

Questions About Suffering

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:2

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Atheists use human suffering as evidence (in their minds) that God doesn't exist.
 - A. How could a loving God allow a young woman with three small boys suffer from a life-threatening brain tumor? i.e., Susan Ferrell
 - B. How could a loving God allow a young man (Christian Shadburne) suffer from a deadly form of cancer that ravaged his body with pain and misery and ended his life long before old age?
2. Atheists believe that if God existed life would be just rosy and without any problems/suffering.
3. But we know God allows suffering in the human family; whether Christian or non-Christian (**Job 14:1**: *"Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."*).
 - A. This being true, we need strength, endurance, and patience to overcome suffering.
 - B. We also need to understand why people suffer; why God permits it.
 - (1) Are all trials the result of sin committed by the one who suffers?
 - (2) Do trials, worries, anxieties, and difficulties serve a purpose in God's plan for man?
 - (3) When we suffer should we blame God and turn away from Him?
 - (4) Or, can we use troubles and suffering to make us better people? In other words, is the old saying, "When given lemons make lemonade," true or false?
 - (5) Is it possible to faithfully endure our sufferings?
 - (6) Very importantly, does the Bible offer any solutions to help us endure and overcome our problems, afflictions, and hardships?
4. Few, if any, people in the history of mankind suffered more than Job:
 - A. He lost his servants and livestock (Job 1:14-17),
 - B. He lost his sons and daughters (Job 1:18-19),
 - C. He lost his health (Job 2:7-8),
 - D. He lost the support and respect of his wife and friends (Job 2:9ff).
5. It's no wonder Job said, *"Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble"* (Job 14:1).
 - A. Different people deal with different problems and afflictions, and it seems that some suffer more hardships than do others.
 - B. But we all know by personal experience and from the experiences of those we know, that Job's statement is true (e.g., those on our prayer list).
6. Suffering concerns us, not just because hardship itself is a burden, but also because we know affliction can lead to spiritual temptations.
 - A. We may be tempted to feel our trials justify committing sin.
 - B. We may become so discouraged we blame God for our troubles, lose faith in Him, or begin to doubt His goodness and mercy (i.e., believe the atheist!).
 - C. As Job's wife said, *"Curse God and die"* (Job 2:9).
7. **3** The purpose of this study is to look to the Bible to answer some of the questions people often ask about suffering so we can successfully deal with suffering in our lives.

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **4 Question #1: Why do people suffer?** The Bible teaches several reasons, not just one. Why people suffer; we suffer as a result of...

A. Sin: (i.e., the consequences of sin; indirectly, not directly!)

- (1) King Saul lived a miserable life and eventually was slain because he rebelled against God (**1 Chron. 10:13-14**: “So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. 14 But he did not inquire of the LORD; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.”).
- (2) Judas killed himself because he had betrayed Jesus (Matt. 27:3-5).
- (3) Likewise today people suffer as the consequence of their sin:
 - ☛ *Alcoholic*: disease, poverty, loss of job, family, reputation; prison for killing someone in an auto accident, etc.
 - ☛ *Adulterer*: divorce, STD’s, loss of respect from family, friends, colleagues; money lost to child support/alimony, etc.
 - ☛ *Smoker*: lung cancer.
 - ☛ All sins have some sort of negative temporal consequence(s) to it.
- (4) Some people think this is the only reason people suffer, but that’s not true.
- (5) Collateral damage: innocent people suffer as a result of other people’s sins (bystander killed in accident by drunk; wicked persecution of the righteous; Jesus a good example, no sin, but was persecuted and suffered more than anyone EVER! 1 Pet. 2:19-23).
 - (a) In fact, the treatment Jesus received should warn us of the treatment we can expect (**Jn. 15:18-20; v. 20**: “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”).
 - (b) Nobody in the history of Christianity did more for the cause of Christ than Paul, but he suffered more than anyone (save Christ Himself) for the cause (2 Cor. 11:23-26).
 - (c) Hence, we need to remember Paul’s words to each of us: **2 Tim. 3:12**: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (See also 1 Pet. 4:12-16; Heb. 11:35-38; 1 Thess. 3:2-4; Acts 14:22; Jn. 16:33; Gen. 50:20)

