

**Grace Bible Church**  
***Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries***

**The Tree of Life is a weekly teaching summary.**  
**The Tree of Life from the week ending 09/13/09**  
**Why God made us like He did; Why Chaos and Sin. Part 2.**

In relationship to our main study of Rom 9:19, **You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?”**

We have begun to answer our fourth important principle concerning the will of God which is: Why God allows human suffering. The most obvious reason why we suffer is because we have a free will and God allows us to make our own decisions and allow the consequences of those decisions to prevail. We commit certain sins, and make bad decisions that cause us suffering. This suffering comes from our own volition even if done in ignorance. We make bad decisions and if we are humble enough we will learn from them (Psa 25:9)

On the other hand, there is a category of suffering that glorifies God. This is the category of undeserved suffering, or suffering for blessing. Here the believer is challenged to use the problem solving devices, and the different forms of rationales. The doctrinal rationales include: the essence of God rationale, the plan of God rationale, the policy of God rationale, the a fortiori rationale.

We are going to approach this subject of undeserved suffering from different stages: First, there is preventative suffering which is added to the first stage of spiritual adulthood, to strengthen it to greater spiritual growth. It is defined as short-termed suffering from the sovereignty of God for the benefit of the believer. There are times that we go through certain forms of suffering that come from God for our own benefit. Often the purpose of preventative suffering is to learn obedience, self-discipline, and therefore enforced and genuine humility. **Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations or the advance doctrinal understanding of the believer, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me to keep me from exalting myself! (2Co 12:7).**

Paul was given some sort of handicap to keep him in constant touch with his limitations. The Greek word for “given” is “edothe” in the passive voice it means that this was given for a blessing and benefit. You may not think it is when you're going through it, but it is. It may not feel good for you, but it is. The thorn in the flesh was an angel from Satan who was assigned to torment the apostle Paul and this keeps him from becoming arrogant. The thorn in the flesh tormented Paul by using members of the human race to persecute and harass Paul. When a believer has a lot of doctrine, he needs to stay away from arrogance, and therefore there are times when God allows the kingdom of darkness to torment one of God's children, but in fact it is for their own benefit.

**Concerning this [thorn in the flesh] I entreated or appealed to the Lord three times that it might depart from me. (2Co 12:8)**

Preventative suffering, like all suffering for blessing, is not designed to be removed by prayer. It is administered by God, and what God does not remove He intends for us to bear. You do not pray for the

removal of suffering for blessing, for without suffering the believer cannot fulfill the spiritual life or the PPOG for his life. Paul prayed three times for the removal of this suffering and he never received an answer.

**And He had said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power [the power of God given to the believer in spiritual adulthood] is perfected in weakness [or when you are unable to rely on your human strength or your human assets]. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” (2Co 12:9)**

The Greek verb for “to say” is “eireken” it means that Paul remembered something that the Lord had taught him. This was not an answer to prayer, but a recall of Bible doctrine which he had learned. Many believers don't understand that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself. A person who fears suffering is already suffering from what he fears. Only through experiences of trials and sufferings can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved. Everything necessary to fulfill the spiritual life in PPOG was provided in eternity past by way of our assets in the Portfolio of Invisible Assets. Then God provides doctrine and suffering in time. What a marvelous combination!

Suffering becomes a spotlight to the angels in the angelic conflict focusing on God's power and our simultaneous weakness, weakness brought about by suffering for blessing. Suffering for blessing focuses on God's grace, and turns boasting away from self-glorification into worship, love, and appreciation for God. Paul is boasting because this is suffering for blessing through which God is glorified. This is boasting in a good sense, which looks away from Paul and toward the grace provision of God. It is not boasting to glorify self, but the dynamic mental attitude of spiritual self-esteem facing preventative suffering.

**Therefore I am well content with weaknesses [when I go through preventative suffering], with insults [a reference to slander and people testing] with distresses [a reference to pressure and thought testing], with persecutions [a reference to system testing], with difficulties [a reference to stress and disaster testing], for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2Co 12:10)**

Spiritual growth develops spiritual muscle from passing these four warmup tests with the result of the believer becoming spiritually self-sustained. these tests are: 1) Insults, a reference to slander and people testing. 2) Distresses, a reference to pressure and thought testing. 3) Persecutions, a reference to system testing. 4) Difficulties, a reference to stress and disaster testing.

