

# **ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL**

## **THE PURPOSE OF HARDSHIP**

Dear Brethren,

Calvary greetings to you in the most wonderful name of our Lord and Master. I have this note for you at this period of the year and with the hope that the wisdom in it would help you to let-go the memory of every trouble even in your ministry that the year has brought into your way, so that you may learn the lessons and be better able to prepare to carry-on most perfectly, "the God given assignment in your life" this coming year.

In the book of Job we are told that man who is "born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble." All of us have experience that life seems short, and most of us have had plenty of troubles. This world is filled with heartaches and sufferings of all kinds. No one is immune from troubles. The rich suffers as well as the poor. The sinner suffers and so does the saint. Wherever one turns, he finds suffering, sorrow and heartaches. There is suffering from sickness, suffering from infirmities of advancing age, suffering from disease, suffering from poverty, suffering from mental anguish and on and on one could go mentioning types of hardship that people suffers.

We don't have much trouble understanding why wicked people suffer. We know that "the way of the transgressor is hard," and that "whatever a man sows, that shall be also reap." But we find a different problem when we see godly and perhaps servants of God as one may like to say, passing through trials and troubles. Why do some righteous people have to wear sackcloth on their hearts almost continually? This is the big question. There are some things we will never understand until we are safe in the arms of Jesus, but the Bible does give some light on this vexing question, "Why do righteous suffer?" Note the four Scriptural reasons why a righteous person may be called upon to suffer.

### **SUFFERING GIVES JESUS CHRIST CHANCE TO GET GLORY**

The gospel according to John, Chapter 9 tells about a man who was born blind, and how Jesus had opened his eyes. The disciples said to Jesus, "Who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" (John 9:2).

Like many of us, they thought the affliction was brought on because of the sins of his forebears. But Jesus answered the question: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the Lord did not mean that this man never committed any sin, nor that his parents were perfect, but Jesus clearly stated that this particular suffering was not a punishment for his own sin, but rather that the affliction came upon him to give God a chance to reveal His power and glory in his life. It was for the same reason that Lazarus was permitted to die. Jesus said in John 11:14 (when He had first heard that Lazarus was sick), "This sickness is not unto death, but that God might be glorified thereby."

When Lazarus was sick, his sisters called for Jesus, but Jesus did a strange thing. Instead of coming immediately, He waited until Lazarus was dead and had been buried four days. When Jesus finally arrived, He merely spoke the word and Lazarus came back from death. As a result of the miracle, many of the Jews were convinced that Jesus was really the Son of God and many believed in Him. Of course Martha and the fact that Jesus didn't come immediately must have been even more disturbing, but think of the glory Jesus got out of it. People were saved through it. This story could be relevant to your situation, it is possible that the Lord has allowed that temporary situation, of trouble and perhaps stagnancy in your life and ministry to take glory over your life and to let you see how uncommitted to Him you have been. Though, I would not want you to make doctrine out of this, for God uses His word most of the time in warning His men and not hardship (II Timothy 3:16).

### HARDSHIP IS CHASTENING INTENDED TO MAKE US HOLY

The nature of divine chastening is described in Hebrews 12. We are told that God chastens (punishes) because He loves us, and He does it for our good. Hebrews 12:10 says that He chastens that "We might be partakers of His holiness." The Scriptures make it clear that God's purpose for us is that we should be holy. See Ephesians 1:4, I Thessalonians 4:7, I Peters 1:15. And God accomplishes His purpose in one of two ways. And just so God chastens us not because He hates us and takes pleasure in punishing us, but because He loves us too much to let us go on and make a complete shipwreck of our lives and His ministry which He has released into our lives. His first plan is that we should willingly make a complete surrender to His will and be eager to do His will from an obedient heart. But if we become rebellious, sometimes God has to lay us on our backs in order to let us to say, "Not my will but thine be done." He may even take a more drastic step against us, "for God would not change His programme – it is man that He would change."

