

DOCTRINE OF SUFFERING

- I. Preliminary considerations.
 - A. Suffering is defined as undergoing or bearing something that causes pain, grief, distress or injury; suffering is painful by its very nature. IPet. 1:6
 - B. Although the Greek verb λυπέω (lupeo) is primarily limited to mental or emotional distress, it is evident that a believer may suffer mentally, physically, or both. IICor. 11:23-28
 - C. A believer may endure suffering willingly, or be forced into it; however, suffering out of fellowship does not glorify God or accrue reward for the believer.
 - D. This doctrine will focus on the believer, the types of suffering he may experience, and the Divine viewpoint about how he should address the issue of suffering.
 - E. The believer faces some of the same sufferings or tests that are common to all members of the human race. ICor. 10:13
 - F. One difference is that the positive, adjusting believer has the knowledge that God is working on his behalf; therefore, all his sufferings are being caused to work together for his ultimate good. Rom. 8:28
 - 1. This verse indicates that God is actively orchestrating the difficult and distressing events of life in a way that serves the ultimate good of the believer.
 - 2. While one may argue grammatically that God does this for all believers, **those who love God** are emphasized in the construction.
 - 3. Although God is working all things for good, the negative believer may not recognize this truth and may not benefit from the comfort that it is designed to provide during his testing. Matt. 13:20-21
 - G. Suffering is a normal and regular feature of the Christian way of life and those that advocate otherwise are not sound in the faith. IPet. 5:10
 - 1. Those that advocate a prosperity doctrine that teaches that the believer will not suffer in time are not only deluded, but are at odds with the Bible and with the experience of believers throughout the centuries. IICor. 1:6; Phil. 1:29; Rev. 2:10
 - 2. Catholics and Hindus are among those that advocate suffering as a form of penance (self-imposed suffering) that gains them some form of religious merit with God.
 - 3. Suffering is not an illusion as taught by the Hindus (Maya), the New Age Movement, and Christian Scientists.
 - 4. Suffering is real and is not cured by meditation, wishing it away, pretending it does not exist, or being reincarnated until one achieves Nirvana.
 - 5. Although the believer may enjoy the blessing of inner peace in the midst of his sufferings, the sufferings are still a real and present pressure. Jn. 16:33
 - H. Just as the sin nature is universal within the human race, suffering is also a universal fact of life. Job 5:7, 14:1; Eccles. 2:23; Rom. 8:18-23
 - I. Suffering may involve a loss of position (Gen. 3:23-24), bodily pain (Ps. 31:9-10), rejection by others (Mk. 8:31), mental distress (Matt. 26:37-38), physical illness (Phil. 2:26-27), persecution (ITim. 3:11), injustice (Ps. 64:1-6), disappointment (Prov. 13:12), a guilty conscience (Matt. 26:75), temporal discipline (Heb. 12:10,11), and eternal punishment. IIThess. 1:8-9

II. Vocabulary.

A. There are a number of Hebrew and Aramaic terms that deal with suffering, or the results of suffering.

1. דָּכַךְ (dak), m.adj., 4X, crushed, oppressed, or miserable. Ps. 9:9, 10:18
2. יָגוֹן (yagon), m.noun., 14X, sorrow or grief. Gen. 42:38, 44:31
3. יָצַח (lachats), verb, 19X, lit. to push someone into a corner, to squeeze into a smaller place, to cause suffering by oppression. Num. 22:25; Jud. 4:3
4. כָּאַב (ka'abh), verb, 8X, the root means to have pain, to suffer physically; it is also used to refer to the suffering of mental anguish. Gen. 34:25; Prov. 14:13
5. מַכְאוֹב (makhobh), 16X, m.noun, derived from the previous verb; denotes the suffering, sorrow, grief, or affliction. Ex. 3:7 *sufferings*
6. עָנָה ('anah), verb, the primary meaning is to force, or try to force, someone into submission; to punish, to inflict pain or suffering on someone. Gen. 15:13, 16:6
7. עָנִי ('aniy), m.adj. 80X, derived from the previous verb, one that is suffering some kind of disability or distress.
 - a. Monetary suffering. Ex. 22:25 *poor*
 - b. Physical danger. Ps. 10:2 *afflicted*
 - c. Political oppression. Isa. 3:14
8. צָרָר (tsarar), verb, 74X, lit. to become narrow or confined; this verb is used to denote the suffering or distress one feels when he seems to be trapped. Gen. 32:7; Jud. 2:15
9. צָרָה (tsarah), f.noun, 71X, from the previous verbal root; the noun denotes the internal suffering of fear or distress. Gen. 42:21; Ps. 25:17

