

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Topical Bulletin, September 2017

A question often heard is: *If God is love, why is there so much suffering in the world?* In fact, even Christians have been known to say things like: *Since Jesus has paid for all of my sins, why do I still have to suffer? Why am I afflicted in this world?* Perhaps you've had the same or similar thoughts or someone close to you has voiced such things. In this month's ILC Topical Bulletin we will see what God's Word has to say about suffering and afflictions in the case of unbelievers and in the case of Christians.

The root cause of ALL suffering and affliction is SIN, because before sin entered the world all was absolutely perfect, for "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was very good.*" (Gen. 1:31 KJV) So, at the creation there was no suffering, no affliction, and no death. However, man by his own choice gave way to the devil's temptation, disobeyed God, and thereby brought sin into the world, for the Holy Bible informs us: "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12 KJV) And, regarding the devil Holy Writ reveals: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44 KJV) Thus, death, temporal and eternal death, and therefore all suffering and afflictions, are the results of SIN which is man's fault and not God's fault. Furthermore, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8 KJV) Hence, we all deserve suffering, afflictions, and death because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23 KJV) Indeed, God is not only love, God is also perfectly just and therefore rightly demands: "Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God *am* holy." (Lev. 19:2 KJV) Accordingly, the high and holy God has every right to punish sin, and so: "the wages of sin *is* death" (Rom. 6:23a KJV), temporal and eternal death, for it is written, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18:20 KJV)

Nevertheless, God in His great mercy and love sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ to save us, for "the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (Rom. 6:23b; John 3:16-18 KJV) Thus, we ALL actually deserve suffering, afflictions, and temporal and eternal death; and yet, God in His grace and mercy has given us a Savior so that we need never suffer eternal death in hell, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:44 KJV) So, take it to heart that people bring eternal suffering and death upon themselves by their own stubborn unbelief, their rejection of God's only begotten Son Jesus Christ, for Holy Writ declares: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John 3:36 KJV) Hence, it is vital that all people sincerely repent of their sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, for "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 KJV) Therefore, it is plain to see from Holy Scripture that eternal suffering, afflictions, and death can be avoided since our loving God and Father who is also just and holy has graciously given us a Savior, Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled all righteousness.

Yes, Jesus Christ has kept all of God's Law perfectly for us and has paid the price in full for our lack of keeping it, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with

corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:18-21 KJV) Accordingly, never-ending sufferings in hell can be and are completely avoided only by having heart-deep faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord.

Concerning life in this world, unbelievers are punished now with suffering and affliction because of their sins, and later they will be punished in hell if they do not repent and come to faith in Christ while they are yet in this world, for "I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the LORD: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." (Jer. 21:14; Isa. 26:21 KJV)

Nevertheless, suffering and afflictions are part of life in this world for Christians too, and the believer's sufferings are sometimes greater than the unbelievers which causes us Christians to wonder why; yes, it's as Asaph the psalmist writes: "as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For *there are* no bands in their death: but their strength *is* firm. They *are* not in trouble *as other* men; neither are they plagued like *other* men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them *as* a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly *concerning* oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full *cup* are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these *are* the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase *in* riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart *in* vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend *against* the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it *was* too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they *brought* into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when *one* awaketh; *so*, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish *was* I, and ignorant: I was *as* a beast before thee. Nevertheless I *am* continually with thee: thou hast holden *me* by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me *to* glory. (Psalm 73:2-24 KJV)

Oh beloved, we Christians have the forgiveness of sins but we still dwell in sinful flesh and we sin daily in thoughts, words, and deeds. Therefore, our heavenly Father chastens us by permitting affliction and suffering to come upon us so that we daily repent of our sins and cling more firmly to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith as our personal Savior and Lord in order that we remain delivered from eternal doom in hell. The Holy Bible clearly states the case: "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. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness. 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." (Heb. 12:5-11 KJV) So, let's remember that God lovingly chastens us in order that we remain in the faith, grow in the faith, and depart this life in the faith and arrive safely in heaven.

The reality for Christians in this world is: "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." (2 Tim. 3:12-13 KJV) Indeed, and we Christians also need to keep the following words of Holy Scripture in mind: "this *is* thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory *is it*, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this *is* acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." (1 Pet. 2:19-25 KJV)

Luther rightly remarks: "The rule is: If you would have the fire, you must also have the smoke. If you would be a Christian and a child of God, you must also bear what in consequence happens to you. In a word, a Christian just because he is a Christian, is subjected to the dear, holy cross so that he must suffer either at the hands of men or from the devil himself, who plagues and terrifies him with tribulation, persecution, poverty, and sickness, or within, in the heart, with his poisonous darts. The cross is the Christian's sign and watchword in the holy, precious, noble, and blessed calling which is taking him to heaven. To this calling we must do justice, and we must accept as good whatever it brings." (What Luther Says, #680) Luther is correct, because in Acts 14:22 we read "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Jesus Christ our Savior says: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:34-39 KJV) Note well that the Christian's cross of suffering often includes strained family relations.

May each and every one of us Christians take the following words of our Lord to His disciples to heart: "If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Matt. 16:24-27 KJV) Our works give evidence of sincere faith in the Savior or a lack of such faith. Therefore, let us patiently bear the sufferings and afflictions which come upon us that we may hold more firmly to Jesus as our Rescuer from eternal ruin; and, let us not forget to faithfully and fervently pray to the Lord for ourselves and for one another.

In Jesus,
Pastor Mark Latsch, ILC president

God's blessings!