ordained that *New Testament* Christians suffer in time.

Acts 9:16 For I will shew him [Saul of Tarsus] how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Acts 14:22 [Paul went about] Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

32. In light of the place of pain and suffering in the plan of God what should be said in response to the Word of Faith movement that instructs its people to disbelieve or down play their sickness and sufferings in order to magnify faith with a view towards healing?

- First, our brothers and sisters must be challenged not to verbalize a non-truth in the name of spiritual truth thereby denying objective reality. Words become a mockery in the mouth of someone dying of cancer who declares he is healed in the name of Jesus. Words become a mockery in the mouth of someone who denies I have no need of glasses while putting them on to read the Bible. Such dualistic thinking is not healthy and breeds spiritual pride at its worse; non-sensible thoughts at its best.
- Second, our brothers and sisters must be invited to return to the *Bible* to see that God is sovereign over sickness and suffering not by its removal but by what He can accomplish in weakened vessels. The paradox of the Christian message is not that God uses the healthy and the wealthy but he uses the sick of this world to accomplish His purposes.

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

1 Corinthians 1:27-2:1 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

- Third, our brothers and sisters must be taught to consider the whole counsel of God in a given passage for spiritual balance and to avoid entering into heresy, which is extreme error.