B. Greek vocabulary.

1. βασανίζω (basanizo), verb, 12X, primarily to put to the test, to prove the quality of something; secondarily, to subject to extreme suffering or torture; lastly, used of suffering in general. Matt. 8:6, 29
2. πάσχω (pascho), verb, 42X, to suffer.
 - a. πάθημα (pathema), n. noun, 16X, that which one suffers or has suffered; externally, a suffering, misfortune, calamity or affliction.
 - b. παθητός (pathetos), adj., 1X, one with the capacity for suffering, subject to suffering, destined to suffer. Acts 26:23
 - c. συμπάσχω (sumpascho), verb, 2X, to suffer with some one else. Rom. 8:17
 - d. προπάσχω (propascho), verb, 1X, to suffer before.
3. κακουχέω (kakoucheo), verb, 2X, to be ill treated, to be oppressed, to suffer. Heb. 11:37
4. συγκακουχέομαι (sunkakoucheomai), verb, 1X, to suffer persecution or affliction with someone. Heb. 11:25
5. κακοπαθέω (kakopatheo), verb, 4X, to endure hardship or troubles, to be afflicted or suffer.
 - a. κακοπάθεια (kakopatheia), f. noun, 1X, the suffering of evil, trouble or hardship. James 5:10
 - b. συγκακοπαθέω (sunkakopatheo), verb, 2X, to suffer hardship together with someone. II Tim. 1:8
6. ζημιόω (zemioo), verb, 6X, to experience the loss of something with the implication of undergoing hardship or suffering. Matt. 16:26

- III. Categories of suffering.
- A. There are several types of suffering, but only three of which provide the potential for Divine good production and accruing reward.
 - B. The first type of suffering is called **deserved suffering**; these are sufferings that come upon the believer as a result of his own decisions and actions.
 1. The first area of deserved suffering comes as the believer violates the righteousness of God via sinful activity. Heb. 12:6-10
 2. Divine discipline is the just retribution, which God administers to his disobedient children; just as a human parent administers discipline on a disobedient child, so God disciplines believers as His righteousness demands.
 3. The believer is encouraged not to respond to God's discipline in an inappropriate fashion; the one extreme is to trivialize it, while the other extreme is to overreact to it.
 - C. Self-induced misery is the second form of suffering that the believer brings upon himself by his own erroneous thinking and bad decisions. Prov. 19:15, 24:33-34; Acts 21:7-13; IPet. 4:15
 - D. The third form of suffering comes upon the believer for associating with those that are negative; this type of suffering comes from violating the doctrine of separation. Prov. 13:20, 22:24-25
 - E. A more neutral form of suffering comes from common human problems; the believer faces some of the same sufferings that are shared by all men. IICor. 4:16 *Aging, bills, flat tires, health tests, toothaches, etc*
 - F. There appears to be a category of preventative suffering, which God may use in order to deal with a positive believer's area of weakness. Lk. 22:31-32; IICor. 12:7-10
 - G. Lastly, **undeserved suffering** involves the types of suffering that comes to the believer through no fault on his part.
 1. The book of First Peter is primarily designed to acknowledge the matter of undeserved suffering, as well as to instruct believers on how to handle it. IPet. 1:6
 2. When the believer becomes the object of verbal slander or ridicule, he is to leave it in God's hands. IPet. 2:12, 3:13-14, 16, 4:4
 3. As the believer applies doctrine to the test (be it verbal maligning or overt persecution), he glorifies God, produces Divine good, and accrues rewards. IPet. 1:6-8, 2:19-20, 4:14, 16
 4. This aspect of suffering may include suffering by association with other positive believers. IITim. 1:8, 2:3; Heb. 10:32-34
 - H. The final three types of suffering have the benefit of building the virtue of patience and eternal reward; however, the believer must field these sufferings in fellowship and apply doctrine to them.
- IV. Suffering is a regular part of the believer's experience in the cosmos. Jn. 16:33
- A. Jesus taught His disciples to expect it. Jn. 15:18-21, 16:1-4
 - B. Paul briefed his new converts on the certainty of it. Acts 14:22; IThess. 3:1-4
 - C. It is a recurring theme in the New Testament. Acts 9:15-16; Rom. 8:17; Rev. 2:10
 - D. There is a variety and an abundance of sufferings that the believer may experience in time. Ps. 34:19; IICor. 1:5; IPet. 1:6
 1. Persecution for the truth. Mk. 4:17; Jn. 15:20; IITim. 3:12
 2. Suffering (loss of companionship and fellowship) that results from applying the doctrine of separation. Matt. 10:34-37

