

REFORMATION PLATFORM LEADERSHIP RETREAT, DECEMBER 2015

THEME: SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN

HYMNS: *It pays to serve Jesus*

Stand up, stand up for Jesus

Onward Christian soldier

More holiness give me

****INTRODUCTION: AN ARMY OF CIVILIANS...**

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Timothy 2:3 KJV)

"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ " NASB

There is a modern teaching that is pervasive...it has become accepted in almost all Christian circles, but it is foreign to the spirit of true Christianity...it is the false belief that the gospel primarily promises us happiness in this present world, with plenty to eat, fat bank accounts, continuously accumulating possessions and no suffering of any kind.

In fact, suffering as a Christian is particularly singled out as archaic, parochial, unbalanced and primitive, based on the 'incomplete' revelation of the early fathers of the Christian faith...

This heresy became popular with the rise of the '*New Generation churches*' some thirty to forty years ago in Nigeria and the United States. These new movements were discontented with the orthodoxy of the Orthodox churches and they felt they could do better.

As the years have passed, it is evident that basic doctrines like suffering for the cause of the gospel has been completely eroded, persecution for righteousness sake has been relegated to the background; with thousands of freshly minted Christians (some of whom have risen to become senior pastors in many 'newer' generation churches), viewing suffering of any kind as primarily the work of the devil...

I rejoice in my spirit that the fathers of the Christian faith left us with records of their own exploits, experiences, sufferings and testimonies of God's faithfulness to them in the midst of it all... Thus, regardless of the current attitude or body language of the Church regarding the matter of suffering, we have chosen to align our beliefs with what the Lord Jesus taught and His apostles practised...

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (2 Timothy 2:3 KJV)

"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ " NASB

The first matter the Holy Spirit highlighted for me in this verse of scripture is this: **"Thou therefore endure hardness..."** This is a very strong matter. As early as the birth of Christianity upon this present world, we were ordered that we were not to be **laid back**, **lackadaisical** or **spineless**. From the very beginning, we were told that Christianity is

actually a spiritual armed force (2Tim.2:3, 2Tim.2:4, Eph.6:12, 2Cor.10:3-6), thus, upon any serious and genuine enlistment, we were given army uniform and weapons of offense and defense (the armour of God- see Eph.6:10-18, 1Thes.5:8).

Thus, one of the earliest injunctions from some of our elder brothers who also double as our Commanding Officers is this: "**Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.**"

Can I tell you brethren that you must be hard...I am not talking of the hardness of sin or being hardened in the flesh...rather I am talking of being hardened against whatever salvoes of bombardments Mr Sin, the flesh, the world system or even the devil throws against us.

We must not be men and women who cracks under pressure as quickly as the first sign of opposition, afflictions, persecution or any other threatening thing appears (Matt.13:20-21)...yet, this is the sad reality today because the Body of Christ is not trained to endure hardness...

Neither do you begin to train soldiers on the battle field. You don't begin to sharpen swords on the day of battle. Any sensible person knows that soldiers spend their times of peace to keep honing their deadly skills such that at the advent of war, they are ready to get into action at the first sign of hostilities.

My best films are war films. This is because I see a lot of illustrations of what Christianity is supposed to look like when I watch those movies. For example, when an enemy unit begins to harass soldiers with artillery fire, I noticed that the soldiers will not run away because of the noise and the ferocity of the bombs dropping upon their positions. Instead, they dig in and hope that no errant bomb will fall upon their own particular trench.

Even though they would lose friends and colleague due to the explosions, even though it is painful to watch other men, who are your friends and colleagues die, without being able to do anything about it, they would not leave those trenches because they had been taught and trained to obey the last command (1Tim.1:18 NASB), they have been trained to endure hardness and persevere under even the most gruesome circumstance until the victory is won...(2Tim.2:4)

It is sad that what we have in the Church today is an army of civilians...untrained, undisciplined, unpatriotic and totally lacking in courage...at the first sound of battle, this army flees...Lev.26:36-37

GIDEON'S ARMY OF 31,700 CIVILIANS...

In Judges chapter 6, when the Midianites and Amalekites mustered their armies, numbering a total of 135,000 soldiers (see Judg.8:10) and crossed into the territories of Israel, in order to continue oppressing them, something happened. The Lord God stirred up Gideon and the announced a call to arms and some 32,000 Israeli men gathered to him.

However, there was a mixed multitude in this army, even when you would think that 32,000 men was still a small number if facing 135,000. The Lord saw that 31,700 men out of the army of Gideon were civilians with no interest in fighting the Midianites because:

1. 22,000 of them were afraid of either fighting or dying (see Judg.7:1-4, Deut.20:1-4, 8)
2. 9,700 of them only wanted ease and would be useless if allowed to march onwards with the army. (See Judg.7:4-7)

Contrary to human expectations, all that God needed to face 135,000 enemy soldiers was a simple number of 300 committed soldiers who are

ready to fight based on His own terms and in His own way, armed primarily with but a torch a pitcher each (see Judg.7:16, 19-20)

"Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ " NASB

1Ths 3:1-4 TLB: "Finally, when I could stand it no longer, I decided to stay alone in Athens and send Timothy, our brother and fellow worker, God's minister, to visit you to strengthen your faith and encourage you and to keep you from becoming fainthearted in all the troubles you were going through.

