

# **“Pain, Suffering, Death and the ‘Whys?’ Thereof”**

## **Paper 2: The “Why’s” of Suffering – General Reasons**

**We have dedicated Papers 2, 3, and 4 to looking at the “WHYS?” of Suffering**

Paper 2 – The “Why’s” of Suffering – General Reasons

Paper 3 – The “Why’s” of Suffering – Suffering for God’s Glory

Paper 4 – The Many “Why’s” of Job’s Suffering – God’s Answer and Job’s Reaction

We will deal directly with the topic of “*Suffering and Suffering Well*” itself in Paper 5

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**God has told us in His word what to expect in our short time on earth ...**

*“Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.” (Job 14:1)*

*“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22)*

*“... it is appointed for men to die once” (Hebrews 9:27)*

For the Christian, *suffering* and *death* are an *expected* part of living. Both are sure to come. And when they do, many questions arise, even for strong Christians, chief among them being

*“Why did God do this, or allow this to happen, to me?”*

**So, let’s take up the first part of our three-part answer ...**

## **Paper 2: The “WHYs?” of Suffering – General Reasons**

So ...

*“Why?” does God allow bad things to happen to His children?*

*... and “Why?”, in particular, did He allow this to happen to me?*

Well, we’re sorry to have to tell you right off the bat, but only God Himself knows for sure the specific reason or reasons “*Why, in particular, He has allowed this to happen to you*”. In fact, both the book of *Job* and the incident of Jesus and His disciples with the man born blind (John 9:1-3) warn us not to make rash assumptions in this area.

Still, we do know, from God's word, *some* of the "General" reasons "*Why God sometimes allows bad things to happen to His Children.*" But, even then, in particular cases His reasons are for the most part still "*unsearchable and past finding out*" and are among "*The secret things [that] belong to the LORD our God*" – leaving room only for faith and trust on our part.

Even so, we can still look at some of the "General" reasons why God sometimes allows 'bad' things to happen to His children, and though we may not know, for certain, "*Why?*" in your particular case, we do know that He has promised you that whatever the particular reason or combination of reasons, He will bring "*good*" out of it for you ...

*"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28).*

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**But, before looking at some of the General Reasons "Why?" things might have happened, we want to be very clear on what, specifically, HAS NOT happened**

It is very important for you to realize that you, as a Christian, are never being punished by God for something you have done. No. Jesus Christ has already been punished and paid the full price for all your sins on the cross, and God, being a just God, will not require or make you to be punished in any way for any of them a second time.

Indeed, as we will shortly see, all of God's actions towards His children are *always* instructive or corrective, and are always intended for their personal growth in sanctification. They are *never* punitive in nature.

*So, the one thing a Christian can always know for sure is that whatever their present situation, health-wise or otherwise, is, it was not sent by God for punitive reasons.*

**OK. But the questions still remain ...**

*'Why does God allow or permit bad things to happen to His children? Why suffering?*

**Well, there are at least eight possible "General" reasons why God might allow bad things to come into His children's lives.**

They are ...

1. *Though all of our sins were paid for by Christ on the cross, sometimes we suffer from the natural physical consequences of sins and actions committed before our conversion.*
2. *Sometimes, God allows His children to suffer the natural consequences of a sin they commit after becoming a Christian.*
3. *Sometimes God will “chasten” or “discipline” His children for spiritually straying away from Him (usually through neglect of the means of grace) to bring them back to Him.*
4. *Sometimes we suffer because God is “jealous” for us and will not have our love for Him in any measure displaced by our active involvement or over-entanglement with the fleeting pleasures of life.*
5. *In some cases God uses various trials and afflictions simply to strengthen your faith in Him, build your Christian character, and to teach or reteach you some valuable lessons that you need to learn or relearn.*
6. *Sometimes God will permit the suffering of His children “for His own glory” and/or to allow them to share in the “sufferings of Christ”. [Note: We will go into this in much greater depth in our next Paper, Paper # 3, on “The ‘Why’s’ of Suffering – Suffering for God’s Glory”]*
7. *Whether you are suffering, approaching death, or both, your present condition might well be a God-sent opportunity for you to witness and speak of godly things to those you have longed to speak and witness to, but haven’t.*
8. *There are Spiritual Benefits of Suffering*

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**Let’s look more closely at each possible reason.**

**General Reason # 1 is that ...**

1. ***Though all of our sins were paid for by Christ on the cross, sometimes we suffer from the natural physical consequences of sins and actions committed before our conversion.***

For example, if we have been abusive alcoholics for decades before conversion, becoming a Christian is no guarantee that we will not develop liver problems after conversion. Likewise,

if we have been morbidly obese for years before our conversion, becoming a Christian is no assurance that we will not sometime in the future develop diabetes or have heart attacks or strokes. And so on.

