

X. GOD'S USES OF SUFFERING IN BELIEVERS' LIVES

If God is working all things together for the good of molding believers into the likeness of Christ, how does suffering help to accomplish this purpose? What uses does God make of suffering in the lives of His redeemed children?

When we examine the scriptural materials, we discover at least eleven such categories of use.

A. The Uses to which God Puts Suffering

1. God sometimes uses physical calamities to call our attention to our sins and to motivate us toward repentance.

II Chronicles 7:13-14 – "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Sometimes the unleashing of destructive forces is seen as an expression of God's judgment of man's sinfulness. This is not always due to individual and personal sins, as we see in the case of Job, but at times such calamities call our attention to the way in which our original sin brought a curse on the created world, and remind us of God's holy hatred of sin, as well as His mercy and longsuffering toward sinners. In such cases, God's goodness can be used to move us in the direction of repentance.

2. God sometimes permits suffering in order to bring us to an end of ourselves and our resources, so that we will cry out to Him for His deliverance and realize our utter dependence on Him.

Psalms 107:17-19 – "Fools, because of their rebellious way, and because of their iniquities, were afflicted. Their soul abhorred all kinds of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He saved them out of their distresses."

Psalms 107:23-30 – "Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business on great waters, they have seen the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths. Their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble; and He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet; so He guided them to their desired haven."