

The Difficulty and Triumph of Continued Affliction

I have written elsewhere on the Biblical doctrine of Christian suffering, a doctrine that has a large place in apostolic teaching but a rather small space for many modern Christians. However, here I am more concerned with the practical application of this teaching to believers who are forced to confront continued suffering, and with answering others who consider that such circumstances are not right. In other words, does continued suffering indicate that a believer has significant problems?

Suffering is a Biblical norm

First we have to understand that the Christian life contains a measure of tribulation by necessity. This measure varies from person to person, but all partake of suffering. This is a normal part of life and thus is no surprise; however true believers will suffer more than most.

The idea that the Christian life is one of total happiness, peace, health, prosperity and joy is a fantasy sold to gullible people. While all these things are part of the Gospel, the realm that we live in today is not the sphere where these items are poured out upon us in fulness. Such fulness is reserved for the time of consummation - eternity, where they are part and parcel of unhindered united fellowship with God on a renewed earth.

But what about abundant life now (Jn 10:10)? This is a reference to the superior quality of (eternal life) that Jesus gives to those who believe in him. The fulness of eternal life is experienced in the new world where God and men fellowship in union, where heaven and earth are united. Grace is glory begun (as Matthew Henry said) but the fulness of this life cannot be experienced on this earth where we have spiritual and corporeal enemies, physical weaknesses, temptations and an old nature constantly warring against us. Jesus never promised that we would be protected from the normal tribulations of life.

It is wickedly cruel to suggest to a sick believer that they ought to have faith for healing, or to say that a bereaved Christian should be rejoicing or that someone surrounded by a multitude of troubles should be full of peace. Believers can know joy, but they can know sadness; they can be healthy but they may get sick; they can be at peace but it is not a sin to know some anxiety.

To prove this let's look at the following examples.

Healing

Despite the presence of men whom God used to heal when it suited his Gospel purposes, apostles and their workers were often sick: Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-27); Timothy (1 Tim 5:23, notice Timothy was often ill); Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20); Paul (2 Cor 12:5, 7, 10). Indeed, there is not one record in the New Testament of a Christian being healed from sickness, yet there are several records of Gospel workers being so ill that they were prevented from their evangelistic endeavours.

Anxiety

Paul experienced deep anxiety and worry (2 Cor 1:8), he could be at a complete loss (2 Cor 4:8, the meaning of 'perplexed'), and knew 'trouble on every side' (2 Cor 7:5). In defending his apostleship credentials, in just one passage, he lists his troubles as: five whippings, three beatings with rods, one stoning, three shipwrecks, danger from drowning, dangers from bandits, persecution from his own people and others, problems in wildernesses,

weariness, toil, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness and anxiety for the churches every day (2 Cor 11:24-29). How many modern Christians would look at this list and say, 'Paul, you should be having an abundant life, this ministry of yours is cursed and cannot be from God, you had better repent.'

Worry

The psalmist and king David knew trouble of soul (Ps 6:3) as did Jesus (Jn 11:33, 12:27; Matt 14:33). Jesus was even so distressed he was 'sorrowful unto death' (Matt 14:34, 26:38). Jesus' suffering as a man was so intense that he prayed with tears to his Father repeatedly for help (Heb 5:7) - yet this suffering produced a maturity or fulness of completion in his fitness for ministry, and this is the key to suffering.

Persecution and tribulation

Furthermore, we were warned at the outset of our discipleship that the Christian life was going to be one of tribulation, it is not an 'if' but a 'when' -

For when tribulation or persecution arises. (Matt 13:21)

They will deliver you up to tribulation. (Matt 24:9)

In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer. (Jn 16:33)

[God] comforts us in all our tribulation. (2 Cor 1:4)

We told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. (1 Thess 3:4)

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (2 Tim 3:12)

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation. (Rev 1:9)

Those modern preachers who insist that believers should be always happy, healthy, prosperous, victorious and never anxious or depressed are telling poor people to be stronger than Paul, all his apostolic workers and even Jesus in the days of his flesh. It is the height of wickedness to tell a crippled person that they are in a wheelchair because their faith is not strong enough, or to tell a bereaved-grieving husband that they should be rejoicing.

The point is that God uses suffering to make us strong.

Tribulation is given to us to make us steadfast, we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Rm 5:3-4). Without our problems we would not learn how to access grace which then build us up and develops enduring character. The problem is not the tribulation but how we approach it.

