

ARE YOU SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE OR FOR EVIL?

When I first came to the Lord (when He drew me near), I had a pleasant period of time that some describe as a honeymoon, but then I began a period of suffering and I didn't know this was normal for a serious new believer.

Let me explain what I mean by suffering. When I became a believer in Jesus, I told Him that I wanted all that He had to give me, and He began His work in my life. Needless to say I'm thankful now, but then I did not know what I was asking for.

The next thing I knew, I was going through these trials and tests on all the areas where I had stuff inside of me that was wrong with God. Man, I mean that people I knew and thought were my friends began to treat me in awful ways. And I began to react in more awful ways than they did. It was pure agony and I didn't know why all this was happening to me. I soon found out that previously unknown to me, I was wrong with practically every person on planet earth! I had trials-and-tests suffering and I didn't know how to get it right because I was so busy blaming everybody else! Have you ever been there?

After my honeymoon with the Lord, I began to be taught the duties of housekeeping and cleaning, just like any new bride might experience.

After some period of suffering, where I seemed to have the same problems over and over, I had to ask myself; "Am I suffering for righteousness sake, or am I suffering because of the evil within me?" God had been showing me all along why I was in suffering, but I still didn't have a clue because I really didn't want to hear. But I did look to the Lord for answers and for what I must do. Here's some of what I found out.

No believer can deny that Jesus suffered for our sake. There can never be another person who suffered like Jesus suffered. He not only suffered for righteousness sake, but he suffered also because of His holiness. We can never suffer like He did because He was without sin and without iniquity. None of us can make that claim because we are of a fallen race. But we can say "That He is our

righteousness” and that as we take up our cross and follow Him, we will suffer for “righteousness sake”, if we do indeed take up our cross and follow Him.

What does it mean “To take up our cross?” If we look at what happened to Jesus on the cross, we can see that His flesh had to die. He was “That” perfect sacrificial offering for us without blemish and perfect in every way. All the sins of the world were put on Him and He paid the price for our sins.

Since I found myself less than perfect in every way, I soon realized that I most definitely had some flesh that had to die. As Jesus offered his Perfect flesh up to God on my behalf, I found that I had to offer my imperfect flesh up to the Lord through trials, repentance, and deliverance for Him to transform me into His image. In Romans 12:1, Paul says:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service”.

I found that all my hatred, bitterness, unforgiveness, and all my other treasures of darkness had to be put up there on that cross to die, one by one, as the Holy Spirit gave me conviction, repentance, and judgement. This process made me free because the Holy Spirit would bring me “truth” about myself and “Truth” about God’s plan to destroy the evil within me. In John 8:32 He says:

“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”.

I found that at the cross I was saved, but every day thereafter, I was to cleanse myself. Look at the 2Cor 7:1 commandment given to us:

“Therefore, having these promises (see vs 16-18), beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”.

So when we come to God, we are forgiven through Jesus, but not all our ways are yet made perfect. The perfecting of our ways through accepting the truth mentioned in John 8:32, through receiving the conviction of sin, the hastening of righteousness and judgement of the Holy Spirit through suffering, is one way of describing the meaning of “picking up your cross and following Him”.

As I picked up my cross to follow Him I soon discovered that I was suffering because of the evil that was in me and not because of circumstance, bad luck, false accusation, bad treatment, or the like.

You might say “How do you know that? Does that mean that as believers, we all suffer because of the evil that is in us? Couldn't we be suffering and having hard times now and then just because someone else was having a bad day and we just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time?”

That's what I used to think. At first, I did not realize that all my problems, whatever they might be, were most certainly the result of my own doing or lack of action. Paul said in Romans 7:15-19 that it was the evil within him (in his flesh) that made him do what was wrong. Let's look at what Paul said:

“For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

If then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the Law that it is good.

But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.”

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find”.

Like Paul, I found out that Satan had a lot of evil stuff within me, which was my own fault and my responsibility because I had

committed a lot of sin which gave place for that evil. When I came to the Lord, I had a lot of bondage from my previous worldly ways. I had a lot of bad habits and, just as it took me 44 years to get into that ungodly condition, it was going to take a while for the Holy Spirit to get me cleaned up.

And yes, God loved me the way I was when he drew me near, but He loved me too much to leave me in that condition.

This cleansing period involved some suffering on my part because all that old flesh had to die. At first, I did not know what was going on and I did not know why I was suffering. I had thoughts that maybe I'd had it better when I had been in the world; but the tremendous love of God, that love that passes all understanding, kept me in the program. The world had nothing to compare to God's love for me.

So I suffered, and I learned. And I suffered some more and I learned some more. At some point in time, I decided that as long as I was going to suffer, I was going to buy into the cleansing program and was going to suffer for righteousness sake, and not just because of the evil within me. It became an attitude of heart. I wanted the cleansing and I asked the Holy Spirit to come into my heart, just like I had asked Jesus to come into my heart.

(If you haven't done this, please take a moment to pray and ask the Holy Spirit into your heart. He will come in at your request and will begin a work in your life like He did and is doing in my life.)

After I did this, I realized that I had new eyes and ears and suddenly it was revealed to me that:

Jesus not only died on the cross for my sins and returned again to His Father in heaven,

BUT HE ALSO

Sent back to me the Holy Spirit, who convicts me of sin, righteousness, and judgement.

This is so important to understand that I am going to say it again.
 “Jesus not only died on the cross for our sins, but He also sent us the Holy Spirit to get us cleaned up to be His bride.”.
 (see John 16:7-8)

Also, at the beginning of our walk with the Lord, there is a “honeymoon” period for most new believers. After this period of peace, grace, and joy in our newfound relationship with Jesus, we then begin to be taught the things we need to know that will please God.