3. Lupe from negative volition. Lk. 13:34-35, 19:41-44; Rom. 9:1-3
 4. Health tests. IICor. 4:16-18; Phil. 2:25-30
 5. Living grace tests. ICor. 4:11; IICor. 11:27; Phil. 4:12
 6. Verbal abuse. IPet. 3:16, 4:4
 7. Suffering under unfair authority. Jn. 18:19-24, 19:1-16; Col. 3:21; IPet. 2:18
 8. Temptations from within and without. Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15
 9. The suffering that comes from orientation to your niche, time in history, and relative isolation. IITim. 1:15; James 5:4-6
- E. Those that aspire to the ministry endure a specialized set of sufferings, some of which are shared by other positive believers. IICor. 1:7
1. The potential pastor candidate must be willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure his preparation under the Timothy principle. IITim. 2:2-3
 2. He must be willing to suffer the loss of his chosen career, relocate if necessary, and devote himself to whatever niche God provides during his academic preparation.
 3. Once he is academically qualified, he will likely endure the pressure of being put “on hold” as he waits for his assignment from God the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:28
 - a. Part of this suffering is avoiding any attempt to procure a local church by means of the energy of the flesh. Acts 20:30
 - b. In that regard, he must be willing to wait for positive volition and not compromise the good deposit just to get a group.
 - c. He must avoid the temptation to fly false colors, saying what he thinks a prospective flock wants to hear in order to ingratiate himself with them. IThess. 2:4-5
 - d. He must respect the issue of the kanon, recognizing that God will not legitimately appoint him to run in another man’s kanon. IICor. 10:13-16
 4. Once God brings him together with his right congregation, he must be willing to give up his job, friends, other positive believers, and the fellowship of an adjusted local church, to relocate to his assigned geographic area. ITim. 1:3; Tit. 1:5
 5. He must be willing to do what is necessary to establish his authority with a new group; in that regard, he must suffer isolation at some level to maintain the appropriate distance from his congregation. Tit. 2:15
 6. He must endure whatever sacrifices and sufferings are necessary to fulfill the study/teach routine. ITim. 4:15
 - a. He will suffer the loss of a certain amount of his life as he takes whatever time is necessary to accurately prepare in the study. IITim. 2:15
 - b. He must adjust his niche by keeping it as simple as possible to allow him to devote the maximum time possible to teach those under his charge. ITim. 4:13
 - c. He must constantly monitor his own spiritual status, as well as his pulpit content. ITim. 4:16
 7. He must be willing to work (to the point of exhaustion, if necessary) to provide for himself if the congregation is not able to provide full financial support. IThess. 2:9; IIThess. 3:8
 - a. The Greek term κόπος (kopos—labor) means to engage in activity that is toilsome, burdensome, or wearying; working to the point of distress or exhaustion.
 - b. The second term μόχθος (mochthos—hardship) is only used in the New Testament in conjunction with κόπος; this construction is designed to intensify the laborious and difficult aspects of the communicator, as he labors to bring believers to maturity.

8. He must be willing to suffer and teach through times that are **out of season**, and continue to **reprove, rebuke, exhort, and instruct** those that have been allotted to his charge. II-Tim. 4:2
9. His sufferings will include witnessing believers rejecting sound doctrine (IITim. 4:3), refusing to assemble (Heb. 10:25), refusing to apply (James 1:22), and perhaps becoming spiritual casualties. ITim. 1:19; IITim. 2:17
10. He also shares in the personal sufferings of those within the local church; additionally, he suffers when the local church suffers corporately. ICor. 12:26; Col. 1:24

