

What about Suffering?

Do we truly want a life where no suffering exists?

Second Corinthians 1.3–7

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Scripture Reader and Reading: Phil Joseph – Psalm 102.1–5

Prelude:

I. Probably most people, believer and unbeliever, has a question similar to these:

6 I am weary with my groaning;
All night I make my bed swim;
I drench my couch with my tears.
7a My eye wastes away because of grief...
(Psa 6.6, 7a)

1 Why do You stand afar off, O LORD?
Why do You hide in times of trouble?
(Psa 10.1)

Even the Messiah would ask about God's presence during His darkest hour,

1 My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning?
(Psa 22.1)

3 My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me,
“Where is your God?”
(Psa 42.3)

9 I will say to God my Rock,
“Why have You forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?”
10 As with a breaking of my bones,
My enemies reproach me,
While they say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

(Psa 42.9, 10)

II. People respond differently to suffering.

- A. Some use it as a time to challenge God.
- B. Others use it as a time to seek God desperately.

III. The world entrenched in evolutionary thought,

- A. uses human suffering to declare that God does not exist, but
- B. how does that help the sufferer?

IV. Listening to the Scriptures makes sense,

- A. not merely because they make sense or provide comfort, but
- B. because they declare the truth,
 - 1. affirming that there is a God, and
 - 2. that suffering has various reasons.
 - a) When we combine the Scriptures with our observations of life,
 - b) we see why suffering exists.

V. We all experience suffering or see it in someone we love.

- A. It is important to have the right thoughts going into suffering
- B. rather than trying to develop them when we are in the midst of suffering.
 - 1. Soldiers do not train during the suffering of battle, but before.
 - 2. Likewise, Christians should train for suffering before they experience it.

VI. It is important to know that God has not abandoned us during suffering,

- A. although we might be tempted to think that He has, but
- B. for that reason I provided the quotes from the Book of Psalms at the beginning.
 - 1. God knows

- a) our suffering, and
 - b) our thoughts during suffering.
2. Therefore, He included the cries of the psalmists
- a) to show us that He knows and
 - b) to show us how the psalmists dealt with suffering, and
 - c) that He approves of what they did.
- (1) That is why I am preaching through the Psalms.
 - (2) It is why I urge you to read the whole Bible every year.

VII. If you consider the biblical message and your common sense,

- A. you will have peace of mind during suffering, and
- B. you will not curse God,
 - 1. which is what Satan wants you to do.
 - 2. Remember from the Book of Job why Job suffered,

**9 So Satan answered the LORD and said, “Does Job fear God for nothing?
10 Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and
around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his
hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. 11 But now, stretch
out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to
Your face!” (Job 1.9–11).**

Persuasion:

I. Is Suffering Evil?

- A. By what basis does the atheist think that suffering is evil or bad?
 - 1. Who is the atheist to set up a standard and then
 - 2. to judge the Creator by it?
- B. Why do unbelievers think

1. that God should either eliminate suffering or
 2. never have allowed it initially?
- C. Why does the unbeliever not think that suffering is natural?
- D. Why does he think it is an argument against God?
1. They think that if He is all powerful,
 - a) He could remove all suffering, but
 - b) since He does not,
 - (1) He either does not have the power or
 - (2) He lacks the compassion.
 - (a) Either way, they conclude He cannot be God.
 - (b) Hence, God does not exist, according to their reasoning.
 2. Or they will say that if He is a God of love,
 - a) He would remove all suffering, but
 - b) since He does not,
 - (1) He either lacks the power, or
 - (2) He is not love.
 - (a) Either way, they conclude he cannot be God.
 - (b) Hence, God does not exist, according to their thinking.
- E. Is He a God of infinite power? Yes, for God by definition is all powerful.
- F. Is He a God of endless love? Yes, for the Bible affirms it repeatedly.
- G. However, He is not a God of power and love *only*, but
1. a God of justice, wrath, mercy, grace, patience, and other qualities.
 2. I will deal with this more later, but for now let me say this.
 - a) By His power and by His love,

b) He will remove all suffering for His children at a future date.

