

Study 3

SUFFERINGS, TRIALS, AND TESTINGS

First Peter 1:6-7

The Christians of the first century were under tremendous pressure. The people of their day were entrenched in pagan practices such as immorality, idolatry, Emperor worship, and lewd festivals. Much of this cultural activity was actually laid down in Roman law. Naturally they refused to participate in such practices. For this they were seen as traitors and outcasts. Many rumours abounded about them. The fact that Christian adults worshiped and conducted their meetings alongside children, brought the accusation of incest. The fact that there was embracing and outward expressions of love, one for another, in Christian meetings brought accusations of indecency. The fact that Christians met secretly in homes at night brought accusations of treachery against the Empire. Then there was the refusal of the early Christians to acknowledge *Caesar as Lord*. Their catch-cry became *Jesus is Lord*, especially meaningful when they were publicly martyred by the Roman Empire.

1. During these times of persecution and distress, how was the church instructed to react? (vs. 6a)

(Note, James 1:2) _____

But in the midst of all this suffering, one thing stands out. These things were not getting the better of God. God is still in control even during dark times. Thus, sufferings become *trials*. Even Christ set us an example by enduring trials (Lk. 22:28; Heb. 2:10; 12:2-4). The Christian is destined to go through trials (1Thess. 3:3). If this life was all there was to live for, then sufferings and trials are a cruel joke. But if sufferings in this life produce something that will be of benefit to the believer for eternity, then we rejoice in our trials and sufferings.

2. How did the apostles react to suffering as recorded in Acts 5:41?

3. What does suffering produce in the Christian? (Rom. 5:3)

4. Why was Paul comforted during his sufferings? (2Tim. 1:12)

KINDS OF TRIALS

We mentioned some of the trials that the early Christians faced. Perhaps we could add to these such things as economic persecution, social ostracisation and denial of normal rights. Today, Christians suffer in the same way, just in different forms. Perhaps one of the strongest reasons to have a country based on Christian principles, even though it doesn't profess Christ as Lord, is the freedom it gives people to express their religion, and the moral flavour it sets for a country. This is a good reason for Christians to be politically vocal. While such things as pornography, abortion, homosexuality, adultery, murder (euthanasia), corruption, drug abuse, and fraud are only symptoms of a greater problem- *the wickedness of every human heart stained with sin*, we still need to maintain standards for the benefit of the *entire* community. Whenever there is massive opposition to Christians it is never logical. It is always spiritual. When we are persecuted for no apparent reason, we can be assured it is a spiritual attack.

5. How did Jesus say to respond to such attacks? (Lk. 6:28; also note Rom. 12:14)

FAITH REFINING

Why does God allow such trials to come upon His people? Certainly some of the troubles that Christians experience are self-induced.

6. Therefore how did Christ instruct His disciples to live? (Matt. 10:16)

The result of trials is always positive for the Christian who endures. With every trial successfully passed, the believer is better equipped to face the next one.

Does God have to keep bringing us back to a point where we obey Him fully in the midst of a trial, or do we learn to quickly obey Him and press on in our growth?

One thing that trials achieve in the church is the sorting out of genuine from non-genuine believers. In some countries of the world, the measure of Christian stature is not gauged by how many university degrees a person has, but how much they have suffered for their Lord.

7. What qualifications did Paul cite to prove his right to be a minister of Christ? (2Cor. 11:23-28)

GLORY & HONOUR TO JESUS!

If this life was all there was to living, then suffering would mean that there is no justice in the universe. But we are assured that God will bring justice.

8. What are some of the blessings that come from enduring through suffering? (2Tim. 2:12)

While God allows the enemy to bring suffering and trials upon the Church, God Himself will end the age by trying mankind.

9. What benefit awaits last-days believers who endure through sufferings, when God begins to try the people of the earth? (Rev. 3:10)

At the end of all things believers will receive *a crown of life* (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). We are given a glimpse of heaven in the Book of Revelation when we are shown crowned believers.

10. Note this passage in Revelation 4:4-11. What do the crowned saints do?

May we not wait for heaven to give Jesus all the glory! Any blessing that we receive now from God should be acknowledged as coming from Him and used for His immediate glory. Thus the believer goes from darkness to light, to suffering, to glory, to glorifying.

Amen.