- V. The proper mental attitude and overt applications when enduring suffering.
- A. A very important factor in fighting the good fight is to be armed with the correct mental attitude. IPet. 4:1
 - B. The believer must be **willing** to endure whatever sufferings come his way on behalf of the plan of God. IITim. 2:3,9
 - C. The believer is to walk in fellowship and rely on the virtues of courage, peace, and joy during times of suffering. Jn. 16:33; James 1:2; IPet. 4:13
 - D. The inner resources of Bible doctrine and prayer (for both deliverance from the suffering and the strength to endure the suffering) are essential to applying under our difficulties. Phil. 4:6-7; Eph. 3:16; Col. 1:11; Heb. 4:16
 - E. The believer must remember that God is loving, wise, perfect, and in complete control of all that comes to him in the angelic conflict. Ps. 37:23-24
 - F. Because of these facts, each believer should always remember that God will not allow him to be burdened beyond his ability to deal with it under grace. ICor. 10:13
 - G. The believer should also keep before him the fact that God provides the appropriate comfort and encouragement for those that are suffering for His plan. IICor. 1:3-5
 1. The comfort may come from the ministry of the Comforter directly; God the Holy Spirit provides the internal strength during times of testing and suffering. Jn. 14:16; IICor. 13:14
 2. The comfort may come from other believers, who may have endured similar types of suffering. IICor. 1:4
 3. Part of the comfort is recognizing that your sufferings are not unique; other believers are enduring the same types of suffering. IICor. 1:6
 - H. Therefore, the believer should be encouraged during times of suffering, recognizing that other believers are enduring similar afflictions. IThess. 2:14; IPet. 5:9
 - I. He should focus on the eternal life niche, keep his suffering in perspective and always remember that his suffering is temporary. IICor. 4:17; Rom. 8:18; Rev. 21:3-5
 - J. The believer must continue to walk by faith and trust God to provide the appropriate resolution to his suffering. Ps. 9:9-10, 18:2-6
 - K. When one undergoes suffering of any sort, he should recognize the inappropriate responses and seek to avoid them.
 1. **Surprise.** Given the extent of revelation on this subject, the believer should certainly not be surprised when suffering comes his way. IThess. 3:4; IPet. 4:12
 2. **Revenge.** Avoid revenge tactics and simply returning evil for evil when suffering comes from others. Rom. 12:17; IPet. 3:8-9
 3. **Threats.** Verbal threats and retaliation are also to be avoided. IPet. 2:23

4. **Compromise.** Do not compromise with false doctrine to alleviate pressure and avoid suffering. Jn. 18:33-38
5. **Fear/worry.** Mental attitude responses such as fear and worry are inappropriate. IPet. 3:13-14; Rev. 2:10
6. **Shame.** Do not be ashamed of your suffering or that of other positive believers. IITim. 1:8,12,16; IPet. 4:16
7. Other reactions to avoid include **soul fainting, bitterness, self-pity, anger, complaining,** etc.

- VI. Reasons for suffering, and the spiritual benefits suffering can produce.
- A. The first reason we suffer is that we live in a fallen world, which has been cursed; further, the sin nature has affected all men, rendering them incapable of perfect righteousness. Rom. 8:18-23; Eccles. 9:3
 - B. The second reason that believers suffer is found in the fact that they have aligned themselves with God in the angelic conflict; however, believers still live in the Devil's world. Eph. 2:2, 6:12; cf. Rev. 12:17
 - C. Our sufferings are necessary in order to complete the corporate suffering of the Body of Christ. Col. 1:24
 - D. When we suffer in fellowship on behalf of God's plan, we glorify God by our obedience. IPet. 4:16
 - E. Our sufferings are designed to cause us to rely on the power of God and not to trust in our own abilities. IICor. 1:8-10, 12:7-10; IPet. 4:19
 - F. We suffer in order to be trained in the Divine viewpoint and to produce further spiritual growth. Ps. 119:67,71; Heb. 12:11; IPet. 5:10
 - G. Suffering may not only produce greater levels of spiritual growth, God may use it to vindicate His viewpoint in the angelic conflict. Job
 - H. God uses suffering to produce the virtue of patience. Rom. 5:3-4; Heb. 10:32-39
 - I. Suffering, and the patience it produces, are a necessary part of making the maturity adjustment. James. 1:2-4
 - J. Suffering is necessary in order to test the believer's doctrine, which is vindicated when he applies it to his testing; those applications are the basis for SG₃. IPet.1:6-7; James 1:12
 - K. Rewards will be distributed based on your willingness to acclimate to your sufferings. Rom. 8:17; IPet. 4:13
 - L. When the believer faces sufferings, God provides the appropriate level of comfort during the suffering. IICor. 1:4,7
 - M. The sufferings that you endure in time (coupled with the comfort you receive) develops in you the capacity and ability to comfort and encourage others, who may undergo similar testing or suffering. IICor. 1:4-7
 - N. Suffering according to doctrine demonstrates that we are worthy of God's kingdom. IIThess. 1:5
 - O. Suffering may provide a means by which we are able to expand the witness of the life and function as ambassadors. Lk. 21:12-13; Phil. 1:12-13
 - P. Suffering may also drive people to seek spiritual help in their sufferings; some have come to salvation because of suffering. IIKings 5:1ff; Dan. 4:28ff; Acts 16:27-34