We need to keep in mind here that these are things we have done to ourselves and are not punishments sent from God.

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**General Reason # 2 that God might allow bad things come into His children's lives is that ...**

- 2. *Sometimes, God allows His children to suffer the natural consequences of a sin they commit after becoming a Christian.***

Becoming a Christian does not immunize one from the consequences of sins they might commit as Christians. For example, if a Christian weakens and commits an immoral sex act, being a Christian is no guarantee against their getting pregnant or contracting a STD.

But, again, that is something that we have brought upon ourselves and not something sent by God as punishment for our sin.

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**General Reasons 3 and 4 have to do with our Sanctification Process and will necessarily involve a rather lengthy discussion in order that we might understand their importance and their cause.**

The Christian is told in the Bible of God's "will" for him ...

*"For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (I Thessalonians 4:3)*

Make no mistake about it, Christian, God is very, very serious about your Sanctification, about your striving *against* sin and *for* holiness. It is His "will" for you.

In fact, the Bible tells us of the seriousness with which you are to approach the "working out" of your sanctification process ...

*"... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13)*

We are to work out the *implications* of our salvation (i.e., we are to “*work out*” our Sanctification process, not salvation itself), with a great diligence, seriousness, and deep respect for God who is ‘*working in us*’.

**One of the reasons that God is so serious about our Sanctification is that our God is a “jealous” God.**

Indeed, God Himself enshrined the fact of His “*jealousy*” in His Second Commandment ...

*“You shall not make for yourself a carved image ... For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God ...” (Exodus 20:4,5)*

And He is a very jealous God. He is jealous not only of His own glory being given to another, but He is also very jealous for you – for your love, for your loyalty, for your affections and for your attention. He wants you to depend and lean on Him for comfort and security, and not upon yourself, your talents, your position in society or the multitude of your possessions. He likewise wants you to rely on His wisdom and not your own.

In sum, your Sanctification is God’s “*will*” for you and you are to “*work*” at it “*with fear and trembling*” because God is very “*jealous*” for you and your relationship with Him.

**As we shall shortly see, Reasons 3 and 4 tell us that if pain and suffering are necessary to keep us on track to achieving the ends of our Sanctification process, they will be applied. But, again, this is corrective and not punitive.**

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**Let’s start our look at at General Reasons 3 and 4 by looking more closely at the Sanctification process itself.**

To begin, there are two things you especially need to keep in mind as we look at and consider your sanctification process ...

The first is that “*you are not your own*” person ...

The second is that God in every case wants only what is best for you, and being all-wise, He knows what your best interests are and how to best attain them for you.

So, let’s start looking at our Sanctification Process by looking at ...

**1. The fact that “*you are not your own*” person ...**

The Apostle Paul tells us in I Corinthians ...

*“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)*

God set His love on you in eternity past, a love so great that He “bought” you at a great “price” – the cruel death and shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, because of that, “you are not your own”. No! Both your ‘body [and] your spirit are God’s’.

You are God’s not only by right of creation, but also by right of purchase from slavery to sin.

You personally belong to Him ...

God the Father has adopted you as His son,

God the Son suffered and died for you, not only that you may eternally dwell with Him, but also that you, most wonderfully, could enter into a true spiritual union with Him

God the Holy Spirit gave you the “gifts” of “repentance” and “faith” and replaced your old “heart of stone” with a new “heart of flesh”, a heart fit for Him to dwell in, which He now does

So ... thrice over ... “you are not your own”. No – Both your “body [and] your spirit are God’s”.

Again, God is very serious about your sanctification.

As your Creator, Savior, Kinsman-Redeemer, and adoptive Father, God has every right to be very “jealous” of your love for Him, and He will not allow anything else to overshadow it.

We can of course dearly love other people – spouses and children for instance – but we cannot let our love even for them come before or in any way displace our love of God. It was our Lord Jesus Himself who said ...

