***Reasons for Suffering, No. 2

Colossians 1:24-29

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Hebrews 4:12: "For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

2 Peter 1:19-21: "And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever given by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

1 Corinthians 3:19: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God, for it is' written: 'He is the one who catches the lies and their craftiness.' And again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.'"

Please join me in turning to the reasonings of the Word of God in Colossians 1:21-24. Our subject is "The Mystery of the Church," segment number three.

**Religious Misconceptions**

People who are not blessed with expository preaching, which explains the meaning of Scripture from the Hebrew and Greek texts, naturally accumulate a lot of false religious beliefs. And I know that all of us have come up against the nonsense that people believe relative to spiritual matters, and the foolishness of the way they conduct their lives.

These misconceptions are picked up from commonly held religious opinions of people in general in a society. They think that if a lot of people believe something, it must be true. And there are all kinds of wrong information spiritually that people pick up from one another.

These misconceptions are also picked up from their churches and denominational misinterpretations of Scriptures. Whole denominations are built on major misinterpretations of the Word of God. Therefore, these people are off-base from the mind of God, and usually cannot even find their way to salvation.

These misconceptions are also picked up from human reason which sin has perverted from reality. People have many logical, false doctrines – certain things that they just believe are so: "This is the way it has to be. Logic demands it," but it is contrary to the Word of God. And the reason it seems right to us is because our minds are perverted from reality. That's what happened in the Garden of Eden. We can't think straight. We have to have an outside source of guidance, such as Scripture.

These misconceptions are also picked up from listening to preachers who appeal to the emotions of people rather than to their minds with objective doctrinal truth. A great deal of misconception is to be found in people who operate on emotions that have been manipulated by some clever preacher. So, suddenly they're very convinced that they know that God thinks something about something, when it's not true at all. But their emotions have led them to that deception.

These misconceptions, religiously, are also picked up from the desire of the sin nature to justify its lust patterns. So, people redefine Scripture – the moral code, in order to revise the standards of what is right and what is wrong, so that people can do their own thing.

So, in a lot of different ways people are up against it to try to find out what's really true in spiritual things. All of these things naturally work against us.

The odd thing is that when people are made aware of their non-biblical beliefs, they usually resent it. We often find this true of our relatives, who do not have the benefit of expository preaching – people who sit in church every Sunday, and they hear a lot of pulpit-pounding excitement exuding out to the audience. But there's no objective content. And when we point out to them that they have some very wrong ideas biblically, and we show them from the Word of God, they resent it. They complain sometimes that such a Bible teacher is acting as if his Bible way is the only way of truth in spiritual things. It always surprises me that, just after I have pointed something out in Scripture, somebody will say, "Your way has to be the only way, doesn't it?" And I have to say, "No. No. Let me read it again. This is God's way. And I'm just quoting." But people don't want to look at it that way, and you would think that they would have enough concern to say, "If this was the Word of God, I better give it some close attention."

They also complain that such a view of Bible doctrine that has come from expository preaching, if true, makes them feel that they have been wrong in their religious beliefs all their lives. I had a brother-in-law one time who said, "You make me feel like everything I've always believed all my life is wrong." The trouble is, he was, because he got bum information. And yet he was a very religious guy. He was the most religious of them all. Church time was always church time. Nothing interfered. Now he has gone to that big church in the sky. And boy, has he learned better?

When you feel that someone is making you feel that what you believed all your life has been wrong, don't blame the faithful expositor. Blame God, Who wrote the Bible in plain, ordinary English. That's where you're getting the information from. Don't blame the expositor.

Now if you're younger, you want to be aware of the fact that you want to be open to the truth, wherever it leads. I guarantee you that every year that clicks by, some of these old dudes that we have in our midst here now find it very hard to change from misconceptions. The older you are, the harder it is. That's why it's so very hard to try to teach your parents better. It's almost impossible. You may be way ahead of them in the game, but your parents find it too humiliating to admit how wrong they have been in their religious beliefs, and how far they have led you astray in what they were teaching you.

People also, when they've been shown the error of their ways spiritually, decide to dismiss the communicator of God's truth by demeaning him; by challenging his competence to teach; or, by ridiculing him. But, of course, that doesn't change the plain truth of Scripture. The communicator is not the issue. It is what he says – whether that is indeed the mind of God.

