

# Why do the Righteous Suffer?

A precious doctor friend told me once how God enlisted him in the "school of sympathy." He had very little empathy with people who complained of pain. Doctors see and hear so much regarding pain that they often become immune to it. He couldn't understand why patients with kidney stones, for instance, would scream with pain. He thought, "It can't be that bad - they must be putting it on a little - perhaps to get medication. How could anybody hurt that badly?" Then one day he woke up with kidney stones! The pain was all they said it was: he needed medication just to endure it. It was terrible! Today, my doctor friend has a true sympathy for the pain of his patients.

I read some of the letters my wife Gwen receives from women who have had mastectomies or who have to go for check-ups for a lump on the breast. They know Gwen has survived five cancer operations - her mastectomy was over seven years ago. They are crying out for sympathy and hope. Gwen guards those letters like gold. To her, those hurting women are like suffering students - and she has been in God's school of sympathy. She has gone through the suffering and pain, and now she can offer comfort, hope, and strength. Gwen knows the agony of waking up with bandages and feeling disfigured.

There is a Holy Ghost school of sympathy which consists of tested saints who have suffered greatly. They have been tossed to and fro, tempted, tested, tried, mistreated. The Bible speaks of a "*fellowship of His sufferings*" (PHIL 3:10). It is a fellowship of shared sufferings: deep, mysterious, unfathomable trials, and testings. This is a school

Jesus founded and He set up the curriculum. He proved it is possible to go through it all, endure it, and graduate as an overcomer. We will not graduate until we too are glorified!

Jesus suffered mental and physical anguish - He was rejected, distrusted, abused, mocked, laughed at. He knew what it was to be lonely, hungry, poor, unloved, shamed, made the butt of jokes, slandered. He was called a liar, a fraud, a false prophet. He was humiliated; His own family misunderstood Him; His most trusted friends lost faith in Him; His own disciples forsook Him and fled, one even denied he knew Him. Finally, they spat upon Him, mocked Him, and murdered Him! *"But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled."* (ACTS 3:18). Jesus sympathizes with all our hurts and sufferings, because He went through it all Himself: *"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."* (HEB 4:15).

My purpose in this message is to warn you not to be disturbed by the trouble and suffering in your own life, or by that which you see in the lives of many godly people around you. You may love Jesus now more than ever before and can't understand why you should be going through such trials and hurts. You can be very sure that God has a divine purpose behind every trial, behind every single suffering you are enduring right now!

Paul had a great concern that Christians not be disturbed by the suffering they saw in his life. He knew his life was a spectacle, a fish bowl! Jews believed that if God were pleased with you, you would always be blessed and never suffer. Paul did not want converts to be confused by all the troubles that swarmed about him. Few men suffered more than Paul. Remember what Ananias prophesied to him right after his conversion: *"...for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."* (ACTS 9:15-16).

Reports of Paul's great sufferings spread all through the churches. Many converts and the Judaizing teachers still held to the traditions of the Jews, that all suffering is a sign of God's displeasure. So Paul sent Timothy to the church at Thessalonica and said, *"That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know."* (1.THESS 3:3-4). He also says to the Ephesians, *"I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations..."* (EPH 3:13).

## The Bible Warns Us in Advance That the Godly in Christ Will Suffer

We should not be surprised when we suffer. I don't care which teacher or pastor or evangelist told you that trusting saints, if they only have proper faith, don't have to

suffer. The Word of God says the opposite. Jesus Himself said, *"In the world ye shall have tribulation..."* (JN 16:33). The word here for "tribulation" in Greek is *thlipsis*, meaning "anguish," "burdens," "persecution," "trouble." Jesus forewarned us that in the last days great troubles will fall upon us: *"Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake."* (MATT 24:9). I listen to all this sweet pabulum preaching that America is getting back to God because we are the nation that is evangelizing the world - and we are the nation that supports Israel. My Bible says that all nations will bring tribulation down upon those who love Jesus. Paul said to the churches: "We kept warning you in advance that we are going to suffer persecution."

Jesus has warned us in advance of an approaching tide of suffering, persecution, and tribulation, even to death. You say it can't happen in America! They said it couldn't happen in America, but today gays have constitutional rights to practice their sin; 500,000 marched in New York City streets! It couldn't happen - yet, Congress is going to pass laws against exposing those with AIDS, the first disease (plague) ever protected by laws of privacy by constitutional cover!

