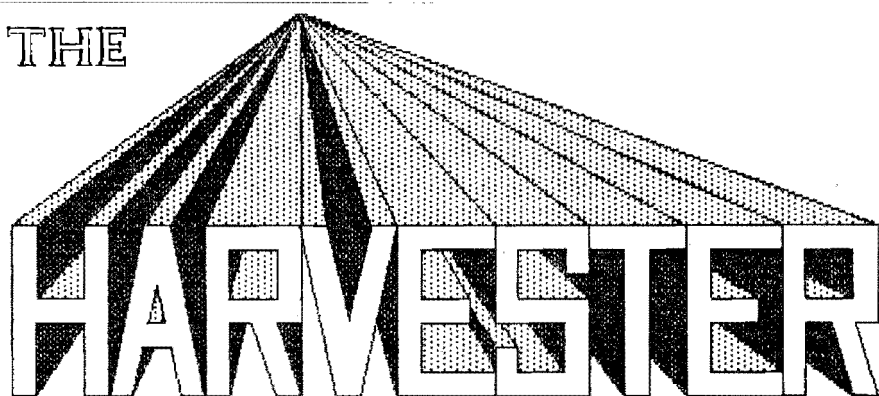


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"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest!" [Luke 10:2]

DECEMBER 1992

No. 084

WHEN A CHRISTIAN SUFFERS

Suffering is a part of every human being's life. We suffer, not because God has caused it, but because of sin. Remember when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandment? That was when they introduced sin to the human race. Unknowingly they also brought human suffering into their lives. Today much of our suffering can be traced to man's wickedness and thousands of innocent people have to bear its burden.

There are two kinds of suffering: physical and mental. Since we are human beings with physical bodies, we are subject to physical sufferings like injuries, pain, or disabilities.

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We are also subject to mental sufferings such as anxiety, fear, or concern over various matters, whether material or spiritual. In either case, a Christian can suffer just as much as the non-believer.

Oftentimes we think that once a person has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and becomes His child through baptism (John 3:5; Mark 16:16), that person becomes immune to human suffering. On the contrary, that person will probably suffer MORE because he is now a Christian! As disciples of Christ, we are "separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) and "different" (2 Pet. 2:9) from the rest of the world. We now convict the world (Eph. 5:11) and for that reason all Christians will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

How does a Christian deal with suffering? Most people would turn to a psychologist or some other kind of doctor of wisdom for advice. Others might consult noted 'experts'. But the Christian has only one place to look to receive the right answer: in God's Word. In the Bible we can learn a lot from the examples of others who suffered as godly men. Today we want to notice four items that a Christian can do when he begins to suffer.

Job was one who suffered terribly, both physically and mentally. Not only did he have "sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown" (Job 2:7), he also had to contend with the loss of all his earthly possessions including the loss of his seven sons and three daughters (Job 1). Surely Job suffered more than any of us. Yet, how did he handle it? First, he worshipped and blessed the name of God (Job 1:20-21)! No matter how difficult the circumstances, Job remembered his God. He did not forget who the Creator and Provider in his life was.

Sometimes when things are going bad for us and we have to suffer a little bit, the first thing we ask is "Why me, God?" We want to blame God for all our troubles and sometimes, when the stress is unbearable, we even come close to renouncing him! Wasn't it his wife who told Job to "curse God, and die"? When we begin to suffer, the devil whispers the same cure in our ear, "Curse God, and die". Satan wants us to hold God personally responsible for our own sufferings and thus, shift the blame elsewhere. He deceives us into thinking that if we will reject God out of our lives and turn to the devil's evil ways, then the suffering will disappear and everything will soon get better!

But as Christians, we must always remember who our God is and how wonderful he has been to us. No amount of suffering should diminish our love for him (Rom. 8:38,39). We must never cease to worship and praise the Almighty. When we do this, we put our sufferings into the proper perspective and it becomes a secondary matter.

Second, Job was blessed to have a few friends who cared about him and who came to help him. In the rest of the book, we find that Job took advantage of that opportunity and discussed his situation with those friends. Brethren, we are blessed to have fellow Christians all around us who really care. When we are suffering, we ought to take advantage of that same opportunity and share our problems. The early believers suffered much persecution in the days of the Roman emperors but they survived. How? They had ALL things common (Acts 4:32). They shared their material wealth, but they also shared their spiritual riches. They were brothers and sisters in Christ, bound in the love of the Lord and with concern for each other. They helped one another (Rom. 15:1; Gal. 6:2). If a Christian

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suffers today, he can depend on finding much comfort from the fellow believers around him.

The two outstanding times in Jesus' life when He suffered was in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary. In both instances He suffered physically and mentally. In both instances He turned to God the Father and prayed earnestly. Shouldn't that teach us something important about dealing with suffering? Prayer is usually the last thing we resort to when we suffer because we get so caught up in ourselves and in our problems. Sometimes we think nobody can "understand" or "sympathize" with our particular situation. Therefore we feel justified in keeping it 'bottled up' inside and letting it eat our 'insides' out. But when we go to God in prayer, we go through a Mediator who knows our every concern (Heb. 4:15). In time of crisis, our greatest help comes from Him who said, "*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" (Matt. 11:28) Instead of being our last hope for survival, prayer should be the very first way we deal with any type of suffering!

