

Gamma 13

Study 3

1 Peter 1:6-12

- 1. Can you discuss amongst the group what are some of the attitudes towards suffering that we used to have before we became Christians, how did we view them? What are the attitudes of other world views towards suffering like Buddhists , Hindus , Muslim and Westerners? How do they each try to handle suffering? What are the weaknesses of each approach?**
- 2. This verse has some interesting apparent contradictions. *1 Peter 1:6 (ESV) In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, We are asked to rejoice on one hand and on the other we are also expected to grieve, how do you reconcile the two or is Peter contradicting himself? What is the nature of grieving in a Christian and how is it different from unbelievers? Why is it that a Christian can be one who is simultaneously sadder than everyone else and happier than everyone else***

There is a simultaneous rejoicing and grieving when a Christian faces suffering. The Buddhist and Hindu views are inadequate because they believe that all of life and suffering is an illusion hence the way to cope with the suffering is to deny its reality. They say suffering is caused by desires and the way to handle suffering is to stifle desire through meditation , prayer and yoga one can learn to detach from the desires of this world and handle suffering.

The Christian view does not deny suffering in fact it accepts suffering in a world tainted by sin and rebellion and all suffering has its roots there. The proper response to suffering is to grieve...which is express the pain . The British attitude of the stiff upper lip is taken from the Stoic approach to stifle the emotions. Jesus on many occasions wept with tears as he felt our pain in our world. He did not deny it. Look at Jesus at the garden of Gethsemane and the anguish he underwent. Grieving is the natural response to suffering and must never be denied.

The nature of Christian grieving is different from that of the unbelievers as they grieve out of their pain and hopelessness.

In a scene from the raising from the dead of Lazarus... John 11:33 (ESV) When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

Jesus was troubled and angered by the sheer ugliness of death and its power over people but also at the grieving and weeping in sheer hopelessness. Christians this side of the cross should always grieve as the appropriate response but never to the point of hopelessness

At the same time there is rejoicing because of the anticipated outcome of the suffering which is the proving of the faith that leads to salvation.

How is it possible to experience two emotion at the same time? One only has to go and see any of the old Rocky movies which star Sylvester Stallone as that ageing boxer whose fighting style is one of a slugger going toe to toe taking as much as dishing out the punches. The final scene is always the same, the bruised and battered Sylvester bleeding and winching from the pain and yet triumphantly lifting the heavy weight title belt above his head, the reward for all his pain he had undergone. He is beaming ear to ear and shouting out triumphantly to his wife “ Yo Adrienne!” whilst he bleeds on to his title belt.

A Christian is simultaneously sadder than anyone else because more than anything he is made aware of the seriousness of sin and the penalty it bears. He grapples daily with the Spirit showing him his own sinful desire of the flesh and hidden idols in his life which he has not sufficiently dealt with. Then just as he is gaining on some victory with his sin , the Spirit produces a heightened sensitivity to even more sin in his life. He realises his sin and he repents and is repenting all the time and yet he is also happier than anyone else in the room because he realises that no matter how heavy the debt of sin , it has been taken on the cross. He has an unspeakably glorious inheritance that is awaiting him and the way God looks at him today is the way God looks at His own Son.

- 3. The Christian response to suffering is dual , grieving as well as rejoicing. What are the reasons that form the basis for this response? Or more simply put how can we rejoice when we are in pain ? From these verse how are we to face suffering? Suffering therefore brings purpose and opportunity to a Christian in verse 7 what are they? How does this consistent with John 15:1-2 and Heb 12**

First of all we are to rejoice by looking back at spiritual realities and not be swallowed up by the circumstances of our pain ... 1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV) **In this** you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,

The word “in this “ refers back to the previous passage which Peter praised God for His great mercy ..which means grace He gave us something we did not deserve. He gave us a new birth of an eternal nature. He has kept for us an eternal inheritance and has promised to keep us safe and secure in faith till we obtain it one day. When we face suffering in life we cannot let the circumstances of the suffering take control and obliterate the way we think and feel about things. Suffering tends to colour the whole perspective of our lives, we are discouraged , more negative, less confident and less sure of what we have. Peter is saying to us, the first step is not let suffering and its feelings

dominate our landscape, instead we need to hold a proper perspective in life we need to fall back on to our true treasures in heaven and the assurances that no matter what our current pain and our mistakes we have made that God will never forget us and has prepared a bright future for us. It is over and against this backdrop that we must now re-evaluate our suffering and circumstances. It's like explaining to a child how he must undergo the pain of the antibiotic injection by focussing on the ice cream reward that is waiting just outside the doctor's office.

Secondly, we are to focus on eternity and understand the suffering is short lived
1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV) In this you rejoice, **though now for a little while**, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Most of us can endure suffering if we are assured that there will be an end to it at some time. Endless suffering means no hope and people don't suffer well without hope. It is hope that mitigates suffering. So as we suffer we take comfort that this too shall pass.

Thirdly we are to focus on the sovereignty of God
1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV) In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, **if necessary**, you have been grieved by various trials,

The suffering that comes upon us are actually necessary which means that they are planned and God has allowed them to come into our lives and will move us in our response to these sufferings in a way that will mould us in to His image. The most important questions that will be asked when a person is suffering is "why am I suffering" and unless we believe in a sovereign God in whom no suffering on our part is beyond His control then we will not be able to successful cope with it

Lastly focus on the gold
1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV) In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the **tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold** that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to **result in praise and glory and honor** at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

There is a purpose to our suffering after all it is to test the genuineness of our faith. The picture is the refining of gold and once the fire comes in it separates the pure metallic gold from the dross, the impurities that contaminate the gold and make it less shiny and valuable. In peaceful and prosperous times any person can say they are believers and even fool themselves that they are in the kingdom of God. It is only in the fire of suffering that their true allegiances will come out forth. Do they make decisions to stand up for the faith or do they capitulate like the rest when the chips are down revealing that they never had real faith. The suffering reveals the nature of our faith to praise God and to bring assurances to ourselves. John 15 teaches that God will prune those vines that bear fruit, that are productive and Heb 12 tells us that God disciplines those He loves like a Father disciplines his sons. There is no way true faith is demonstrated and refined to glorify God.

4. There is a John Newton quote “Everything is necessary that he sends , nothing can be necessary that He withholds “ Can you discuss if you agree with this in the light of the passage and can you share your experience of this?