*“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” (Jesus Christ, Luke 14:26)*

The use of the word “*hate*” here means ‘*love less*’, such that by comparison to our love for God all others are “*hated*”. And, very importantly, it is not their persons that we “*hate*” in comparison to Jesus, but their relationship, which we must be ready to give up should the occasion arise. For example, if we should have to choose to obey Christ or our spouses, we must choose Christ.

It is as Matthew Henry says,

*“Every good man loves his relations; and yet, if he be a disciple of Christ, he must comparatively hate them, must love them less than Christ”.*

Again, God loves you very much and wants you to become just like your elder Step-Brother, the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants you to bear the family image. He wants you to become holy, “*as He is holy*”. It is His “*will*” for you ...

And, again, He will do whatever is necessary to accomplish it, including the use of afflictive pain and suffering, which, again, is not punishment, but the corrective discipline of a loving Father.

**The second important thing that you need to bear in mind concerning your Sanctification process is that ...**

**2. God in every case wants only what is best for you, and being all-wise, He knows what your best interests are and how to best attain them for you.**

God, as a loving Father, is always much more interested in your holiness (which is your highest good) than your happiness. And, whenever the two conflict, God will always give you what you need, rather than what you might want. We remember that when the paralytic was laid before Him, Jesus did not immediately heal him but said to him “*Your sins are forgiven*” – meeting a much higher need and a much greater good than being healed of his affliction; though Jesus did, in this particular case, later heal him.

Again, God always seeks your highest good and will not let you hurt or destroy your relationship with Him by any over-entanglements with the fleeting pleasures of this world. He will break you of them, even if it takes pain and suffering to wean you away.

**And so, God means for you to pursue personal sanctification and have it.**

God, as a good Father, loves and cares for you, and, as a good Father, will not leave you to your own self-imposed ruin, but will “*keep*” you from it. Thus does Peter tell us that we have ...

*“... an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:4-5)*

Though it is true that we are ... “kept” by God ... that “sin shall not have dominion over you” (Romans 6:14) ... and that one of the “fruits of the Spirit” is “self-control” (Galatians 5:22) ... God still holds us personally responsible to ...

*“... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13)*

And, though it is true that all Christians will have periods of weakness and spiritual barrenness and that no Christian will ever be perfect in the fulfillment of any Christian duty, that is no excuse for spiritual idleness. No, knowing our weakness is rather a call for increased watchfulness and a more diligent use of the means of grace on our part.

Like all good fathers, God will discipline us, if necessary, for our own good. For, just as we correct and discipline our own children to save them from harm and to build up their character, God will do with His children.

Indeed, for a Christian, chastening by God is a sure sign of their adoption as His child ...

*“And have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons:*

*‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,  
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;  
For whom the LORD loves He chastens,  
And scourges every son whom He receives.’*

*If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:5-11)*

Again, it is very important to always remember that in all cases, God's chastening and disciplining of His children is always corrective and for their good, and never punitive.

### **Some Final Notes on our Sanctification Process:**

First, if you feel that you do not love God in this manner, or do not love Him enough, then go to Him, confess it, thank Him for showing it to you, and ask His help in more properly loving Him. He will delight to help you do so through the means of grace.

Second, we need to be careful in this and all other spiritual matters, to remember to distinguish between a spiritually "weak" Christian (a "weakness" usually brought on by not actively participating in the means of grace) and a non-Christian. There is a vast and major difference between a Christian seriously "*struggling*" daily against sin in general and certain sins in particular, and having sin "*reign*" over them.

Third and last, it is also important to note that the more you advance in your sanctification process the more you will see of the enormity and depth of your sin. This is actually a good sign of your spiritual growth and should lead you to a greater love for and thankfulness to God for what He has done for you, for as our Lord Himself said, the one who knows that he has been forgiven more will love more (Luke 7:41-43).

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We have spent a lot of time covering the Sanctification Process because Reasons 3 and 4 of "*The 'WHYS?' of Suffering – General Reasons*" involve both parts of your Sanctification Process

Reason 3 has to do with striving to draw nearer to God ...

Reason 4 has to do with struggling against and pulling away from sin.

Both parts are closely related to and feed off of each other, but they are different. Again, an extended neglect or failure on our part in either of the two parts of our sanctification process can result in "*chastening*" and "*discipline*" by a loving Father for our own good, perhaps even through pain and suffering.