B. Adam and Eve’s sin:

- (1) God originally placed Adam and Eve in a paradise (no suffering); but He warned them of the consequences of sin.
- (2) They sinned anyway, He decreed they would endure pain, suffering, hardship, and eventual death (Gen. 3:16-19; pain in childbirth, submission of wife to husband, curse on the ground, thorns and thistles, work for food, death!).
- (3) All people since that time have endured these same problems. In particular, because of Adam, all people die (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:22; Heb. 9:27).
- (4) Much of the suffering people endure, thus, can’t be attributed to any specific sin committed by themselves; it’s just the common lot of mankind because sin is in the world.
- (5) Doesn’t mean we’re guilty of Adam’s sin or will be lost because of it (Ezek. 18:20; 2 Cor. 5:10). But we do suffer in this life because of the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin.

C. Temptation from Satan:

- (1) By reading Job 1:1-2:10 we find Job's suffering was a temptation from Satan. Satan hoped that inflicting suffering on Job would cause him to turn away from God.
- (2) Many Bible passages teach that Satan is responsible for the suffering of other people:
 - (a) Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was "a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
 - (b) The woman with "a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up" was in that conditions because Satan had "bound" her (Lk. 13:16).
 - (c) Peter described Jesus as one "who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38).

D. **5** Lessons we must learn:

- (1) Suffering is not limited to those who are wicked.
 - (a) Some people think only wicked people suffer; God is on the side of the righteous and will remove all their troubles (e.g., health, wealth and prosperity gospel).
 - (b) Thus, if a person is suffering, he must have committed some sin he should repent of.
 - (i) This was the theory of Job's friends (**Job 4:7-9**: "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? 8 Even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. 9 By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of His anger they are consumed."); disproving this idea is a main theme of that book.
 - (ii) This same false doctrine is taught by many "faith healers" who teach people that God must remove all their problems if they are right with Him; if they are not healed it is God punishing them for not having enough faith.
- (2) Righteous people suffer. This is important for the following reasons:
 - (a) We should not conclude we have been guilty of sin every time we have a problem. Maybe we are suffering because of sin, so we should examine our lives. But maybe we are suffering for other reasons, perhaps because we are righteous (2 Tim. 3:12).
 - (b) We should not become Christians thinking it will automatically solve all our problems. If this is our motive, we may fall away when the hardships come.
- (3) The main lesson is: **God should not be blamed for the existence of suffering.**
 - (a) That idea is totally false! Lk. 13:2-5 When we see suffering...think "Satan"! Job 1-2:8
 - (b) The command to endure suffering is just another part of a Christian's life, like the command to study the Bible, pray, worship, etc.
 - ☛ Faithful Christians of every century have suffered; we are not the only ones.
 - ☛ We should expect suffering to come, so our faith will not be shaken when it does.
 - (c) Never forget the ultimate and primary blame for suffering rests on Satan who tempts people to sin and thereby brings sin and suffering into the world.
 - (d) The secondary blame rests upon people, ourselves included, who've given in to temptation and committed sins whose consequences often lead to suffering.
 - (e) When Adam and Eve chose to sin, God should no more be blamed for punishing them than a parent should be blamed when he must punish a rebellious child. (**Jas. 1:13-15**: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be

tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”).

- (f) Remember, if we blame God and reject Him because we are suffering, then we are doing exactly what Satan wants us to do.

- ☛ He has defeated us!

- ☛ The only way to defeat Satan and really overcome hardship is to maintain our faithfulness to God in spite of it.

2. **6** Question #2: Can suffering have good results?

A. The simple answer is “Yes!” *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted”* (Psa. 119:71).

B. Usually when we suffer we can only see the problems involved; and surely if we commit sin as a result, then the suffering is harmful.

