

WHY? DOESN'T GOD LOVE US?



Last week we looked at one of the reasons people give for human suffering: “God is not powerful enough to prevent calamities.” We learned how God limits His power and how we often contribute to our own troubles. The human family has never completely understood God’s methods, but acceptance is far more important than understanding. We are promised troubles. We cannot expect a life of ease. God is powerful enough to free us of all troubles, but He limited Himself when He gave our first parents freedom of choice and the laws of nature became consistent.

Now we’re ready to examine the other explanation mortals give for our afflictions.

*Humans Reason that His Love Is Not
Sufficient to Spare Us from Suffering.*

KINDNESS AND LOVE

Perhaps much of our lack of understanding is the result of a failure to distinguish between the traits of kindness and love. There is kindness in love but the two are not synonymous.

LET THIS *Cup* PASS

Too many of us perceive God as a heavenly Santa Claus or a dotting grandfather who passes out toys and candy to good little boys and girls and never disciplines them. Such action may be kindness but it is not love. After all, the primary reason for man's creation was not that man might love God but that God should love him and be well-pleased (Revelation 4:11 KJV). God's love is completely unselfish. He loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son so we could have eternal life.

Good parents want their children to develop into responsible unspoiled adults. So does God. But love demands the perfecting of the beloved. Love had rather see a child suffer for his ultimate good rather than to watch him grow into a contemptible undisciplined adult. God wants what is good for us in the same manner that a parent will ignore the pleadings of his child for food immediately before surgery.

- ▶ What is the difference in kindness and love? What part do the two have in the rearing of children?

- ▶ According to Revelation 4:11 KJV, why were you created?

- ▶ How do we know that God is not selfish? (See John 3:16.)

BENEFITS OF TRIBULATIONS

Troubles are promised so we should expect them. Tribulations help make us better people, but how is it done? We will study six benefits:

1. Trials and tests are a part of the Christian life.
2. Suffering changes us.

3. Chastening is of God.
4. Suffering is not necessarily the result of sin.
5. Afflictions enhance our comforting of others.
6. Suffering helps us establish new goals.

TESTS ARE A PART OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

When a new convert rises from baptism, she had better get her pencil sharpened and her paper ready because she will be tested. Any testing, whether oral or written, is a valid means of ascertaining how much the student has learned. When the pupil scores poorly on a test, a teacher knows that either the teaching was inadequate or the student did little work in preparation. Mark these verses:

- “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small” (Proverbs 24:10).
- “Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3).
- “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Abraham’s faith was tried when he was asked to sacrifice Isaac. (Many more great Bible characters also went through the agonies of trials.) There is a difference in the suffering of a Christian and that of a sinner. A Christian suffers for a purpose (1 Peter 4:13–14).

► Read 1 Peter 2:19–20. What kind of suffering is commendable?

- ▶ What word is used twice in 1 Peter 4:12? How can that verse prepare us for testing?
- ▶ According to Philippians 1:29, what is granted to Christians along with faith?

We must remember that our problems are filtered by God and no more is put on us than we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). Our ability to handle tribulations properly increases if our hearts are receptive and our attitudes are right. The twists and turns of daily living do not cause us to act out of character, rather, they reveal our inner spirits. So don't fret over burdens. They are indicative of someone's confidence in your ability.



Problems
are necessary
for our
growth.

Problems are necessary for our growth just as exercise is necessary for a baby's development. Each successful solution to any problem is another rung in the ladder to maturity. A seed of something good is in every adversity. Each hardship should make us better. To realize the worth of the anchor, we must feel the storm. So long as we live purposefully, we will be plunged into the mainstream of life with its inherent tests.

Visit a nursing home and you will find those who are completely withdrawn. They have detached themselves from life, so they have few problems. They are not really living. Neither do we measure a person's ability in life by her attainments as much as by the difficulties she has overcome in reaching that goal.

God will not look you over for medals,
degrees, or diplomas but for scars.

—Elbert Hubbard

We never rise so high in Christian living that we cannot be tested. When we satisfactorily complete one trial and breathe a sigh of relief, another trial might rear its ugly head. Often the scar tissue never leaves, but the child of God grows stronger with each victory.

- ▶ Why do we often feel that God has turned against us when our faith is put to the test?

- ▶ What is the difference between the suffering of a Christian and the suffering of a sinner?

- ▶ According to 1 Corinthians 10:13, what happens to problems before they are sent our way?

SUFFERING CHANGES US

Adversity produces repentance, strips us of vanity and pride, and causes us to depend on God. The suffering of the prodigal son caused him to repent, but so does the goodness of God (Romans 2:4).

David's affliction caused him to realize that he went astray (Psalm 119:67), and he confessed a few verses later that it was good for him to have been afflicted (v. 71). We can rest assured we are punished less than our iniquities deserve (Ezra 9:13).

Christ's strength was made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Most of us are more like Jonah. He had to face adversity before he remembered the Lord (Jonah 2:7). Troubles cause us to lean on God.

LET THIS *Cup* PASS

- How can suffering cause us to repent and become humble?
- Cite examples of Bible characters who repented because of troubles.
- How can both the chastisement of God and His goodness lead to the same end?
- Discuss Proverbs 3:5–6 to prove that troubles cause us to trust in God instead of our own understanding.

God has no place for the proud and the haughty. Most humans are too arrogant to be of much use to God. Like the great stones used in making a mighty building, we must be cut and shaped to be of value.

We sing loudly, “Thou art the potter; I am the clay.” Then we start whimpering when He moves in to shape our lives. We must willingly give ourselves as unfinished clay into the Potter’s skilled hands before He can shape us into vessels of value.

God had one Son on earth without sin,
but never one without suffering.

—Augustine

- “And whoever exalts himself will be _____, and he who humbles himself will be _____” (Matthew 23:12).
- “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the _____.”
Therefore _____ to God . . . Draw near to God and

W H Y ? D O E S N ' T G O D L O V E U S ?

He will draw near to you . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will _____ you up (James 4:6–10).

- ▶ Why do we require some shaping and chiseling before we can be of real value to the Lord in His service?

God wants us to have greater blessings—salvation, character, humility, love, concern for others, appreciation, integrity. Our hands are often too full of material possessions and a sense of haughtiness over our own worth—much of which can be attributed to good health which we take for granted. There is no room to hold the great blessings He wants to shower on us. Just as Christ’s hands were torn by spikes before He was lifted up from the earth, so must ours be emptied of worldly possessions and filled with burdens before we can be lifted up.

Wisdom is oft times nearer when we stoop than when we soar.

—William Wordsworth

CHASTENING IS OF GOD

Although His natural laws are consistent, there can be no doubt that God works through these laws or by some other means to chasten His children. There are too many scriptures to deny this fact.

- “As a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you” (Deuteronomy 8:5).
- “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:11–12).