*Let's now leave our general discussion of the Sanctification process and turn back to our look at "*The 'Whys?' of Suffering – General Reasons*".*

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### **General Reason 3 of the General "Why's" of Suffering is that ...**

**3. Sometimes God will “chasten” or “discipline” His children for spiritually straying away from Him (usually through neglect of the means of grace) to bring them back to Him.**

Reason 3 has to do with sins of “neglect” or sins of “omission” in our Sanctification process, i.e., our failure to do the things we ought to do to maintain and grow in our relationship with God.

We are all likely familiar with, and know the truth of, the great hymn line ...

*“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; Prone to leave the God I love”.*

It is very sad, but true, that we do have a “proneness” to “leave” or neglect “the God [we] love”, quite often through a neglect of the means of grace on our part.

If it is a prolonged neglect, we often become dejected, barren, fruitless, and tired of the things of God.

**We need to return and straighten out what we have lost.**

But, “How?” do we do that?

The Apostle James tells us ...

*“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8)*

OK. But “How?” do we “Draw near to God”?

You “Draw near to God” by “abiding” in Christ, and you “abide” in Christ through a regular and diligent use of the *means of grace*.

One of the most important verses in the Bible is John 15:5, where our Lord tells us ...

*“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me, you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)*

**There are several very important lessons to be learned from this verse**

First, we are but “*branches*”, branches connected to our Lord Jesus Christ, the “*vine*”. Branches draw all of their sustenance from the vine and if they are detached from the vine they wither and die.

Second, Jesus tells you that if you “*abide*” in Him, you will “*bear much fruit*”. The “*fruit*” that you will bear “*much of*” is “*the fruit of the Spirit*” ...

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22)*

Again, you “*abide*” in Jesus through a regular and diligent use of the “*means of grace*”.

Third, you cannot improve your own sanctification in any way or have any spiritual growth at all – on your own.

Read it again ...

*“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me, you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)*

Note it well, Christian, according to our Lord Jesus Christ, the sum total of what you can spiritually accomplish on your own is “*nothing*” – zero, zip, nada. I hope no part of “*nothing*” is unclear to you.

**And so, our Lord Jesus Christ sums it all up and leaves us with two options ...**

We can “*abide*” in Him and “*bear much fruit*” ... or ...

We can go our own merry way and accomplish “*nothing*” good spiritually.

Again, the “*fruit*” that we will bear “*much of*” will be “*the fruit of the Spirit*” ... “[*which*] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” (Galatians 5:22)

So, if you need more “*love ... joy ... peace ... self-control ... etc.*” in your life’ if you are really feeling the lack or loss of them, you know where to go to get it and how to keep it.

It is also important to know that ...

**In their sanctification process, a Christian is either advancing or declining.**

A Christian may feel that they can coast along for a few days on their own, but it is an illusion, because, as we have seen, a Christian can do “*nothing*” spiritually good on their own. They will begin a slow and imperceptible (to them) decline that will gather speed as it advances. They most certainly cannot avoid a serious spiritual decline if the means of grace are neglected over a long period of time – though, again, the decline will for them likely be largely unnoticed or seem non-existent, as the more they cease to “*draw near to God*”, the more immune they become to the promptings of His Spirit.

It is exactly because we can do “*nothing*” on our own that we are told to “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*”. We must “*abide*” in Christ through the diligent use of the means of grace if we are to grow in our sanctification process. Again, sins in this area are sins of *omission* – sins of not doing our duties and responsibilities of “*working out*” our sanctification process with due “*fear and trembling*”.

And, again, because God loves and cares for you, He will not allow this process of neglect on your part to deepen and continue. After numerous promptings of His Spirit are ignored, He will sometimes have to use pain and suffering to get you back on track. Because He is jealous for you and is a good Father, He will not leave you to a self-imposed ruin of your relationship with Him.

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#### **General Reason 4 of the General “*Why’s*” of Suffering is that ...**

- 4. Sometimes we suffer because God is “jealous” for us and will not have our love for Him in any measure displaced by our active involvement or over-entanglement with the fleeting pleasures of life.***

General Reason 4 deals with the other side of our Sanctification Process. It involves *sins of omission*.

*Sins of omission* (as in Reason 3) involve passively neglecting to do things we should be doing.

*Sins of commission* (as in Reason 4) involves things we are actively doing that we should not be doing or are overdoing to an unhealthy degree.

God, in His goodness, has provided us with many sources of pleasure in our time on earth. If we are becoming increasingly entangled with the fleeting pleasures of the world such that they are displacing God from His proper place in our affections, God will sometimes use

pain and suffering to get us back on track. These entanglements may even be with things that are good in and of themselves, but are pushed to an inordinate degree so as to displace God from His proper position in our lives. [See our Luke 14:26 discussion above.]