(But of course you know that such troubles are a part of God's plan for us Christians. Even while we were still with you we warned you ahead of time that suffering would soon come--and it did.)"

"...that no one be continuously wagged as a tail (= shaken or agitated) within these pressures (contractions, constrictions; oppressions), for you yourselves have seen and are aware that we are continually laid into (= repeatedly destined and set for) this! You see, even when we were with you we were predicting (laying it out and telling beforehand) to you that, "we are about to be continuously pressed (or: squeezed; oppressed), " just as it was even birthed (or: also came to be), and you have seen and know. JMNT

For example, in 2Tim.4:5, the bible says: **"But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry."** (NKJV)

The statement, "**...endure afflictions...**", literally means '*continue doing what you should even though you are suffering*' or '*remain firm even though people cause you suffering*'. (See also James 5:10)

****LESSON ONE**

RECOGNIZING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUFFERING...

1. TRIAL

Trials are basically examinations by fire (thus, they are referred to as '*fiery trials*', see 1Pet.4:12 AUV); they are experiences that puts the strength and patience of faith of the Christian to the test. They are sufferings that exercises and proves the graces or virtues of men.

Primarily, they denote painful circumstances (1Pet.1:6-7, James 1:2-3 AMP, AUV, BWE, ERV, JMNT, MSG) into which the Christian is brought by Divine Providence (Isa.48:10-11, 1Pet.5:8-10, Matt.4:1), with a view to illustrate the perfections of God (Job 42:1-6), to bring to light the character of the person thus tried (1Pet.4:12, Deut.8:2, 2Chron.32:31 compare with 2Kgs.20:14-19), and by the influence of temporal suffering, which shows the transitory nature (1Cor.7:31) and uncertain tenure (1Tim.6:17,) of all earthly advantages, thus promoting their eternal and spiritual interests (Job 23:10, Ps.66:10).

To explain it in simpler terms, trial is the process of eliminating impurities by the means of fire (Isa.1:22, 25-26, Mal.3:2-3). The Lord God, whenever He intends to make progress with our lives as disciples of His Son, places us in a furnace of affliction (Isa.48:10, Prov.25:4); there, as the heat increases, the impurities in our lives [which, it is noteworthy to mention, are unknown to us], floats to the surface (Prov.17:3, Ezek.22:18-22); seeing the things that have clung to us inseparably before the trials will shock us, and we will be able to beg the

Lord to remove all the impurities that have floated to the surface (Job 23:10, Ps.66:10-11) and that He should continue refining us until we become exactly like the Lord Jesus (Ps.26:2, Zech.13:9).

2. TRIBULATION (AFFLICTION)

In his *Study of Words*, Trench gives a very interesting account of the history of the English word ‘tribulation.’ Derived from the Latin word: *tribulum*, the threshing instrument by means of which the corn was separated from the husks, *tribulatio*, the term applied to the process of separation, came to be used for the disciplinary ordeal of distress and adversity. It equally means severe affliction.

The word affliction, which many times is used interchangeably for tribulation, means a state of pain, distress, or grief. It equally means the cause of continued pain of body or mind, such as sicknesses, losses etc; or an instance of grievous distress; a pain or grief.

The Lord Jesus and the holy apostles repeatedly warned us that tribulation must be expected by the saints as it is our appointed lot as long as we are in this present, evil world (Acts 14:22, Jn.16:33, Acts 9:16, 1Thes.3:2-4). In fact, in the teachings of the Lord Jesus, this word points to three different things:

a. The persecution to which His followers will be subjected and by which their loyalty to Him will be tested (Mk.4:17 compare Matt.13:21, Matt.24:9, Jn.16:33).

b. The privations and sufferings necessarily induced by His service (2Cor.11:23-33 TLB, MSG, CEV; Acts 5:40-42 AMP, GNB), 2Cor.4:7-12, 17-18 AUV, TLB, JMNT, MSG)

c. It equally describes the birthpangs of a woman, as a means of explaining how our sojourn in this present world will be filled with repeated bouts of afflictions and how through them all, the Lord Himself will see us through until we see Him face to face when He returns (Ps.34:19, Ps.71:20 ERV, Jn.16:16, 19-22, 33 AMP; Jn.20:20).

Different types of affliction

1. Infirmities

1. This primarily means want or lack of strength, weakness, infirmity, which means a moral, mental, or physical weakness or flaw.

