

Suffering, a Riddle Without an Answer

There are times when it visits all of us and it has a profound effect when it does. Christians, just like all other people recoil when it happens. But since it visits all of us at sometime or other lets think a bit about it tonight. To help us as believers, lets remember the line of A.W. Tozer who said *Seldom does God use a person greatly who has not been hurt deeply.*

I. There is more suffering in the world than we realize.

Some is physical, some is mental, some is emotional, and some is spiritual. Of the emotional type which we find is so prevalent in our churches, one homiletics professor said to his students, "Remember, every time you preach there is someone in your congregation with a broken heart."

And of the spiritual, there are people all around us who suffer silently because they have not found the peace Christ offers to them. John 14:27 says *I am leaving you with a gift--peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid.*

So we see that there are various types of suffering and any of us has suffered one or more types at some time or other.

II. Some false solutions to the problem of suffering that we must reject if we are to get relief from it.

A. **Some believe that all suffering comes from God.**

But isn't that what the devil would like for us to think? If we think God is bad we will avoid him at all cost and be mad at him for what we think he has done

B. **Some believe that all suffering comes from sin.**

In Job 4:1-9 that is what Job's fine counselor says Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied to Job: 2 *"Will you be patient and let me say a word? For who could keep from speaking out?*
3 *"In the past you have encouraged many a troubled soul to trust in God; you have supported those who were weak.*
4 *Your words have strengthened the fallen; you steadied those who wavered.*
5 *But now when trouble strikes, you faint and are broken.*
6 *Does your reverence for God give you no confidence? Shouldn't you believe that God will care for those who are upright?*
7 *"Stop and think! Does the innocent person perish? When has the upright person been destroyed?"*

8 My experience shows that those who plant trouble and cultivate evil will harvest the same.

9 They perish by a breath from God. They vanish in a blast of his anger.

In other words V 8,9 because you sin that is the reason for your suffering.

Also note James 5:14,15 *14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.*

Notice, the word IF, he has committed sin, so the conclusion is some suffering is not the result of sin.

C. Some believe that all suffering is mere illusion.

We are aware that the mind does play a great part in suffering but all suffering is not just something we can change by simply changing our thinking.

III. Some partial explanations for the problem of suffering.

A. The devil does deserve much blame for what God gets charged with.

God may allow suffering to take place and he will use it in the life of the believer (Romans 8:28,29) it is still the devil who is the culprit

Job. 2:7 where we read Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

B. Sometimes we are personally responsible for much of our suffering

- Sometimes we choose to do foolish things and we suffer for it
- Sometimes we neglect to do the right things and we suffer for it
- Sometimes we get careless like driving and looking around and we get into an accident
- Sometimes much of our suffering comes in the form of worry because we don't trust God.

Question: Have you ever suffered from worry? Whose fault is that? Is it the devil's, is it God's, or is it ours?

C. Sometimes others are responsible for our suffering because their actions and words touch us and we might not have been involved at all.

D. Sometimes natural law of the universe is responsible for some suffering.

It has been observed that to violate this law is not to break it but instead, to be broken upon it. For example: Fire both warms us in a healthy way but can burn us and cause us to suffer if received in the wrong way

E. Some suffering does come from God

However this is designed not just for us to suffer for sufferings sake but it is designed to perfect us as we note in Hebrews 12:5-12 where we read *and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."*

7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.

11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,

IV. How should we react to suffering?

Should we react with self-pity? We should not, but the truth is we will all do it to some degree won't we?

Should we react with blind resignation that it is the will of God so I might as well just suffer quietly? Well not actually because we just learned that not all suffering comes from God and to react like it does just gives him a black eye doesn't it?

Should we react with bitterness or resentment? Not necessarily because it closes our minds and hearts to any good things God may want to do out of our suffering.

So, lets not look for easy answers to the problem of suffering but lets continue to work towards victory over it when it visits. The next time suffering comes to visit you why not think of the cross and remember this, It has been said,

" God is no stranger to suffering, for there was a cross in the heart of God long before there was ever a cross on Calvary's hill. Christ suffered courageously and victoriously."

Listen to this little poem by Rebecca Williams as we close

One ship drives east, and another drives west
While the self-same breezes blow;
It's the set of the sails and not the gales
That bids them where to go.

Like the sails of the seas are the ways of our wills
As we voyage along through life
It's the set of the soul that decides the goal
And not the storms or the strife.

How about that? Next time we go through the valley of suffering why not set the sails and ride the tempest all the way to calm seas once again.