And so, as John Flavel would say, God will in this case also apply the “*healing cordials*” of pain and suffering if necessary to draw us back to where we should be.

**Again, when considering our Sanctification Process, we should always remember that God, being all-wise, knows what is best for us (what is our highest good) and the best way to go about attaining it.**

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**Our fifth General Reason as to why God might allow afflictions into the lives of His children is that ...**

- 5. *In some cases God uses various trials and afflictions simply to strengthen your faith in Him, build your Christian character, and to teach or reteach you some valuable lessons that you need to learn or relearn.***

We read in the Scriptures ...

*“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5)*

*“My brethren count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (James 1:2-4)*

*“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes.” (Psalm 119:71)*

*“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 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, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:6-9)*

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**A sixth General Reason that God might allow or send affliction into our lives is that ...**

- 6. *Sometimes God will permit the suffering of His children “for His own glory” and/or to allow them to share in the “sufferings of Christ”. [We will go into this in much greater depth in our next Paper, Paper # 3, on “The ‘Why’s’ of Suffering – Suffering for God’s Glory”]***

For now, we need to distinguish between two kinds of “*suffering for God’s glory*”.

There is a general “*suffering for His glory*”, a suffering of which all Christians will partake ... and ...

There is a special “*suffering for His sake*” that is “*granted*” to some only.

Concerning the “special” class of suffering, we read in Philippians ...

*“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29)*

We note again that suffering “*for His sake*” is a high privilege that is “*granted*” to people.

Most of the time, this “special” kind of suffering (i.e., “*suffering for His sake*”) has its origins in active and overt persecution leading up to death, a persecution which is practiced throughout the world today on a scale never seen before.

In this “special” kind of suffering, people “*glorify*” God by bearing witness to His name even to the point of death. God takes very special note of this, and even now the martyred saints are under the very throne of God itself.

“General” suffering for God’s glory would encompass all other forms of suffering, both physical and intellectual, including the ridicule and mockery of today’s America.

We read in Romans ...

*“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” (Romans 8:16-17)*

When we suffer “general” afflictions, we glorify God by exhibiting patient endurance and trust in Him and in His plan for our lives, knowing that we will in return receive many

spiritual benefits and will be “*glorified together*” with Him at the consummation of all things.

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**It is very important for our comfort and hope to know that our Lord very personally and very closely identifies with us in all of our afflictions, which “*afflictions*”, we are told that He suffers along with us.**

Confirm the prophet Isaiah ...

*“In all their affliction He was afflicted,  
And the Angel of His Presence saved them;  
In His love and in His pity He redeemed them;  
And He bore them and carried them  
All the days of old.” (Isaiah 63:9)*

And it is attested to in our Lord’s discourse on the judgment of the nations in Matthew ...

*“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and cloth You. Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to see You? And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:37-40)*

Concerning treatment by “*the world*”, we should always remember our Lord’s warning that the “*world*” will “*hate*” us, and expect no less from it ...

*“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you ...” (John 15:18-20)*

And in all our sufferings we should also always remember the accompanying promise of the Lord ...

*“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12)*

**Three things we should always remember as we strive for “*patient endurance and trust in Him and His plan for our lives*” during periods of suffering are ...**

First, as we will shortly see in *Paper # 3 on Suffering for God’s Glory*, God’s love for us is such that His glory and our highest good are always intertwined and bound up together. Any suffering that we endure “*for His glory*” is simultaneously accompanied by an increase in our own good, betterment, and higher happiness.

Second, we need to always remember that there is no punishment or wrath whatsoever in even the worst of our sufferings and afflictions. As Jesus has already paid the full penalty for all our sins, God, being “*Just*”, would never punish us a second time for any of them. Any affliction sent by God to us is sent in love and is for our training, instruction or loving Fatherly discipline.

Third, even when patiently enduring sufferings with faith and trust in His wisdom and His will for our lives, we can still continue to pray for relief from our afflictions. But we must do in the manner of our Lord who prayed, on the night of His crucifixion ...

*“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39)*

We will shortly look at “*The Spiritual Benefits of Suffering*”.