Others would seek to escape the truth of God by silencing the teacher to escape the truth. They want to stop his divine viewpoint, which is irritating them. In ancient times, when a messenger brought bad news, they killed him. So, you can silence the communicator that way. Or, in modern times, you can silence him by simply not showing up for the church services. And that's exactly what people do. When people come to the place where the pressure is so great upon them of a principle of Scripture, or the mind of God, or an application of the Word of God, and their negative volition is so intense, you will find that they are no longer among us. They disappear. And you say, "Hey, what happened to so-and-so? Where's so-and-so? What happened to so-and-so?" Well, he's over there now. He found himself a more comfortable climate, because there was a major issue of life, such that he was unwilling to subject himself to the Word of God and to the will of God. So, people respond by silencing the truth to themselves.

Others simply take comfort in their religious misconceptions because so many other people share their beliefs and their practices, even though they may suspect them themselves. Somehow, they think that if people are sincere, God is going to say, "OK, that's all right." And if they get a lot of people who are sincere, then they know that God is going to tolerate their misconceptions. That is not so.

Of course, most people simply blow off the expository preacher as some kind of weirdo who ultimately is simply expressing his own opinions, and is really misrepresenting the mind of God and His teachings. I cannot tell you how many times I have been told that, point blank, and eye-to-eye – that: "That's just the way I'm interpreting it. That is not what the Bible said, but that's just the way I'm saying that that's what it says." But, of course, that's kind of hard to do with an expository preacher, because he even goes back one step beyond the plain, ordinary English Bible, to the original text, and says, "Here's what this word is. Here's what it says. This is what the Holy Spirit put there, and this is what this means. Now, you may do what you wish with it, but you can't pretend that words do not mean what words mean.

**Divine Institutions**

The first divine institution that God instituted and it was in the Garden of Eden. A divine institution is something that God has ordained that applies to all humanity, whether you're saved or unsaved.

The divine institution of marriage, for example – there's a principle. It doesn't mean whether you're a princely Christian or an unsaved dog. The divine institution holds and applies. You cannot evade it.

The divine institution of family – it doesn't matter whether you're saved or unsaved. There's a principle of family order authority. That's the way it is.

The divine institution of nationalism – countries that are independent nations, so that Satan cannot control the whole world by being dominant in every country, as will be in the tribulation. That divine institution of nationalism – that nations are to operate as independent units, and they are to avoid internationalism. Internationalism is one of Satan's doctrines of demons.

**The Divine Institution of Volition**

However, the number one (first) divine institution God ever instituted was called the divine institution of volition – personal freedom of choice. This was the first thing that God told Adam and Eve – that they were free to live in that garden any way they wanted to, and enjoy what they wanted to. There was just one thing they couldn't do. They couldn't eat the fruit of a certain tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They could live each day to their full enjoyment. They could eat all of the nutritious fruits and vegetation in the garden. But the one thing they couldn't do was eat of that tree. Now volition became a very dangerous thing. They were free to choose, which is why your volition and my volition is a very dangerous thing, because we can choose, and we can exercise our will in spiritual matters today. But that choice will have serious consequences.

So, it did in the Garden of Eden. They misused the divine institution of freedom of choice, and brought down upon the human race sin, and consequently, death. We are free to choose in spiritual matters. And with that choice, we will determine our destiny; our quality of life; our well-being; and, our happiness. Volition can be a great blessing, but it can also be a very great curse.

This wonderful gift of freedom can be used for temporal and for eternal blessings, or to bring temporal and eternal sufferings upon us. That's why people who are wise in counseling do not play around with all the nonsense of what makes somebody do something terrible. Instead, they go right to the heart of the thing – that this person has a volition, and they made a choice, and they made an abusive choice. They used their choice out of keeping with the principles of the Word of God. They violated principles of integrity set up by divine standards. And that is why they have brought cursings and judgment upon themselves rather than blessing.