If Jesus needed to suffer as a man under God's plan, into order to fulfil his ministry (Heb 2:10), then it's absolutely certain that we will too. There is no doubt that suffering is vital for the training of believers in ministry:

- All God's children will know suffering and this is necessary to prove our inheritance and gain glory (Rm 8:17).
- Afflictions enable us to enter in to the problems of others and be more effective ministers of consolation (2 Cor 1:5-7).
- Being united with Christ in his death and resurrection also entails sharing in his sufferings (Phil 3:10).
- The work of the Gospel incorporates suffering (2 Tim 1:8).
- Trials (especially persecution) are fellowshiping in the sufferings of Christ (1 Pt 4:13).
- Sufferings are required of believers the world over (1 Pt 5:9).

Furthermore, the best testimony of faithfulness to God is patience during unjust suffering:
When you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this /is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. (1 Pt 2:20-21).

Jesus is our master, and as he was unjustly persecuted, we as his followers will also know persecution. The supreme testimony to God is the cross of Christ, where God's pure spotless Son was falsely accused and illegally executed. Jesus' submission to harsh treatment and death is an example to us of the attitude we should display in this world (see Phil 2).

For this reason God pledges grace and power in order that we should bear our troubles with patience:

... strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy. (Col 1: 11)

The fulness of God's power is given to believers - not for everyone to raise the dead or perform miracles, but simply to be patient in affliction. The testimony of God is best seen where Christians return good for evil, are patient in affliction or have joy in the midst of suffering.

Christian history is replete with examples of men, women and children who suffered terribly for their faith but who also knew the grace of God so that their tribulations astonished those who witnessed them. Some preached the Gospel from the stake whilst they were burning, others prayed for the onlookers and forgave their tormentors. These people willingly gave their lives, sometimes for simply refusing to celebrate a mass. Today some evangelicals participate in the blasphemous mass as part of inter-faith services without even a blush.

Trying to avoid suffering actually leads to more difficult problems

- **TEACHERS ARE FORCED INTO DECEPTION BY INSISTING THAT BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT SUFFER, OR THAT THEY SHOULD BE PERFECTLY HEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS.** The Bible clearly teaches that suffering is not only normal, but that genuine believers, and especially teachers, will suffer various trials. The walk of the Christian is even called 'the tribulation' while the kingdom is a 'kingdom of patience' (Rev 1:9).
- **IT IS A WRONG ESCHATOLOGY TO SEEK THE BLESSINGS OF THE FUTURE WORLD WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN GRANTED TO THE PRESENT EVIL AGE.** Future blessings include: eradication of sin (2 Tim 4:8), destruction of death (Rev 20:14, 21:4), no curse, (Rev 22:3) complete unity with God in material/spiritual terms (Rev 21:3), no tears at all (Rev 21:4; Isa 25:8), no sickness at all (Rev 22:2).
- **BY INSISTING THAT BELIEVERS SHOULD ALWAYS REJOICE, TEACHERS CASTIGATE SOULS BURDENED BY GOD.** Tears are given by God (Ps 80:5) and great saints even drenched their bed with them (Ps 6:6) or continued day and night in tears (Ps 42:3). Tears and sadness are still normal under the New Covenant, **For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears (2 Cor 2:4), being mindful of your [Timothy's] tears (2 Tim 1:4).**
- **JESUS AND THE APOSTLES WARNED THAT SUFFERING WAS PART OF THE CURRENT EXPRESSION OF THE KINGDOM; TO AVOID THIS IS TO DISOBEDIENTLY SEEK A DIFFERENT PATH TO THAT WHICH GOD HAS DECREED.**
- **IF GOD HAS BEEN SOUGHT FOR RELIEF, SUFFERING SHOULD BE ACCEPTED AND GRACE RECEIVED TO COPE. THE MAIN TESTIMONY IS IN LONGSUFFERING (COL 1:11). And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Cor 12:9)** It is normal to seek relief from suffering, as Jesus and Paul both did, but when God's answer is that the

suffering will continue it becomes sin to keep demanding release from it. If God gives continued suffering, he also gives power and grace for longsuffering.

What about exhortations to have faith?

Throughout the scriptures God encourages, or even commands us to have faith, to rejoice, to not fear, to not worry and to trust for grace. Surely we should never be anxious and should always be joyful? Some examples of these follow:

- And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. (Lk 12:29)
- Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Phil 4:6)
- For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (2 Tim 1:7)
- Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, rejoice. (Phil 4:4)

Firstly, all such passages need to be expounded in their proper context. Sometimes the words used need qualification. For instance, in 2 Tim 1:7 the word 'fear' means 'timidity' or 'cowardice' not fear. Paul is urging Timothy not to fail to use his pastoral gifts through timidity. Indeed, in another letter Paul tells believers to **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling** (Phil 2:12), and the word here is *phobos*, the root of our word 'phobia'. There is definitely a place for the right sort of fear in the Christian life. We cannot say that the Christian walk is without fear.

