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Biblical Suffering

Suffering that is Undeserved

Lesson 12

SUFFERING FROM THE WORLD

2 Timothy 3:10-12

Why is it when we go out to tell the world about Christ, giving them the true, unadulterated truth about sin, judgment and salvation, we get opposition, an indifferent attitude or hostile rebellion from most people? We are immediately labeled with names which make us feel bad on the inside. We are called fanatics, narrow-minded, bigots, holy snobs, worshippers of a paper pope, and spiritual fault-finders.

The Bible tells us why we get this kind of reaction from people. We are told in Scripture that the unsaved world is a system controlled by Satan. ***“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ”*** (2 Cor. 4:4). The whole world system is against God and the person of Jesus Christ. ***“. . . the whole world is under the control of the evil one”*** (1 John 5:19).

Each Christian must face the reality and realize the world in general will oppose him because the world hates Jesus Christ. The world hates the Christian because the Christian represents Christ, and all the forces of the world and hell are opposed to Christ.

The Christian is not to have a persecution complex, but he is to expect opposition from the world towards the gospel and consider this normal Christian experience.

The world’s hatred of Christ does not mean the world does not need Christ. The Christian should be faithful in getting out the gospel, for there are multiple millions of people who are hungering for reality in their lives and only Jesus Christ can fill that void.

Suffering from the world is necessary for it proves one is really a Christian and prepares a person to enter the kingdom ***“Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said.”*** (Acts 14:22).

The early Christians had to be encouraged and exhorted in order that they would not give in to the world’s persecution. How much more do we need to be encouraged in the 21st century in light of the world’s opposition to Christ?

SUFFERING BECAUSE OF WITNESS BEARING ***“. . . persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”*** (2 Tim. 3:11-12).

In context, Paul is talking about persecution which came upon him as he was a witness to the world. This suffering comes as men are confronted with the truth of the gospel.

At Antioch some Jews and many Jewish proselytes believed in Christ. The next Sabbath the whole city turned out to hear the word of God but the unbelieving Jews became jealous, spoke evil of Paul and his teachings, argued with him and blasphemed (Acts 13:42-45). At Iconium many Jews and Gentiles believed but this caused opposition, and a plot to stone Paul was discovered and avoided. (Acts 14:1.-5). In Lystra. Paul was successful in his preaching in that some responded to Christ. but Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19).

The Apostle Paul declared that persecution of one form or another will be experienced by every Christian who lives godly. Faithful witnessing is part of true godly living.

The sooner a Christian makes up his mind to the fact he will receive persecution from the world, the better will be his witness to the world. Furthermore, the Christian will come to realize whenever the gospel is faithfully proclaimed there is opposition to it, but some will respond and be saved.

SUFFERING BECAUSE OF GOVERNMENT (1 Pet 2:12-20)

The Christian may suffer unjustly at the hands of unbelieving governments but he is still to be subject to that government in order to be a testimony to it. The Bible teaches the believer is to be subject to government as long as the government's demands do not conflict with the commands of God.

Christians are first heavenly citizens. ***“But our citizenship is in heaven”*** (Phil. 3:20). Second they are servants of God. ***“. . . live as servants of God”*** (1 Pet. 2:16). Then they are citizens of the state. ***“Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard’”*** (Acts 4:18-20).

When a government takes away the right of the Christian to read the Bible, or the right to meet publicly as a church, or the right to proclaim Christ, or force the Christian to go against God’s moral law, then the Christian must obey God rather than men and go underground. Governments can make it rough on Christians, but as long as they do not take away our basic Christian rights, then we must obey.

SUFFERING BECAUSE OF LIVING A RIGHTEOUS LIFE ***“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear: do not be frightened.’ But in our hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil”*** (1 Pet. 3:13-17).

After a person is saved, he begins to live to please Christ and takes on a whole new lifestyle. A desire to live a life of practical righteousness is often misunderstood by the non-Christian world, and the Christian suffers because of it. Why does he suffer? Because righteous living brings conviction to the unsaved, and the only way for the unsaved man to cover up his sin is to mock, ridicule, spurn, reject and sometimes kill those who bring conviction to him.