Now, sometimes choosing God's right way in the situation in life (using our volition in a godly way) also leads to suffering. But this is undeserved suffering. And along with it comes a great a great blessing of eternal glory of God upon us for our right choice. When we use our volition in a godly way, we will be treated with contempt by men, but we will be honored by God, our Father. Even genuine Christians, when they're out of fellowship with the Father (they're living in carnality – they're out of the inner circle of spirituality) – they will cause suffering for godly believers, who live by the righteous way of Scriptures. And that's always disappointing: to see Christians beating up on those who are compatible with the ways of God. But that is exactly what happens.

Here's a Christian who chooses to use his volition to do right. Here's a Christian that that Christian's choice condemns the other Christian. The other Christian uses his volition to beat up on the person who is walking with God. That has happened from the time of Cain and Abel. Christians have suffered. That is a reality because, fundamentally, Satan's world hates the Lord Jesus Christ, and it also, therefore, hates His body, the church (the Christians). And they want to deal with Christians all the misery that they can. And this is what the devil does. He will use other Christians to deal you misery, to get you so out of fellowship with God that the devil can gleefully rub his hands, and sock it to you, because what can the Father do: nothing. His principle is that if you step out of that inner circle of spiritual fellowship, you're in the devil's territory, and the devil's got free reign, until you decide to use your volition (that dangerous feature for good or for evil), to confess and come back in.

**Christian Suffering**

For the faithful Christian, under the fire of suffering for righteousness, there is a great treasure of eternal rewards and glory reserved in heaven. We pointed out last time some of the nature features that characterize Christian suffering. Just to refresh our minds, suffering originates from the destructive effects of sin upon God's perfect creation, and it's experienced by all believers. The world was once a perfect place to live in. But because now it is not a perfect place, we suffer.

Next, the value of Christian suffering certainly demonstrates to man his mortality: here today; and, gone tomorrow. When we get suffering, we see how quickly we can be gone. It brings us up short to say, "Wait a minute. Let me see. Is this the way I want to use my life, in view of my imminent demise?

Christian suffering reveals the holiness of God. Justice is exercised toward sin, and blessing toward righteousness. Suffering makes that clear.

Next, forces people to make decisions about their evil ways to gain relief. It drives people to repentance. Suffering for evil drives people to change their minds.

**Reasons for Christian Suffering**

For Christians, there are specific reasons for suffering: to force them to repent and to return to temple fellowship, to escape the effects of their reversionism; to experience God's sustaining grace in time of undeserved suffering in the angelic warfare; to develop the godly character of Christ in dealing with others in suffering; that is, to have an experience where you understand what someone else is going through, because you've been there, and you can you can experience with them the suffering they're having; to prepare the Christian to be able to handle greater personal stress in serving God in the future – because of the suffering you've experienced, you're ready for a greater challenge; and, then to complete the earthly sufferings of Jesus Christ, which are involved in preaching the gospel and appointing people to true doctrine.

Our Lord is now in heaven. He's no longer teaching doctrine. He's no longer walking around this earth, pointing people to a life of righteousness. Therefore, he personally is not taking the flak anymore. Now, his body, the church (you and I, as believers) – we take the flag. There's a certain amount of suffering, so to speak, that's going to be involved during the whole church age, in getting people into a knowledge of the Word of God, and bringing them into heaven. The Lord Jesus cared a great deal of that suffering. He's not here to do it anymore. It is now on our shoulders to take that suffering.

Unfortunately, most Christians turn tail and run at that point. They don't want to bear the suffering. They don't want to take the abuse that is involved in walking with God, and acting with responsible Christian character, no matter what anybody else does. What Christians want to find for themselves is the good life of a country-club church. Christians who suffer with the Lord Jesus in their service for the Father, will most certainly one day share in His greater glory in heaven. The focus of the believer while he is going through suffering for Christ is the Word of God – not the distress of the moment. Certainly, this was clearly taught us by Christ on the cross. In the midst of that horrible, physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering that He went through on the cross, His mind kept focused upon doctrine. He kept talking about what's coming. The whole 22nd Psalm reviews what was going through His mind – the great things that were going to be the result of this terrible moment of suffering. And His focus was not on the suffering, but it was on what was going to result. Doctrine carried Him through.

