***Suffering

RV171-02***

This is segment number 18 in our study of "The Antichrist" in Revelation 13:1-10.

**Pay Attention**

In Revelation 13:9, we read the admonition, "If anyone has an ear, let him hear." This verse is a warning to pay attention to what God has revealed about the future antichrist. What this man will do someday is clearly predicted by God. When the antichrist will come on the scene of world history is not known. The antichrist cannot, however, do his thing until certain world conditions have been met.

We must have a world which, in general, rejects the Bible as the natural law of God to guide the laws of men. We must have a world which is enthusiastic for the concept of world government to be controlled by an elite few leaders. We must have the technological means for controlling the world's population in its daily commerce. We must have an acceptance of the concept that man himself is his own God. We must have the condition where the restraining influence of God the Holy Spirit over evil is removed, because the Spirit of God has departed this world scene. We must have the nation of Israel in a condition of great desperation relative to its national survival, so that it is willing and ready to accept a protector. We must have the rule of law replaced by the rule of 51% majority; that is, a democracy. We must have the family unit in such disarray that there simply is no longer any foundation for civilized society.

As you run your eye over these principles, it is quite evident that never in the history of the world have these very prerequisite conditions for the rule of the antichrist been more in effect than they are today. All of these things are rapidly coming to a climax. So paying attention to God's Word is the greatest responsibility that rests upon any human being. How little people can pay attention to the Word of God is determined by how much they know or how little they know about the Word of God. It is always an educational experience to sit in a conversation with people from various church backgrounds and the structures of their church services, and to look into the face of people who are successful in life; intelligent; knowledgeable; thoughtful; and perceptive, yet dumb when it comes to biblical principles. They are religious up to their eyeballs, and they have nothing in the way of an anchor in life.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians, he stressed to them that the priority of their life was to be the Word of God. In Philippians 2:14, the apostle Paul has pointed out here the priority of Bible doctrine. He calls upon Christians to rise to a certain level of godliness; that is, Christians are to live lives, both in private and in public, which befit a child of God. I need not tell you that we've had a lot of public exposure in recent times of Christians and Christian leaders who live anything but lives that are befitting those who claim to be members of the royal family of God.

**Do Everything without Grumbling**

For this reason, the apostle Paul to the Philippian Christian says, "First of all, do things without grumbling. Do everything without an attitude of grumbling. Grumbling reflects a bad attitude toward God because you are complaining about your lot in life. A lot of people come to me, and they have things they want to talk over. The bottom line is, "I don't like my lot in life. I don't like the circumstances under which God has placed me.

A classic example of this, of course, was that of the Exodus Jews in the wilderness, who, having received their freedom from slavery in Egypt, continue to criticize God and to complain at every turn of the road. Going through life with a constant mad on is unbecoming a child of God. So, the apostle Paul says, "First of all, as a child of God, who is trained in the Word of God, there should be one consequence in your life that should be very clearly there, and that is that you're not a grumbling complainer – that you're not walking around with a constant mad on, always criticizing, and always on the attack.

**Do Everything without Arguing**

Secondly, Paul says, "You should do all things without disputing; without arguing; and, without having a spirit of contention in dealing with people. What a sad sight it is when we see Christians fighting one another, and contending with one another, instead of fighting the devil who gives them all the battle that they can handle. What this reflects in us is a spirit of arrogance and of self-righteousness. We go through life constantly on the attack, and we're never satisfied.

**Take Life in Stride**

We are therefore, as Christians, if we know the Word of God, to do things without complaining, and to do things without arguing. That doesn't mean that we do what is wrong. We do what is right, but we also take in stride our lot in life. We take in stride the circumstances under which we find ourselves. We take in stride the fact that we can't do all those things we would like to do in life; all those things we had planned to do; and, all the hopes and expectations, many of which are justified and right, but we get nowhere with them. We can't follow through: "Why me?"

**Be Blameless**

In verse 15, the apostle Paul calls upon the believers to be an example in conduct, "That you may prove yourselves to be blameless." Prove yourself to be blameless before an unbelieving world. This word "blameless" does not mean sinless, but it means that you do right by people.

