

CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

INTRODUCTION

When you first believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior you probably experienced great joy and gratitude – because of God’s matchless grace you have become a child of God and been granted eternal life in Christ. You may also experience great moments of happiness when you are participating in a church service and singing songs of praise to God, as you forget about the worries of day-to-day life and reflect on God’s perfect character and His provision of all the good things in your life. Throughout a normal week you may also find moments of joy as you enjoy the company of family and friends, and appreciate certain things and events that occur. However, throughout your life as a born-again Christian you will find that you can never escape adversity – you will constantly run into frustrations, disappointment, injustices and various disasters, both natural and man-made, which can easily take away your happiness and leave you in a state of confusion and misery, and possibly wondering: ‘how could God let this happen to me?’ It is not unheard of for believers in Jesus Christ to experience even long-term depression and mental illness brought about by suffering because they did not know how to deal with their situation, having never learned, or rejected God’s solutions to problem solving (Deut. 28:28; James 1:8).

The purpose for this study is to help you understand that suffering comes in many forms which can be defined and categorized. As we examine the various categories of suffering you will see with greater clarity the reasons why we, as Christians, face adversity and suffering, and what the word of God teaches in order to benefit from negative circumstances in our lives.

1. The general causes for suffering in life — believers and unbelievers.

a) Loss: of health, wealth, property, money, loved ones, or anything that you value.

b) Suffering from people (“People Testing”):

Deliberate intent: gossip, ostracism, persecution, violence, crime, warfare.

General frustration: personality clashes, bureaucrats, arrogant politicians, bad drivers etc.

c) Privation — hunger, thirst, cold, heat, storm, earthquake and other natural disasters, accidents in any variety.

d) Mental suffering — from sins, pride, arrogance, jealousy, hatred, bitterness, guilt reaction, neurosis or psychosis, worry, anxiety, fear, etc. All of these fall within the

overall category of 'Self-induced Misery', suffering resulting from incorrect thinking.

- e) Suffering from rejection of authority. (Lack of Authority Orientation) This includes:
 - i. Rejection of authority in marriage. When the woman rejects the authority of a man she suffers.
Failure in adulthood because of rejection of authority in childhood.
 - ii. Being fired from a job because of rejection of authority.
 - iii. Being angry at the government and protesting leads to serious consequences.
 - iv. Criminal behavior is always punished – if law enforcement agencies or the court system does not (or is unable to) administer a just punishment then God will.

2. The Believer Only Suffers in Time.

The human race is divided into two categories by John 3:36, believers in Jesus Christ and rejecters of Jesus Christ.

“He who believes on the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him.” (John 3:36)

In eternity the unbeliever suffers the most intense of all sufferings, the lake of fire forever — Revelation 20:12-15.

There will be no suffering for the believer in eternity — Revelation 21:4.

3. Most suffering in the world can be classified as 'Self-induced Misery'

Self-induced misery results from incorrect thinking, leading to bad decisions which lead to bad consequences. A simple principle:

“Bad decisions limit future options.” (Rick Hughes, evangelist.)

Self-induced misery (SIM) is distinct from Divine Discipline in that God does not become involved in the process between your decision making and the consequences. He just lets history play out so that you suffer the natural consequences of a bad decision.

God has laws in place for every aspect of life: Scientific Laws; Mathematical Laws; Establishment Laws; Economic Laws. If these laws are disregarded, natural suffering is the result:

Examples:

- Failure to brush your teeth regularly results in toothache (disregarding biological laws)
- Adding numbers incorrectly leads to engineering failure (disregarding mathematical laws, see example below)
- Parents' failure to discipline their child leads to constant disobedience and disorder in the family (disregarding establishment laws)
- Borrowing and spending more money than you earn leads to financial disaster (disregarding economic laws)
- Driving too fast in the rain, while drunk, texting your friends, with bad brakes, bad tires and no seat-belt on leads to serious injury or death (biological, physical, and establishment laws all being disregarded. This person is also involved in sinning in many ways.)

Anecdote from the news:

Published: June 6, 2013, 12:11 pm (Associated Press)

HARTFORD, Conn. — A new, Spanish-designed submarine has a weighty problem: The vessel is more than 70 tons too heavy, and officials fear if it goes out to sea, it will not be able to surface.

