



From the desk of David Sims



## Why do Christians Suffer?

*Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*  
*James 1:3*

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The world is filled with hungry people, cold, homeless people. There are lonely people, lonely, lonely people longing to be loved and cared for. Longing just to know and feel that someone loves them truly, and unselfishly. Many are just miserably existing and they don't even know that love exists or what it is to be loved.

Broken homes, jealousy, evil surmising, infidelity, verbal abuse, negligence, ingratitude, unfeeling hearts in every way have caused emotional pain



and heartache unimaginable. Sickness, wars, persecution, and natural disasters, all have left their ugly scars on countless lives.

Why? Why does such a state of things exist? Why if there is a God of love does He allow such things to continue? Why did He allow it in the first place and why does He allow it to continue, seemingly endlessly? How can God love us, and still allow us to suffer so? When will it all end?

Millions if not all have asked this question, and it is a question that deserves consideration. If God has the power to stop this endless suffering, why doesn't He do it? We know He has the power to do it, and He does at times. We have the examples of the miracles that Christ and His disciples worked for the relief of suffering while on this earth. Others have experienced miraculous deliverances. Why doesn't He do it all the time, and why doesn't He do it for everyone?

I can, perhaps to a degree understand why the wicked world suffers. They have chosen the rule of the devil. For God to arbitrarily, and forcefully remove them from suffering the results of Satan's rule would be unfair to them not respecting their choice. And for Him to do it secretly; just removing the pain and the difficulties; while letting them remain under Satan's rule; obeying him; would be to confirm the wicked in their rejection of God and their choice of Satan. They would not know that Satan's rule is one of unmerciful tyranny and death. God allows the wicked to taste of the fruit of their own choice, the knowledge of evil, that now while probation lingers, some may yet choose God, may yet choose life.

But what is more difficult for me to grasp is, why after I have given my heart to God for Him to rule in my life, why do I still have all these problems and suffering?

Of greater magnitude than the pain we suffer because of others, are the scars left upon us for inflicting pain or suffering upon someone else. We are scarred by our service of self rather than of others; scarred because of our ingratitude, negligence,

"My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." (Job 10:1-2)

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

"The sin of Judah [is] written with a pen of iron, [and] with the point of a diamond: [it is] graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars;" (Jeremiah 17:1)

"The heart [is] deceitful above all [things], and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate [to be] conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." (Romans 8:29) 1Jn 1:7-9

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:2)

"And not only [so], but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." (Romans 5:3-5) Rom 5: 6-10

anger, evil surmising, etc. It is not the pain we suffer, but our response to it, and more than that, it is the pain we inflict upon others that scar us. These scars are the greatest of all and the most enduring. They are the deformed characters we bear because of our sins. How can we be rid of these ugly scars that are as seeds of death ready to spring to life and bear their ugly fruit again and again throughout eternity? This is the real question. For in the answer to this question lies the answer to why God allows His children to suffer.

The answer is really quite simple, though it seems to evade us most of the time, especially when we are suffering. We have chosen to sin. We have been sinning and sinning from the time we were old enough to reason. Our entire nature is corrupted with selfishness. Our characters have received a stamp upon them of ugly selfishness. We are unfit for the society of unfallen beings, Christ or God. We are unfit for heaven. Heaven or the new earth would not be heaven if we were to take the characters we have formed with us there. The same problems that confront us here would confront us there, but it would be far worse because it would be immortalized. And for God to miraculously give us a character fit for heaven would entirely take away our free will and we would be no higher than the animal creation. To impose upon us new characters would be to change our personality, it would be to change our very identity. To do this would be the same as destroying the human race and starting all over again, this time with a race of puppets, mere animations, or robots. This He will not do. He loves us too much, and He desires that His love be reciprocated freely, and from the heart.

Therefore, for God to be able to save us means that the characters we have formed must be totally erased and new characters formed through our own diligent effort by the choices we make. Character is not something that can be given to us. We can be forgiven and a new opportunity given to us through the blood of Christ, but this is not enough to save us. (It is like giving us a new blank cassette, but we have to make the recording) We must have a transformed character. I repeat, character is not something that can just be given to us. It is something that has to be formed by a repetition of habits, which are formed by a repetition of actions. (remember the story of the 10 virgins; the 5 wise and 5 foolish. The foolish were not able to obtain oil from their friends in an emergency.)

But don't get the idea that God leaves us to form our characters alone. He does all that it is possible for Him to do, but He cannot do our work. He leads us through many different circumstances to afford us the opportunities we need to form the right characteristics. These circumstances are all within the painful environment of the knowledge of sin that we and others have brought upon ourselves by our sinful choices. He leads us in a way that will avoid all the pain that it is possible to avoid, and still obtain the experiences needed to form right characters. (Though it is not possible to avoid all pain as long as sin exists anywhere in the universe) He does all this, but we must make the choices. He will even strengthen our wills: He will put within us a desire to do right, but He won't make the choices for us. If we are to be saved at last, and if there is to be a heaven to go to, we need our characters to be formed like Christ's. This must take place here and now, under the varying circumstances that we are placed in, for when Jesus comes, everyone's character must be fixed forever. There will be no changes then. Heaven will not be a place of probation, another place of suffering and pain. Here is our probation.

Everyone will go through the various trials that sin has brought upon us. However, the one who has surrendered his life to Christ will have the blessing of knowing that " ...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (1 Peter 4:12-13)

"Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls [to him] in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." (1 Peter 4:19)

"...and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." (Matthew 25:8-10)

"Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psalms 55:22)

"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." (Revelation 22:11)

"And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psalms 50:15)

"God [is] our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;" (Psalms 46:1-2)

"The steps of a [good] man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth [him with] his hand. I have been young, and [now] am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. The law of his God [is] in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. ...Mark the perfect [man], and behold the upright: for the end of [that] man [is] peace." (Psalms 37:23-25, 31, 37) Ps 34

"Will the Lord cast off for

called according to [his] purpose." (Romans 8:28) And There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God [is] faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear [it]." (1 Corinthians 10:13) God will not allow him to go through one trial more than is necessary for the needed work of character formation. When the dross is purified, he will be brought out of the furnace.

Those who have surrendered themselves to God for sacrifice or service, as He deems best, may go through additional trials for the benefit of others (martyrs, for example). This is because they have voluntarily chosen to be used by God for the salvation of their fellow human beings.

Often, those who have surrendered their lives in service for God will be used by Him to bless others. Miracles are seen, and the power of God is manifest to save. God works in this miraculous way when He deems it best for the salvation of souls, and when He has someone consecrated to His service that He can work through.

It is impossible for our finite minds to understand everything about why things happen in different circumstances, but we can know that God is Love and we can trust Him fully. It is time we get out of the slough of doubt, self pity, discouragement, and diligently put forth every effort to live for others, put selfishness away, to study the life and character of Christ that we can copy it. It took Moses 40 years to unlearn the law of force that he had learned in Egypt and to learn the law of love. (Ed p. 65) I pray it will not take us that long.

What shall we do when we are in the dark valley of suffering, disappointment, bereavement, loneliness, etc, when we can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, when everything is dark and mysterious and we can't discern the hand of God in our affliction or understand why? Then it is time to trust in God. We must make a giant leap of faith and decide to trust God, though we can't understand why. Then we must realize that if we trust God, in a little while, the dark things will be made plain. Then it is time to remember the way the Lord has led us in the past, and trust that He will do the same in the future.

ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth [his] promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah. And I said, This [is] my infirmity: [but I will remember] the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, [is] in the sanctuary: who [is so] great a God as [our] God? Thou [art] the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people... Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." (Psalms 77:7-14, 20)

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