

## Affliction Comes From God

One of the most difficult teachings in the Bible is that affliction comes from the hand of God. We can see this taught in the psalms:

**Psalm 102:8-10:** “Mine enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping. Because of thine indignation and thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.”

Why had enemies risen up against the psalmist? Why was he weeping? It's because God had cast him down.

One famous example of this is Job. He was a wealthy, prosperous, and upright man. Nothing could harm him because God protected him:

**Job 1:9-11:** “Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.”

The only reason the devil was able to kill Job's children and take away all of his possessions was because God permitted it:

**Job 1:12:** “And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon

himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord."

It's true that the devil wanted to destroy Job very badly, but as long as God protected him there was nothing he could do. Satan had to wait until he obtained God's permission. Only then could he reach out his hand and destroy Job's life.

Job himself recognized that his affliction came from God:

**Job 2:9-10:** "Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

As Job pointed out, there are times when the hand of God gives us great blessings. There are also times when God brings terrible affliction and suffering into our life. In fact, He may bring evil things upon entire cities:

**Nehemiah 13:18:** "Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath."

It's impossible for evil things to happen apart from the will of God. The Lord is quite clear about this. Although God Himself never does anything evil and is not wicked in any way (Psalm 92:15), affliction and suffering can only happen if God permits it:

**Amos 3:6:** "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?"

In this context the “evil” that has been done refers to some type of terrible disaster. God is in control of both the good things that happen, and the evil things as well. He is sovereign over all.

Yet we know that God is good (Psalm 73:1). He is gracious (Psalm 116:5), loving (1 John 4:8), kind (Psalm 42:8), and merciful (Joel 2:13). In spite of that, affliction still comes into our life even though God could stop it from happening! How is this possible? How could a kind and loving God allow His people to suffer?

When the disciples asked Jesus about this, He told them that it was unavoidable and had to happen:

**Matthew 18:7:** “Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”

One point that must be made is that although there are times when God removes His protection from people and allows them to be afflicted, He will severely judge those who carried out that affliction. For example, God used Judas to betray Jesus to His death so that He could pay the penalty that we deserved for our sins – but Judas himself died (Matthew 27:5) and went into perdition (John 17:12).

There are many reasons why affliction is necessary. There are times when God uses it to accomplish His will, such as the way He used the death of Jesus to save us from our sins. There truly was no other way for us to be saved. Since God is just, He *must* punish sin. That means the only way our sins can be forgiven is if an innocent person is punished on our behalf. In order for us to be saved, Jesus (who never sinned) had to die in our place. Our salvation *required* His affliction. If He hadn't been afflicted and killed then we wouldn't have been saved. That means God used the affliction of His Son to bring salvation to the world:

**Isaiah 53:5:** “But he was wounded for our

transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

There are also times when God uses one group of wicked people to punish another group of wicked people. For example, when Habakkuk complained to God about all the evil things that wicked people were doing, God told him that He was raising up the Chaldeans to carry out His wrath:

**Habakkuk 1:6-10:** "For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not their's. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it."

One of the biggest reasons God brings affliction into our life is to test us. That's why Job suffered the loss of his children, his wealth, and his health: God was testing him to see if he would curse God if he lost his prosperity. Since the nature of our faith is extremely important to God, He tests it:

**1 Peter 1:7:** "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth,

though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:”

Peter described our faith as being much more precious than gold, and it certainly is. This is because without faith it's *impossible* to please God:

**Hebrews 11:6:** “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

If God tests us and we turn away from Him then that means our faith was worthless. We can only be saved from God's wrath by a faith that endures suffering and trials! One of the key ways we can tell if we have that kind of faith *is by suffering*. It's a painful and dreadful thing to suffer trials in this life, but it's far worse to be tormented for all of eternity in the lake of fire. Our faith is literally the difference between Heaven and Hell, which is why it's so much more precious than gold.

God uses affliction for more than testing our faith. He also uses suffering to chastise us so that we turn away from our sin:

**Hebrews 12:5-8:** “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”

God chastens those He loves in order to turn them away from their sin. As the author of Hebrews pointed out, those who aren't chastised when they sin don't belong to God at all (which means they're not saved). It's painful to suffer affliction, but in the sight of God it's much worse to continue living a life of sin. Since God loves us He chastises us to turn us away from our sin.