Secondly, if both the Lord himself and the apostle Paul expressed a measure of distress in suffering, then there is a time when anxiety can be experienced without sin.

Thirdly, there is a difference between a habitual disposition of character and the short sharp fear that drives us to seek God's and his grace. We must not have an anxious mind, a worrying spirit or habitual fear. Paranoia, irrational fear, is not part of the Christian life; but a fear that leads to prayer and faith is normal.

Rejoicing ought to figure as a large part of the Christian life, yet we are not robots. Only heartless, cold and unemotional creatures would be joyful when it is time for tears - such as in bereavement. We are to weep with those who weep (Rm 12:15), we are to empathise with those who are suffering, even to tears (Jn 11:35). As the world grows worse in deception and pain, even our rejoicing is not to be obvious in its expression (1 Cor 7:30). Check with a concordance the number of times the Biblical people of God wept, and were encouraged by God for doing so. So important are Christian tears that God keeps them all in a bottle (Ps 56:8, i.e. remembers their pain).

The idea that believers are never fearful, never sad, never prone to worry, never ill, always rejoicing, always confident and always prosperous is not a Biblical picture but a triumphant caricature. To peddle such a lie is the height of deception. Surely Paul was the greatest Christian disciple of all, and yet the Biblical record shows that he knew: anxiety, weakness, trembling, dishonour, distress, betrayal, poverty, fear, pain, hunger, thirst, oppression, perplexity, persecution and finally execution.¹

Exposition

There is so much on this subject in the scriptures that we could write a whole book citing examples to strengthen our case; however, we will look at just one passage from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament to show that suffering is the common lot of believers.

¹ 1 Cor 2:3, 4:10ff; 2 Cor 4:7-12, 7:5, 11:29, 12:5-10.

Ps 119

25 My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word.

28 My soul melts from heaviness; Strengthen me according to Your word.

51 The proud have me in great derision, *Yet* I do not turn aside from Your law.

61 The cords of the wicked have bound me, *But* I have not forgotten Your law.

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, *But* now I keep Your word.

69 The proud have forged a lie against me, *But* I will keep Your precepts with *my* whole heart.

71 *It is* good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.

83 For I have become like a wineskin in smoke, *Yet* I do not forget Your statutes.

84 How many *are* the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?

87 They almost made an end of me on earth, *But* I did not forsake Your precepts.

95 The wicked wait for me to destroy me, *But* I will consider Your testimonies.

107 I am afflicted very much; Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word.

110 The wicked have laid a snare for me, *Yet* I have not strayed from Your precepts.

146 I cry out to You; Save me, and I will keep Your testimonies.

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

Here we see that the Psalmist (often presumed to be David but we cannot be certain) not only suffered but knew deep anxiety and extreme tribulation. Notice the following: weariness of soul, heaviness of soul, attacks from proud men, binding by wicked men, falling astray, enduring lies from evil people, affliction (sickness) so great that he withered like a wineskin, persecution, attacks on his life and snares laid for him. But during all these note that at every single turn he looks to the word of God for comfort, help and answers. At no point does he desert his faith in God but depends upon God's salvation and keeps God's law. The suffering may have been intended by the enemy to turn him aside from God words, but it actually achieves the opposite: *I do not forget Your statutes ... I have not strayed from Your precepts ... I do not forget Your commandments.*

David would not have been the great man of God that he was, the man after God's own heart, if he had not known this tribulation.

Rm 8

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope;

21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

23 Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of* God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Notice:

- Paul presumes that his readers will know suffering (v18).
- The present suffering is incomparable to the great glory we will later experience, and this hope should drive us to faith (v18).
- All creation, including humanity, is subjected to suffering. People outside God's covenant undergo this suffering in futility, but Christians experience it in faith, grace and patience (v19-21).
- The struggle in the present time often leads to believers groaning and not knowing how to pray (v23). In this situation we are helped by the Holy Spirit (v26).
- We are never alone, even when we have lost hope and can't pray, because the Spirit intercedes for us (v27).
- Everything that happens, even our deepest suffering, is predestined by God to make us the kind of people he wants us to be (v28-29).
- Being conformed to the image of Jesus means that we will know suffering even as he did. If Jesus' suffering was necessary for him, how much more necessary for us (v29)?
- If God is for us, who can be against us (v31)?