We also pointed out a very important principle. And I just know that most Christians are going to agree that they never knew this. And a lot of Christians who knew it are going to wonder why they forgot it. A Christian may save the potential of his life for earning eternal rewards through a service for God, or he may lose this potential of his life by carnal living; in preoccupation with this life; and, with material prosperity. Everybody plays the role of the poor widow lady or the foolish rich man. That's it. Everybody plays that role. And the person who plays the role of the poor little lady is going to make that life count for eternal rewards. The one who plays the foolish rich man, with his bigger barns to build, is going to have all eternity to regret having wasted the potential of his life, as he's a poor hound dog in heaven.

The apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:24 expresses his joy in having been privileged to face suffering from Satan and his world system, in bringing grace salvation and full church-age doctrine to the Colossian Christians. He says, "Now, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." And he writes this even while his suffering in imprisonment in Rome for preaching the truth of the gospel – undeserved suffering. But he said it is a source of deep satisfaction to me that I am suffering because you are being benefited with the Word of God.

Christians are going to have suffering in many ways in the course of serving the Lord. You will have physical suffering which will make you want to cut out and flee. You will have social suffering of various kinds of human relationships, on a human level: disappointments; and, terrible conditions that arise on the human level, and in the family outside. You will have financial distresses – distress financially that get out of focus, and suddenly they seem to become the greatest thing in the world, when they're nothing but peanuts. And religiously, you will have suffering. It is the result of serving God.

Now, the issue is: can you take that suffering physically; socially; financially; and, religiously because of doing what's right, and of serving God, and rejoicing in it? That's the issue. What ultimately is the reason for Christians' suffering at the hands of Satan, and of demons, and of the world system? What is it that the devil wants to silence you about? What's the bottom line? The gospel of the grace of God. What is it that Satan wants to do to a church that focuses upon teaching Scripture? He wants to silence them on, first of all, the doctrine of the grace of God in salvation, and then the full gamut of church-age truth, living by the grace of God.

**Presenting the Gospel**

Please don't forget the pattern of presenting the gospel. It should be memorized. You should have it clearly in mind. It doesn't take long to speak to a person to whom you want to present the gospel. This is the bottom line of why you're suffering in all these ways. At least you should know that, when you're going to suffer for something, that it's going to be suffering that you deserve. Get the story straight so that the devil really has reason to cause you to suffer.

First of all, you tell a person there's some bad news from God that I'm sorry to tell you. One: you are a sinner. You have violated the moral codes of God. You have been guilty of a variety of sins – acts that God condemns. You are a sinner. Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" – God's standard for entering into heaven, which is absolute perfection. That's the first step. This covers, in a very easy way, the nice moral person, because nobody is going to say, "I'm perfect. I never did anything sinful. I never thought anything wrong." It'll be clear to everybody: "I'm condemned. I'm a sinner."

Then you say, "There's a second piece of bad news that I must tell you, and that is that the divine penalty for sin is death, which is eternal separation from God in the lake of fire. And then you give him the Scripture: Romans 6:23 – the first part of that verse: "For the wages of sin is death. And death always means a separation.

Boy, the devil is now getting really antsy when you get to this point. You've told him the bad news. Now you say, "I've got some good news from God for you, on the authority of the Bible itself. I'm not making this up. It's true." First of all, the first piece of good news: "Christ died for you. He died in your place to pay the death penalty required for sin for you." Then you read Romans 5:8, which tells us that: "But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ for us."

Then you tell the person: "And there's a second piece of good news that I can give you, and that is that you can be saved and go to heaven. You can be saved from the lake of fire and go to heaven through faith in Jesus Christ – through trusting in Him as your Savior. Then you turn to Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast." I just believe that what Christ has done for me covers my sins, because that's what God the Father says has happened, and I go to heaven.

This is the fundamental reason that the devil does not like to see Christians serving the Lord, and why you suffer. Now, the less of a channel of the gospel you are, the less suffering you will have, and the better your life will be, relative to what Satan does to you. The fewer of our evangelism brochures you hand out, the easier things will be in your life. You may be one of these people, and we have them here and there in our congregation, that have a great sense of divine call to tell the gospel. They wake up in the morning, and they're standing before the Lord, ready to go: What's the plan of action? What's the ministry for me for this day, and giving out the Word of God, from the gospel, to the full council of grace-age truth (church-age grace truth)? And that's their whole life.