We have infirmities:

a. of the body

i. its native weakness and frailty. Rom.6:19, Rom.8:26, Heb.4:15, Heb.5:2

ii. feebleness of health or sickness. Gal.4:13, Matt.8:17, Lk.5:15, 1Tim.5:23.

b. of the soul or spirit

i. want of strength and capacity requisite:

a. to understand a thing (Rom.6:19, Rom.15:1)

b. to do things great and glorious (Rom.3:23, Rom.7:24)

c. to restrain corrupt desires (Heb.7:28 AUV, Heb.5:2)

d. to bear trials and troubles (Mk.4:17)

2. Reproach

Reproach is serious and strong criticism based upon presumed evidence (Acts 21:27-30). It is also an expression of strong disapproval, that manifests itself primarily in finding fault with another person (Acts 24:2-9).

It also means rebuke, shame, humiliate, disgrace, taunt, scold, insult, embarrass, slander, ridicule and revile another person (Jer.20:8, Isa.51:7, Ps.69:7, Jer.15:15, Heb.10:32-34).

It is equally a sense of disgrace that comes from public humiliation; particularly on the basis of standing by faith in the truth as it is in Jesus (1Pet.4:14-16, 1Pet.2:19-20, 1Pet.3:14-17, Lk.6:22-23, 2Cor.12:10, Heb.11:24-26, Ps.89:50-51).

***Heb.13:12-14

The Christian is not expected to return insult for insult (1Pet.3:9, 1Thes.5:15, Rom.12:17, 19-21 TLB, JMNT)

3. Necessities

Necessity primarily means a compelling force, as opposed to willingness. It also means to be in a state of constraint.

They are things that constantly demands attention (Matt.13:7, 22 AMP, compare Mk.4:7, 19 AMP, Matt.6:25) and if the christian is not careful, they will constantly dictate his actions and reactions (Ps.127:2 GNB,CEV, ***Lk.12:29-30, Matt.6:34).

They include but are not limited to: hardships (Phil.4:12 AMP), needs (2Cor.6:4, Phil.4:19), deprivations (2Cor.11:27), hunger (2Cor.6:5), thirst, lack of shelter or clothing (1Cor.4:11) or any other necessity.

4. Distresses

Distress is the state of being in great trouble, great physical or mental strain and stress. It is to be in pain from grief or heavy toil. 2Cor.2:4 AMP, Lk.22:44-46.

Distresses are tight situations, perplexities, disturbances, anxious moments, inescapable problems and difficulties (2Cor.4:7-13, 2Cor.7:5-6) .

Several times in the bible, distress and afflictions (or tribulations) are mentioned together, but with care to distinguish and separate them (see Rom.8:35, 2Cor.6:3 etc.).

Distress is different from other forms of affliction in the sense that afflictions are troubles that press upon a person from without (I.e outside of him) e.g. persecution, tribulation etc; whereas, distress is troubles that arises from within a person (usually on account of currently experienced afflictions, tribulations or persecution). See 2Cor.7:5, 2Cor.11:28

Distress expresses itself primarily in things like mental or emotional anguish, discomfort, depression or sorrow. Matt.26:36-39, Lk.22:44, Jn.16:20-22, Rom.9:1-2.

4. Slander

**Prov.6:16, 19; Prov.26:20-22

Slander is the utterance of false charges or misrepresentations which defame and damage another person's reputation.

It could also be said to be a false and malicious oral statement targeted specifically at ruining a person's reputation either through misrepresentation, wrongful accusation or other forms of falsehood.

It is equally aimed at demeaning a person through speech. In other words, it means speaking in a disrespectful way that demeans (i.e. to lower in character, status or reputation), denigrates (i.e. to attack the reputation of another, or to deny the importance or validity of another) and maligns (i.e. having or showing intense and often vicious ill will towards) another person.

Simply put, it is speaking evil of another person.

I. Habits included in Slander...

a. Whispering. Rom.1:29, 2Cor.12:20

Whispering is providing harmful information about a person, often spoken in whispers or in low voice, with the implication that such information is not widely known and therefore should presumably be kept secret.

By whispering, the Holy Spirit is telling us of the bad habit of hurtful gossip and detraction (i.e. a lessening of another's reputation or esteem, particularly by envious, malicious or petty criticism.

b. Backbiting. Rom.1:30, 2Cor.12:20

This is to say mean or spiteful things about another person behind his back (I.e.when he is not present); to particularly say things that would not be repeated in the presence of the other person.

c. Evil Suspicions. 1Tim.6:4,

This means to have and hold a secret opinion, often without sufficient evidence, and with the implication of regarding such false opinion as true. It is to imagine, to conjecture, to falsely suspect...

d. Tale-bearing. Lev.19:16, Jer.6:28

In very simple terms, this roughly means gossiping. However, the meaning of the word in Hebrew is heavier than to merely 'gossip'; It primarily refers to spreading rumours or falsities about someone and it entails revealing things that should not be made public (Prov.11:13, Prov.20:19).

