

## Chapter 10 - The Christian's Response to Tribulations

### 10.1 Introduction

We have been looking for biblical guidance as we strive to walk worthy of our calling. We do this because we want to please God in the way we live. In our lives as Christians, we often encounter trials, testing and tribulation. In this chapter, we seek biblical guidance regarding how we should respond to the question of suffering, and what our response to suffering should be.

### 10.2 Christians will have trials, testing and tribulation in this world

The Bible is clear that Christians, who are in the world but not of the world, should expect trials, testing, persecution, suffering and tribulation in this world.

**Matt 5:10,11** *“Blessed are those who are **persecuted** for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when **they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.**”*

**Jn 16:33** *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you will have tribulation**; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

**Phil 1:29** *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake*

**1 Pet 4:12** *Beloved, do not think it strange **concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you**;*

### 10.3 Some Trials and Testing are Sent by God for our Good

When we are “new” Christians, having just been saved, we are “babes in Christ”.

**1 Cor 3:1f** *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.*

We need to grow spiritually to become mature Christians. The process of maturing spiritually is referred to as sanctification. When applied to the whole body of believers, it is sometimes referred to as the edifying (building up) of the body of Christ, as illustrated by the following passage:

**Eph 4:11-16** *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the **edifying of the body of Christ**, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

God guides the process by means of which babes in Christ grow spiritually to become mature Christians – the sanctification process. He does this by “pruning” us so that we become more fruitful (Jn 15:2). He chips away at the “living stones” until they are perfect for their unique positions in His spiritual temple (1 Pet 2:5). (As this latter verse states, we “**are being built up**” – it is an ongoing process.) The process of “pruning” and having bits chipped off is painful but necessary. They are evidence of the Father’s love for His children, and His disciplining is always for our long-term benefit, as the following passages illustrate:-

**Deut 8:5,6** *You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God **chastens** you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to **walk in His ways** and to fear Him.*

**Prov 3:11,12** *My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; **for whom the Lord loves He corrects**, just as a father the son in whom he delights.*

**Jn 15:2** *... every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*

**Heb 12:7-10** *If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 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? 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.*

**Rev 3:19** *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

The Bible often refers to our trials and testing as a refining process. As in the refining of silver and gold, the unwanted dross in our lives is removed so that we can emerge pure and without stain.

- Job 23:10** *But He knows the way that I take; when He has **tested** me, I shall come forth as gold.*
- Ps 66:10** *For You, O God, have **tested** us; You have **refined** us as silver is refined.*
- Isa 48:10** *Behold, I have **refined** you, but not as silver; I have **tested** you in the furnace of **affliction**.*
- Mal 3:3** *He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will **purify** the sons of Levi, and **purge** them as gold and silver.*
- 1 Pet 1:6,7** *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, **if need be**, you have been grieved by various **trials**, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold which perishes, though it is **tested** by fire, may be found to praise, honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

#### **10.4 How Should Christians Respond to Tribulation?**

In this world, Christians will undergo trials, testing and tribulation. Sometimes God chastens us to correct, refine and purify us. Sometimes we are persecuted because we are Christians. Sometimes bad things happen to us simply because we are in an evil world. How should Christians respond to such tribulation?

As we have seen from the passages of Scripture quoted above, when God chastens us we should endure it and not despise it, realizing that it is for our long-term benefit. And Jesus said that we are “blessed” when we are persecuted for His sake. We need to examine Rom 5:1-5 to get a fuller answer to the question of how Christians should respond to tribulation.

In this passage, Paul is listing the benefits of salvation:-

- Rom 5:1-2** *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

Then Paul makes a remarkable statement about tribulations, adding them to his list of the benefits of salvation:

- Rom 5:3-5** *And not only that, but we also **glory in tribulations**, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

**Glory in tribulations!** Paul is not the only NT writer to make this astonishing point.

**Jas 1:2-4** *My brethren, count it **all joy** when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

**Matt 5:11,12** ***Blessed** are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. **Rejoice and be exceedingly glad**, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

**Acts 5:40-42** *And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and **beaten** them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing** that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

**1 Pet 4:12-13** *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the **fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but **rejoice** to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*

Does this mean that when we are chastised we should immediately ignore the pain and burst forth into praise of God? No, the pain is necessary; but it is the long-term benefits which enable us to praise God.

**Heb 12:11** *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. (See also **1 Pet 1:6,7** quoted on p10.3)*

To make sense of all of this, we need to return to Rom 5:1-5. Again, note in Rom 5:1,2 that the benefits of salvation enable us to *rejoice in hope of the glory of God*. Remember that biblical *hope* should always be interpreted as *great confidence*. So our salvation results in us having great confidence of our heavenly destination.

But then come the tribulations in our lives (Rom 5:3), and a process gets underway. Tribulation produces perseverance. (For *produces*, the KJ has *worketh*, which seems to emphasize that time and process are involved.) Tribulations *worketh* perseverance; perseverance *worketh* character; and character *worketh* hope.

So we start with *hope in the glory of God*, but then God gets busy with His pruning and chipping, and we now have **hope**; but this differs from the hope with which we started!

Paul emphasizes this by using litotes. Litotes is a literary device for emphasizing a positive by using the negation of its opposite. So when Paul says, “*Now hope does not disappoint*”, he is stressing through litotes that **this** hope is absolutely thrilling – if we had great confidence before, we now have absolutely overwhelming confidence.

And the passage goes on to tell us the reason for this new *hope*, and the reason why we can *glory in tribulation*. As usual, it has nothing to do with our ability; it is all God’s doing:-

**Rom 5:5** ... *because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

... *the love of God* ... not our love towards God, but God’s love for us!

... *poured out* ... the verb indicates that God’s love is gushing forth abundantly; not a trickle but a torrent!

... *in our hearts* ... not *into* our hearts, but *in* our hearts. As Christians, we know that God already indwells us. He is already *in* our hearts, and that’s where His love is gushing forth.

**1 Jn 4:16** *And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*

This happens *by the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit makes us abundantly certain and assured of the love of God.

**Rom 8:14-17** *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we **suffer** with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

Note that this outpouring of God’s love in times of tribulation is not something we deduce intellectually through reason; rather, it is the direct and immediate assurance given by the Holy Spirit, who overwhelms us with the love of God. It is poured out in our hearts, and is the highest form of assurance.

Tribulations enable us to mature as Christians, and are a real test of our faith (1 Pet 1:6,7). Ps 119:71 tells me that it is **good for me that I have been afflicted**, that I may learn Your statutes. And it is love of God, poured out in our hearts, that enables us to respond to tribulation with joy, giving praise and glory to God.

In conclusion, meditate on the following passages of Scripture, and their guidance to us regarding how we should respond as Christians to tribulation in our lives:

**Rom 5:1-5** *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

**Rom 8:28** *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

**Rom 8:35,37** *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*

Note that it is ***in all these things*** – in the midst of them – in tribulation, in distress, in persecution, in famine, in nakedness, in peril or sword – that *we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*.

As we strive to walk worthy of our calling, we will face times of tribulation or distress or persecution. May we do so as ***more than conquerors through Him who loved us***.

### Devotional Exercise

- Are you going through ***tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*** Then focus on ***the love of God has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit***.
- And know that ***in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us***.
- Mature as a Christian to be more than a conqueror!