And a former Spanish official says the problem can be traced to a miscalculation — someone apparently put a decimal point in the wrong place.

"It was a fatal mistake," said Rafael Bardaji, who until recently was director of the Office of Strategic Assessment at Spain's Defence Ministry."

	Suffering in Time			Suffering in Eternity
	Self-induced misery	Punishment due to involvement in sin and evil	Divine Discipline (corrective discipline)	Eternal Judgment in the Lake of Fire
Unbeliever	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Believer	Yes	No (As believers we are disciplined for correction rather than punished)	Yes	No

4. The purpose for Christian Suffering.

Note: Christian Suffering excludes self-induced misery which is not designed by God but is 'created' by the individual. Christian suffering includes only the categories and subcategories of 'Divine Discipline/Deserved Suffering' and 'Undeserved Suffering'.

5. **Outside of 'Self Induced Misery' (which applies to both the unbeliever and the believer) there are two further major categories of *Christian Suffering*.** This is a suffering experienced by the believer in Christ only:
- a) Divine Discipline / Disciplinary suffering, called **Deserved Suffering**
 - b) Suffering for blessing, called **Undeserved Suffering**

DESERVED SUFFERING

Divine Discipline is applied by God in order to motivate the believer to submit to the authority of God and His commands. (Hebrews 12:6,7; 1 Cor. 11:30)

Divine Discipline comes in three *stages*:

The overall concept of the three stages is shown together in one verse, 1 Cor. 11:27. Here Paul is warning believers that if they partake of the communion service out of fellowship (i.e. without having first 'judged themselves' by means of rebound) they will be subject to divine discipline:

"...For this cause many among you are weak [warning discipline] and sickly [intensive discipline], and many sleep [the sin unto death]." (1 Cor. 11:27)

1. Warning Discipline:

Rev. 3:20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." *

Explanation of warning discipline from *Christian Suffering*, Page 36: "That knock at the door is warning discipline. As a general rule, warning discipline is in itself less severe than the believer's self-induced misery. However, the combination of warning discipline and self-induced misery adds up to a significant shock. Because he has not yet declined into the later stages of negative volition, this believer is still sensitive to the truth. He can still profit from this degree of discipline so that God does not have to proceed to the next stage of punitive suffering. He can still hear the knocking on the door. God can catch his attention with relatively mild suffering."

*(Note: Rev. 3:20 is often used to evangelize the unbelievers, however the book of Revelation is a message to believers, not the unbeliever (Rev. 1:4). Also, misunderstanding of this verse is used by ignorant evangelists who try to get the unbeliever to 'invite Jesus into your heart/life' as part of a process to obtain salvation. However, it is blasphemous to suggest we could invite Jesus into our sinful hearts or lives (Jer.17:9). On the contrary, it is Jesus who invites *us* to have an eternal relationship with *Him* by means of His Gospel Message.)

2. Intensive Discipline:

If warning discipline doesn't work (i.e. the believer does not respond by correcting his bad decisions) the discipline will be intensified

When a believer continually rejects God's commandments he becomes dull to truth. God must intensify the discipline in order to bring the believer to a point of objectivity, where the believer understands clearly that God will not continue to put up with (allow) his blasphemous behavior. Even though the suffering becomes unbearable for the unbeliever, God continues to provide logistical grace, keeping the believer alive as a sign to him that God still has a plan and purpose for his life. At this point all the believer needs to do is Rebound and begin applying doctrine in his life to get back into the plan of God for his life.

3. Dying Discipline / The sin unto death

If the believer does not respond to Intensive Discipline it is likely he will face **Dying Discipline** — a horrible death. (1 John 5:16)

The longer a believer remains habitually rebellious to God and out of fellowship, the more scar tissue he develops in his soul (called 'hardness of heart' Heb. 4:7; 6:6) and the more difficult it becomes for him to make a positive decision. Unless he rebounds and submits to God he will face the sin unto death.

In some cases God will keep the reversionistic believer alive for an extended time before they die the sin unto death, even knowing that this believer will never recover from reversionism. In this case God will use the negative believer as a 'testing tool' for other believers, and an example of how NOT to live the Christian life.