The chastisement of God

We need to consider the nature of Biblical discipline in this connection. Does suffering ever constitute the application of God's displeasure towards a believer?

The clearest NT passage on this is Heb 12:5-11

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.'

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Clearly God disciplines believers in a way that can be 'painful', likened to a 'scourging'. Like a father who loves his son but applies the rod when necessary, God our Father sometimes has to deal with us harshly. In extreme cases this can involve sickness and even lead to death.²

However, God always brings clarity of judgment with chastisement; the reason for his displeasure is always plain and well known. The Holy Spirit acts like a ray of light when

² 2 Sam 12:14; 1 Cor 11:30 ('sleep' here is euphemism for death). See also Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

speaking into our lives to draw our attention to a failure or sin.³ We know when we are rebelling; those who are growing in holiness have a heightened conscience, not a weaker one. If one is under God's judgment for any reason of a failure in one's walk, then suffering and problems are understood as a last resort - God has spoken and has been ignored.

However, if one's problems have no known cause and if one is not aware of any specific sin or failure, it is fairly certain that the suffering is in God's plan for a different reason. Timothy was accused of no sin causing his frequent ailments; Epaphroditus was not told that his illness near to death was the result of wickedness.⁴ Paul's manifold problems and hard life was part of God's pleasure for him, not his judgment.

God is not a harsh judge and a hard taskmaster to his people, rather he is a loving heavenly Father. It is not a Biblical concept that for every minor mistake we make there is an equal hardship in life. Indeed, one could make a strong case, even from the Old Testament, that God overflows in grace to his servants - even when they make serious mistakes. Chastisement that leads to significant suffering is exceptional and for good reasons.

Historical examples of fruitful lives that were surrounded by suffering

Ezekiel Rogers

The son of a famous preacher, Rogers began his own ministry in Yorkshire in 1616 and was responsible for the conversion of many people. For 20 years people streamed to hear his preaching of the Gospel. After Archbishop Laud came to power, evangelicals were persecuted and Rogers emigrated to New England rather than lose freedom of worship. The whole village of Rowley decided to follow him and they left in 1638 for Massachusetts. Founding a town they called 'Rowley' they encountered all sorts of problems: disease, Indian attacks and hunger, but they were always encouraged by Rogers. Soon people flocked to hear him preach; his preaching was so powerful that people thought he could read their minds.

Rogers was frequently ill and his preaching exhausted him, he was later asthmatic. Not trusting doctors, he learned medicine and was soon able to give good medical advice to his people. With a reputation as a peacemaker, he was often sought to reconcile differences in New England.

Roger's sufferings continued; his beloved wife Joan died, followed shortly by all his children. He remarried but his new wife died shortly afterwards, along with his new-born child. On the night after his third marriage, his house caught fire and destroyed everything from England. Then he fell from a horse and dislocated his right arm, paralysing it, so he learned to write with his left hand. Yet in all these he knew the consolations of God. As he approached death at 70 years old, he wrote:

I am hastening home, and grow very asthmatical and short-breathed. O, good brother, I thank God I am near home, and you too are not far. O the weight of glory that is ready waiting for us, God's poor exiles! We will sit next to the martyrs and confessors. O, the embraces wherewith Christ will embrace us! Cheer up your spirits in the thoughts thereof, and let us be zealous for our God and for Christ and make a conclusion. Now the Lord bring us well through our poor pilgrimage.

Missionaries

The stories of missionaries who endured through terrible suffering and adversity are legion, books after book has been written elucidating the lives of these godly people who

³ 1 Sam 13:13; 2 Sam 12:7-9; 1 Kg 18:18; Acts 5:3.

⁴ 1 Tim 5:23; Phil 2:25-27.

sacrificed themselves for others. For example:

- DAVID BRAINERD - died at the early age of 29 and this was no doubt brought on by his labours amongst the Native American Indians. Despite suffering from TB he rode many miles on horseback in the pouring rain, often sleeping out in the cold and wet.
- WILLIAM CAREY - had a lifelong struggle serving India with the Gospel, often being destitute. His wife went mad, he saw no converts for the first seven years, his presses and ten editions of his Bible translations burned down and he later lost his house to floods. Despite all this he eventually knew great success and affected many people.

Times of persecution

Church history is full of these, indeed, it is unlikely that there has never been a time of persecution for the church somewhere in the world, and this is certainly true today where believers are being tortured, imprisoned and killed in many countries, even countries in alliance with the UK. The awful brutality of the Roman persecutions of the church is well known, but English believers have known persecution many times.