Paul went about warning believers they would experience personal sufferings, *"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."* (ACTS 14:22). Again, the Greek word Paul uses here for "tribulation" is the same one Jesus used above, meaning "anguish," "burdens," "persecutions," "troubles." Paul said, *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (2.TIM 3:12). The godly will enter the kingdom, not without suffering, without sickness, without pain. But rather, they will enter through much anguish, much persecution, many burdens, and many troubles! To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote: *"So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:"* (2.THESS 1:4).

Jesus warns of a certain kind of believer who stumbles and falls when trouble arises. *"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."* (MATT 13:20-21). This is the compromising Christian who is suddenly exposed to the true Word of God. He is suddenly awakened and there is new joy. This one says, "This is just what I've been seeking! It's changing my life. It's wonderful!" He goes everywhere, like a walking commercial for this new truth, telling everybody, "You must come with me - they give you the truth in my church!" He appears to be happy and growing, but there is a hard, stony heart that's not yet broken. Then God allows suffering, anguish, pain, hurt, and rejection, and he can't understand it! It doesn't compute for him. He says, "I've tried! I've prayed - I've read my Bible - I've turned around from what I was. So why is all this happening to me now?" God's Word is at work in him, but he becomes impatient. It offends him. He sees very godly people suffering and it doesn't seem right. So he stumbles over it - gives up - and falls!

I've had people from Times Square Church, having heard Gwen was terribly sick for nearly three weeks, say to me, "Brother Dave, I don't understand - she's so sweet and caring - she's not living in sin. Why is she suffering so much?"

**My secretary's sister, Faith, gave her last twenty-five years to helping ghetto children. She was a godly, caring, humble disciple of Jesus Christ, doing everything He commanded her to do.** She died recently, consumed by bone cancer. While I was praying for her just prior to her death, I felt Jesus take her by the right hand and lead her into calm, green pastures.

Some are offended, confused. But David said, *"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."* (PSA 116:15). "Precious" in Hebrew means "valuable," "necessary." It means that He needed them - their death is necessary to His eternal purpose. Paul said boldly, *"...Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by*

*death... to die is gain."* (PHIL 1:20:21). He goes on to say, *"And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation..."* (PHIL 1:28). What he is saying is that suffering, or even the death of a godly soul, is a sign to the world of loss, ruin, or disaster - but to those who know God, it is all deliverance, by life or death.

### The Apostles Did Not Preach the Kind of Painless Gospel Being Preached Today

Christians are being told it is not God's will for believers to suffer, but what did the apostles preach? Peter said: *"Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator..."* (1.PET 4:19). *"...because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."* (1.PET 2:21). Peter is saying, "It is enough to know God is faithful, that He won't let you suffer more than you are able, that He will make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." Commit the keeping of your body and soul to Him!

*"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."* (1.PET 5:10). *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."* (1.PET 4:12-13). Paul said, for His sake, *"...I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."* (PHIL 3:8).

**Do Christians suffer? Wasn't Paul a godly man?** Listen to him: *"...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 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; 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; In*

*weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."* (2.COR 11:23-28). Through all his pain and suffering, Paul could say triumphantly, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (ROM 8:18).

### **The Purpose of Suffering Is to Produce Comforters to the Body of Christ**

Through the school of suffering, God is training sympathizers who have been tested in the fire and have proven Him faithful. God sees the great tribulations that lie ahead for the church: incredible sufferings beyond description, great and grievous persecution. And He is not going to be caught without tried and true witnesses in this last time.

Some of you may not know or understand why you have gone through such deep testings. It was so difficult at times, you nearly gave up. But the Comforter came and established your goings! You have been in the Holy Ghost school of sympathy because God has a ministry of comfort for you. You have been taught - you are still being taught - great lessons. This is so you can give hope and consolation to others who are just going into the fire.

We know the Holy Ghost is our comforter. But why does He come to us in our deep sorrow? Why does He strengthen, help, and lift our spirits? *"...that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."* (2.COR 1:4-5). Paul makes it very clear that some are permitted to endure much affliction, not just for their own learning, but to benefit and teach others. *"And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer... knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation."* (2.COR 1:6-7). Who is there among us who can look at what he or she is going through and say, "This is going to comfort,

and save others who will go through the same thing"? It's so hard to believe, and accept, but God's Word declares, *"...tribulation worketh patience"* (ROM 5:3).

Today the church must have a people who have not been offended or destroyed by their sufferings, a people who are not cast down, dejected, full of questions, but holding fast to His love, proving Him faithful in all things. They are to be an example to the weak, to be a source of true comfort and consolation. It is easy for those who have not suffered to throw around meaningless, empty words of advice. But unless they have died to self, died to human wisdom, died to unproven doctrines, they can't produce life. They have no true comfort or hope to offer.