H. What do atheists want?

1. Do they want God to intervene in every act to prevent suffering? No.
2. Yet, why do they charge God with failing to stop suffering?

II. Smooth Seas Never Made a Skillful Sailor

- A. Do we truly want a life where we can never suffer?
- B. “The Good Side of Disasters,” *USA Weekend*, February 20–22, 2009, Cover story, and pages 6, 7.
- C. Paul and Victoria Waters born with congenital insensitivity to pain (“Children Who Feel No Pain,” *Parade*, April 5, 1987, page 20.
- D. Remember from First Peter that God uses suffering to our benefit,

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1Pe 1.6, 7).

1. Those trials can take any form.
2. Suffering for Christ can be explicit or implicit.

III. A Painless Life Is Coming

4 “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21.4).

- A. God wants to see who wants to live there, because
 1. He will shut out evildoers.
 2. Life now determines whether we want to live there.

B. Why do we have to show whether we want to live there?

1. Revelation shows who will be excluded from that painless place.

27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 21.27).

2. Why will some be excluded?

a) Let us understand why suffering exists in this world.

12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— (Rom 5.12).

b) God will not allow in heaven those who want to continue to sin.

(1) They would only ruin heaven as they have ruined the earth.

(2) For this reason,

(a) God kicked Satan out of heaven,

(b) God kicked Adam and Eve out of heaven on earth.

3. Therefore, by repentance and living a new life we show God

a) that we want to live in a place where suffering does not exist, and

b) that we will not contribute to the existence of suffering by sinning.

C. Our time on earth is about this very thing.

1. Therefore, God waits for the ungodly to repent (2Pe 3.9).

2. If God ended all suffering right now as the atheist wants,

a) then a strong motivator

b) for many people to change would disappear.

3. If God ended all suffering right now,

- a) He would destroy the earth and begin eternity for humans, and
 - b) that would mean some humans would suffer eternally
 - (1) who otherwise may have changed and
 - (2) gone to heaven.
- D. Originally *man* ruined the earth,
- 1. introducing sin that brought on suffering, but
 - 2. God keeps working with man.
 - a) The first humans did what all humans end up doing,
 - b) exerting their own will,
 - (1) believing that living as God directs
 - (2) somehow keeps us from living a better life.

Exhortation:

I. We should not be callous towards suffering and the sufferer.

- A. We must practice the Golden Rule.
- B. We must use it as an opportunity to minister to people.
- C. We must use it as an opportunity to show the compassion of Christ.
- D. We must use it to glorify God.

II. If you truly want to live where no suffering exists,

- A. now is the time to prepare for that place, because
- B. it never will exist on earth, but
 - 1. it will exist where God lives, and
 - 2. we have to qualify ourselves now to live there.

III. Going to live eternally in a place of pure delight and righteousness

- A. requires more than a halfhearted effort.

B. It takes 100% commitment.

IV. What happens when you put a carrot, an egg, and coffee in boiling water?

A. Boiling water softens the hard carrot.

B. Boiling water hardens the soft interior of the egg.

1. The boiling water changed the carrot and the egg.

a) The carrot wilted, unable to stand up anymore.

b) The egg hardened, unable to be formed anymore.

2. However, the boiling water released the aroma and flavor of the coffee.

a) The coffee changed the water.

b) The heat brought out the best in the coffee.

V. When suffering comes,

A. do you wilt,

B. do you become inflexible, or

1. do you permeate your environment and

2. become something wonderful to others?

VI. Happy people do not have the best of everything, but

A. they make the most of their life experiences.

B. They do not challenge God,

1. they run to Him for comfort, and

2. when they receive it,

a) they give it to others.

b) Are you ready to run to God?