

**Q. In your article, "Why the Suffering?" ([http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wohg\\_008.htm](http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wohg_008.htm)), you say that the root cause of human suffering is sin. Okay. But, if God has forgiven our sins, why do Christians continue to suffer?**

A. It is true that the root cause of human suffering is sin—our own sins and the sins of others. We live in a fallen world. It is also true that God has forgiven the sins of those who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ, as their Savior. God is certainly not punishing the sins of those who trust in His Son because Jesus bore all of the punishment in our stead. But, even though we believers are not of this world, we still live in this fallen world and suffer the effects of it: disease, crime, wars, natural disasters, dishonesty, and so forth, and, finally, physical death.

Yet, through all of this, we have these promises: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.... For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:28, 38-39—unless otherwise noted, *World English Bible* WEB used throughout); "No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

But there is a reason God leaves us in this world—a reason beyond His wanting us to preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15) and be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). This reason applied even to Jesus Christ: "He, in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and petitions with strong crying and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (Hebrews 5:7-8). Even the Son of God learned obedience by the things He suffered while in the flesh.

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The Greek word for "obedience" is *hupakoē*, which very literally means "a hearing under." It is submission or obedience. Philippians 2:8 says this of Jesus: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, yes, the death of the cross." This might seem odd: how do we become obedient to death?

The account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest gives us the information we need to understand:

He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and severely troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me." He went forward a little, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire." He came to the disciples, and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What, couldn't you watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray, that you don't enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cup can't pass away from me unless I drink it, your desire be done." He came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. He left them again, went away, and prayed a third time, saying the same words. Then he came to his disciples, and said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let's be going. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand."

Matthew 26:37-46

This is a description of a battle—the flesh against the spirit. What Jesus said to Peter was also true of Jesus: The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. Thus, while Jesus prayed that, if it were possible, He would like to have the cup (His crucifixion and death) pass from him, His spirit always caused Him to end the prayer by wanting that God's will or desire be done. He was learning obedience to God. Philippians 2:8 might sound like Jesus was obeying death, as if death were personified. But what it means is that Jesus was obedient to God, willing to die to obey what God had determined. In the Garden, Jesus was whipping His flesh into line, so to speak, making it obedient. This is the ultimate show of faith: "Not my will, but yours, be done" (see Luke 22:42).

This is why Christians suffer trials—to learn obedience. Certainly, we can, as Jesus did, ask God to deliver us from the trial. As 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, there will always be a way of escape. It may be an obviously miraculous, quick escape. Or God may will that we have a trial of endurance that brings us closer to Him and that causes us to mature in our thinking. It may even be the trial that ends our life. All of these are escapes, but while the trials continue, they cause us to learn obedience to God's will—"Not my will, but yours, be done"—but they will not cause us to fail in enduring to the end. That is, they will not, as Romans 8:38-39 explains, separate us from the love of God. They will work out for our good (Romans 8:28).

Peter writes to Christians "who by the power of God are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been put to grief in various trials, that the proof of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes even though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ—whom not having known you love; in whom, though now you don't see him, yet believing, you rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory—receiving the result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:5-9).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we live in a world full of sorrows. But let us, as did our Lord before us, use them to learn obedience to the will of God, trusting in Him to see us through to the end. "May the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you" (1 Peter 5:10).

*The Spirit himself testifies 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 with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us.*

*Romans 8:16-18*

**Peter Ditzel**