



March 8, 2024

The Reason for Suffering

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

CGM regularly receives prayer requests from scattered brethren here in the U.S. and around the world. I forward many of them to the brethren via email, share them in my weekly prayer requests sent with our announcement bulletin that we send out each Friday evening, and post them to our website.

It seems that every week that goes by we hear of more of our brothers and sisters who are having health trials. Cancer, heart disease, infections, joint pain, accidents, and other factors have brought pain and health trials to so many members. People write in with comments and questions about their health challenges and healing. I recall clearly a specific e-mail. A man was in his senior years and had recently lost his wife. They were church goers their entire lives and even attended special healing services to have prayers offered on her behalf. He said they both had faith in God's healing, yet his wife died.

I empathize with him regarding the illness and subsequent death of his wife. I recall that a good friend of mine in the ministry had lost his wife in 2002 from liver cancer. We had prayed many times for her healing yet God allowed her life to be taken by the cancer. She remained faithful to God's ways to the end. My friend accepted God's decision not to heal her and that God will ultimately heal her at the resurrection of the dead and she will be brought back to life and will be given perfect health with a spirit body that will not be subject to illness and death. It was a very difficult time, and was for many years since her death.

Not too many years ago, I my wife and I also spent many hours with a young 13 year old girl that eventually also died of a rare form of Leukemia. Each time I would anoint her, she would get slightly better, but often only for a week or so. It was a roller coaster ride for months I will never forget. I struggled with why God would allow her to suffer, but understood His will.

Does the fact that God does not answer our prayers for healing now for ourselves or others mean that we did not have faith? Does it mean that God does not care and that there is no use in praying for healing? Wrestling with these thoughts and circumstances can be difficult. Part of the means of understanding these unanswered prayers and the pain and trials that God's saints endure is coming to grips with *the reason for suffering*.

Jesus came to this earth as a human being for the purpose of being subject to suffering and death. (Philippians 2:8) He suffered for us. Look at what Peter wrote, "*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps*" (1 Peter 2:21). He is a high priest who knows what it is to suffer and be subject to human temptations and yet He remained faithful. (Hebrews 2:9, 17-18; 4:15) We are to carefully examine and then follow His example.

Christ's death paid for our sins so we can be reconciled to God (Colossians 1:21-22). So why do people continue to suffer? Although Jesus took on Himself the death penalty we earn because of our sins (Romans 6:23; Hebrews 10:10, 12), that does not mean that all the immediate consequences of sin are removed. Sin brings enormous suffering of body and mind. Indeed, the two are closely related. A negative mental or emotional state can cause certain types of physical illness. Past emotional and mental trauma can resurrect time after time exacerbating our illnesses.

One of the reasons Christ came into the world was to deal with our physical and emotional afflictions. His personal suffering makes our physical and spiritual healing possible. Before His death by crucifixion, He was cruelly beaten. He took

on Himself even the physical consequences of our sins so we, through Him, can be healed (1 Peter 2:24). Also, because of His sacrifice, the time will come when all suffering can be abolished forever (Revelation 21:4).

Jesus proclaimed, "*The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD*" (Luke 4:18-19, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2).

The Father sent Jesus to fulfill this Scripture (Luke 4:20-21), written hundreds of years before by the prophet Isaiah. This was in addition to His primary mission of giving His life for the sins of humanity. The four Gospel accounts all attest to Christ's exemplary life in relieving the sufferings of His fellow human beings.

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them" (Matthew 4:23-24).

Christ commissioned His specially trained disciples and future apostles and ministers for their healing. "*Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick*" (Luke 9:1-2; compare Mark 6:13; Luke 10:1-2, 9).

Healing has always been one of God's blessings for mankind. (Psalms 103:2-3) When we are ill, we are instructed first to pray ourselves (if it is possible) and then to ask the elders of the Church to pray for us, anointing us with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14). We are then told that "*the prayer of faith shall save the sick*" (verse 15). The oil used for the anointing is symbolic of the healing power of

God's Spirit. We also send out an anointed cloth when we cannot anoint someone personally. Neither the oil, nor the cloth has any special miraculous affect, it is the symbolism of being anointed, and *God is the one who heals*. Neither is the elder anything special, as all credit goes to God according to His will with an answer.

It is the Lord who will decide the means and the timing to raise the person up and provide healing. We cannot demand this of God. Yet some still do. We ask it and in faith wait for God's choice of timing and circumstances. But healing is one of the benefits God offers to those who exhibit real faith and put their trust in Him. Jesus healed a blind man and stated, "*According to your faith let it be to you.*" (Matthew 9:29) God is the judge concerning our faith and the circumstances. His ultimate will is paramount, even though we may not understand it.

The apostle Paul sought deliverance from some kind of infirmity called a "*thorn in the flesh.*" Paul asked three times to have this affliction lifted. (2 Corinthians 12:7-8) The Lord's answer was, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" (v. 9) God is all wise and He wants us to learn to obey Him and live by His commandments even when we have trials that continue for some time and perhaps never end in this physical life.

God calls on us to endure through trials and troubles such as health problems. We are reminded of the endurance of Job (Job 5:11). Paul compares our challenges with hardship and trials to that of a soldier. "*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" (2 Timothy 2:3)

The apostle Paul made a sobering statement, "*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 14:22) It's even more profound when you examine the circumstances leading up to his statement. Paul and Barnabas had to flee from Iconium when unbelieving Jews stirred up the citizens and they attempted to abuse and stone them. (Acts 14:1-5) They fled to Lystra and after preaching there, they encountered a man who was a life-long cripple. (v.6-8) Let's read what took place next. "*This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud*

voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked." (v.9-10) After this the populace tried to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas as gods and were scarcely restrained. Their mood quickly changed to anger and violence. "Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead." (v.19) The disciples gathered around Paul and he rose up and he and Barnabas continued preaching in Derbe. They then returned Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith" (v.20-22)

Interesting that God healed the lame man but did not shield Paul from the violence of the mob. He did rescue him from death so Paul could continue to preach and encourage the disciples. Paul recounts these and other trials in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33. Paul recounts these things to validate his sincere and sacrificial care and concern for the Corinthians.

God can use us as His witnesses and as examples of enduring faith as we faithfully accept and endure our trials including those that affect our health. May God strengthen you all and bless you for your continuing faith and trust in Him and His mercy, and for our ultimate healing and transformation.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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