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**Another very important consideration as to “*Why?*” God might have allowed afflictions to come into your life is our General Reason 7 ...**

**7. *Whether you are suffering, approaching death, or both, your present condition might well be a God-sent opportunity for you to witness and speak of godly things to those you have longed to speak and witness to, but haven’t.***

It has rightly been said that we old folks need to keep in mind that our opportunities for serving God are running out. This is true and increasingly so with every day that passes. Perhaps we are nearing the end of our life and have been looking back and wishing that we had done more service for our God who has done so much for us.

*Well, your present condition just might be a major and wonderful God-sent final opportunity for you glorify Him and witness to people of your trust in and love for Him. We really can serve Him right up to the very end!*

For the Christian, “*living well*” is important. But, “*suffering well*” and “*dying well*” are just as important, and we can have a great impact by our witness to our friends, neighbors, and family members (especially non-Christian ones) – as they will know that under our present circumstances what we do and say to them is genuine, from our hearts, and not canned, contrived, concocted or scripted.

It is very important to note that witnessing to people at this point in our lives does not mean putting up a false façade and acting like we are not hurting or concerned with our condition (and we ourselves must keep in mind that there is a big difference between legitimate concern and sinful and despairing worry). No, our relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc., need to see the genuineness of our concern and hurt, and that, in spite of it, we are trusting in, relying upon and committing our condition to God’s sovereign will and are willing to accept His decision in the matter. Talking with them of our faith and trust in God at such a time will be very meaningful to them. And they will very likely, even if only to humor us in our condition, be willing to let us share the gospel with them.

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**Our eighth and final General Reason for our suffering would be for us to partake of ...**

### ***8. The many Spiritual Benefits of Suffering***

There is a wonderful book written by Brian Cosby titled ...

*Suffering & Sovereignty – John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence*

We note again that, any suffering purposefully sent by our loving and caring heavenly Father to His children *always* has their best interests in mind and is *always* accompanied by both practical and spiritual benefits for the sufferer. God is a loving Father and *always* acts in the best interests of His children in everything He does to and for them.

These thoughts take us right back to our three basic questions that we raised earlier ...

- 1. Is God really “good” in all that He does to His children?*
- 2. Does God really “love” His children and in what way?*
- 3. Is God really “worthy” of our faith and trust?*

Your answer to our 3 Questions will determine your whole outlook on your ordeal of suffering and pain and we will spend a lot of time on them in later Papers.

Again, that God loves us and yet will send “*loving afflictions*” of pain and suffering to us for our good, may sound contradictory and be hard to understand right now, but will become much clearer from future lessons as we more thoroughly and deeply discuss ... The nature of God’s “love” ... how God’s love differs from man’s “love” ... how God’s love differs from mere kindness ... and the difference between *egoistic* “love” and *altruistic* “love”.

For now, we will simply agree with Crosby that ...

*“Flavel sees the affliction of the saints as ‘sanctified afflictions.’ These are sufferings brought about by the sovereign will and design of God in accordance with one of His many purposes for the saints – all of them, to be sure, for their ultimate good ... From the standpoint of the elect, these afflictions are ‘sanctified, sweetened, and turned into blessings.’ Afflictive providences, then, are blessings to [believers], and come from the love of God.”*

And so, far from being a sign of God’s punishment or hatred, sufferings and afflictions are, for His children, a sign of God’s Fatherly love – and are always sent to achieve the joint and totally unified purposes of both His glory and our highest personal good.

**Flavel gives us eight sets of reasons as to why God ordains suffering for His children and the spiritual benefits to be derived therefrom.**

*[Note: Due to time constraints, we can only mention each reason and would urge you to obtain a copy of Suffering and Sovereignty for a more in-depth treatment.]*

They are ...

*Reason 1: To Reveal, Deter, and Mortify Sin*

*Reason 2: To Produce Godliness and Spiritual Fruit*

*Reason 3: To Reveal the Character of God*

*Reason 4: To Relinquish the Temporal for the Eternal*

*(1) By loosening the believer’s grip on temporal and earthly things*

*(2) By showing the believer the vanity of this world*

*(3) By revealing the true nature of comfort*

*(4) By making the believer long for heaven*

*Reason 5: To Produce a Sincere Faith, Devoid of Hypocrisy*

*Reason 6: To Encourage Fellowship with God through Word, Prayer, and the Sacrament of the Lord's supper*

*Reason 7: To Bear Witness to the World*

*Reason 8: To Cultivate Communion with Christ, the Greatest Sufferer*

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### **In conclusion ...**

**Whatever the particular reason or combination of reasons for your present affliction, you should always remember three things about it**

FIRST: You always need to remember that Christ died on the cross to purchase many freedoms and benefits for us with His blood. But He did not and never has promised us freedom from sorrow and suffering. Indeed, as we saw earlier, the situation is quite the opposite, we are repeatedly warned to expect it.