Even if a believer dies the Sin unto Death, his salvation is assured under the doctrine of Eternal Security. He will surely go to be face to face with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8) and experience much happiness, however he will not receive the rewards and extra blessings which are granted only to the winner believer (1 Cor. 3:14,15; Eph. 1:3).

THE LAW OF VOLITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

In eternity past decreed that man, just like the angels would have free-will. God also decreed that man, just as the angels, would be responsible for their decisions. The law of volitional responsibility recognizes that a persons decisions have natural and logical consequences. Until a believer reaches spiritual maturity many of his decisions will disagree with the will and plan of God, and therefore the law of volitional responsibility ensures that suffering results.

It is the parents responsibility to teach their children from a young age that bad decisions result in negative consequences. In this way children can develop "Authority Orientation", that they must be in obedience to those who have legitimate authority over them throughout their life time. From the time

of birth we are born into a structure of authority which God has established in order that there can be stability in marriage, family, and society.

Divine Institution	Authority (as ordained by God)	Genuine Humility (through developing obedience to authority)	Enforced Humility (consequences of disobedience to authority)
The Individual	Volition	Self-discipline (1 Cor. 9:24-27) Genuine Humility (James 4:10; Luk. 22:42)	Self-induced misery. Divine discipline (1 Cor. 11:30; Heb. 12:6, 7)
Marriage	Husband	Through spiritual growth the woman develops authority orientation to the husband. Also, a wife will respond more easily to a spiritually mature (grace-oriented) husband.	The husband must allow room for disciplinary action from God (Rom. 12:19). Physical punishment by the husband is not permissible in any form.
Family	Parents	Children must be evangelized and taught doctrine at an early age by the parents. This provides opportunity for the children to learn and obey mandates like Colossians 3:20 “...obey thy parents in all things for this is pleasing to the Lord.”	Corporal punishment is demanded from parents to discipline disobedient children. (Prov. 13:24; 22:15)
The National Entity	Government	Under divine establishment all people are expected to be moral (Ex. 20:12-17) and ‘honor the king’ (1 Pet. 2:17). The believer can understand that God establishes leaders, rebellion against the leaders is therefore	Justice is meted out to criminals via divinely established law enforcement (Police agencies, Judiciary, prisons, executions) (Rom. 13:3-6; Gen. 9:6)

		rebellion against God (John 19:10; Rom. 13:1,2)	
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- Other examples of authority in life are: the teacher in the classroom; the supervisor at work; the commanding officer in the military; the coach of a sports team; etc.
- In all institutions the person with the highest authority is the one who is responsible for his organization and the individuals under his authority.
- Because the volition is the 'decision-maker' of an individual's decisions, the volition therefore holds authority and responsibility over the individual.
- God ordains (establishes) people into positions based on his sovereign will. Therefore all those given a position of authority over others will be held accountable to God for their use/misuse of power.

If a child has grown up learning to accept authority, as taught through punitive discipline (enforced humility) and by applying principles of humility as taught by the Word of God (genuine humility) he will naturally be more obedient to the will of God when he becomes a believer, thus avoiding the suffering that comes from Self-induced Misery and Divine Discipline. The Lord will also promote this believer in His plan:

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up." (James 4:10)

Major categories of deserved [disciplinary] suffering:

- a) Suffering because of carnality — Psalm 38; for reversionism — Ecclesiastes.

The word carnality literally means 'fleshly'. Paul and other writers uses the term 'sarx/flesh' because the sin nature resides in the DNA of the physical body (Rom. 6:19-7:25). Carnality therefore is the state of being out of fellowship with God because of unconfessed sin in life, and therefore being under the control of the sin nature. The sin nature controls the life of the believer who "grieves" and "quenches" the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1Th 5:19)

- b) **Suffering because of involvement in the cosmic system.**

The Cosmic System is Satan's modus operandi for deceiving humanity in order that they deny the existence of God; reject God's grace message of salvation, and (for those who become Christians) to reject the spiritual life for the believer in Christ.