C. But if we remain faithful, there are favorable results that can occur. Consider some positives:

(1) Gives us the opportunity to prove our commitment to God:

1 Pet. 1:6-7: *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,”*

(a) If suffering was limited to sinners and Christians never suffered, everyone would want to be Christians, not because they loved God, but just to avoid earthly problems.

(b) That Christians also suffer means suffering “separates the men from the boys”: It shows who’s willing to remain faithful even when hard (Acts 5:40-42; **1 Pet. 4:12-13**).

(2) Causes spiritual growth:

Jas. 1:2-4: *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*

(a) Counting trials and tribulations as “all joy” is hardly the natural reaction.

(b) But we must because this leads us to patience and completeness in God’s service.

(c) Whoever developed patience when his patience was never tried?

Rom. 5:3-5: *“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*

(i) In the physical realm, which bones and muscles are the strongest? The ones that face the most hardship (i.e., no pain, no gain).

(ii) Lay a block of ice and a block of clay in the sun, one melts the other hardens.

(d) Often the same circumstance produces opposite results. Two sons of an alcoholic.

(i) One son became a drunkard, the other became a teetotaler.

(iii) Both explain their conduct: “What can you expect with a father like mine?”

(e) The same problem produced opposite results.

- (i) Trials defeat some people but strengthen others.
- (ii) It all depends on how we deal with them.

(3) Keeps us humble and dependent on God:

2 Cor. 1:8-10: “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,”

- (a) Affliction taught Paul not to trust in himself, but in God.

2 Cor. 12:7-10: “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

- (b) Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was a messenger from Satan, God allowed it to remain to keep Paul from becoming too proud over the many revelations he had received.
- (c) From suffering, God can produce great positive results: consider Joseph...
Gen. 50:20: “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”
- (d) Joseph explained that his brothers had mistreated him, but God used that as a means to save the family from famine.
- (e) Satan puts trials in our lives to harm us; yet one of the greatest demonstrations of God’s power is His ability to take those problems and use them to accomplish good.
- (f) The greatest example of this is the death of Christ; Satan intended it as a defeat for God and all mankind, yet it ended up as the salvation of all mankind. (1 Pet. 2:21-24)
- (g) Think for a moment of the really important things in life; how many of them are accomplished without hardship? Birth of a baby? Graduating from college? Starting a career or business? Working to care for our families? Our eternal salvation? Suffering is an inherent part of everything good!
- (h) Satan sends trials to harm us, but God can use them for our good if we allow Him!
Rom. 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”). **But this works only if we remain faithful.**

3. **7** Question #3: What assurance is there that we can endure?

- A. When facing hardship we may think, “I just can’t take it anymore! I can’t hold out.”
- B. We may convince ourselves that what we are going through is impossible to endure; God surely would expect no one to go through what we’re going through. It can be easy to rationalize ourselves into disobeying God.
- C. The Bible makes definite promises that help us endure suffering:

1 Cor. 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

- (1) What a wonderful promise! God will not allow us to face a temptation beyond your ability to endure!
- (2) Every temptation will be accompanied by a way of escape so you can endure it.
- (3) This means we can endure every trial, no matter how difficult, without sinning!
- (4) If we think we “can’t do” what God said to do, or if we ever justify disobeying God, we have believed the Devil’s lie.
- (5) We need to quit looking for excuses and look instead for the way of escape!

Psa. 34:19: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.”

- (6) God may not remove all the afflictions, but He makes sure we are able to endure them faithfully: all of them!

Rom. 8:35-39: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- (7) No temptation/trial can separate us from God; in them all, we are “more than conquerors.”
- (8) If we simply endured the temptation without sinning, we would just be “conquerors.”
- (9) But we are “more than conquerors” if we allow the problem to make us better people.

1 Pet. 5:8-9: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”

Jas. 4:7: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”; Eph. 6:10-18

Prov. 24:10: “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.”

“O ye of little faith!”

- E. **8** Not only does the Bible promise we can endure faithfully, it gives us examples of many people who DID! If they did, so can we!