**Be Innocent**

It is a sorry sight indeed when a Christian, out of greed, or out of self-righteousness, or out of self-interest, or out of self-centeredness, or out of sensuality, does not do right by other people: "You may prove yourself blameless and innocent." The word "innocent" means to prove your personal integrity relative to moral evils. You obey the moral rules of God.

**Above Reproach**

"Children of God are blameless and innocent, and you are then above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." We are to be "above reproach in an evil society." A crooked and perverse generation is rejected as your model. It is so easy for Christians to do things the way the world does things. It is so easy for Christians to justify acting in an evil way because, in the particular business that they're in, everybody else acts that way, and they think that if they don't act that way, they're going to be overwhelmed. The unbelievers are moving about in a spiritual darkness. They are devoid of all divine viewpoint to guide them. We, who are the children of God, are to be above moral reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

**Lights in the World**

Paul says that: "We are to be among them as lights in the world." He means that we are to be like those bright, shining stars up in the sky by which people can navigate into a safe harbor; in salvation in Christ; and, in knowing the full counsel of the Word of God. Christians ought to be the people to guide the others. That's a great responsibility. It's a great honor. It's something that we cannot force you to do. The stars in the sky, which can be used by knowledgeable people to navigate at night, cannot force you to use them to navigate, nor can they force you to navigate in the right way. But the possibility is there. The opportunity is there.

**Improper Witnessing**

We, as navigating lights in a dark world, cannot shove it down the throats of people. There are places when it is improper for you to witness for Jesus Christ. For example, it is improper for you to be proclaiming the Word of God on your employer's time, or within the context that distracts you or others from the calling for which you are being paid. It is improper for you to be witnessing for Christ before God the Holy Spirit has opened the door.

**Hold Fast (Focus)**

Paul comes to his point: If you're going to be a person that isn't always grumbling and on the attack; if you're not going to be constantly arguing; if you're going to prove yourself a person who sins, and makes correction, and deals with God and man in that area so that you can be declared blameless; if you're going to be a person with personal integrity in moral matters; if you're going to be above reproach in the midst of a society that's completely reproachful in its evil; and, if you're going to be a guiding light to the world in which you live, verse 16 says this is how it happens: "You must hold fast" to something. The Greek word here is "epecho." The word "epecho" here means to focus your attention on something. Here is the apostle Paul telling us exactly the same thing that God the Holy Spirit, in the book of the Revelation, has instructed the people who are going to be faced with the antichrist to do: Pay attention to what God has said. Holding fast the Word of Life.

In Luke 14:7, this word is used, and it illustrates the idea: "And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He (that is, Jesus) noticed ('epecho' – when He observed, by focusing His attention on something) how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table." Jesus sat there watching these people, shoving each other around to get the places of honor. And this is the word: "focused on."

Acts 3:5 also illustrates this: "And he (the man who was lame) began to give them (Peter and John) his attention." And there, "to give them his attention" is this word "epecho:" expecting to receive something from them? He was focusing on them.

1 Timothy 4:16 also uses this word. Paul says to Timothy, "Pay close attention." This is the same word again: "Pay close attention to yourself, and to your teaching. Persevere in these things, for as you do this, you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who are here." Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching. The word "teaching" in the Greek is the word "doctrine." Pay close attention to the Word of God.

So, this word means to focus in on something. It's in the present tense. You do this all the time. You're always conscious of the Word of God. It's active voice, which means that you do the paying attention – it is not somebody else paying attention for you. It's a spiritual principle being stated.

This word does also connote holding fast to what your attention is focused on. You may have that concept. You're not only focus on something, but you hold fast what you are focused on in the Word of God. It also connotes holding firmly. What you have, your hold firmly. It also then connotes offering it to others, so that you are like a beacon.

So, this is a splendid call on the part of the Christian to be in such an exemplary position. So, we are to be holding fast; focusing on; holding it firmly; and, extending out the Word of Life. The Word of Life refers, of course, to the special life to be found in God – His eternal life, as that eternal life is transmitted through the Word of God; that is, through Scripture.