Well, I notice that some of these people of this kind, even other Christians don't like. People come to me and share with me their personal experiences out there in the field, on the firing line of fighting the devil with the gospel, and the resentment that even, not only religious people have, but even really Christians have toward them, for saying, "There's one way, and only one." And, because they're so well versed in Scripture, when people come up with their nonsense, as we begin with this morning, this person can say, "Well, here's what the Bible says. It refutes that." These people turn in anger and vengeance against this person who is telling them simply what the Bible says. "It is because of the gospel that the Christian ultimately suffers.

In Colossians 1:24, Paul says, "I'm pleased to suffer." For the apostle Paul, there was physical suffering: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." The apostle Paul was a former prosecutor of Christians. Now he declares his joy in suffering for these very people he once persecuted. Paul's joy stemmed from the fact that he had a very clear sense of divine call to his missionary service, in spite of his former treatment of Christians. God had forgiven him. He was very much aware of that forgiveness. And he was very much aware of his call now to serve that very Christ and those believers.

In 1 Timothy 1:12-13, Paul says, "I thank Christ (Jesus) our Lord, Who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." Now, it is one thing to ignorantly in unbelief. There's punishment for acting in unbelief. There's punishment for doing what is sinful, even in unbelief, but even more so if you know better. This is why Jesus said to the Pharisees: "It would have been better had you not been here to be instructed by Me this day, because you're going to go negative to what I have told you. And your sin for violating what I have now taught you is going to be all the greater because you know better." That's one of the verses that indicates to us that there are degrees of punishment in hell.

When you deal with God, you better realize that you're dealing with maximum integrity. Dr. J. Vernon McGee, formerly of the Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles, California, used to be a special Bible lecturer at Dallas Seminary. I noticed that he seemed very sensitive about Christians making promises to God that they don't keep. In listening to his radio programs, I often heard him stress: "Don't say you're going to do something for the Lord, and then double-cross Him, and don't do it. But if you do, you better do it." Then McGee would say, "And if you don't, God help you." So, Dr. McGee used to tell us: "Keep your mouth shut. Don't make vows to God that you're not going to keep. You can get away with that with people, but not with God."

The apostle Paul said, "I was the worst kind of person. I was a murderer and a persecutor. I can't believe how bad I was toward the very people of God. And when I was hitting them, I was hitting the very son of God Himself, the Creator of the universe." And Paul said, "I've learned my lesson. Now He has forgiven me. He has made me the special missionary to these people that I used to persecute. And I'm glad that now I suffer by being true to my calling to deliver to these people the Word of God.

Paul was simply humbled by God's selection of him for the ministry – the ministry of reaching out to the gentile World. In Ephesians 3:8-10, Paul says, "To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given to preach to the gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." And all of us had that same grace extended. You can tell people what's the straight scoop about the Word of God? And you could direct them, but not if your life is contradicting it. Paul says, "My life was once in opposition to God, but no more. I don't live so as to contradict the great ministry and the message to which He's called me – to bring light that is the administration (or the dispensation) of the mystery (that is, the mystery of the church age), which for ages had been hidden in God, Who created all things, in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in heavenly places."

Paul was thrilled, because of his background, to realize that Peter didn't know all this stuff about church-age truth. James didn't know it. John didn't know it. There was only one apostle who knew the full gamut of church-age truth – the former, horrible persecutor of the body of Christ, the apostle Paul. It was Paul alone that was led out into that Arabian Desert. And for three years there, the Lord Jesus Christ now gave him that great course of training on what it means to be a Christian in the era where grace dominates – no longer the Mosaic Law; what it is to be free in Christ; the power system of doctrine plus the indwelling Holy Spirit; and, the whole gamut – commonplace to us. Nobody knew about that before. And all of a sudden, here are these great potentials of the Christian life. And Paul is sitting there, absorbing it, and eating it up.

Finally, he comes out of the desert, and he said, "I have the revelation." And he starts teaching. Peter says, "Are you sure? Paul, that's terrific." And Scripture says that there were some things hard to understand, that Paul said. It was just unbelievable. But they knew he had been with God. They knew that Paul was speaking the truth. It's no wonder this man looked upon himself and said, "I can't believe that I now have the magnificent, precious truth of the Word of the church age. Nobody else has it."