- (1) The prophets & Job: serve as examples of suffering.

Jas. 5:10-11: “My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

- (a) Have we suffered as much as Job? As much as the prophets? Surely not.
 - (b) Yet they remained faithful and so can we.
- (2) Paul: Paul suffered great hardship for the Lord, and asks us to share in those sufferings.

2 Tim. 1:8: “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,”

(a) If he endured without falling away, so can we!

(b) He is the example we should imitate (1 Corinthians 11:1).

(3) Jesus & faithful Old Testament characters: they are witnesses to what we can do under trying circumstances. **Hebrews 12:1-4**

(a) Our temptations are no worse than theirs; in fact, much less.

(b) All these examples show God will keep His promises to help His people endure faithfully (1 Pet. 2:19-23).

4. **9** Question #4: What blessings does God provide to help us endure?

A. God has promised to help us endure, but we must make use of the help He provides. We need to put the notion out of our mind that He is unwilling or reluctant to help us!

Psa. 46:1: “God is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble.”

Heb. 13:5-6: “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ 6 So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”

B. Let’s summarize a few avenues God uses to help us in our suffering:

(1) Scriptures: **Rom. 15:4:** “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

(a) We have already learned several ways the Scriptures comfort and strengthen us when we are suffering (1 Cor. 10:13; Jas. 1:13).

(b) They help us understand that we will have to suffer, but good can result from our suffering (Gen. 50:20).

(c) They give us assurance that we can endure as others did (Heb. 11 & 12).

(d) They give evidence of God’s wisdom, power, and faithfulness to his promises. This strengthens our faith God can and will help us endure.

(2) Prayer and worship:

Jas. 5:13: “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.”

Phil. 4:6-7: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”

(a) When Job suffered, he went to God in worship. Far too often when we suffer, we do the opposite. We neglect to worship, because we don’t feel like it (**Job 1:20:** “Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped.”).

1 Pet. 5:7: “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

(b) These passages do not promise God will remove our problem, but they do promise He will provide the strength we need to be faithful despite the problem.

(c) Jesus and Paul both prayed about problems, and God answered their prayers, but the problem was not removed.

(d) Instead, God gave them strength to endure (Matt. 26:36-46; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; **Heb. 4:16:** “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”).

(3) Other Christians: **2 Cor. 1:3-4**: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

(a) Not only can God comfort us, so can other Christians; and we should strive to comfort others. **Gal. 6:2**: “Bear one another’s burdens.”

(b) We should never allow another Christian to suffer alone, if we can help.

(c) One of the best places to get encouragement in time of trouble is the public worship assemblies (Heb. 10:24-25).

(d) However, we must come to the assemblies and express our needs.

1 Cor. 12:26: “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”

1 Thess. 5:11, 14: “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 14 ...comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak...”

(4) Hope of eternal life: **Rom. 8:16-18**: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

(a) The hope of eternal life allows us to have the proper perspective of our suffering (**2 Cor. 4:17**: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more and exceeding and eternal weight of glory,”

(b) We are heirs of God if we suffer with Jesus (**Rom. 8:17**: “if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”).

(c) The sufferings of this life can’t even compare with the future glory awaiting us.

Jas. 1:12: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Matt. 5:10-12: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 ‘Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

(d) Rejoice and be glad (**don’t gripe and complain**) when we are persecuted, because we are suffering as God’s people always have.

(e) And “great is your reward in heaven” (2 Tim. 1:11-12; 2:12: “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.”; **1 Pet. 1:3-7**; 4:13)

III. CONCLUSION: **10**

1. Faithful Christians will suffer (**2 Tim. 3:12**: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”).

2. Yet the Christian’s life is still the best, because only faithful Christians have the assurance that we can endure, that God will help us, that the result will be for our good, and that in the end we will have eternal life.

****2 Cor. 4:16-5:1:** *“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”*

Adapted from an article (“God Helps with Your Troubles: Bible Solutions for Problems, Suffering, and Hardship”) by David E. Pratte.