John 6:63 refers to this concept. Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." The words of the Bible, because they are the Words of God the Holy Spirit, are different than any other book in the world. They're not simply the words of people. They are the Words of God. Therefore, when you pronounce the Words of Scripture, you are dealing with Words that potentially can trigger eternal life within the hearer, depending on his response.

Hebrews 4:12 also exalts the Words of God as being something very special: "For the Word of God is living and active, and sharper than a two-edged sword," and so on. Every other book in the world, and every other ecclesiastical pronouncement that religious leaders may make are simply the words of man, and they lack the life. All the religious books of the world are dead words. All the pronouncements of the Pope are dead words. Only in the Bible do you have words that are Words of Life. The Bible, as the Word of Life, then, is to be the Christian's main focus in life. That's what he's telling us here in Philippians 2: "Focusing in and holding on to the Word of God, so that you yourself are a guiding light.

In 1 Timothy 4:16, the apostle Paul puts it this way: "Pay close attention to yourself, and to your teaching. Persevere in these things. For as you do this, you can assure salvation for yourself, and for those who will be hearing you.

So, in this way, a Christian will pay attention to is not what God has said. This will replace those false objects of focus in life. You will be focusing upon the Word of God instead of on false objects.

You may substitute that focus by turning to an orgy of emotional excitement to satisfy the lust patterns of the sin nature. You may focus instead on the church program of activities. Churches love to have programs which are totally unrelated to spiritual advancement. They love to use their facilities for the same thing that the YMCA uses its facilities for; that the Ladies Garden Club uses its facilities for; and, that the Civic Auditorium uses its facilities for.

It's amazing how churches have no compunction about using their facilities for things that have nothing to do with spiritual objectives, because they somehow think that this brings them close to God. It's a fallacy. Church programs do not bring you to God, nor do religious rituals and ceremonies. That's a false focus to satisfy the asceticism of the sin nature.

I spoke to one of our parents after the open house Friday night. I asked him where he went to church, and he told me where he went. I knew he was in trouble, but he said, "I've been then there all my life. I was born there; baptized there; and I grew up there." And I knew what he meant by "baptism." They sprinkled a little water on him when he was a baby. ... But here he is. He's very proud of it. I know the place well. And I know that somehow, by the grace of God, he has brought his child into our school. I didn't want to say anything, but I said, "Boy, are you in for some surprises?" Just wait till this kid starts coming home, because he goes to a church that doesn't believe that the Bible is the Word of God. He goes to church that believes that the Bible *contains* the Word of God, with a lot of stuff that you have to notice and shove out of the way because it's wrong. He believes that there are mistakes in there. He has a basic foundational problem, but he's very proud of his church, because the family has been there, and he has been there.

How do you think I help? Wouldn't I like to reach out and say, "Listen, you're really focusing on the wrong thing? I know what happens when you sit there and watch that ritual being performed in those ceremonies. I want to tell you, that you will spend all eternity regretting that you have wasted your life in that. God has something infinitely greater for you." Until God gives the opening, the mouth remains shut. When God is ready, the open door comes, and then we are ready to speak.

You also do not focus on sharing experiences with one another to prove that God is real and working in the world. God is real because the Bible says that He's real, whether He ever does anything for you, or whether you ever have any experience with Him or not. That is a false focus.

You also do not follow some religious leaders as your guru – some religious personality that becomes your guru, and what he says is what you believe. You don't know whether the Bible confirms that or not, but that is your focus. That is the kiss of death.

Another bad practice is glamorizing Christianity by public relations methods so that you appeal to the sin nature in man; and, so that people will be convinced that they ought to give God a tumble.

These are all false areas of focus of our lives. This is what Paul is talking about. Don't do that! Let your focus should be upon what God has said. Pay attention to him.