It is a habit Christian women are especially warned against (Titus 2:3) and a quality that must not be found in a minister's wife (1Tim.3:11).

e. Babbling. Prov.23:29, 1Sam.1:16

Babbling means to complain bitterly. The same word can be used in explaining praying bitterly as in the case of Hannah. However, in the context of the slanderer, we are talking about one who always has one thing or the other to complain bitterly about another person, as in the case of the the Pharisees and Jesus (see:Jn.9:6-34, Jn.7:19-23 compare Jn.5:16, 18; Lk.7:36-39)

f. Tattling 1Ti 5:13, Prov.10:19

This means talking idly, incessantly. It is being a chatter-box, being one who is prone to communicate confidential information in the midst of much talking.

g. Evil speaking. Psa 41:5; Psa 109:20

Evil Speaking is using language that is either reproachful or untrue about others, and thereby injuring them. It is an express command of Scripture, "To speak evil of no man." Tit 3:2. Jas 4:11.

h. Defaming Jer 20:10; 1Co 4:13

This is speaking with impious irreverence concerning God Himself or who/what stands in some particular relation to Him. It means to blaspheme. See also Job 32:2 AMP, CEV

i. Bearing false witness Exo 20:16; Deu 5:20; Luk 3:14

j. Judging charitably Jas 4:11; Jas 4:12

k. Raising false reports Exo 23:1

- Repeating matters Pro 17:9

II. Different Types of Slander...(or how professing Christians persecute other Christians)!

a. Charging others with faults they are not guilty of Matt.26:59-61

b. Affixing scandalous names and odious characters to an innocent person which he doesn't deserve; Mk.3:22

c. Aspersion (i.e. attacking with evil reports or false or injurious charges) a man's actions with foul names, insisting that they proceed from evil principles, or tend to bad ends, when it does not or cannot appear; Matt.27:62-63

d. Perverting a man's words or acts disadvantageously by deliberate misconstruction; Matt.26:62-65

- e. Partial or total representation of men's words or practice, suppressing some part of the truth or concealing some circumstances which ought to be explained;
- f. Instilling sly suggestions which create prejudice in the hearers;
- g. Magnifying and aggravating the faults of others;
- h. Imputing to our neighbor's practice, judgment, or profession evil consequences which have no foundation in truth.

2. You will be slandered.

3. The Christian response and reaction to slander (*How to avoid slandering others and how to react when we are slandered*)

1. Persons in the administration of justice may speak words which in private intercourse would be reproachful.
2. God's ministers may inveigh against vice with sharpness and severity, both privately and publicly, Is. 58: 1. Tit 1:13.
3. Private persons may reprove others when they commit sin, Lev 19:17.
4. Some vehemence of speech may be used in defense of truth, and impugning errors of bad consequence, Jud 1:3.
5. It may be necessary, upon some emergent occasions, with some heat of language, to express disapprobation of notorious wickedness, Act 8:23. Yet in all these the greatest equity, moderation, and candour, should be used; and we should take care,
 1. Never to speak in severe terms without reasonable warrant or apparent just cause;

2. Nor beyond measure;

3. Nor out of bad principles or wrong ends; for ill will, contempt, revenge, envy, to compass our own ends; from wantonness, or negligence, but from pure love for the good of those to whom or of whom we speak.

This is an evil, however, which greatly abounds, and which is not sufficiently watched against; for it is not when we openly speak evil of others only that we are guilty, but even in speaking what is true we are in danger of speaking evil of others ().

There is sometimes a malignant pleasure manifested; a studious recollection of every thing that can be brought forward; a delight in hearing any thing spoken against others; a secret rejoicing in knowing that another's fall will be an occasion of our rise...

All this is base to an extreme. The impropriety and sinfulness of evil speaking will appear, if we consider,

1. That it is entirely opposite to the whole tenor of the Christian religion.
2. Expressly condemned and prohibited as evil, Psa 64:3. Jas 4:11.
3. No practice hath more severe punishments denounced against it, 1Co 5:11. 1Co 6:10.
4. It is an evidence of a weak and distempered mind.
5. It is even indicative of ill-breeding and bad manners.
6. It is the abhorrence of all wise and good men, Psa 15:3.
7. It is exceedingly injurious to society, and inconsistent with the relation we bear to each other as Christians, Jas 3:6.
8. It is branded with the epithet of folly, Pro 18:6; Pro 1:7-27:

9. It is perverting the design of speech.

10. It is opposite to the example of Christ, whom we profess to follow.

5. Persecution

Persecution is also a major part of tribulation, but because of how broad it is as a topic and the things we need to know distinctly about it, we will explain it elaborately in the next section.

3. PERSECUTION

Persecution is the infliction of loss (eg.confiscation of goods and properties see Heb.10:34), pain (bodily harm [see Heb.11:36, Acts 5:40, Acts 16:22-23, Acts 21:30-32], verbal abuse (see 1Pet.4:14-16, Acts 28:22), punishment (e.g. prison sentences or fines, see Acts 8:3, Acts 12:4, Acts 16:22-23 MSG, GNB, **Jer.37:11-16 GNB, NLV, NIRV) or even death (see Acts 12:1-2, Acts 26:10, Acts 7:57-60), upon others unjustly; particularly for adhering to a religious creed or mode of worship (see Acts 4:18, Acts 5:28-29), either by way of penalty (Acts 5:33, Acts 23:12) or of compelling them to renounce their principles. See Acts 26:10, Gal.1:13.