Sometimes we suffer in order that God might teach us some lesson in prayer. All of us call upon god more earnestly and much more frequently when His chastening rod is on us than we do in the day of prosperity. The 107th Psalm repeatedly says, "Then cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses." We know that many times we don't really pray. But when trouble comes, then we call on God from the bottom of our hearts.

### HARDSHIP FITS US FOR THE MINISTRY OF SYMPATHY

God gives special comfort to His own children in the hour of suffering, and Paul says that we receive this strength and help from the hand of God so that we can extend sympathy to others. II Corinthians 1:4 says that the comfort we receive from God is designed to enable us to impart comfort to others, particularly as we are His servants. This world is filled with hardship and heartaches, and one of the greatest needs that suffering people have, is for someone who can sympathise with them in their troubles. And the only way we can really learn to comfort others and to sympathise with them is to suffer ourselves. We cannot understand the loneliness of others unless we have been lonely ourselves. We cannot weep with those that weep unless we have been bereaved ourselves.

There are some things in life that cannot be learned in schools, and this is one of them. We have to learn how to sympathise with others by actual experience. Many of us have already learned that the person who can help us most in the hour of trial, is the one who has already passed through an experience somewhat like ours. This is another reason God permits righteous people to suffer. The fires of affliction make us tender-hearted and sympathetic toward others and perhaps the reason God has granted us the privilege of being in a position, place or posses certain material things.

### HARDSHIP TURNS OUR ATTENTION TOWARDS GOD

One of the besetting sins of men of God these days is earthiness. Many follow money and pleasure and even women, forgetting God's assignment. They plan and scheme for the future like the rich fool in the parable Jesus told. Thank God that He sends problems and sorrow. This takes our eyes away from those things of the world, and makes us think seriously of God. Sometimes it takes hardship and disaster and vanished hopes and shattered dreams to bring us to the end of ourselves and turn us to God in faith and hope. The suffering and sadness that we experience often gives us a desire to leave things of the world and to concentrate on the assignment that He gave to us. God permits hardship and suffering to turn our attention toward the heavenly City (remember not to take this as Doctrine).

In Hebrews 12, we learn that there are three different attitudes one can take toward hardship and afflictions: We can despise them (Hebrews 12:5). Many would ignore or despise their troubles and lash out violently against others. They blame others, blame God and so reject the correction. This is very dangerous.

We can merely endure them (Hebrews 12:7). A great many just grit their teeth and make up their minds they are going to bear hardship the best they can. They say, "We've all got troubles; other people bear theirs, and I'm going to take mine lie a man." This may be better than despising it, but that is not even the best way.

We can be exercised by them (Hebrews 12:11). We can profit from our trouble. Instead of accusing others and God, we can search our hearts, and as a result, we will grow in faith and patience and we will manifest the fruits of righteousness in our lives and ministries. No matter how severe the situation is, we should accept it with thanksgiving and submit to it without a murmur because we know that God has a good purpose.

Those who continue to maintain faith in God wills someday look into His face and thank Him for every sorrow that drove its sharp edge through their souls. They will thank Him for every stroke of affliction cane received, for every insult, for every day of heartache because they will have learned obedience through these (not to be takes as Doctrine)

Someday the sorrow and sufferings of life and even in the Ministry will be over, and the Bible says that God Himself will wipe away our tears, and take us to a place where there is no more suffering. If you are yet to re-evaluate your life and your work in His ministry into which He has called you to serve, it could be that hardship and trouble are God's way of calling you to order (remember not to take this as a Doctrine). If you pray "Lord be merciful to me" He will answer

your cry and you can then ask Him to have His way in your life and ministry.

However, I pray that God may grant you patience to read and the ability to understand this letter of mine that you may be able to make a quality decision of surrendering your ways one more time to Christ and ask Him to have His way. Till we meet, let the peace of God that passes all understanding be with you. Amen.

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