There are many things that will distract you from being able to focus on the Word of God, not the least of which will be the failure to attend a HICEE-type church. That will do you in every time. Living in carnality, out of temporal fellowship, so that you're building calluses on your soul, will blind you to divine viewpoint. The distractions of Satan with various evils that he brings into your life: carnality; immorality; and, breaking the rules – that will distract you from focusing on the Word of Life. Your personal lack of self-discipline will cause you not to able to make room for reading of the Word of God and for study of the Bible. That's a tough one. We've got to make it. We've got to hustle. Our intentions are good. We just float through the week and hardly ever touch the Bible. A rebellious attitude toward what the Bible teaches will keep you from focusing on the Word of God. Even poor health will keep you from it, because you live in a way such that you don't give your physical body a chance to maintain its maximum capacity, so that you don't have the physical capacity and the mental alertness to be able to focus on the Word of God.

In Philippians 2:16, the apostle Paul explains why this is so important to him – that the Christians whom he has taught in Philippi should be able to focus upon the Word of Life, the Word of God. He says, "Holding fast the Word of Life (focusing upon it), so that in the day of Christ." The day of Christ is a technical term in the Bible referring to the rapture and the Judgment Seat of Christ. You should learn that. Whenever you read about the day of Christ in the Bible, it's referring to the church being caught up to meet the Lord in the air; being taken into heaven; and, being lined up one-by-one to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, to get your report card on how you did your Christian service.

This event of the day of Christ is described for us in one place in 1 Corinthians 15:52: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the comfort with will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." To whom is he speaking? He is speaking to Christians, and he's talking about that moment in time when suddenly we are transformed, as living believers, and taken into the Lord's presence, along with the believers who have been raised from the dead. This day of Christ event is described in greater detail in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, where Paul describes the day of Christ in these words:

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord (this is the day of Christ – the rapture) shall not precede those who have fallen asleep (we won't leave the dead Christians behind), for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (they come to life first), and then we who are alive have our transformation." First, the bodies of dead believers are transformed into the sinless body of Christ, and then our bodies are transformed into the sinless body of Christ: "We who are alive remain and shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words. This indeed is the great comfort that all Christians look forward to – knowing that someday, either through life or through death, we'll be caught up to meet the Lord in the air." That is the day of Christ.

In the Bible, this term is associated with the rapture and the Judgment Seat of Christ. You have this shown in several Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:6; Philippians 1:10; and, Philippians 2:16. All of these associate the day of Christ with the day of the rapture, and the day of the judgment of the believer's works.

So, what is Paul concerned about here? In Philippians 2:16, the apostle Paul calls upon the Christians to focus upon the Word of God for what purpose? So, that at the rapture: "I may have cause to glory." Paul is concerned about his own evaluation, relative to the service which he delivered to the Philippian believers. He is concerned that he will have a cause to glory; that is, to boast. Boasting of what? Of the positive volition results of the Philippians toward the Word of God. Paul said, "I want to be sure that when I'm up there, I'll be pleased to find that I did not run in vain" – that he did not run the race of the Christian life as a loser. His Christian service was not the race of a loser. Also, he did not toil in vain – that he will be pleased to find that he did not exhaust himself in teaching and ministering to others with the Word of God, and that it was to no purpose.

This word "toil" in the Greek language is an interesting word because it's a word that reflects exhaustion. It does not just connote coming down and teaching a Sunday school class. That is demanding, but it's not exhaustive. Paul says, "I ran a race where I exhausted myself in God's service. I couldn't keep up with my own business, in trying to keep on top of God's business. I'd hate to get to heaven and find that I had done that, and you people blew it. You did not focus upon the Word of God – that somehow I misdirected your attention. If I do that, there'll be no rewards for me." So, I knew that if they focus there, it would be a blessing, and it would mean great joy for them. He did not toil in vain.

So, God the Holy Spirit, in Revelation 13:9, is simply trying to tell us what Paul has told us – that paying attention to the Word of God (that you have been taught) is important for your happiness now (for your functioning now), and it has enormous consequences in eternity. Paying attention to what God has said is the primary calling of every believer. This is not easy to do. It is easy to be distracted from it. It is easy to focus on secondary things.