The second thing that God gave to this man, uniquely, was the doctrine of salvation without human effort, and the grace way of life. The rest of them didn't know that. They knew about salvation as a gift from God, but they didn't know the full implications of the grace way of life. That marvelous lifestyle was something that they all had to learn as Paul laid it out to them, because it was so contrary to their whole Jewish background experience.

So, Paul had this deep sense of appreciation that he had been called to be the great teacher of church-age truth. Well, how do you think that made him feel? He had been going about, fooling around, wasting his life, and trivializing his days. How about you? Do you realize what you know, that all these good folks in churches all around you don't have a glimmer of? So, what are you doing with it?

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 9:16-17, said, "For I preach the gospel – the gospel of the grace of God. I have nothing to boast of. I'm under compulsion. It's not even a credit to me that I do preach the gospel, and that I'm faithful to my calling. For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel, for if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward. Paul said, "If I voluntarily wanted to preach the gospel, I'd get a reward." But he said, "I didn't even want to do it. I wasn't even interested in doing it. I wasn't even thinking about doing such a thing as preaching such a magnificent gospel of grace."

So, he said, "If I did that voluntarily, I'd deserve to be rewarded. But if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. But I did this when I wasn't planning to do it." God jerked him off the Damascus road. He said, "Now I have a stewardship. I have an administration. I have a dispensation that's been entrusted to me, and I will not be unfaithful to it."

So, you and I have to keep our perspective on what we have, and what that implies on how we shall live. And as Scripture says, part of that is: "As our day, so shall our strength be." And there are things that some of you can no longer do in God's service. There are other things you can do better now, and you have our freedom to do than you've ever had before. If you know the gospel of the grace of God in church-age doctrines, you better look upon yourself. Go home and take yourself a good look in the mirror, and understand that you're no different than the apostle Paul: "Woe are you," if you do not use every means at your command to see that that gospel has freedom to be proclaimed. And I mean, "Woe."

The apostle Paul knew about the doctrine of rewards. He knew about the Judgment Seat of Christ. And he was saying, "God help me if I am not true to my mission for which I am called, and I have the means to do it.

Therefore, Paul said that he rejoiced in his Christian service for God, and he was honored with the stewardship. He could not ignore it, as we cannot ignore ours. All Christian service will be a joy if it is under the sense of a divine calling to a special mission. Pressures? Yes. Demands? Where do you get the money? Where do you get the people? Where to get the means? Yes. But it's always a joy.

Every now and then, somebody says to me, "Dr. Danish, why don't you just retire? Why don't you just out from under the gun all the time, going from this burden, and this crisis, and this battle to fight, and this problem to resolve?" Well, it's because of a divine calling, and you're not free to retire if you have a divine calling. While it may seem a great burden, and it is, it's nevertheless a great joy.

Christian Service is not to be done, therefore, with complaining, moaning, groaning, or seeking some reason to avoid it when called and presented with an opportunity to serve. And that's the problem. That is the disloyalty. That is the opposite of what Paul says: "I'm under the pressure for preaching the gospel to you. I'm even in prison. But boy, what a joy it is." Instead, Christians are running around saying, "How can I get out of this? How can I escape this? How can I not do this thing?" Paul says, "Fine. That's the doctrine of the divine institution of volition. Use it to your great injury. You can enjoy that for all eternity if that's what you want."

Our Lord Jesus Christ is a classic example. In devotion to His call (duty) to God in the midst of suffering. And He did it without any whining, and without any self-pity, and without any desire to evade. Hebrews 12:1-6: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin was so easily entangles us. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." Every encumbrance – some people may get tired of my warning you again and again that the world system is a millstone around your neck.

We have Christians from time-to-time, and we've had them all these years, on-and-off, who have splendid capacities for service, but they can't do it because they're so tied up to their eyeballs with the service of the world, and with living in the world. And they're doing everything to teach their children to do the same thing. So, they don't have the capacity to be able to run the race of Christian service with a joy in the midst of all the suffering, because of the eternal consequences to themselves and to others.

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecta of faith, Who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him, Who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart." How do you grow weary and lose heart? Through physical suffering; economic suffering; emotional suffering; or, social suffering.

