

XI. APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO HUMAN SUFFERING

A. How Should Believers Respond to Various Sources, Forms, and Degrees of Suffering?

Although it is important to know about the uses God makes of suffering in believers' lives, and to know that suffering remains an evil even when God makes good use of it, it is crucial to learn how to respond to suffering appropriately, not only in our own lives, but in the lives of others.

Let us take up the various aspects of suffering that we have discussed, and ask how believers should respond to each one.

1. How should believers respond to suffering due to their involvement in the Fall and its terrible results?

They should accept responsibility for their involvement in the Fall and its effects, both on human beings and on the created universe. They should not try to excuse themselves by blaming original sin and/or its results on Adam or on Satan or on God. Adam tried to blame his sin on the woman whom God had given him (notice how he indirectly blamed his sin on God). And Eve tried to blame her sin in the Serpent, Satan. And ever since, human beings have been trying to blame sin on someone else!

It is difficult for us in the United States, living in a society and a culture in which individualism is stressed, to grasp the concept of a solidarity of the whole human race, and of a shared responsibility for the Fall. But we must try.

Adam was the true and perfect representative of the entire human race. When Adam sinned, we all sinned. When Adam rejected God and His Word, we all did this. When Adam became guilty, we all became guilty. When Adam became corrupt, we all became corrupt. When Adam died spiritually, we all died spiritually. And when Adam incurred physical death and its accompaniments, we all incurred the same terrible effects! The proof of this is that all human beings come into this life spiritually dead, morally corrupt, and physically dying! And this is true, not in view of what they are going to do, but in view of what they have already done in the person of their representative, Adam.

2. How should believers respond to suffering due to the effects of original sin?

They should acknowledge that God would be just if he allowed all of sin's effects to fall on them; and they should thank God every day for graciously preventing or alleviating some of the results of sin. Let us be grateful for God's grace rather than critical or resentful of God's