### **You Must Decide Whether You Will Allow Your Sufferings to Train You or Destroy You**

*"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: 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."* (HEB 12:6-15).

It's all up to you: either you allow your suffering to become a school of sympathy to help others - or it will become a death camp which will destroy you and defile many

others who looked up to you. Some of you reading this are now enduring great sufferings because you are being chastened by the Lord. He is spanking you in great love, trying to soften your heart to produce His holiness in you - to break your stubborn will. But even if your suffering is a result of chastening, God said it is for your profit and it will afterward produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness if you are willing to be trained by it.

If a root of bitterness takes seed, it will destroy and defile. But there is a way to stop that root, to stop the defilement: encourage yourself in the Lord. *"Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."* (HEB 12:12-13). This is a call to rouse yourself, to shake off apathy, to get back to serving and trusting God, to keep straight on and be healed - otherwise total apostasy will set in. Get rid of the thought of quitting. Bring into captivity every thought of easing off in your total obedience to the Lord.

It is not affliction or suffering in itself that teaches us. Many good people have learned nothing in their troubles. Some have even lost ground with God. Rather, it is suffering understood and affliction accepted as from His hand. The natural mind is irritated and depressed by any kind of suffering and affliction. So unless we understand that God permits it and has a training purpose in it all, it will only hinder spiritual growth. David said, *"In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord..."* (PSA 77:2). That is the purpose: to break us from the love of this world and to drive us to Jesus for help. David also said, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word."* (PSA 119:67). God knows you and me! He permits afflictions, saying, "You are the kind who will forget me in good times! You neglect me when all is well. I love you too much to lose you to the devil. I'll awaken you through affliction, to remind you how short life is, and make you dependent on me."

Let me give you some good arguments to use against the devil:

- (1) Christ suffered in the flesh mightily - and He was perfect!

- (2) Paul and all our church fathers suffered great afflictions - and God loved them dearly.
- (3) Instead of suffering being a sign of God's displeasure, it is a sign of sonship - whom He loves, He chastens!
- (4) Every affliction is intended for my spiritual benefit and growth, and to equip me to sympathize with others in need.
- (5) It may be grievous and painful - I may cry and hurt - but afterward, if I receive it, it will bear the fruit of holiness.

**God Has Promised a Day of Deliverance Out of All Our Afflictions!**

*"Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all."* (PSA 34:19). The Hebrew word used here for "afflictions" is "ra" which means "evil," "calamity," "distress," "mischievous," "sorrow," "trouble," "wretchedness." That just about covers everything that could happen to a human being! These afflictions are many - and, to the righteous! That is God's Word. *"The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles."* (PSA 34:17). Here "deliver" means "to snatch away," "pull out," "rescue."

**God Delivers When His Will is Accomplished**

How does our Lord deliver those who call upon Him? Certainly, no one doubts that God can stop all our suffering, all our pain, all our distress, simply by speaking a word. He could send a legion of angels, a host from the heavens. We know there is already an angel encamped about each of us who believe. But an all-wise God would not put us in the furnace, go part of the way with us, and then feel sorry and let us off. He would not quit on us before He accomplishes His will. It would then have all been in vain. He will not spare us for our crying. Paul speaks of being "delivered unto death" so that life may spring forth. *"For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."* (2.COR 4:11).

Here is where we have mistaken the meaning of deliverance: we are not always delivered by the letting up of suffering, but rather by the intensification of it, so that God can hasten our escape through our dying to this world. We are delivered when we die to the flesh! Have you cried out to God for deliverance? Has the trouble increased instead? Are things getting worse, not better? Rejoice! You are about to be delivered up to

death! You are about to lose all your fight, about to die to your will. That is the escape - through death to self-will.

Deliverance is not through resignation, but through resurrection. David said, *"Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them."* (PSA 22:4). He is speaking here of Israel at the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's army coming down on them. How did God deliver? By doing away with the trouble? Not until they went down first into the Red Sea! This is a type of dying to the world.

Jesus became our deliverer by first being delivered up to death. *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* (ROM 8:32). It is not a good testimony to be able to say, "God gave me special faith - I spoke the Word - and all my troubles and sufferings stopped! Praise God I am free of all pain and affliction!" It is better to be able to say, "No matter what lies ahead - no matter what the trial or affliction - God has proven Himself faithful. He has produced life out of death. None of these afflictions move me now. ***Though he slay me, yet will I trust him!***" (JOB 13:15).

by David Wilkerson  
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