"You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood in your striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons. My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord (the pressure demands of service), nor faint when you are reproved by Him. For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines. And He scourges every son whom he receives." Now, He's not going to whip you when you're taking your calling seriously, and you're loyal to His service. The scourging comes when you're whining and seeking to escape the service.

What good is your life? What good if you've gotten everything you want in life? And then you suddenly find yourself checked out to heaven, and you can't take it with you. Somebody disposes of all those things you've spent your life getting. And they don't invest it in the eternal rewards for you or for anybody else. What good is that?

Jesus Christ said: "Not for Me. My life is going to be always in terms of the things of eternity. I am God's servant, and I'm going to let Him take care of Me." That was Paul. Paul said, "Sometimes I got real hungry on that basis of operating, and I had to stop ministering, because the Christians stopped giving. So, I had to go back to my trade of tent-making to earn the money to feed my team, and to get the money together to get the next step forward of what we were doing. Then God would raise up somebody like the Philippian church, and they would come through the big funds, and we'd get some open-field running again. But in it all," he said, "I've known to be content in whatsoever state I am." He was not a whiner. He's not a self-pitier. He was not spending his life getting upset over what people, circumstances, or things were doing to him.

The carnal Christian has his eyes on himself and his world, so he's filled with self-pity about the circumstances of life. He complains about the raw deal he has gotten at some point. He has no eyes for Christ and for the things above, so that there's no joy in his life. He has just unhappiness, because he is cut out of the first duty of the Christian life, which is to put your mission first. Paul never lost sight of his mission. He never lost sight of his call to serve God, so he was never overwhelmed by people, circumstances, and things in life.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed," Paul says, "but not despairing. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. Always caring about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18: "Therefore, we do not lose heart. But though our outer man is decaying (and indeed it is), yet the inner man is being renewed day-by-day by that devotion to duty, and that willingness to put the things of God first. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. Any affliction and any suffering is light compared to the magnificent glory that shall encase us (our recognition in heaven). Why we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

For the apostle Paul, there was never the mistake of looking on life here, and things here. He never got caught up with it. He was never anybody's fool. His focus was always on going through suffering; being mistreated; recognizing what was done that should not have been done. But always it was the mission, and the mission, and the mission. Paul was happy in the service of the King. He was happy in the service of King Jesus, even, he said, "If it's going to cost me my life.

In Ephesians 2:17, Paul says, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering (dying) upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice, and share my joy with you." The apostle Paul found constant joy and satisfaction in knowing that God the Father, is always in control of life. So, he kept serving one day at a time, and he kept meeting the need of the moment of God's work. That's the only way you can live: one day at a time, meeting each moment as the needs of the Lord's work arise, and of your particular mission in that service.

Colossians 2:5: "For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless, I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline, and the stability of your faith in Christ."

**The Crown of Joy**

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20: "For who is our hope, or joy, or crown of joy? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus, at His coming? For you are our glory and joy. And here you have one of the four crowns that certain Christians will be given in heaven. These are spiritual Medals of Honor of recognition. This one is the crown of joy. Or your translation may say the crown of exultation. We usually refer to it as the crown of joy. What is the crown of joy? This is the crown of joy as the result of seeing people who have responded to the Word of God that you have made possible for them to get one way or another. The crown of joy will be your reward (your recognition) that you spent your life getting the Word of God out to people who had a chance then to believe it, and to come into a life with Christ. And you did that through suffering, whether or no you were faithful to your calling.

How many Christians are going to be able to rejoice in having the crown of joy? Philemon 7: "For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother." The apostle Paul said, "Getting the word out has refreshed the hearts. That has brought me joy and great satisfaction."

So, the apostle Paul is leading us to some very deep territory when he makes such a simple little statement in Colossians 1:24: "Now, in my present circumstance, here in prison in Rome, I'm happy up to my eyeballs. I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." Specifically, he says, "In my flesh." It is one thing to suffer on some triviality of life that you can't get, but it's another to suffer in what the Bible calls your "sarx." That's your physical body. And, boy, did he know what it was to suffer in his physical body? But as the writer of Hebrews says, "How many of us have suffered by shedding blood as Jesus did? How many of us have suffered that kind of extreme physical suffering?

