

The Why of Suffering

Ours is a shrinking world. The press, T.V. and radio bring us news of disaster, wars and trouble-spots all over the world in a matter of hours. The mass media have made us become accustomed to starvations, mutilations and wanton killings.

We have become used to the paradox of human bestiality walking hand in hand with our technological civilization. Today, and I suggest because of the amazing progress in the world of science, we live in a world of fear.

Communications are so swift that it is a small world in which Northern Ireland, the Philippines and Vietnam are closer to us than ever before. Daily, we see on the T.V. screens the unrest and the trouble in the world. While great strides are made in the field of science, Men's hearts are failing them for fear." The apostle Paul's summary of the world situation is so applicable for our times: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now ... waiting for redemption." We live in a "groaning and travailing" world.

Our age has so much suffering and pain. We have become so used to the agony and anguish of millions. We are bombarded with tales of woe. But suffering is really felt and highlighted by some tragedy very close to our own experiences and leads us, even as Christians, to ask these soul searching questions:

1.) Why does it happen to me? 2.) Why does God allow suffering in my life? 3.) If God is a God of love, why then should I have to go through all this trouble? When suffering comes we are confronted with questions for which we cannot find simple answers.

To write about suffering seems to go against the prevailing mood of current religious thought. Faith healing is so much in the news. Numerous books have appeared on this subject as it has become a matter of much discussion. I suggest that the Biblical teaching on suffering should again receive careful and reverent attention from all who claim to be the twice born of God.

We cannot afford to neglect it, for whether we like it or not, we are going to experience some suffering. As human beings we cannot escape it. "Every man who lives is born to die," wrote the poet Dryden. So true! Between the first breath and the last, pain and suffering dog our footsteps. As we journey through this life we cannot get away from these experiences.

As a pastor you come in contact with suffering on a rather regular basis. You find that it does not bypass any home, whether rich or poor. Suffering does not know class distinctions.

The Bible has a great deal to say about suffering. Naturally! The Word of God touches the total life of man, and deals with it effectively. Because suffering is so human, such a real part of living, Christ Himself took part in it and learned obedience through what He had to go through for us. He identified Himself with suffering. Christ is no stranger to

pain, agony or sorrow. He. experienced all of it when He was on earth. Suffering has many positive values. It teaches the difference between the essentials and the nonessentials in life. But the highest profit to be gained through suffering is the increasing awareness of the presence of Christ.

When in the Fourth Century the persecutions raged with more than usual violence. Theodorous, for singing praises of God, was jailed and put to the rack, though not to death. After being taken down, he was asked how he could so patiently endure such tortures; to which he gave this remarkable reply: "At first I felt some pain, but afterwards there appeared to stand by me a young man, who wiped the sweat from my face, and frequently refreshed me with cold water, which so delighted me, that I regretted being let down".

Through suffering, we learn through the Spirit, that the twice born have indeed a sympathizing Saviour.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh
And Thy Maker is not by:
Think not thou canst weep a tear
And thy Maker is not near.

Johan D. Tangelder
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