- VII. The sufferings of Jesus Christ.
- A. Jesus Christ serves as the pre-eminent example of one who acclimated to and endured every manner of suffering and temptation. Lk. 17:25; IPet. 2:21-24
 - B. They include His unique sufferings in regard to the bearing of sins. Heb. 2:9-10, 13:12; IPet. 3:18
 - C. His sufferings were the subjects and fulfillments of prophecy. Lk. 24:25-27; Acts 3:18
 - D. Jesus suffered the following:
 1. Rejection by His own people. Isa. 53:3; Jn. 1:11
 2. Betrayal by a close friend. Ps. 41:9; Matt. 10:4
 3. Rejection by His family. Ps. 69:7-8; Jn. 7:5
 4. Being hated without cause. Ps. 69:4; Jn. 15:25
 5. Being forsaken by His disciples. Zech. 13:7; Matt. 26:31
 6. Being accused by liars. Ps. 35:11; Matt. 26:59
 7. Verbal abuse. Ps. 22:7; Matt. 27:31
 8. Physical abuse. Isa. 50:6, 53:5; Ps. 22:16; Matt. 26:67, 27:26-31
 9. Treatment as a criminal. Isa. 53:12; Matt. 27:38
 10. Being abandoned by friends. Ps. 38:11, 69:20; Lk. 23:49
 11. Being stripped of His clothing, for which soldiers gambled. Ps. 22:17-18; Lk. 23:34-35
 12. Having His teaching distorted and ridiculed. Ps. 56:5-6, 109:25; Matt. 27:39-44
 13. Physical deprivation. Ps. 69:21; Matt. 27:34; Jn. 19:28
 14. Refusal to defend Himself. Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:62-63, 27:12-14
 15. His condescension, kenosis, and humiliation constituted the foremost example of suffering in all history. Isa. 53:1-3; Phil. 2:5-8
 - E. Jesus Christ is our supreme example of enduring suffering and faith-resting the outcome to God. Isa. 50:7-10; Heb. 5:7
 - F. The sufferings that Jesus endured were a necessary part of His spiritual matriculation. Heb. 2:10, 5:8-9
 - G. The extent and quantity of His sufferings render Him a perfect comforter to those who are suffering. Heb. 2:17-18, 4:15-16
 - H. His orientation to His sufferings and obedience to the will of the Father will result in His exaltation for all eternity. Phil. 2:9-10; Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:21
- VIII. Concluding observations.
- A. Believers should recognize that by virtue of faith in Christ and union with Him, they are going to endure suffering in the angelic conflict; it is part of our spiritual heritage. Acts 14:22; Phil. 1:29
 - B. In that regard, if we intend to reflect the glory of Christ, we must be willing to endure the same types of suffering He endured. Rom. 8:17-18
 - C. Jesus Christ endured all the same types of sufferings that we endure (likely in greater quantity and quality), as the means of His spiritual growth; we should expect nothing less. Heb. 2:9-10
 - D. Therefore, one should not be surprised or overwhelmed by the various kinds of suffering he encounters in the angelic conflict (we live in a hostile environment) in a fallen world (sin natures are ever active).

- E. The believer should resist human viewpoint reactions to the sufferings he encounters, which include:
 1. Shock--why is this happening to me?
 2. Questioning God's judgment--why did You do/allow this?
 3. Anger/bitterness--God, this is not right!
 4. Fear--is this only going to get worse?
 5. Despair--God, I cannot live through this.
- F. Instead, the believer should focus on the fact that he has a perfectly qualified comforter, Who will provide the appropriate level of support during his time of suffering. Heb. 2:16-17, 4:15-16
- G. Part of His comfort includes providing others around us, who can be a source of comfort and encouragement during times of difficulty. Col. 4:11
- H. We should seek to minimize those forms of suffering that come from the source of our own sin nature and/or rejection of doctrine. Prov. 11:15, 13:20, 19:15; IPet. 4:15; IIPet. 2:13
- I. The greatest forms of loss and suffering are reserved for eternity; the unbeliever will suffer eternal torment from which he cannot be delivered. Rev. 20:10ff
- J. The believer that rejects sound doctrine as the means to spiritual growth and substitutes anything else will suffer great loss at the Bema Seat. ICor. 3:15
- K. We should always remember that no suffering can separate us from God's love for us; our sufferings are limited and temporary. Rom. 8:35-39; IICor. 4:17

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Rom. 8:18

"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

IICor. 4:17