Other than Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul has endured more suffering than anyone else on earth (2 Cor. 11:24-27). He was even given a "*thorn in the flesh*". Undoubtedly this caused Paul much suffering because three times he prayed to God to remove this "thorn" (2 Cor.

12:8). The answer to his prayer was this: *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* At this point Paul realized there was a reason for his suffering and that made the suffering easier to deal with! As with all sufferings among God's people, there is always a divine purpose behind every one of them. There was a godly intention behind God 'allowing' Job's sufferings, wasn't there? And behind Jesus' sufferings? Paul found out the purpose behind his sufferings, too (2 Cor. 12:7).

Brethren, if we suffer because of some evil act we have committed, then we deserve it. But if we suffer because of some 'good' we have done, do not complain about it! Accept it. Glorify God (1 Pet. 4:16). Rejoice in it (1 Pet. 4:13). Why be so cheerful about it? Because out of this suffering, we can become stronger like Paul! Just as the metal is made purer through a fiery process, our faith and patience are enhanced through hardships and trials. That was what Paul found out about his *"thorn in the flesh"*. *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong?"* (2 Cor. 12:10) Our sufferings will become much easier to deal with when we learn the divine reason and potential behind every one of them!

Everybody expects evil men to suffer. It just seems like the natural thing. But when a Christian suffers, we have trouble accepting that. What can be done? If it's me, I know I must remember my Creator and I must continue to worship him. I also know that I have many Christian friends to turn to for help. Prayer should be the first thing I do because I have the perfect Advocate in Jesus Christ. And finally, I know there is a godly purpose behind my sufferings: to make me stronger!

RAY McMANUS

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Since Christ died for us, then we should no longer live for ourselves but should live for whom?
2. Name the two things that God used to destroy Sodom?
3. Peter says one's faith is more precious than what?
4. How did David say he panted after the Lord?
5. What happened when Moses struck the rock at Horeb?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. What was Hamar's son's great sin? HE
DEFILED DINAH (Gen. 34:2)
2. Where did Lazarus and his sisters live?
BETHANY (John 11:1)
3. Why should the people who believe in Moses
believe in Christ? BECAUSE MOSES WROTE OF
JESUS (John 5:46)
4. In Leviticus, what must the fire on the
altar not be allowed to do? BURN OUT (Lev.
6:12)
5. What was the name of the boy king that
Queen Athaliah failed to kill? JOASH (2 Chr.
22:11)

*There are still a considerable number of
old-fashioned women in this country,
each of whom is trying to make one
husband last a lifetime.*

SEARCHING FOR CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS

Once in a while Truth shows up in the most unexpected places. Read, for example, the following excerpt taken from a denominational preacher!

"It finally began to dawn on me that I would not find Christ in Christmas. Since Christmas means the "mass of Christ" I realized I would not find Christ in Christmas because He is not a Catholic and, therefore, does not go to mass.

Also, since it is the "mass of Christ" or "sacrifice of Christ", Jesus would not go to mass, any mass, because He was crucified once and for Him to condone the mass by His presence would indicate His "one sacrifice" was not enough for the salvation of His people . . .

After several years of searching for Christ in Christmas and not finding Him, it was obvious to me that Christ does not celebrate Christmas and neither should I. He said for us to observe those things which He commanded. While I searched for Christ in Christmas, I also searched for a commandment for us to observe Christmas. You guessed it. Both searches turned out to be fruitless. Christ does not celebrate Christmas, and He did not command His people to do so!"

Friends, there is nothing wrong with "getting together" during the holiday season. There is nothing wrong with eating good food and exchanging gifts. There is also nothing wrong with praising our Saviour in song and praying for peace on earth. But where in the Bible do we find that Jesus was born on December 25? And what scripture tells us to honor His "birthday" at all? If we must know the Truth, there is nothing wrong with the day of Dec. 25 except when we treat it as a religious "holiday". As people are starting to find out, Christ is not in "Christmas" after all!

RAY

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Place & Time</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
Dec. 4 - 6	Mt. Zion Church Crab Orchard, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
Dec. 18-20	Second Ave. Church Opelika, AL	Chris Melton (Valley, AL)
Jan. 8 - 10	Laurel Church London, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

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**HE THAT BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED
SHALL BE SAVED. (Mark 16:16)**

Editor's Note: The year of 1992 was an especially busy one for me and I was not able to write as much as I wanted. For that reason I am so grateful to all those who sent in articles. This year we published writings from: Max Gaskins, Ricky Holland, Bobby Ramsey, and Tony Whiddon. We have a few more articles in stock at this time, but if you can send one in, it would be most appreciated. This is an excellent opportunity to preach the pure gospel of Christ.

Thanks go to those who have sent in names to be added to the mailing list. The list is now over 1000 names and your interest keeps me going! Thanks also to the many contributions of money, though it really isn't necessary. Finally, this editor owes much to the Sun Hill Road congregation in Birmingham, AL for allowing us to mail under their permit, thereby cutting our mailing expenses. Like last year, these brethren have also helped me with the task of Address Corrections.

Continue to pray for this work and for our feeble efforts at spreading the Truth. We have a tremendous responsibility to "preach Christ and Him crucified" and must do so by any means authorized in the NT! If we have the Truth, we cannot be ashamed to share it.