Whatever our present situation, we are in it because God has decreed it so. This is not fatalism, because our suffering is permitted by a loving and deeply caring Father who has promised to bring “good” for us out of it and to give us great rewards for patiently enduring it. We should simply trust Him and His wisdom and His love for us.

Again, we may never know while on earth the answer to our particular “*Whys?*”. But He does. And that should be sufficient for us and for our peace and joy. We should of course continue to pray for relief, but we should also trust Him and be willing to accept His answer in the matter.

*In short, suffering is not unusual and God knows what is going on and what He is doing. Simply trust Him. He is worthy of it.*

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SECOND: The second thing to remember in any present affliction is that when considering that our Lord Himself suffered the terrible and excruciating physical pain of scourging and crucifixion and the much worse spiritual pain and torment of being branded with our sin, being forsaken by His Father, and suffering an eternity of hell in our place, all to redeem us and bring us to Himself, we should never question God's love or care for us.

*In short, look to the cross and never question God's love or care for you.*

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THIRD: The third thing we want to remember is what waits for us on the other side of our suffering.

Paul tells us concerning his many great sufferings ...

*"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)*

And again ...

*"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)*

Suggesting that you try to maintain perspective by considering *"the glory which shall be revealed in us"* and the *"far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"* that is to come, is not intended to trivialize or make light of your present pain and suffering, which is very real and deep.

But it is very helpful to remember that in heaven, when we have minds made perfect in God and see the wonderful tapestry that He has woven for our lives, we will not wish that one second of our earthly ordeals and afflictions would be changed. No, we will, rather, rejoice that we were found worthy to suffer with Him and for His sake.

*In short, try to maintain perspective by considering the great and wonderful tapestry that God is weaving of your life, the service and glory that you are rendering to Him and many other people, and the many great eternal rewards that He has stored up for you in heaven.*

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**So, three things we should always remember in our times of suffering are ...**

*Suffering is not unusual and God knows what is going on and what He is doing. Simply trust Him. He is worthy of it.*

*Look to the cross and never question God's love or care for you.*

*Try to maintain perspective by considering the great and wonderful tapestry that God is weaving of your life, the service and glory that you are rendering to Him and many other people, and the many great eternal rewards that He has stored up for you in heaven.*

Again, whatever God's reason or combination of reasons for your present condition, you should not dwell on it, but trust your sovereign God, who has proven His trustworthiness and love to you over and over again all of your life.

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**A Final, but Very Important, Note:**

If you are tempted to think that drawing closer to God won't mean as much to Him because you are only drawing nearer to Him after finding out that you are going to suffer and/or die, you could not be more wrong.

You should instead realize that your drawing closer to Him might actually be one of the reasons why He has allowed this to happen to you, because He loves you intimately and wants to draw you to Himself. Remember again that your condition is not punitive and that Christ also died to pay the price for all your sins, including the sins of spiritual laziness and neglect. So, rather than shying away from God, you should run to Him, embrace Him and thank Him for loving you enough to give you another opportunity to draw near to Him.

The Bible tells us ...

*"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:6-7)*

What could possibly be more "*exalting*" for a Christian than to draw nearer to God and then shortly thereafter hear from the mouth of his Lord the words ...

*"Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your lord."*

**So, again,**

... do not shrink back from Him. Instead, run straight to Him, embrace Him and "[cast] all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." He invites you to come to Him, to know Him, and to "*enjoy Him forever!*"

Do not shrink back from Him due to misapprehensions, groundless fears, or misconceptions about the nature and love of God.

Though some may get more rewards in heaven than others, God loves each of His children equally, because –

His Son has died for you and is in spiritual union with you

You are indwelt by His Holy Spirit

He Himself has legally adopted you and bidden you to call Him “Father”

**So ... Trust Him and Enjoy Him!**

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Having finished our look at

*Paper 2 – The “Why’s” of Suffering – General Reasons*

We will next turn to

*Paper 3: The “WHYs?” of Suffering – Suffering for “God’s Glory”*

**Soli Deo Gloria**

*[In Paper 5 on “Suffering” we will take an in-depth look at what C. S. Lewis has called “the intolerable compliment” of God’s love.]*