God also uses affliction to perfect us. The chastening of God moves us to repent, which yields the fruit of righteousness:

**Hebrews 12:11:** "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."

Affliction builds character qualities that God wants to see in our life:

**Romans 5:3-5:** "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope; And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

God uses affliction to build patience, experience, and hope in our life. Those are critical qualities that we need to have. It's painful to suffer affliction, but that may be the road we have to take in order to become the person God wants us to be.

The Lord also uses affliction to grow the church. There have been a great many people saved through the example of the martyrs. The testimony of those who chose to die for Jesus instead of forsake Him is exceptionally powerful, and God has used it in mighty ways.

It may seem unfair for God to afflict us when He has the

power to stop it from happening. Job was *very* upset when God afflicted him. He complained that it was unfair for God to make him suffer, especially since he hadn't done anything to deserve it:

**Job 10:7-9:** "Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand. Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me. Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?"

God has the power to prevent bad things from happening to us, and yet there are times when He deliberately draws back His hand so that terrible things happen (as He did in the life of Job). God has infinite power and wisdom, and yet there are times when He deliberately and knowingly causes us terrible pain (including death). How is that fair?

Jesus Himself addressed this. He pointed out that we're not greater than Him:

**John 15:20:** "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

When the Lord Jesus Christ was in this world He suffered terribly. He was betrayed (Matthew 26:45), beaten (John 19:1), and tortured to death (Matthew 27:50). He was so poor that He didn't even have a place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). He came unto His own people and they refused to receive Him (1 John 1:11). Jesus was despised and rejected. This is how the book of Isaiah described it:

**Isaiah 53:3-9:** "He is despised and rejected of

men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth."

The God who sometimes afflicts us to carry out His will was Himself afflicted. The God who sometimes allows His saints to be martyred was Himself put to death. He knows what it's like to suffer because He suffered. He understands rejection because He was rejected.

Jesus experienced all of these horrible things – and He's infinitely greater than we are. Since He's greater than us, we can't claim that we deserve to live a more comfortable life than He did. We can't say that it's fine for Jesus to suffer, but we're greater than Him and deserve a happier and more prosperous life than the one He lived. Since Jesus suffered, it's only fair for us to suffer as well.

The apostles also suffered. For example, the apostle Paul suffered tremendously:

**2 Corinthians 11:24-27:** “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”

The apostles are far greater than we are – and they suffered terribly. All but one of them were martyred. We can't claim that we're greater than them and therefore deserve a more comfortable life. If it was the will of God for Jesus and His apostles to suffer and die (which it was), then we shouldn't feel that it's unfair if that's God's will for us as well.

God has promised us that the things we suffer aren't meaningless. The Lord doesn't willingly afflict or grieve us:

**Lamentations 3:33:** “For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”

The reason we are afflicted is because it is necessary to carry out the good and perfect will of God. The death of His saints is very precious to Him:

**Psalm 116:15:** “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”

Jesus even said that those who persecute His saints are

persecuting Him:

**Acts 9:5:** “And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

God has promised us that one day our suffering will end. The day is coming when all of the righteous will live forever in a perfect world, where we will never be afflicted again:

**Revelation 21:1-5:** “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”

It all comes down to faith. Are we willing to believe in God and let Him have His way with our life, even if that involves terrible pain and suffering? Are we willing to continue to believe that God is loving, kind, and good, even if we must suffer and die?

This is the difference between Heaven and Hell. It's of

infinite importance:

**2 Timothy 2:12:** “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:”

If we accept affliction and suffer, while continuing to believe in God and holding on to our faith, then we will be saved. We will go on to inherit everlasting life, and will live in a world where we'll never have to suffer again. However, if our affliction causes us to turn away from God and reject Him then we will be cast into the lake of fire and tormented day and night for all of eternity (Revelation 20:15). Those are the only options that are on the table.

It is hard. It is painful – and our eternal future depends on it. The very good news is that God is always with us, even during our suffering:

**Isaiah 41:10:** “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

**Psalm 46:1:** “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

**Matthew 28:18-20:** “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

The fact that God is the one who afflicts us is actually comforting, because it means God is able to help us through that suffering and deliver us out of it. If affliction happened outside the will of God, and He couldn't stop it, then we would be in a terrible place indeed. In that case it would be useless to pray to God for deliverance because He would be incapable of helping! Since God has power over our suffering, that means He can also provide the strength we need to get through it.