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CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF PAULINE THEOLOGY

OF

SUFFERING IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Suffering in Christian ministry today, is in different forms and shapes. It comes as pain, as temptation, as trial, as trouble, as self-denial and even death. The meaning and the benefit of suffering are shown by the life and ministry of Paul the Apostle.

Paul the Apostle has about 1/3 of the New Testament credited to him. And each of these books has mentions of suffering in one form or another. The mentions come both as a declaration and experience of the Apostle himself. Paul shows that the Christian should prepare to suffer, and prepare to reap the gains of suffering. Paul proves that from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that suffering is not an end, but a means to the beginning of another experience in Christian ministry. Suffice it to say, that Christ endured the cross because of the latter glory. Paul gave similar sign when he mentioned the glory that awaits Christians in heaven, especially the crown.

The Apostle Paul also shows that suffering is a necessary accomplishment with Christian ministry. He talks of Christian ministry as a general responsibility of the Christian Church on behalf of Jesus Christ.

Hope appears as a motivating vehicle for the Christian to endure suffering. Through endurance, a Christian subdues the negative consequence of suffering and takes the best advantage out of that experience. Hope to make heaven through faith in Christ is illustrated; A heaven where suffering exists no more is the final destination. Every Christian sufferer is a suffering pilgrim.

B. CONCLUSION

When Christians sin, the consequence of sin, is the exercise of God's holy character, which is invested in His justice and mercy. Punishment for sin, or wrong done is a just act of God. It may be an opportunity for evil to come in, but there is a way out, the way is in the repentance of the suffering, an acknowledgement of the wrong, a confession of the act. All brings the merciful side of God into manifestation.

The world is sentenced to vanity; the god of this world does no good. Christians in the world, work against the rule of the world therefore must pay the price for their disloyalty to the ruler ship of the god of this world. The hope is in the sovereignty of God, who sets the limit of power of this god, thus there is relief at the end. This is the case when Christian suffers as a sign of their commitment to the message of Christ.¹ God however allows suffering equal to the coping capacity of Christians. The seed of life, grows to become the tree of life in the soul of man, for God to allow extreme affliction, by that "He is nailed to the same cross as Christ"²

¹Judith Perkins. "The Self as sufferer" Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 85: No 3 July 1992, p.263.

²Simone Weil. Gateway To God. (Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1970). p.87.

Paul presents the cross as a mark of reproach in his theology of suffering, and both are affiliates.³ Reproach is common to the preaching of the kingdom of God.

Suffering is for the purpose of Education in Christian ministry,⁴ Used to teach the Christian how to care for others who might experience similar fates. Suffering is educational, when the end result teaches others how to cope with similar suffering to the glory of God. It is the will of God to suffer in this circumstance not for punishment but for promotion.⁵

Faith does not prevent suffering, but keeps the suffering on the goal and the God who delivers. It therefore helps the sufferer overcome suffering profitably.

The purpose of God's call on Christians is not to suffer, but to be who He wants them to be, however, the journey towards becoming require suffering. Christian ministers would depend what they teach, preach and live, with doses of pain and sorrow. To prove what they believe they suffer, such minister is called by Paul to be "a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1) KJV.

The events of the life of Jesus Christ, the ministry of Paul the Apostle has shown, that "no suffering theology" is anti God. But God has the ability to deal with suffering. The sufferer must however co-operate with God for suffering to be profitable.

The reality is that humanity has no solution to the problem of suffering, and cannot eliminate it.⁶ The sufferer should bear it justly and hopefully. This is because, the father-heart of God makes him suffer when His children suffer. Suffering is not just a moral issue but also a theological one.

³Hanson. Studies In Paul's Technique And Theology. P.51

⁴Clinnard. Southwestern Journal of Theology. Vol. April 1959. p.20.

⁵Leslie D. Wheatherhead. Salute To A Sufferer. (London: Epworth Press. 1962). p. 17.

⁶Michiel. God and Human Suffering. P.42.

Today, suffering is often seen as a general affliction of the church by adherents of other faiths, the government of the day, or various institutional agents. This kind of suffering is close to Christian suffering. General hardship that engulfs a nation or an area is not Christian suffering. Only sufferings generated by belief in or obedience to God's only son should be associated with Christian suffering.

For Christian who suffers for what they do, in the name of who they believe and profess hope rises again. Like those that have gone ahead, seek not to be free but to overcome by faith in the same. LORD and Kurios.