

TRUTH B-P CHURCH
Adult Sunday School

THE CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

LESSON ONE: WHY DO CHRISTIANS SUFFER?

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult questions a Christian may ask is, “Why do Christians suffer?” Sometimes Christians struggle with this question because they have mistakenly adopted a wrong expectation of the Christian life. They may think, “If I am faithful to God, I should have fewer problems,” “If I pray enough, God will surely remove my difficulties,” or “If I obey God, everything should work out well.” But the God of the Bible does not promise a life without suffering.

It is important for a Christian to have the right understanding of Christian suffering. In this lesson, we will learn from Apostle Peter’s encouragement to the suffering believers. 1 Peter 4:12–13, “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.”

II. THE EXPECTATION OF SUFFERING

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial” Apostle Peter addressed the suffering believers as **“beloved.”**

A. Suffering is Reality

The Christian life is a blessed life, but it is not necessarily a trouble-free life. Christians still live in a fallen world affected by sin. Following Christ may bring opposition, rejection, sacrifice, disappointment, and various trials. Therefore, we should not be surprised when difficulties come. “Think it not strange” means that Christians should not regard suffering as something abnormal or unexpected.

B. Suffering can be Painful

Apostle Peter describes the suffering as a “fiery trial.” A fire tests and reveals the quality of something. In the same way, severe trials can reveal the condition of our faith. Gold may be placed in a furnace so that its impurities may be exposed and removed. The fire does not create the gold; it reveals and refines it. Indeed, suffering can be painful.

III. THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

“Which is to try you” Apostle Peter gives the purpose for the fiery trial. The word “try” means to test, examine, or prove.

A. Suffering is a Test

Trials reveal whether our trust in God depends upon comfortable circumstances. Do I trust God when I cannot understand? Do I still believe God is good when life is difficult? Do I continue to pray when there seems to be no answer? Do I remain faithful when circumstances do not go according to my plans?

B. Suffering Teaches Dependence upon God

When circumstances are beyond our control, we learn that we cannot depend upon ourselves. We may not know God's specific purpose in every trial, but we can know that suffering can test and reveal our faith. The trial may be painful, but it need not be pointless. God can use it to examine and strengthen our faith.

IV. THE FELLOWSHIP OF SUFFERING

“Ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings” Apostle Peter taught suffering from another dimension. Through suffering, we have fellowship with Christ and one another. The word “partakers” speaks of sharing or participating.

A. Christ Himself suffered

The Christian follows a Saviour who have experienced rejection, opposition, misunderstanding, sorrow, and suffering. Therefore, we should not expect the world always to welcome those who faithfully follow Christ.

B. Christians Identified with Christ's Suffering

When Christians suffer because they belong to Christ, they experience something of the cost of identifying with Him. Our suffering does not have the same saving purpose as Christ's suffering. Christ alone suffered for our sins and accomplished our redemption. Rather, Apostle Peter meant that believers may share in suffering because they follow the same Christ who suffered.

V. THE JOY OF SUFFERING

“But rejoice” This is Apostle Peter's command to the suffering believers. It does not imply that suffering is pleasant and easy to bear. Christian joy does not require pretending that suffering does not hurt. A Christian may grieve and still have joy. A Christian may shed tears and still trust God. A Christian may experience pain and still have hope.

A. Christ's Glory is Coming

“When his glory shall be revealed.” Our present suffering is not the final chapter. Christ's glory will be revealed one day. The One who was rejected will soon be revealed in glory. The One whom the world despised will soon be honoured before all men. Therefore, the Christian looks beyond present circumstances to the coming glory of Christ.

B. Future Glory Brings Exceeding Joy

“Ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” Fiery trial → Christ's glory → Exceeding joy. The Christian's present suffering for Christ is only temporary, but Christ's glory and the joy that comes is eternal.

VI. SUMMARY

The Christian does not rejoice because suffering for Christ is pleasant and easy to bear. In fact, it can be most trying and difficult. Yet he rejoices because Christian suffering has a good purpose in Christ. It also signifies and represents our fellowship with Christ and fellow brethren in Christ. Ultimately, suffering will end with exceeding joy when Christ's glory is revealed. May we be found faithful until we meet our Saviour face to face. May God help us. Amen.