

Why Christians Suffer

Part 1

Introduction

Why do Christians have to suffer? Didn't Jesus say that He had come "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (Luke 4: 18), "to bind up the broken hearted...and to comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61: 1, 2)? Surely, that includes suffering.

Perhaps no subject perplexes believers more than the question of why we suffer. To help us understand we must go back to the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned through their disobedience, a curse fell on the entire world. Although Jesus, our redeemer, came to rescue us from that curse, we still live in a fallen world, in which suffering plays a large role.

Christian suffering, however, can be redemptive. It can be a means whereby we are tested, purified, and brought closer to God. As God restores us, He uses our suffering to make us more like Jesus.

Our Study

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus shows us a curious relationship between Christianity and suffering.

The Scripture: Matthew 5:11

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

1. What kind of suffering did Jesus talk to His listeners about? _____

2. What did He call them when they suffered in this manner? _____

Yes, the scripture says blessed. This is not a condition to be railed against, not a time to sink into self-pity or despair, but interestingly enough, a time of blessing. The apostles James and Paul not only saw this same relationship but took it a step further.

The Scripture: James 1: 2-4 and Romans 5: 3-5

"Consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you will be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

"We also rejoice in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us."

3. How does James describe suffering? _____

As if this idea were not startling enough, the disciples' accompanying command is even harder to understand.

4. What do both apostles say our attitude should be when we are tested? _____

5. Why? _____

6. What does James say is the end result of perseverance? _____

7. What does Paul say suffering produces? _____

8. Why does hope not disappoint us? _____

In a later verse James even promises us another kind of reward.

The Scripture: James 1: 12

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

9. What reward does James promise the person who perseveres under trial? _____

This crown is eternal life with God. It is only one of our rewards.

The Scripture: Hebrews 6:10-12

"God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continued to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end in order to make your hope sure."

10. In what way does the author of Hebrews say God is not unjust? _____

11. How do we show our love to God? _____

12. How do we make our hope sure? _____

We must never forget one important purpose of suffering in Jesus' life.

The Scripture: Hebrews 2:10

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for Whom and through Whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."

13. What did Jesus achieve through suffering? _____

The Scripture: Hebrews 5: 8

"Although He was a son, He (Jesus) learned obedience from what He suffered."

14. What else did Jesus learn from what He suffered? _____

No one likes the process of being pruned, but it is one method Jesus uses to help us achieve obedience and perfection. Jesus explains this process in the book of John.

The Scripture: John 15: 1-4

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

15. What does Jesus call Himself? _____

16. What does He call the Father? _____

17. What does the Father do to every branch in Jesus that bears no fruit? _____

18. What does He do to the fruitful branches? _____

19. Why? _____

20. What is the requirement for bearing fruit? _____

21. Why? _____

Every knowledgeable gardener knows he must prune the fruitful branches as well as those that are unfruitful. Jesus explains why.

19. Why? _____

20. What is the requirement for bearing fruit? _____

21. Why? _____

The Scripture: John 15:5-8

"I am the Vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit. However, apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."

21. What happens to the one who remains in Jesus? _____

The Scripture: John 15:16

"I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

22. What did Jesus appoint us to do? _____

23. What is our reward? _____

Scripture gives us many reasons why suffering can be made bearable. It is not permanent.

The Scripture: 1 Peter 5:10

"And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast."

24. What will happen after we have suffered a little while? _____

Others are going through the same kind of suffering and God will limit our suffering

The Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:13

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand under it."

25. What does this verse tell us about temptation? _____

26. How does Paul reassure us? _____

The Scripture: 1 Peter 5:8-9

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

27. What are Peter's commands to us? _____

Nothing can separate us from God's love.

The Scripture: Romans 8:35-38

"Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword....I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

28. What are some of the things Paul says cannot separate us from God's love? _____

The rewards can be great for the sufferer with the right attitude. For all who suffer, Paul has good news.

The Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:17

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

29. What are our troubles achieving for us? _____

The Scripture: Romans 8: 28

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

30. What are we assured of? _____

While we are suffering, it is easy to believe that God doesn't care about what we are going through.

Yet all suffering seen in the right perspective has a purpose. It can be a time of joy, a time of growth, and a time of growing closer to God.

The Answers

1. Insults, persecutions, false sayings of all kinds of evil against them
2. Blessed
3. He calls it the testing of our faith.
4. One of joy
5. Because the testing of our faith develops perseverance
6. We become mature and complete, not lacking in anything.
7. Perseverance, character and hope
8. Because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit
9. The crown of life
10. He will not forget our work.
11. By our diligence in helping His people and continuing to help them
12. By continuing our diligence
13. Perfection
14. Obedience
15. The true vine
16. The gardener
17. He prunes it.
18. He prunes them too.
19. So they will bear more fruit
20. Remaining in Jesus
21. He bears much fruit.
22. To bear lasting fruit
23. The Father will give us whatever we ask in His name.
24. God will restore us and make us strong firm, and steadfast.
25. No temptation is uncommon.
26. He promises us that God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. When we are tempted he will provide a way out.
27. To be self-controlled and alert, to resist the devil, standing firm in the faith
28. Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, the dangers of sword, death, life, angels, demons, the present, the future, any powers, height, depth, or anything else
29. An eternal glory that far outweighs all our troubles
30. In everything God works for the good of those who love Him and are called to His purposes.

All scripture quotations in this publication are from the Holy Bible, New International version
(unless otherwise indicated)

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, New International Bible Society.

© 2001 by JoAnne Sekowsky