From the Hebrew language, persecution emphasizes the concept of pursuing or pressing upon another in order to oppress, harass and particularly to bring to judgment or punishment. See Acts 8:1-3, Acts 9:1-2

Persecution is a test of true Discipleship (Matt.10:24-25). A godly testimony will often result in ridicule, scorn, deprivation, physical harm and even death. Jesus and His disciples were, are and will be subjected to persecutions. Isa.53:7, Matt.26:65-68, 2Tim.3:12, Rev.2:10, Lk.21:12.

a. The nature of persecution

- i. Physical persecution
- ii. Social persecution
- iii. Mental persecution
- iv. Spiritual persecution

b. The targets of persecution

2Tim 3:12 NIV: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,"

TLB: "Yes, and those who decide to please Christ Jesus by living godly lives will suffer at the hands of those who hate Him."

This is the blunt truth. The genuine Christian is the main target of persecution. The truth is that if you are not constantly under persecution in one form or the other, something is wrong with your Christianity! (See Gal.4:29, Gal.5:11, Gal.6:12 NLT)

c. Reasons for persecution

John 15:18-20 NJB: "If the world hates you, you must realise that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice of you has drawn you out of the world, that is why the world hates you. Remember the words I said to you:

A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours as well."

d. Methods of persecution used against Jesus and His disciples and what we also should expect.

- i. Contempt and disparagement Jn.8:48, Jn.7:20
- ii. Ascribing Christ's miracles to the devil. Matt.12:24, Matt.10:25, Mk.3:22.
- iii. Expulsion of believers from the synagogues (and churches) Jn.9:22, 34; Jn.16:2
- iv. Attempted to entrap Him in His words Mattt.22:15, Jn.8:6
- v. Questioning their authority. Mk.11:28, Matt.21:23, 3Jn.1:9-10 AMP, TLB
- vi. Illegal arrest and the heaping of every kind of insult upon the Prisoner, who was entitled to the protection of the authorities until the authorised penalty was laid on him. Matt.26:67-68
- vii. Threatening the apostles on the pain of death to refrain from preaching in Jesus name. Acts 4:18-21, Acts 5:40
- ix. Recruiting men to pursue Paul and the other apostles into every city they go to minister in order to not only discredit their message, but also to stir the populace against them. Acts 13:49-50, Acts 14:1-6, 19-20; Acts 17:1-10
- xi. Actively plotting the assassination of the apostles and actually carrying out the attempts. Acts 9:23-25, 28-30

xii. Using secular power to harrass, arrest, flog, imprison and executing the disciples. Acts 16:16-35, Acts 12:1-3, Acts 18:1-18.

xiii. Eventual putting to death of huge number of believers who refuse to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ by stoning, beheading and killings through wild animals (The Jews, from AD 33-100 AD, Roman empire, from 70 AD-350s AD, ISIS in Iraq Year 2008 till date, Boko Haram in North Eastern Nigeria year 2008-2015 etc), burning alive (The Roman Catholic church, during the dark ages from around 600AD-till 1600s AD), firing squad (Nazi Germany, before and during the Second World War, Soviet Union, after WWII between the 1950s-1991 when USSR fell) and other forms of death all over the world.

**It is import to note that it was the fear of persecution that drove the disciples to forsake the Lord at the hour of His arrest. See Matt.26:31, 56.

It is noteworthy that all the apostles were violently killed, with the exception of John the Divine, and that was because they threw him into hot oil, he wouldn't fry, therefore they banished him to exile to die on the Isle of Patmos.

CHART: THE FATE OF THE APOSTLES

1. Simon Peter

Crucified upside down (reported by Origen)

2. James, son of Zebedee

Martyred by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1-2)

3. John, son of Zebedee

Exiled to Patmos; later died of old age (one legend is that Domitian had John thrown into a pot of boiling oil, but he was unharmed)

4. Andrew

According to tradition, was crucified (in the form of an X) at Patrae, a city of Achaia, because he rebuked Aegeas, the proconsul for idolatry

5. Philip

According to tradition, died as a martyr at Hierapolis

6. Bartholomew/ Nathanael

Said to have preached the gospel in India or perhaps Armenia where conflicting reports have him flayed alive or crucified upside down

7. Matthew/ Levi

According to legend, preached in unspecified foreign nations

8. Thomas

According to tradition, preached in Parthia and Persia and died as a martyr by being speared with a lance

9. James, son of Alphaeus

Not known

10. Thaddaeus/ Judas, son of James

Not known

11. Simon the Zealot

Not known

12. Matthias

According to tradition, went to Ethiopia to minister where he was eventually martyred

13. Saul/Paul

According to tradition, was beheaded at Nero's command along the Appian Way

Courtesy: Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Acts.

d. The expected Christian reaction to persecution.

i. Forbearance: learn to turn the other cheek. Matt.5:38-48.

ii. Mercy: If your enemy is hungry, feed him. Rom.12:20, Ex.23:4-5, Lk.6:35.

