

A Christian is a sinner who lives in a world ravaged by sin

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin corrupted God's good creation. Paul used such phrases as "*slavery to decay*," (Rom. 8:21) and "*labouring with birth-pangs*," (Rom. 8:22) to describe what sin did to God's good creation. Jacob spoke of his life in this way: "*The days of the years of my life have been few and disagreeable. They have not reached the amount of time that my fathers lived during their lives as foreigners*," (Gen. 47:9). Job observed, "*Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble*," (Job 14:1).

In this life we often experience the ravages of a world corrupted by sin. Because people do not love God the way they should, they do not love one another the way they should. Because of sin, work has become difficult (Gen. 3:17-19). Because of sin, sickness and death have come into this world (Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:12). Because of our old Adam, we do not carry out God's will as we desire (Rom. 7:14-24).

In the midst of all these troubles, what comfort do we have? Paul assures us, "*We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, for those whom He has called according to His purpose*," (Rom. 8:28). We are not pawns of fate or victims of chance. Rather, God directs this world in the interest of His children's welfare. The psalmist wrote, "*The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine*," (Ps. 33:18-19). Jesus said, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father. As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been numbered*," (Matt. 10:29-30). We have the confidence that God directs our lives, making all things work out for our eternal welfare.

What about the times when problems do come into our lives? The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the trials God permits to come into His children's lives (Heb. 12:1-13). These chastisements are God's loving discipline and correction, which He permits to come into our lives with the purpose of bringing us closer to Him. The writer to the Hebrews states that God disciplines believers *in love*. As a father disciplines his children in love, so God disciplines His children for their good (Heb. 12:7-10). The writer to the Hebrews also tells us that no discipline seems pleasant while we are going through it (Heb. 12:11). Trials bring pain, tears, and sorrow, also to Christians. Even Job was severely tried by the trials he endured. Finally, the writer to the Hebrews tells us that suffering in this life will, under God's guidance, produce a harvest of righteousness and peace (Heb. 12:11). The end result is that God will direct us to His means of grace, through which He will strengthen our faith and keep us close to Him (Rom. 5:3-4). The Lord gives His assurance that He will preserve us through our trials. He will limit the extent of them. He will provide the strength to bear them (1 Cor. 10:13). He will be there to sustain us when we falter. As He promised through Isaiah: "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour*," (Is. 43:1-3).

In connection with suffering trials, we need to stress two points:

1. A punishment is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). All people deserve God's punishment for sin. However, God does not punish believers for their sins. He punished Christ for our sins on the cross (Is. 53:4-6). Unbelievers lose the benefit of God's forgiveness by rejecting Christ (2 Peter 2:1).
2. A believer's chastisement may or may not be connected with a particular sin. In the case of Job and the man born blind (John 9), it was not. In the case of David (2 Sam. 12), it was. In any case, God's chastisements are not a punishment for sin. Even when believers suffer temporal consequences of their sins, such as David did, they still have the assurance that God has forgiven all their sins in Christ.

Though this world is a vale of tears, though we will face many trials in this life, we still live in hope. What is hope? The world thinks of hope as something it wishes would happen but has no assurance that it will. When the Bible speaks of hope, it speaks of something that is *absolutely assured*. Peter spoke of "*a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*," (1 Peter 1:3). Our hope is the absolute, ironclad guarantee of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote that this hope "*does not disappoint us*," (Rom. 5:5). Our hope rests on Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose again.

The hope we have in Christ does have an effect on our lives. In the first place, it helps us put the things of this life into the proper perspective. It helps us set proper priorities (Col. 3:1-4). The only possession of value that we have in this world is what God gives us in Christ. Our real citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). Thus, we will seek first the kingdom of God and trust Him to give us what is best for us (Matt. 6:3).

The hope we have also gives us the strength to deal with the trials we face. It is the light we see at the end of the tunnel. It gives us joy in the midst of sorrow (1 Peter 1:6). Finally, our hope enables us to look forward to Christ's second coming with joy and anticipation. It enables us to pray, "*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus,*" (Rev 22:20).