

The Fellowship of His Sufferings

Scripture Reading: II Corinthians 1:3-7

Suffering has always been a relevant topic of study. To some degree, all of us have suffered, are suffering, and will suffer in the future. We live in a sin-cursed, unbelieving, unholy world. We have bodies and temperaments that are subject to weaknesses and failure. We are surrounded by others like us. To some degree, we also have the influence of Satan, the malignant prince of darkness – the enemy of God, angels, and man. As we prepare our thoughts about suffering, we need to look at some of the kinds of suffering that exist.

1. **Suffering that is common to all men** – People suffer just for living in this world, as stated above (I Corinthians 10:13a).
2. **Suffering for righteousness' sake** – This can be done by people who have a strong conscience, but do not truly know the Lord. Or this can be done by those who truly know and serve the Lord (Matthew 5:10).
3. **Suffering for Christ's sake** – This can be done by people who are religious, but not born-again. Most commonly this is done by those who have a true relationship / fellowship with the Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord and His Gospel (Matthew 5:11-12).

Our lesson will focus on how true believers partake of suffering, not only **for** Christ, but **with** Christ. In Acts 9:1-4, Jesus took Saul's persecution of Christians personally, as suffering with those that were persecuted. In Philippians 3:10, Paul understood and desired fellowship with Christ that involved partaking in *"His sufferings... His death... and His resurrection."*

In our Scripture reading, II Corinthians 1:3-7, Paul describes a joint-fellowship among believers that involves mutual sufferings and mutual comfort.

II Corinthians 1:3 – We see God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort. The Father sent His Son to be the source of all our mercy and comfort. Christ's suffering and tribulation were integral to our salvation. It is only fitting that suffering and tribulation, accompanied by mercy and comfort, are a part of our journey through this life into the next life. See I John 4:14; Hebrews 2:9-18; 4:14-16; John 16:33; Acts 14:19-22; I Peter 2:21-25.

II Corinthians 1:4-7 – As we share / partake of Christ’s sufferings, we also share / partake of Christ’s comfort and consolation. When we first suffer and receive help / comfort / consolation from God’s Word and God’s Spirit, we are able then to minister realistically (not theoretically) to others who suffer. Christ also helps us through the experiences and ministry we share one with another. Our trials and victories become a source of joy in the Lord and joy towards each other. See II Corinthians 1:8-14; I Peter 1:3-9; Romans 1:11-12; 5:1-5; 15:1-7, 13-14; I Corinthians 12:25-27; Philippians 2:1-5, 17-18; 4:1,4; I Thessalonians 2:17-20; 5:11.

See the work of God / the call of God through afflictions – Philippians 1:12-30

Philippians 1:12-18 – Paul saw his suffering as a way of getting more people exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:19-26 – Paul was glad to trust God for deliverance from persecution, so that he could minister to the brethren more. Paul was also glad for the day that the Lord would call him home. Whichever thing happened, he only wanted Christ to get the attention and the glory.

Philippians 1:27-30 – Paul loved to see his brothers and sisters committed to doing the work of the gospel (Philippians 1:3-5). They needed to keep their lives as good testimonies (Philippians 2:14-16), working as a team (Philippians 1:27 – *“striving together / hand-in-hand”* – From the Greek word: we get the English word for *“athletic”*). Courage and faith were part of their testimony. They needed to know that God called them to faith in Christ and that God also called them to suffer for His sake (Suffering for Christ’s sake is not an accidental bad turn of events. It is an honor). We have a conflict in this world that we all share together. See II Timothy 1:7-12; Hebrews 13:3. Believing sincerely, speaking with integrity will lead to affliction in/from this world and lead to glory for/from God (John 16:1-3, 12-13, 20-33; II Corinthians 4:1-18; I Peter 4:12-16).

Godly joy and happiness should thrive in the midst of suffering – I Peter 4:12-16

Suffering for Christ’s sake is normal Christianity. Christ is sharing the elements of His former earthly life, so that he can also share the elements of His present and future glory and honor. Do not quench *“the spirit of glory and of God.”* Surrender, with the Holy Spirit’s joy, to the things God has planned for you. Do not get confused or entangled with any suffering that comes from ungodly behavior. Seek to glorify God. Do not let fear, anger, or bitterness rob God of the glory that He deserves. See I Peter 4:17-19; 5:1; 2:11-25; Matthew 5:4, 10-12 [**Note below**]; 16:21-27; James 1:2-8,12; I Thessalonians 5:15-24; II Timothy 2:8-13; I John 2:15-17; Revelation 12:10-11.

Note Matthew 5:4, 10-12 – Jesus used the word *“blessed.”* The Greeks used this word to describe ecstasy that they thought only the “gods” could enjoy – or perhaps people could enjoy, only after they died. Jesus took this strong word to describe what His Spirit can give us when we are united with Him (Same Greek – I Peter 4:14 – *“Happy / Blessed”*). See Acts 13:50-52.