No one in this world likes to be rejected, but faithful Christians will be rejected at times. However, when the world rejects the Christian, the Christian must not reject the world. In their rejection, the unsaved world is simply acting consistently with its depravity.

SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THE CHRISTIAN’S ELECTION ***“As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”*** (John 15:19).

The world cannot endure the thought of God’s sovereignty and electing love. Nothing upsets the natural mind like the teaching of God’s sovereign right to select some for salvation while leaving the rest in their sins to suffer their just punishment.

Any Christian who believes in the Biblical doctrine of election will receive an extraordinary amount of criticism from the world and from other Christians who do not believe in election according to grace.

If the doctrine of election was hated by the natural mind in our Lord’s day, how much more will it be hated today when the world is more godless and Christendom is in such a state of apostasy?

There is nothing like the doctrine of election to make the mind stir to anger. Rejecting unbelievers and indifferent professing Christians can be moved to action when they hear about election. I have had people who were in church twenty years and never moved to do anything, get so angry with me over the doctrine of election they were shaking their fists in my face.

SUFFERING AS A SERVANT OF CHRIST ***“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”*** As servants we deserve the same treatment at the hands of the world that our Lord received. The world hated the Lord and that hate was without a cause. The Christian, as Christ’s servant, is not greater than his Lord.

If they said Christ was demon possessed and crazy, can we expect less as His servants? The unsaved world put Christ to death. Can Christians expect less?

SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THE WORLD'S IGNORANCE OF THE FATHER *"They will treat you this way because of my name for they do not know the one who sent me"* (John 15:21).

The unsaved world is not God-oriented because it is spiritually dead. The world exalts man and fulfills the purposes of the devil.

Because the world does not know the one true God, it makes up a man-made concept of God. It is not uncommon for the unsaved world to persecute Christians in the name of God, thinking they are doing humanity a great service.

"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue, in fact a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me" (John 16:1-3).

SUFFERING BECAUSE ONE BEARS THE NAME OF CHRIST *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that Name."* (1 Pet. 4:12-17). Suffering is the Christian's destiny because he bears the title of Christian. When persecution comes his way, he should not be ashamed because he knows he is suffering for Christ and His kingdom.

POINTS TO PONDER

A professing Christian who does not receive some persecution at times from the world, either social or physical, is either a backsliding Christian or is not a Christian at all.

If we are suffering for our faith, this is evidence we are doing the will of God and are in conflict with Satan and his world system. Right now Christians all over this world are suffering for the gospel. They are mocked, socially ostracized, imprisoned and some are martyred.

Christians must be sure they are suffering for the gospel of Jesus Christ and not for their political beliefs, legalistic rules or man-made concepts of Christianity.

If a Christian suffers for Christ, he should praise the Lord for this privilege. However, if he suffers at the hands of the world for his own stupidity, ignorance, super-piousness, hyper-separation, unfriendliness, laziness and so forth, he has no one to blame but himself.

When I was in seminary, I would go down to the inner city of Dallas to do street evangelism. One time I walked up to a tall, handsome man in his early thirties and said, "Are you saved, brother?" Immediately he answered, "I am not saved; you are not my brother; furthermore, get out of my way or I will bust you in the mouth!" I got out of his way. Did I suffer for Christ? In a way I did because I was witnessing for the Lord. However, I was not a very skilled witness and much of that man's reaction to me was caused by my actions and lack of skill and not the gospel, because I never really shared the gospel with him at all."

Suffering from the world is necessary from the Christian in order to teach him to trust the Lord more and more in life. It is through suffering the Christian learns to release the power of Christ:

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay (earthen vessels) to show that his all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body" (2 Cor. 4:6-11).

God has shined in the Christian's heart the light of the glory of God in Christ. The Christian has Christ contained within his earthen vessel, jars of clay (his body), and this is a great treasure. How then can this life of Christ be manifested in the life of the believer? God permits trials from the world to come into the life which teach the Christian his own inadequacy and his utter need of Jesus Christ. Persecution moves the Christian to trust Christ more. If God is going to use the Christian's earthen vessel (his body), then God must first crack the pot so the glorious life of Christ can be manifested through the Christian. Every Christian must experience being a broken vessel through suffering before He can be a shining light.