iii. Love: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matt.5:44, Lk.6:27-35, 1Thes.5:15

iv. Confidence in God: vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. Rom.12:19, Prov.20:22

v. Realization: If they persecuted me, they will persecute you. Jn.15:20, Jn.13:16

vi. Concentration on Jesus: Looking unto Jesus...Heb.12:2, 1Pet.2:21-23.

vii. Stand firmly with the old apostles and other saints: Same suffering is being experienced by your brethren all over the world. James 5:10-11, 1Pet.5:9.

viii. Challenge: You should seek to emulate Jesus, even in suffering persecution. 1Pet.2:19-23

4. TEMPTATIONS

This is the subtle appeal of the Devil, the flesh [via carnal reasoning and rationalization] and the world system, to the believer to quietly reconsider his position on obedience and loyalty to God by offering seemingly harmless allurements that are targeted at irreparably damaging our relationship with God. Gen.3:1-7, Gen.39:10, Matt.4:2-3.

i. A distinction must be made here. At this level, we must know that there are two levels of temptations:

a. Temptations arising from a man's own inner corruptions [i.e. ungodly expectations arising from his thoughts, desires and the inclinations of his heart i.e. his motives] Eph.4:22, James 1:13-14, Mk.7:21-23.

b. Temptations a man never knew existed before but which comes with promotion, influence, money, power and achievements. 2Sam.8:1-15, 2Sam.11:1-4, 1Kgs.3:3-14, Eccl.2:1-11, 1Kgs.11:1-8, compare Deut.17:14-20.

ii. The Devil does not use a single method. He has several means, ways, methods and strategies he can employ against a man. Sensitivity and absolute obedience to the Holy Spirit is the only means of escape available to the Christian. Eph.6:11, Isa.42:19, 16.

iii. As one rises in his relationship with God, temptations become fiercer, more subtle, more sophisticated and more refined (Matt.4:2-10, Judg.8:22-27); yet the help and comfort of the Holy Spirit is felt even more than these allurements for those who are willing to remain obedient to God. 2Cor.1:2-3, Ps.34:4-6, Rom.5:20b KJV.

Continuous bouts of temptations will not end until we see the Lord face to face...for it is the one who still has something to protect that the Devil will fight and seek to pull down. All the others already belong to him.

iv. It is foolishness for one to assume he is strong in a particular area where he has not been tested or tempted before. It is equally important to note that the Devil looks out for opportune times [i.e. times when men will most probably yield to temptations] before he tempts men. Lk.4:13 [NKJV, AMP]

This is why we must avoid place opportunities, time opportunities the Devil can take advantage of. We must redeem the time for the day is evil.

LESSON TWO

****WHY MUST THE CHRISTIAN SUFFER?**

1Pet 4:12-14 AMP: "Beloved, do not be amazed and bewildered at the fiery ordeal which is taking place to test your quality, as though something strange {unusual and alien to you and your position} were befalling you. But insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, rejoice, so that when His glory [full of radiance and splendor] is revealed, you may also rejoice with triumph [exultantly].

If you are censured and suffer abuse [because you bear] the name of Christ, blessed [are you--happy, fortunate, to be envied, with life-joy, and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of your outward condition], because the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God, is resting upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified."

"Beloved..."

This is the first thing the Holy Spirit would not want you to miss...you are not just loved by God, you are dearly loved. This great revelation is something you will need to treasure deeply in your heart.

This is because, contrary to the deceptions and lies of the devil, you do not go through hard times, trials and troubles because God hates you or because He has given up on you...

No.

Instead, He allows all those things that happened to you to happen because He deeply loves you and He wants you to be tested in every way so that when your promotion comes, it would be clear to all the devils and to all men that you have been tried and tested and you remained true to the Lord...

Heb 12:5-11TLB:

"And have you quite forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you, his child? He said, "My son, don't be angry when the Lord punishes you. Don't be discouraged when he has to show you where you are wrong. For when he punishes you, it proves that he loves you.

When he whips you, it proves you are really his child." Let God train you, for he is doing what any loving father does for his children. Whoever heard of a son who was never corrected? If God doesn't punish you when you need it, as other fathers punish their sons, then it means that you aren't really God's son at all--that you don't really belong in his family.

Since we respect our fathers here on earth, though they punish us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to God's training so that we can begin really to live? Our earthly fathers trained us for a few brief years, doing the best for us that they knew how, but God's correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share his holiness.

Being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening--it hurts! But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character."

Do you remember the Lord Jesus? Just immediately after God the Father acknowledged Him publicly before all men, angels and devils at River Jordan after His baptism at the end of chapter 3 of the book of Matthew, at the beginning of chapter 4, He was immediately led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil!

"...do not be amazed and bewildered..."

Severally, when we are tried by various forms of suffering, for most Christians, the initial and immediate response is one of shock, amazement and bewilderment. The word bewilder meansq

"...at the fiery ordeal which is taking place..."

"...to test your quality..."

"...as though something strange {unusual and alien to you and your position} were befalling you."

But insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, rejoice, so that when His glory [full of radiance and splendor] is revealed, you may also rejoice with triumph [exultantly].

,.....,

BIBLICAL REASONS WHY THE CHRISTIAN MUST SUFFER

1. To produce the fruit of patience Rom. 5:3; James 1:3-4; Heb. 10:36. Too often than nought, we are constantly in a hurry to get out of

unpleasant circumstances and we quickly get upset when things don't go our way. However, rushing out of the furnace of affliction robs us of the opportunity to learn lessons than could only be learnt in the school of suffering and as such, because of being impatient under suffering, we fail very important lessons of life in faith and sadly, many of us would have to repeat the same lessons but under different kinds of suffering until we pass so that we can move on to the next level in God.

2. **To produce the fruit of joy.** Ps. 30:5; 126:5-6
3. **To produce the fruit of maturity.** Eccles. 7:3; 1 Pet. 5:10
4. **To produce the fruit of righteousness.** Heb. 12:11
5. **To silence the devil.** Job 1:9, 10, 20-22
6. **To teach us** (there are important spiritual lessons we need that could only be learnt in the school of suffering). Ps. 119:67, 71; *Heb.5:8
7. **To purify our lives.** Job 23:10 AMP; Ps. 66:10-12; Isa. 1:25; 48:10; Prov. 17:3; *1 Pet. 1:7 GNB, TLB, MSG
8. **To make us like Christ.** Heb. 12:9, 10; 1 Pet. 4:12-13; Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:7-10
9. **To glorify God.** Ps. 50:15; John 9:1-3; 11:1-4; 21:18-19; Phil. 1:19-20
10. **To prevent us from sinning.** 2 Cor. 12:7, 9-10
11. **To make us confess when we do sin.** Judg. 10:6-7, 15-16; Ps. 32:3-5; Hos. 5:15; 6:1; 2 Chron. 15:3-4
12. **To chasten us for our sin.** 1 Pet. 4:17
13. **To prove our sonship.** Heb. 12:5-6

14. **To reveal ourselves to ourselves.** Job 42:6; Luke 15:18
15. **To help our prayer life.** Isa. 26:16
16. **To become an example to others.** 2 Cor. 6:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:6-7
17. **To qualify us as counselors.** Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:2; 2 Cor. 1:3-5
18. **To further the gospel witness.** Acts 8:1-5; 16:25-34; Phil. 1:12-13; 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-17
19. **To make us more than conquerors.** 2 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:35, 37
20. **To give us insight into God's nature.** Job 42:5; Rom. 8:14-15, 18
21. **To drive us closer to God.** 1 Pet. 4:14; 2 Cor. 12:10
22. **To prepare us for a greater ministry.** 1 Kings 17-18; John 12:24
23. **To provide for us a reward.** Matt. 5:10-12; 19:27-29; Rom. 8:16-17; 2 Cor. 4:17
24. **To prepare us for the kingdom.** 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:12
25. **To show God's sovereignty.** Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 10:13; Ps. 66:10-12; Gen. 45:5-8; 50:20

Courtesy: Willmington's Book of Bible Lists

LESSON THREE

****WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF SUFFERING? (What does suffering achieve in the life of the Christian?)**

- 1. It is the most effective refining process.** Prov.25:4, Isa.1:22, 25;
**Isa.48:10
- 2. It is a school every genuine Christian must pass through.**
**Lk.24:26, Rom.8:17-18, Mk.10:35-40
- 3. It is God's practical means of testing our conformity to the life of Jesus,** Rom.8:29 compare 1Pet.2:21-23 & 1Jn.2:6
- 4. It is God's practical means of testing our faith in His word and promises** Heb.6:12-20, James 1:2-4, James 5:10-11
- 5. It is God's practical means of testing our growth in grace and Christian virtues.** 1Pet.4:1-2 AMP, 1Pet.5:10, 2Tim.3:12
- 6. It is Satan's examination hall where he seeks to prove that the Christian is not genuine in his convictions but where God expects him to pass out from in flying colours.** Job 1:6-12, James 2:1-10, Matt.4:1-4, Mk.4:16-17

LESSON FOUR

***SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN:

What it is and what it is not

1. Christian suffering: What it is not

- a. Suffering for murder (1Pet. 4:15)
- b. Suffering as a thief (1Pet. 4:15)
- c. Suffering for being an evildoer
- d. Suffering for being a busybody (1Pet. 4:15)
- e. Suffering for any crime listed in Rom. 1:18-32, 1Cor. 6:9-11, Gal. 5:19-21

2. Christian suffering: What it is

- a. Persecution for righteousness (Mt. 5:10; 13:21; Mk. 10:30; Jn. 15:20)
- b. Revilings and slander (Mt. 5:11-12; 10:25; Acts 13:45; 1Pet. 4:4)
- c. False accusations (Mt. 10:17-20)
- d. Scourgings for Christ (Mt. 10:17)
- e. Rejection by people (Mt. 10:14)
- f. Hatred by the world (Mt. 10:22; Jn. 15:18-21)
- g. Hatred by relatives (Mt. 10:21-36)
- h. Martyrdoms (Mt. 10:28; Acts 7:58)
- i. Temptations (Lk. 8:13; Jas. 1:2-16)