In parts of the world, like in China, the believers have inordinate suffering physically, because they live under a brutal dictatorship that has total control over the lives of the people – the same kind of lifestyle in governmental action that is gradually encroaching upon the United States, where a supreme national government will tell everybody: "This is the way you should live. This is the way you should not live." And freedom will be gone.

Paul, here in his physical body, rejoiced that the sufferings for getting the word out caused him physical problems. He's pointing out that Christian service requires the use of your body. He's going to be incapacitated by age. It will be slowed down by age. But you cannot serve God without your physical body, which includes your brain. The believer's body is also, naturally, therefore, the focus of suffering by Satan, in order to stop the Christian who is trying to do the will of God. That's the only point of contact the devil basically has with you in the world. He hits you physically, so don't be too quick to say, "Well, I don't feel so good. I don't think I should go to church today. I'm not up to it. I don't think I should do this Christian service." You can count on the fact that the physical attack is a way of suffering that Satan has to stop the believer.

The apostle Paul said, "I'd never let that stop me. I had to really be down on my back before I quit." Every Christian at every age level, therefore, has to determine, before God, how much his body should be involved in the institutions and the activities of Satan's world, in contrast to the activities of God's work. How I love that where Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead." Here we have all these spiritually alive Christians everywhere, who are so involved in society, and so involved in the things of Satan's world system, all under noble guise: "We want to have Christian influence. We want to do good in the world." And the world says, "Yeah, go ahead and do it. We'll have a good time (we who are spiritually dead), while you who are spiritually alive, are squandering your life out here, doing the things for us that we could do for ourselves."

So, I see these Christians dragging around. They're dog-tired. They can't be on the deck for the Lord's work. Why? Because They're all shot-through because they're out in Satan's world, doing his work, for all of those spiritually dead. Jesus said, "Let those dead guys take care of their business. Let the dead bury their own dead. You people who are alive, stay on your job in serving Christ. Stay in your maximum spiritual capacity to take the suffering in stride. Don't put yourself in the position where the world can bring you down. At every stage (young person, or adult), you're going to say, "I'm going to join this organization. And now your life goes. Then comes something such that you're supposed to be at church: "I can't. This organization in society already has my life. And they demand that I be here at that time."

One mother came to me and said, "I've got some little pressures because of my little boy. People are really saying, 'Why aren't you letting your little five-year-old boy there get into junior league athletics? How terrible. Why are you denying that?'" So, she's telling me, trying to know: "What should I do about this? The people around me trying to make me feel guilty." But she said, "Am I wrong in thinking that if I sign this kid up for that, that that signs me up, because I have to drive him? They won't give him a license. I've asked. He can't drive himself. I have to drive to the game. I have to be there to come and get him. No matter what happens, it's locked in. There's a schedule. Somebody comes. They need my help. So, I have to say, 'I can't. I've got to drive him to the athletic event.'" Then when the athletic event is over, and all the parents scream at each other, and everybody is mad, what has been done for eternal values? What has the life been trained to do?

I said, "My dear lady, you are right on target. And that's why the devil wants to make you suffer through your Christian friends. From the earliest days, you will now teach your son that he should seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first, and all the good things in life that he may want will be added to him, that he needs. But if you go ahead, and he sees you running around like a ninny for a triviality like a fun event, he'll get the message. And when he's in charge of his life, you may then count on it that he will also be a triviality, running around in the world system – a living believer, serving a dead activity."

Paul says, "I take this suffering, and I take it in my flesh, because my body is my vehicle of Christian service. I cannot serve God, and I cannot fulfill my mission without my body, and the time that it takes."

So, where we put our bodies at any particular point of time, that's very important. That is not a trivial thing. And every day you have this box: emotional energy; physical energy; and, intellectual energy, in time. And at the end of the day, it's gone. And you will never get it again. Live one day at a time. And live that day with your focus upon Christ, and your realization that "woe are you" if you do not make it possible by every means that He has given you to fulfill your mission, and be part of the propagating of the Word of God. That's what it's all about. And the bottom line is to give people the gospel. And the bottom attack of Satan is going to be to give you misery for doing that. So, what will you do with Christ? That's what it's all about.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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