

Suffering and the Christian Life

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you,
as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:12)

1. Suffering and God, the Problem of Suffering

- a. The Problem of Suffering
 - i. God is all powerful.
 - ii. God is all good.
 - iii. There is suffering.
 - iv. Every answer is dangerous. There is an “or” between the comfort of our mind and the comfort in our conscience. (God gives promises, not answers.)
- b. Job
 - i. The council of God (Job 1:1, 6-8)
 - 1. Conversation of God
 - 2. Praise
 - 3. Petitions
 - 4. Declaration/Judgment
 - ii. The council of God on earth (Job 1:2-5, the sacrifice, i.e., the liturgy)
 - iii. The council of the devil (Job 1:9ff, and its four-fold attack on the Gospel through suffering)
 - 1. Loss
 - 2. Pain
 - 3. Shame
 - 4. Despair, and the alternative to the heavenly council
 - 5. The devil uses suffering to attack God’s gifts
 - a. Faith- despair
 - b. Love- self-absorption
 - c. Hope- despair
 - d. (The Lord has the opposite purposes in mind.)
 - iv. God’s witness on earth, There is no answer to the problem.
 - 1. “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” (Job 38:4)
 - 2. “Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it,” (Job 40:2).

- v. The friends of Job brought into the council of heaven (Job 42:7-9).
There is grace and forgiveness for sinners.
- c. The devil wants to use suffering to separate us from the love of God. This fails because of the suffering of Jesus.
 - i. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Psalm 22:1,
Matthew 27:46
 - 1. Three-fold suffering
 - a. Body
 - b. Name
 - c. Spirit
 - 2. Why? A real question with comfort to us.

2. Suffering from God, Our Christian Life of Suffering

a. Faith, Love, Suffering

Our life	God	Neighbor
Active		
Passive		

b. **Job 2:9-10:** Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

c. **Hebrews 12:3-11:** Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

d. The reason (purpose) of suffering

i. Augustine

1. Punish sin
2. Prove faith

ii. Luther

1. Punish faith
2. Exercise faith, teach patience
3. Humility (an attack on pride)
4. To cleanse and improve the Christian

5. To show forth His glory
- e. Suffering and Sanctification
- i. The Bible puts suffering central to our Christian life
 1. Take up your cross (Luke 9:23)
 - 2.
 - ii. What makes a theologian? Luther on Psalm 119, Oratio, Meditation, Tentatio
 1. **Psalm 119:74:** “I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.”
 2. **Psalm 119:71:** “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.”
 3. “Thirdly, there is tentatio, Anfechtung. This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God’s Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom. Thus you see how David, in the Psalm mentioned, complains so often about all kinds of enemies, arrogant princes or tyrants, false spirits and factions, whom he must tolerate because he meditates, that is, because he is occupied with God’s Word (as has been said) in all manner of ways. For as soon as God’s Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and will make a real doctor of you, and by his assaults will teach you to seek and love God’s Word. I myself (if you will permit me, mere mouse-dirt, to be mingled with pepper) am deeply indebted to my papists that through the devil’s raging they have beaten, oppressed, and distressed me so much. That is to say, they have made a fairly good theologian of me, which I would not have become otherwise. And I heartily grant them what they have won in return for making this of me, honor, victory, and triumph, for that’s the way they wanted it,” Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 34: *Career of the Reformer IV*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 286–287.
 4. **Psalm 119:50:** “This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.”
- f. Suffering and Hope
- i. **Romans 12:12:** “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

- ii. **Romans 15:4:** “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”
 - iii. **Romans 5:3-5:** “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”
- g. Suffering and joy
 - i. **2 Corinthians 12:10:** For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
 - ii. **Colossians 1:24:** Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church...
 - iii. **1 Peter 1:6-7:** In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
 - iv. **1 Peter 4:13-16:** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.
- h. We are entrusted with suffering as a gift.

3. Suffering for God, A Readiness for Persecution

- a. **Matthew 5:10-11**: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
- b. Jesus announcement that the end is not coming, **Matthew 24:4-14**
 - i. Nation to nation: war
 - ii. Nations to church: persecution
 - iii. Church to nations: preaching
- c. The bloody boarders of the church
 - i. Secularism
 - ii. Islam
- d. Third Article and First Article Persecution
 - i. The attack on Christianity
 - ii. The attack on humanity
 - 1. An attack on the institutions according to the Ten Commandments
 - iii. Evil is not content with acceptance, it must have power
- e. The Divine Service as preparation
 - i. for pain
 - ii. for persecution
 - iii. for death
- f. **1 Peter 3:13-17**: Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.
- g. Luther, we suffer *with* Christ:

“The cross of Christ” does not mean, of course, the wood that Christ carried on His shoulders and to which He then was nailed. No, it refers in general to all the afflictions of all the faithful, whose sufferings are the sufferings of Christ. 2 Cor. 1:5: “We share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings”; and Col. 1:24: “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the church.”

Therefore “the cross of Christ” refers in general to all the afflictions which the church suffers on Christ’s account, as Christ Himself testifies when He says in Acts 9:4: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” Saul had not done any violence to Christ, but only to His church. But whoever touches this, touches the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8). The head is more sensitive and responsive in its feeling than the other parts of the body, as experience teaches. When the small toe or some other tiny part of the body is hurt, the face immediately shows that it feels this; the nose contracts, the eyes flash, etc. In the same way Christ, our Head, makes our afflictions His own, so that when we, who are His body, suffer, He is affected as though the evils were His own. It is helpful to know this, so that we are not overly sad or even completely desperate when we see our enemies persecuting, excommunicating, and murdering us, or when we see the heretics hating us so bitterly. Then we should think that, following the example of Paul, we ought to glory greatly in the cross which we have received because of Christ, not because of our own sins. When we consider the sufferings we receive only so far as we ourselves are involved in them, they become not only troubling but intolerable. But when the second person pronoun “Thy” is added to them, so that we can say (2 Cor. 1:5): “We share abundantly in Thy sufferings, O Christ,” and, as the psalm says (44:22), “For Thy sake we are slain all day long,” then our sufferings become not only easy but actually sweet, in accordance with the saying (Matt. 11:30): “My burden is light, and My yoke is easy.” Now it is evident that the only reason we must endure the hate and persecution of our opponents today is that we preach Christ purely. (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 27: *Lectures on Galatians*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 134–135.)

- h. **2 Corinthians 4:16-18:** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

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