

Ten Benefits of Suffering

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. 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.

Romans 8:17-18

REVIEW

We have been looking at biblical evidences of being in Christ. We have seen so far that people in Christ 1.) Think differently and 2.) Behave differently. Now we find a third evidence: *They suffer*. We are in Christ “if so be that we suffer with Him.” The “if so be” is called a conditional particle. It means a condition exists if certain facts are true. Examples: we have spark if the engine turns over; the baby is alive if she cries; the diet worked if the dress fits; the burner is on if the water boils. The message today is that a person has evidence of being a true Christian if he suffers, for a person “in Christ” can absolutely count on suffering.

Why is it certain that the godly shall suffer? Partly . . .

- A. Because the world hates God. See John 15:18-21. The simple truth is that the lost hate God, so they hate people who remind them of God, represent Him, or reveal Him. See II Tim. 3:11-12. Indeed, the very word translated “suffer” in our text, *sumpascho*, means “to experience pain jointly or of the same kind.” If people hate God, they hate the godly. Both will be mistreated.
- B. Because the devil resists the work of God. See Zech. 3:1ff – the devil wants to hinder Joshua in his work of rebuilding the temple by stirring up enemies and accusing him of sin. Compare I Thess. 2:18, Rev. 2:10. Satan may even attack our bodies. See Job. See Paul's thorn in the flesh, “the messenger of Satan” (II Cor. 12:7).
- C. Because God uses our suffering for good. See Rom. 8:28 in context (:31, 35-37). Compare James 1:2-4. See also: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”
(Matt. 5:10-12)

So, believers can count on suffering that comes because they are in Christ. It's a litmus test of our true spiritual condition actually. But we do not panic. We count it a joy to be enough like Christ to get the world's and devil's attention. See Acts 5:40-42. Besides, a believer finds many blessings in suffering.

Suffering is . . .

1. Our assurance that God loves us. (Heb. 12:3-8)

How great it is to know God loves us. “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them....” (John 17:23)

“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (I John 4:16)

2. God's way of getting our attention. (Amos 4:6-12)

All these natural calamities are sent by God to impel His people to return to Him. The message: "Prepare to meet thy God!" Compare Rev. 9:16-21. Are you prepared?

C. S. Lewis has written, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

3. God's call for self-examination. (I Cor. 11:31-32)

We can have a health problem but be unaware until we take a look at ourselves. So also spiritually, and God may let us know of our need to look via suffering.

4. God's method of conquering pride. (James 4:6-10)

See the Church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:17-19). See King Nebuchadnezzar. Surely, all great men in Christ have been humbled. How quickly God can take away every thing we have. "If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." (Job 34:14-15)

5. A reminder of our weakness. (II Cor. 12:9-10)

Nothing like a sickness or accident to remind us just how much not in control we are. Matt. 6:27 points to our extreme weakness and helplessness: "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" We can't add one step to our life's journey.

6. Our motivation to cry out to God. (II Sam. 22:5-18)

See also: "And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him; and God moved them to depart from him." (II Chron. 18:31)

7. Our evidence of spiritual warfare. (Luke 22:31)

The devil sifts. He provokes us to count our reasons for pride – "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." (I Chron. 21:1) He sabotages faith – "I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain." (I Thess. 3:5) From Job we learn he can take away our possessions, our family, our health, and our reputation. See Eph. 6:11-12.

8. God's system of purifying our faith. (I Peter 1:6-7)

With each new opportunity to suffer we see all the more clearly that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

9. God's way of increasing our hatred of evil. (Ps. 69:1-9)

When we suffer we may see with more of God's mind the loathsomeness of the world and its enticements, selfishness, pride, ignorance, lukewarmness, flippancy toward the Scriptures, inconsistent thinking, stinginess, excuse-making, sloth, etc.

10. God's call to identify with Christ. (Acts 5:41)

What could be more encouraging than to be enough like Christ that the world takes note?

In review, suffering is . . .

1. Our assurance that God loves us
2. God's way of getting our attention
3. God's call for self-examination
4. God's method of conquering pride
5. A reminder of our weakness
6. Our motivation to cry out to God
7. Our evidence of spiritual warfare
8. God's system of purifying our faith
9. God's way of increasing our hatred of evil
10. God's call to identify with Christ

There is a suffering that indicates that we are in Christ. And it's OK and right thus to suffer.

DISCUSSION

1. Explain this quotation: “A man who has not suffered, what does he know?” – *Henry Suso*
2. Explain: “Yea, and that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” – *II Tim. 3:12*
3. Explain: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad” – *Matt. 5:10-12*
4. Explain: “To be able to explain suffering is the clearest indication of never having suffered.”
– *Oswald Chambers*