**Take it in Stride**

Then, the apostle John goes on, in Revelation 13:10, by reminding us of something else – that we do focus upon the Word of God must remember that there is the inevitability of Christian suffering: "If anyone is destined for captivity." This word "if" is a first-class condition, so it means "if, and you are." Some believers are destined for captivity. Some of the believers, who are living in the tribulation era, are going to be taken captive by the antichrist. If that is your situation, you will go into captivity. If this is the will of God, stop kicking; stop fighting; and, stop flailing out at him. You're going to be taken captive, and your freedom will be removed from you. Take it in stride.

This verse is based upon the Old Testament passage in Jeremiah 15:2. The Jews, in Jeremiah's day, violated all of the things that we've been talking about today. They would not pay attention to the Word of God that was delivered to them by their prophet Jeremiah. In fact, they kept picking on him; they literally kept beating up on him; and, they kept trying to silence him. Finally, the sad news hit them that the judgment of God was inevitable. Nebuchadnezzar was not going to be stopped; Jerusalem was going to fall; they were going to be taken as captives and transformed into slaves; they were going to suffer famine; they were going to suffer death; they were going to be destitute.

So, these people come now to this prophet that they've been pushing around, wringing their hands, saying, "Well, what are we going to do?" And here is Jeremiah's divine viewpoint answer – exactly what John is being told, that believers in the tribulation are going to be faced with the inevitable suffering. These people here in Israel brought it on themselves by their own sins.

Jeremiah 15:2: "And it shall be that when they go, they say to you, 'Where should we go?' Then you are to tell them. 'Thus says the Lord, 'Those destined for death; to death.''" They say, "Oh, I don't like that." The Jew says, "Where am I going to go? How am I going to escape Nebuchadnezzar?" Jeremiah said, "I have the answer. God has just spoken to me. He says, 'Those of you that he has set up for death, that's where you're going to go. Those destined for the sword, that's where you're going. You're going to get hit with the sword. Those who are destined for famine, that's where you're going to go. You're going to go to abysmal starvation. Those of you who are destined for captivity, to be transformed into slaves, you're going to go to captivity.'" This verse is the background of what God the Holy Spirit is saying in Revelation 13:10. Anyone who's destined to become a captive, that is what's going to happen. Some suffering for the people of God is inevitable. The duty of endurance under suffering is the will of God. Now, that's hard to take. I don't have an answer,

**Suffering is Inevitable for the People of God**

When somebody comes to me, as one person did recently, and says, "Why do I have this horrible circumstance in life that surrounds me, when I am trying to be everything that God wants me to be? Why do I use labor under these limitations? Just look at my physical condition. Can you believe this?" What can I say? I know there is a just and a holy God who makes decisions, and whatever the full answers are, that only eternity will tell, I can tell you this much: that when He places upon you the burden of suffering, deserved or undeserved, the principle is: stabilize, and take it. Stabilize, and function within the limitations of your suffering. *Suffering for the people of God is inevitable*.

Here, the believers of the tribulation will suffer like none of us have ever suffered. Some are destined for captivity, and if that's what they see coming, they are to stabilize, and start operating within that captivity. Some of these are going to suffer death at the hand of the antichrist, but God is bringing comfort here to remind them that, in time, God Himself is going to make a captive of the antichrist, and God Himself is going to imprison him in the lake of fire forever. At that time, the believers that he has imprisoned will be freed, and the martyred saints that he has killed will be resurrected. If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity you will go. If anyone kills with the sword, then with the sword he must be killed.

This "if" is also "since it is true" that some will kill with the sword. The antichrist is going to go around putting believers to death. If that is what God has put in the plan for you, then you are going to die. You be prepared to stand in the arena as a martyr. When you have no escape, then you stand. You stand like a John Huss, and you go out into eternity with the praise of God on your lips as the flames of death rise around you.