Without the defense of doctrine in his soul the believer will continue to be influenced by the Cosmic System in one or more of the following areas (in many cases the overall concepts overlap from one category to another):

- i. **Moral degeneracy** - religious reversionism and self-righteous arrogance)

- ii. **Immoral degeneracy** - antinomianism, rebellion against legitimate authority and the laws of divine establishment; licentious behavior)
- iii. **Superstitious (irrational) beliefs and practices** – e.g. astrology; seeking guidance from clairvoyants; witchcraft; ancestor worship; numerology; ‘lucky’ practices; fatalism etc.
- iv. **False religions and values systems** - including monotheistic and polytheistic religions; ‘new-age’ movement; secular philosophies; cults and demon worship; idolatry; narcissism.
- v. **Liberalism** – e.g. feminism; homosexuality and same-sex marriage; anti-nationalism (promotion of open borders); pacifism; anti-smacking policies
- vi. **Addiction** – both physical and emotional: including alcohol; drugs; social media/ cell phone addiction; pornography and illicit sex; video games. These things are all destructive to the proper functioning of the soul within God’s plan but are often justified as normal behavior by those promoting a liberal-progressive agenda.
- vii. **Paganism** - the worship of creation rather than the creator e.g. the belief in “mother-nature”; placing animal rights above human rights.
- viii. **Atheism** - The rejection of the existence of God, fuelled by pseudo-sciences such as the Big Bang theory and evolution;
- ix. **Activism** – campaigning to change laws and societal behaviour, often using manipulation, deceit and violence to promote their personal agenda : “Social Justice Warriors” ; campaigning for ‘rights’ and ‘equality’ (in God’s plan there are no ‘rights’ and no ‘equality’, just privileges and opportunity provided in grace); Green movements; peace movements; animal-rights; etc. etc.
- x. **Anti-Semitism** – Antagonism toward the Jews.
- xi. **Materialism** – Attaching undue importance to the value of wealth and property. The lust for material things (greed) can be driven by sins such as inferiority complex, approbation lust, power lust, a need for security (fear of privation), a lack of trust in God’s perfect provision.

(Please see ‘The Book of James, A commentary’ by Max Klein (Chapter One: The eight stages of reversionism.)

- c) Suffering by association – associating with people involved in sin and evil. This is a principle found in Psalm 1:1; 1 Corinthians 12:26; Romans 14:7, illustrated by 1 Samuel 21.

By contrast God expects us to associate with growing and mature believers, those who will have a positive influence and be a source of blessing to us (Prov. 13:20). Keep in mind that while God never commands you to have friends, you can develop the wisdom to discern who you should associate with, and who you should avoid.

The best friend you could ever have is the Lord Jesus Christ, but you can only develop your friendship with Christ by developing the same thinking and standards of Christ. Therefore, if a Christian grows spiritually to the point where he has developed the ‘mind of Christ’ (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5) and therefore living the Christian life according to all the commands of scripture, the Lord will at that point consider that person as a friend:

“You are my friends if you do what I command.” (John 15:14)

- d) Suffering caused by having the wrong priorities — again two illustrations: Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

Solomon had everything. Despite being granted much wisdom (2 Chron. 1:10-12), he still used his volition to reject God's plan and follow the lust patterns of his sin nature. During the course of his life he had the utmost in riches, power, academic knowledge, illicit sex, entertainment, and approbation. However, the book of Ecclesiastes reveals from the writings of Solomon himself that these things were unable to make him happy (Eccl. 1:13-14; 12:8). In his conclusion he writes:

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, and keep His commandments. For this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it is good, or whether evil." (Eccl. 12:13,14).

The psalmist also reminds us that the inculcation of Bible doctrine is more important than the accumulation of great wealth:

"The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold." (Ps. 119:72 cf. Ps. 19:7-10)

Jesus uses hyperbole to show the importance of correct priorities:

"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36).

You will never be happy in this world until you understand this world cannot make you happy. Only God can do this and he does it through His Word which you must appropriate into your souls.

- e) Suffering from a guilt complex. A guilt complex arises when one continues to judge oneself for one's failures (sins), even after rebound. This is additional misery bought upon self for failure to understand that God forgives you for your sins in grace when you rebound. Just as God has forgiven you, so too you must forgive yourself in order that guilt does not become a hindrance to your spiritual advance.
- f) — 1 Timothy 1:5,6,19,20; 3:9; 4:1,2; Titus 1:15.
- g) Suffering through national discipline (Collective discipline). Five cycles — Leviticus 26. Illustrations — Isaiah 33, 59; book of Hosea. Principle: No nation is destroyed from external forces (i.e. invasion by foreign powers) without its people first becoming destroyed from within.