This period of learning about God and His ways can be very interesting with it’s ups and downs and confrontations with the various ‘truths’ about ourselves. The Word of God says that “we will be troubled for a little while”, but after we repent on the areas of wrongness within us and repent for the past sins He shows us, our mourning will be turned to joy. (John 16;20)

In the process of learning about the Holy Spirit’s function in our lives, there is a learning curve and a suffering curve or period of time where He, the Holy Spirit, is working with us to teach us the ways of purification and cleansing. The amount of suffering we go through is related to how much time it takes us to buy into the cleansing program. See the graph below:

(TABLE-A ON SUFFERING)

		Honeymoon	
S	10 ;	period	
U	9 ;		
F	8 :		We gradually accept the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
F	7 :		
OUR E	6 ;		

Chart “B” relates the new believers suffering for Christ and the time it takes for that suffering to subside, to the knowledge and obedience we have to God and his cleansing work in our lives through the works of the Holy Spirit.

You might say, “Why does it take so long to learn about and understand this process? Why doesn’t God just tell us what’s going on and then we’ll know what it’s all about right away?”

I think there are at least four answers:

1. You are responsible for what’s been revealed to you. If you never catch on to what the function of the Holy Spirit in your life is, you’ll not be held as accountable like you would if you knew what to do but didn’t do it. God is just and merciful.
(See Matthew 7:26)

2. And God says in His word that we should ask, knock, and seek out His secrets and if we do, those secrets will be revealed to us.
(Luke 9:11-13)

He also says that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Heb 11:6)

And “It is the glory of God to hide a matter and the honor of a king to search it out”. (Prov 25:2)

And “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children that we may do all the words of the law.” (Duet 29:29)

3. Man’s nature is to place great value on that which he has spent effort to obtain. This way, the secrets of God will not be treated as common by those who are allowed to discover them.

4. And lastly, God does not force Himself or his

ways on anyone but rewards those who really desire to please Him. He woos us and seeks us as a lover seeks a companion, but He does not force us. He persuades us by allowing us to turn to Him when all else fails. But in the end, it is our decision to make.

So the answer for “Why doesn’t God just spell out His Holy Spirit plan for us?” is simple:

We are to love God with all our mind, body, soul, and spirit and we are to seek after Him and His ways. (Mark 12:30)

Like David said in Psalms, “As a deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for you, O God. (Psalm 42:1)

CAN YOU TELL IF YOU’RE SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS?

When the trials and tests first start, we are sometimes caught by surprise because we expected everything to be better automatically. There are very few people who realize from the beginning that there are ‘works of faith’ that we must do in order to receive that joy mentioned in John 16:20. Such works of faith are mentioned throughout the scriptures and include allowing the conviction of the Holy Spirit in our lives, confession of sins, repentance, deliverance, and more.

(See Mt 4:17, Mk 16:16-17, and 2Cor 7:1 for more on this.)

In Hebrews 12:5 through verse 11, Paul exhorts us in the following manner:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
and do not be discouraged when you are
rebuked by Him;

For whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and
scourges every son whom He receives.
(Hey! Look at this. By His stripes we are healed.)

....but He chastens us for our profit that we may
be partakers of His holiness.

Now no chastening seems joyful for the present,
but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields
the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those
who have been trained by it.”

HOW DOES THE LORD CHASTEN AND REBUKE US?

The Lord uses the Holy Spirit mostly to give us dreams, to set up situations that confront our wrongness, to cause other people to come against us in these wrong areas either by pointing them out to us to our face or by being our mirror to see ourselves in them. The methods that the Holy Spirit uses are very numerous and the things He uses to show us our weak areas depend somewhat on how close we are listening and hearing what He is trying to tell us. If we are a bit deaf, He will use stronger methods to get our attention. If we are of a gentle heart and come to Him as a little child, that is, if we are easily corrected, He doesn't have to use the stronger methods.

The end result is our correction and change in our life. That's when the joy comes and that's how you can tell if you are suffering for righteousness sake: If you receive the correction and are being exercised by it, then you are suffering for righteousness sake and not just because of the evil in you.

When God corrects us, He does so because He loves us and because He hates the evil within us. But if we are exercised by his correction and repent and get rid of the evil, then we are suffering for righteousness sake, even for holiness, as you can see in 2Cor 7:1. We turn evil to good, and thereby fulfill our righteous calling by doing “works of faith”.

This receiving correction does not always happen over night. The realization of what's happening may take years to accept depending

on how hard one's heart is and how willing one is to be converted like a little child to receive correction and change in one's life.

There is a scripture in the Old Testament that says the sum of man's duty on earth is:

“To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God.” (Mic 6:8)

This scripture sums up our walk with God. He brings us to justice in the areas of wrongness and gives us mercy when we ask Him to forgive us, and we walk humbly before Him, standing ready to receive correction from Him and to act on that correction.

Yes, there are ministries to do and people to help, but getting into the cleansing program with the Holy Spirit is our greatest calling because this removes the sin and iniquity that causes God's face to be hidden from us and that separates us from God.

Like so many things in God's ways, we have not because we ask not. We must ask God to be in His cleansing program, it doesn't happen automatically nor do we get lily-white when we die and go to heaven.

He said in Revelations that the “unjust would be unjust still, the Holy would be holy still, etc.” (See Rev 22:11) He has given us a chance to be judged while yet on earth, but only if we ask Him to be in His Holy Spirit cleansing program. This is our calling and the calling is for every person who seeks for it.

Thank you Jesus for your goodness,
lovingkindness, and mercy towards us,

Thomas Barnabas, handyman