The reason these martyrs of old could to do this was that they understood this principle: that when God has placed you in that position, then you go out as an example to your oppressors. If anyone kills with the sword, as the antichrist will do, he will be killed. God's decree has made it inevitable that after 42 months, this man will himself be killed, and his reign of terror will be ended. This will happen at the Second Coming of Christ. It is to be done to the antichrist by God. This word "to be killed" is the infinitive mood, which tells us that this is the inevitable will and plan of God.

So, believers under persecution are not to retaliate, but they are to remain true to God, and trust Him for justice. They are to take what escape routes are open to them, but when the door closes, they are to stand and be counted for the Lord. Tribulation believers are going to face intense, brutal persecution. What he is telling them that they should not try to meet force with force. They would simply give the enemy just cause to claim that they deserve to be made captives and to be killed.

**The Law of Retribution**

There is a law of retribution that he is referring to here. This is the law which is enunciated in Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, this will he also reap. This law of retribution works every day of one's life. It has never been repealed. It is absolutely inevitable.

**David**

One of the classic examples in Scripture is that David used the sword against Bathsheba's husband Uriah to get him murdered so that he could marry Uriah's wife. When the judgment was brought down upon David, and Samuel the prophet confronted the king with what he had done (he had used the sword against one of his subjects in order to take his wife), David heard some very chilling words. The law of retribution was pronounced upon him. 2 Samuel 12:10. Samuel says to David, "Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." Samuel says, "You broke my rules. You knew what the laws were. You knew what the moral code was. You deliberately, David, did this, and you used the sword. Now the principle of retribution will come into play." This is the same thing that is spoken of in the book of the Revelation. And David is told that the sword (people being killed) would never depart from his house.

**Amnon**

2 Samuel 13:28-29 tell about the death of one of David's sons that immediately brought before him the focus of this judgment. Amnon was the eldest son of David. There you may read about Absalom, a son that was dearly loved by David. Absalom, because of a hatred toward his brother, created a conspiracy, and arranged that when his brother was drunk, he would have been assassinated. David got the horrible word that his eldest son Amnon had been killed.

**Absalom**

In 2 Samuel 18:14-15, you have the great tragedy of the sword being applied to Absalom himself. Joab said, "I will not waste time here with you." Absalom has been riding and trying to escape after a failed coup. His head gets caught in some branches along the road. The mule keeps running, and he is hung in such a position that he cannot wrench himself loose. Joab comes up and says, "I'm not going to waste any time. He takes three spears in his hand, and he thrusts them through the very heart of Absalom while he was alive, hanging on the oak tree. The ten young men who carried Joab's armor were gathered around, and they also struck Absalom and killed him.

You may remember that when David got the word on this, he really cried. He just broke up completely, because Absalom was the dearest son to him. Do you see what the law of retribution is all about? What you saw is what you'll reap, and this will have to be a great comfort in the tribulation for the people who are suffering at the hands of this monster, the antichrist. If anyone is destined for captivity, he will go into captivity. Face it. If anyone kills with the sword, as the antichrist will be killing them, he'll be killed. God will bring retribution upon him. This is an encouragement to these suffering saints.

**Steady Trust**

Then verse 10 closes with the words, "Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints. This is describing that the response of the tribulation saints to suffering is perseverance. This word "perseverance" is the Greek word for "hupomone," and it means "steadfastness under attack" – to know that God is for you, and to not compromise. This means to know that, while you are a captive, God is going to free you. It is to know that if you must die, you go into His presence, and in time, your persecutors will be judged by God. This is the stability and the steadfastness, so you do not compromise. This is the faith, or more precisely, the faithfulness of the saints. You continue to be loyal to the Word of God, and you continue to be loyal to the Lord. This is a steady trust in the ultimate victory over the antichrist by the hand of God. You remain loyal to the Lord Jesus even when the antichrist seems to be winning. This is a characteristic of saints under suffering. They stand steadfast, and they remain faithful to the Lord.

Revelation 19:20 tells us that the antichrist and his false prophet will be thrown into the lake of fire. At the end of the millennium, Revelation 20:10 tells us that Satan himself will be thrown into the lake of fire to join the antichrist and his false prophet. God will settle the accounts of His people.