In the persecution that arose in Scotland after the accession of Charles II to the throne of England, evangelical meetings were prohibited and secret meetings called 'Conventicles'; flourished. For attending these the young and old were beaten by soldiers, imprisoned, tortured, branded with irons and killed. Under Bloody Mary in England hundreds of men, women and even children were burned at the stake or drowned for refusing to partake in Roman Catholic services. Poor blind Joan Waste, only 22 years old, was one such victim.

It will not help to list the gory tortures and deaths of godly men and women in these times, but Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* can be read for folk to be encouraged by the way these spiritual people conducted themselves. The point is that throughout church history there have been many persecutions and for centuries it has been almost normative that genuine believers would face some sort of persecution. Few ages of the church have known relative peace and quiet until recent times. The church has often been under trial by fire.

The giants of the Reformation

The Reformation was the greatest move of God on the earth since Pentecost. It was when the Lord took men out of the dark ages of false religion, opened the door to Biblical faith and the caused the publication of scripture in vernacular languages. Yet it would not have occurred without the courage and sacrificial labours of a few great men; but most of these men knew much suffering. The condition of Martin Luther's health is well known and has been the subject of many articles. He suffered from: constipation, haemorrhoids, stone, catarrh, depression and tinnitus; this was in addition to the anxiety of persecution, death threats, the problems of heretics, revolutions, political problems, matters of state and the development of the Lutheran churches. Despite all these, Luther often felt elated, encouraged, and at times felt he was surrounded by choirs of angels.

If Luther was the iron fist that broke with Rome, John Calvin was the great doctrinal systematiser that put evangelical theology together again. Yet Calvin also experienced persistent health problems. These were worsened by his intense labours; indeed, he often only allowed himself 15 minutes of relaxation a day. Even as he lay slowly dying he continued to dictate to secretaries to continue his written works.

Neither of these men knew prolonged prosperity, wealth, health or comfort; in fact they were actually quite hard on themselves, even when they could have profited from their preaching. Both had known exile, fleeing for their lives at least once. There was danger from assassins as well as a multitude of problems with the developing churches and the

new Christian states, where rulers sought their wisdom on all sorts of matters. There is not space here to explain all their difficulties - but their work was huge and life consuming. It is a testament to their courage and labour that the Reformation succeeded.

We could continue in this vein for page after page. It is almost axiomatic that a great work of God involves men and women committed to work through great suffering. Luther considered that suffering was vital for genuine ministry. In this he agreed with the apostle Paul who said, 'we told you before when we were with you that we (apostles and their workers) would suffer tribulation' (1 Tim 3:4). If a work of God requires perseverance, then this perseverance can only be developed through tribulation (Rm 5:3), thus genuine workers for the Lord will need to go through tribulations. But there is little use in extending these illustrations, we have mentioned enough to make the point - godly people suffer. Some very godly people suffer greatly. Prosperity is no measure of spiritual success, while adversity is no measure of God's displeasure.

The prime Biblical example

Although familiar to all, we cannot discuss righteous suffering without mentioning the patriarch Job. I will simply mention a few salient points about Job's suffering as an overview.

- God brings *evil* upon Job. This is specifically stated in Job 42:11 and the word means what it says; the Hebrew word is even sometimes translated as 'wicked', 'trouble' or 'mischief'.
- Job's suffering is part of a hidden testimony that is registered in heaven and misunderstood on earth (Job 1:8-12, 2:3-6).
- Job was faced with a 'majority' of 'Christian' friends who signally:
 - Failed Job.
 - Gave false counsel.
 - Did not understand God and his workings in men.
 - Were disciplined by God: see Job 42:7-8 where God said that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar had, **not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.**

From this we see that Christians can go through severe trials that, on the outside, seem to be 'evil'; they can be so continually harassed as to almost appear to be cursed. Despite this they are undergoing affliction to further the divine testimony in a way that few understand. In this situation it is easy for brethren to give wrong counsel. If a person has consistently sought to obey God, has lived righteously and then undergoes severe, continual trials we should be very careful to view this as judgment unless there is a specific reason to do so.

From this we should be very wary of suggesting that the more godly we are the more blessed, peaceful and prosperous we will be; the claims of many extreme Charismatics and Word of Faith proponents is unbiblical. Finally to those in such suffering, do not give up; never fail to realise and celebrate that God loves you, indeed he loves you so much that he has trusted this trial to you and not someone else. The vindication of the suffering and fulfilment of the testimony will be in heaven when all will acknowledge the work of God in you, and then the blessing will be complete and permanent.

No one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation (1 Thess 3:3-4)