Internal weakening of a nation always occurs due to a rejection of truth. The strength of a gentile (non-client) nation comes from adherence to the laws of divine establishment. A client nation to God must not only abide by the laws of divine establishment but also uphold the responsibilities of a client nation, or face being destroyed as a national entity.

Hos 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge [doctrine], I will also reject you, that you will not be a priest to me [loss of client nation status]:

seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children.

Hos 8:7 For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up. Israel [the client nation] is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein *is* no pleasure.

- h) Suffering from rejecting the principle of right man, right woman. This is the type of suffering that can continue for the rest of one's life because he has married the wrong person. Depending on the believer's attitude it can result in suffering for blessing or suffering for cursing: doctrine or carnality and reversionism. Ezekiel 16,23; Jeremiah 12:7; 15:7-12, 17,18.
- i) Suffering from failure to isolate sin [chain sinning] — Hebrews 12:15.
- j) Suffering from temporary loss of grace norms [when you get into legalism] — Jeremiah 2:24, 25.

UNDESERVED SUFFERING

All Christian Suffering is designed for blessing:

Rom 5:3,4 ... but we glory in tribulations [afflictions/persecution/adversity] also: knowing that tribulation produces endurance [hypermartyria means literally to 'remain under pressure' (without stress or any mental attitude sin): also: fortitude/courage]; and endurance *produces* evidence [dokimeia, "proven character" or "demonstrated integrity."] and evidence *produces* absolute confidence [elpis : absolute confidence of blessings in time and eternity].

"Beloved ones, stop being shocked by the maximum pressures among you, face to face with testing coming to you for your benefit, as though some strange thing had happened unto you." (1Pe 4:12-13)

Exegesis of 1 Peter 4:12-13:

We have the words "fiery trials" to describe a maximum pressure situation. It is a catastrophe which would shock and completely take by surprise an unbeliever or the unprepared believer.

Some Bible translations add the words "which is to try you" — this phrase does not occur. What we have literally from the Greek is: "face to face with testing, coming to you for your benefit" — προς pros [face to face with] plus the accusative; "testing" (πειρασμός / *peirasmos*). Depending on the context this word can also mean 'temptation' but here it means testing with the purpose of determining good or evil, testing to determine what you have in your soul. Do you have the doctrine, the humility and the discipline to overcome your test, or not?

"coming" — a present middle participle of *ginomai*. The present tense means during the course of your Christian experience (Christian life) you go from one set of circumstances to another. The middle voice:

the believer is benefited by fiery trials when he has Bible doctrine, when he is not in reversionism, when he is not in emotional revolt and when there is no scar tissue on the soul.

“for your benefit” is the dative plural of the personal pronoun *su* / “you”. The dative case indicates “for your benefit”.

Corrected translation: “Beloved ones, stop being shocked by the maximum pressures among you, face to face with testing coming to you for your benefit, as though some strange thing had happened unto you.”

The principle of undeserved suffering is found in Rom. 8:28 [Expanded commentary to follow later].

Major categories of suffering for blessing [undeserved suffering]:

- a) Suffering to learn self-discipline — Hebrews 5:8. Our Lord Jesus Christ put Himself under discipline — Philippians 2:8.
- b) Suffering to demonstrate the sufficiency of grace — 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.
- c) Suffering to eliminate the occupational hazard of pride and arrogance, and to relate it to the sufficiency of grace. Also known as ‘providential preventative suffering.’ 2 Corinthians 11:24-33; 12:1-10.
- d) Suffering to encourage even more intensive inculcation and application of doctrine, to enter into the supergrace status — James 1:1-6; 1 Pet. 1:6-7
- e) Suffering as a means of witnessing for Christ — 2 Corinthians chapters 3 & 4.
- f) Suffering to glorify God in the angelic conflict. - Job; Luke 15:20,21; 1 Peter 1:12; 3:17. This is a noble and honorable type of pressure.