**Believers Suffer**

So, after revealing the information about this man the antichrist, God the Holy Spirit just pauses to encourage the believers, and to remind them to stand true to God, because suffering is, in the nature of the case, part of the believer's experience. There is suffering in time.

**Everybody Suffers**

Some types of suffering are experienced by everyone, whether you're a believer or an unbeliever. Everybody suffers with the loss of health. Everybody suffers if you break the laws. Everybody suffers with mistreatment of the people who are dominated by the sin nature. Christians and unbelievers alike will suffer the privations and necessities of life. You just are not able to get it together to cover the costs of your staying alive. It doesn't matter whether you're a Christian or not – things happen that make that hard to bring about. Everybody suffers the acts of nature. Everybody suffers the social conflicts and the rejection by people. Everybody is placed under mental stresses. And certainly everybody is overcome potentially by the details of life – handling the material things, and knowing how much to become engrossed and involved in material things to the exclusion of the things of God.

How often have we seen people who have been active servants of the most high God, and then they got a good job, and it killed , because they had no more time for anything in the Word of God or the service of God, because their job ate them up more and more. And they just loved it. And it never occurred to them that the time had come to terminate that suffering.

**Satan**

Whether you, a Christian or not, you also suffer from natural disasters. Why is this suffering in the world? The primary reason is because of Satan. All of human society is under Satan's control. But Satan can't control all of the sin natures. He can't keep all the sin natures of the people he controls in line. Consequently, all the human viewpoint ways that Satan offers to improve the world eventually backfire on him. Most of the human good intentions of the politicians of the world, motivated by their human love, merely produce more human misery. As long as Satan is ruling this world, mankind is going to be doomed to conflicts; to wars; to privation; and, to suffering.

The devil is really trying to do the best he can – not the worst. The devil is trying to create a millennium without God, not a hell on earth. The devil is trying to bring about peace and prosperity. Yet, historically everything continues to come apart.

**Suffering in Eternity**

There's also suffering in eternity. The unbeliever will suffer for rejecting Christ forever (John 3:18). For the believer, there will be no suffering (Revelation 2:4).

Whatever human suffering we experience always comes because we are out of touch with the real world. All suffering comes from being out of touch with the real world. The real world cannot be known except in terms of doctrine. Unreality in your thinking then turns to unreal solutions: the drug scene; the sexual immorality; the new world order; and, socialism. All of these are attempts to bring peace and stability in a world that rejects God. Satan's views are always in conflict with the real world. God's plan, relative to Christian suffering, however, is very clear, and we need to know that.

**Blessing**

Suffering for the believer is usually designed for his blessing. It's important to remember that when we suffer, God's ultimate purpose in our suffering, whether He imposes it or permits it, is for our blessing. In 1 Peter 1:7-8, Peter said that, "The proof of your faith, being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire." Proof of your faith, proof of putting your faith and your action where your mouth is. Even though tested by the fire of suffering, it may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. At the end of your suffering, when Jesus Christ is revealed, at His Second Coming, lo and behold, you're standing there dressed magnificently in that garment that you have prepared out of your good works service. And although you have not seen Him, you love Him. And though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice, with joy inexpressible, full of glory.

In 1 Peter 4:14, Peter adds this: "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." So, suffering for the believer, especially if it's suffering because you are a Christian, has upon you the glory of God.

**Divine Discipline**

Suffering is also placed upon the believer as divine discipline. In Hebrews 12:6, this is indicated: "For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. That's very sobering. If God loves you, He disciplines you. The parent who does not really love a child lets him get away with murder and does not discipline. But here the words are very strong that those who are in the family of God, if necessary, will be scourged.