- j. Shame for His name (Acts 5:41)
- k. Imprisonments (Acts 4:3; 5:18; 12:4)
- l. Tribulations (Acts 14:22; 2Th. 1:4)
- m. Stonings (Acts 14:19; 2Cor. 11:25)
- n. Beatings (Acts 16:23; 2Cor. 11:24-25)
- o. Being a spectacle to people (1Cor. 4:9)
- p. Misunderstanding, necessities, defamation, and despisings (1Cor. 4:10-13)
- q. Trouble, affliction, distresses, tumults, labors, watchings, fastings, and evil reports (2Cor. 6:8-10; 11:26-28)
- r. Reproaches (Heb. 13:13; 1Pet. 4:14)
- s. Trials (1Pet. 1:7; 4:12)
- t. Satanic opposition (Eph. 4:27; 6:12)
- u. Groaning and travailing because of the curse (Rom. 8:17-26)

courtesy: Dake Annotated Reference Bible

Proper biblical reaction to suffering

a. Expect suffering. John 15:19-20; 16:2, 20, 33; Heb.12:9-10;
2Tim.3:12

The Lord Jesus and His apostles taught us clearly on the need to expect suffering (Matt.10:22, Acts 14:22, 2Tim.2:12 AUV), this is because, it is very easy to feel sad, shocked and withdrawn from the Lord (i.e. 'stumble') and in some cases, even backslide (Mk.4:16-17), because one

is unaware that suffering is a normal, healthy and helpful ingredient in our Christian life that should be expected and prepared for (1Thes.3:2-4).

b. Commit your soul to God at the very beginning of your suffering.

Ps. 3:5-6; 37:3; 31:5; Dan. 3:14-18; Heb. 6:17-20; 1 Pet. 4:19

If from the very beginning of a trial, you do not commit your soul to the Lord, before you go through the complete cycle of the trial, you would have turned back and become rebellious against God because of how hard, difficult and punishing the way you are passing through is...()

Committing your soul into the hands of the Lord is like a ship that drops its anchor in the midst of a raging storm...there is no how that ship will be swept away off its normal chartered course, regardless of the intensity of the storm ().

c. Don't try to understand all the reasons for your suffering. Rom. 8:28, Gen.50:20

It is wisdom to know and admit that you won't always know or fully understand why some things happen, since the secret things belong to the Lord our God (Deut.29:29)

To attempt to wait to fully understand everything that is happening before you obey God and go in the direction he is leading will not only lead to disobedience, but it might also lead to rebellion against God...the consequences of rebellion however, is too heavy to bear. (Num.11:1, Num.21:5, Ex.15:23-24)

d. Realize others suffer. 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Pet. 5:8-9

e. Pray while in your suffering. Ps. 50:15; Job 42:10; James 5:13; Mark 9:20-24

f. Don't despise your suffering. Heb. 12:5

g. Don't faint because you're suffering. Prov. 24:10; Heb. 12:5

h. Patiently endure your suffering in a steadfast way.

Rom. 12:12; 2 Tim. 2:3; James 5:10; 1 Pet. 2:20

i. Thank God for your sufferings. Ps. 42:5; 1 Thess. 5:18

j. Rejoice because of your sufferings. Acts 5:40-41; 16:25; Phil. 4:4; James 1:2; 5:11

k. Don't become a self-made martyr because of your sufferings. Heb. 12:12-13

l. Don't suffer needlessly. 1 Pet. 2:20; 3:17; 4:15-17

m. Weigh your current suffering against the coming glory.

2Cor.4:17-18, John 16:20-21; Rom. 8:18

Five Sources of Suffering

1. Suffering may be caused by satanic activity.

Job 1-2; Luke 13:15-16; Acts 10:38

2. Suffering may be caused by ungodly men. 2 Tim. 4:14

3. Suffering may be caused by this world's system. 2 Pet. 2:8

4. Suffering may be caused by the believer's own fallen nature. Rom. 7:14-23

5. Suffering may be caused by carnal Christians.

LESSON FIVE

**THE REWARDS OF SUFFERING

- 1. Conformity to the image of Jesus.** Isa.1:22, 25; 1Pet.2:21-23
- 2. Spiritual maturity and experiential knowledge of the truth.**
1Pet.5:10, Rom.5:3-4, James 1:2-4
- 3. Enjoyment of the special ministry of the comforts of the Holy Spirit.** 2Cor.1:3-4, Isa.51:12-13,
- 4. Eternal rewards specifically kept aside for He who patiently goes through suffering (like the martyrs' crown, becoming a joint heir with Christ etc).** James 1:12,
- 5. Deepening assurance that, come what may, God will always be there to help us through every circumstance everyday, everywhere and every time.** Isa.41:10, 13; Matt.28:20

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For questions & enquiries:
admin@reformationplatform.com