When we do have divine discipline, however, which is never pleasant when we have come to repentance, and made confession of sin, that discipline turns to blessing. That's an important principle to remember in the world of inevitability of suffering. In 1 Corinthians 11:31, Paul says, "But if we judge ourselves rightly, we shall not be judged." That doesn't mean that the consequences of your evil will disappear. The consequences of your evil may be horrendous. The consequences of your evil may even be a disease that's going to take your life. But suddenly, you will discover that as you're on the downward trail, moving out of this world, with your life slipping away as a consequence of your evil, having confessed and taken your position with God once more (that He was right, and you were wrong), suddenly, your process of dying becomes dying grace, and it becomes a moment of great blessing. That discipline carried to its end is now transformed into blessing. All discipline for the Christian, of any kind, is always designed for blessing.

**The Apostle Paul**

Christians suffer for many reasons because of the suffering that is brought into their life. And certainly no one is suffering better than the apostle Paul. We close with his great example in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33. The apostle Paul says, "I have to do a little bragging because people have been beating up on me. Some of these Christians have been talking about how much they are superior to me socially, racially, religiously, and in devotion." In 2 Corinthians 11:16, Paul says, "Let no one think me foolish, but if you do, receive me even as foolish, that I may boast a little." He says, "This is foolish for me to do. It's silly, but I'm going to do it, because I want to set the record straight. So, I'm going to talk about myself, and I'm going to tell you something about myself that I think should be brought into the picture." In verse 17, he says, "Now, I'm not speaking as the Lord would, but as foolishness in this confidence of boasting. This is something I'm doing in my humanity, but I think it should be done."

So, he begins in verse 23 with a declaration of boasting, and about his suffering. The bottom line is: "His grace is sufficient for me." So whatever the suffering is, God's grace, for the steadfast Christian (for the Christian who is in faithfulness to the Word of God) will be carried through. Now, the wimps who have cracked out of doctrine are not going to be carried through. You're going to whine and break up, and you're going to go right down the chute, kicking all the way into your eternity. But those who are walking with the living God, who are the true sons and daughters of God, as royalty – they're going to be able to stand with the apostle Paul; take this kind of a lifestyle; and, then say, 'His grace is sufficient for me.'"

In verses 23, Paul says, "They are servants of Christ? I speak as if I were insane. I'm more of a servant, in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death." Paul says, "I'm more of a servant of the Lord God than these who are criticizing, attacking, and charging it against me, and sniping at me. I've been more active in the Lord's service on a consistent basis over a period of years, and I'm more experienced, consequently, in suffering for Christ than they are. Talk about suffering. Those twits don't know what suffering is. I know what suffering is."

In verse 24, he reminisces a little bit: "Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes." Boy, that must hurt. He was whipped with 39 strokes on five different occasions? Can you imagine what his back must have looked like? They were putting him in "Mr. Handsome" magazine, with his muscles bulging: "Three times I was beaten with rods." It's bad enough to be beaten with whips, but now to have sticks whipping at you: "Once I was stoned." Yeah, and he doesn't tell us, but he was killed too, and had to be resurrected. But he got a little peek into heaven, which caused him more trouble, because then the Lord gave him a physical ailment to remind him never to tell us what he saw there, because it was so magnificent:

He says, "Three times I was shipwrecked." ... I mean, this isn't like one of those nice little souls they put over the side, and you have lobster to and things to munch on until the helicopter comes and picks you up. I mean, this was a wild, rough sea, and these guys are hanging on to whatever they can to keep from sinking. I mean, this is not one of those fancy scuba diving vests where you can reach over and hit that little button, and it inflates from the tank, and you just go floating along, with not a care in the world. I mean, these guys were hanging on for dear life: "Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I spent in the deep." That even worse – floating around there all night, looking down for those big fish that might come along.

Paul continues: "I have been on frequent journeys, and in danger from rivers." Those of you who went down the Colorado River with us in years past, you know what that must be like in the raging rivers: "Danger from robbers; dangers from my countrymen; dangers from the gentile; dangers in the city; dangers in the wilderness; dangers on the sea; and, dangers among the false brethren. And I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights; in hunger and thirst; often without food; in cold; and, in exposure." The apostle Paul knew what it was to have these kinds of physical sufferings – these terrorizing experiences.

Verse 28 is something that you probably can relate to: "Apart from such external things, there's a daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches." ...

Dr. John E. Danish, 1991

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