Let's look at people testing. In personal love or admiration, the recipient of your love often controls your life or causes you unhappiness, unless you have attained some stage of spiritual adulthood. In wanting to please the object of your personal love, you find yourself being a different person and not following your normal function. In personal hatred or animosity, the object of your antagonism or irritation often has control of your life or happiness, unless you have advanced to spiritual adulthood. Under the PPOG, God designed His plan so that your happiness will always reside in you, and you do not depend on people or things for your happiness. As a function of your royal priesthood it all comes from within.

You are to have personal control of your life, a personal sense of destiny, self-confidence from metabolized doctrine, and therefore, poise and command of self. Therefore, you bring your happiness to others, but do not lean on others or circumstances for your happiness. Many believers are easily led away from the spiritual life and the PPOG by their friendships, love life, and even hatred. This is why Pro 13:20 tells us, **He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm.** You become wise by walking with the wise; you hang out with fools, watch your life fall to pieces. 1Co 15:33 tells us, **Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.**

Unless you attain spiritual adulthood, every time you fall in love or acquire a friend, the object controls your

life and your happiness. Without impersonal unconditional love, you become a slave to people. The solution to people testing is found in the combination of personal love for God and impersonal love for all mankind. Believers can talk about love all they want. They can brag about how much they love; how much love they have in their church or in their little fellowship groups, but every time when you hear them become critical and judgmental of another believer, you are in the presence of phonies.

**“I tell you the truth, whatever you did to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did to Me.”  
(Mat 25:40)**

When you have impersonal unconditional love you have the divine power to cover others and be trustworthy and virtuous. (Pro 11:22; Pro 12:1; Pro 12:15; Pro 15:17; Pro 15:32; Pro 19:3). You do not blame anyone for your decisions when you are spiritually self-sustained. However when you become jealous, angry, bitter, vindictive, or implacable; when you are dissatisfied, antagonistic toward someone else, friend or stranger, lover or enemy; you surrender the control of your life to that person. You become a slave to the object of your antagonism or love. At the same time, you have no control over your life, canceling all the characteristics of spiritual self-esteem and your spiritual growth.

Virtue-love as a problem solving device is the secret of your relationship with God, mankind, and in personal love. **For God has not given us a spirit of timidity or fear, but of power and love and discipline (2Ti 1:7)**. There is no built-in virtue in personal love, which only requires that another meet your standards of beauty, attractiveness, and rapport. Therefore, to make a personal love relationship work, the believer must use a virtue base totally outside himself. Otherwise, people will make him miserable all his life. Personal love is only a virtue when directed toward God. Impersonal love is only a virtue when directed toward all mankind. This means that through impersonal love, the believer has control of his own life and he maintains control of his own happiness. Therefore, disappointment, disillusion, frustration, dissatisfaction with others cannot damage his happiness under the principle of misery derived from getting your eyes on people. Furthermore, once you attain spiritual adulthood, and you begin to function under the different categories of suffering for blessing, God becomes the source of your happiness.

People can only become a distraction to the fulfillment of the God's plan for your life when human relationship becomes more important to you than Bible doctrine. False priorities exist when social life, business life, sexual life take precedence over your residence, function, and momentum inside the PPOG. When personal ambition is stronger than Bible doctrine, then the believer has lost his scale of values, his priorities. So whether it's love or hatred, attraction or animosity, romance or disenchantment, friendship or disillusion, these can distract you from the fulfillment of the PPOG and the glorification of our Lord Jesus Christ; unless you have passed momentum suffering. This means that through impersonal love, the believer has control of his own life and he maintains control of his own happiness.

**For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1Jo 3:11-16)**

If we don't love people we can see, how can we love God whom we cannot see?

So remember, spiritual growth develops spiritual muscle from passing those four warmup tests with the result of the believer becoming spiritually self-sustained. These tests are: 1) Insults, a reference to slander and people testing. 2) Distresses, a reference to pressure and thought testing. 3) Persecutions, a reference to

system testing. 4) Difficulties, a reference to stress and disaster testing. Next we look at thought testing. This is the principle that Paul also gave us in 2Co 12:10, **Therefore I am well content with weaknesses** [preventative suffering], **with insults** [slander and people testing], **with distresses** [a reference to pressure and thought testing], **with persecutions** [a reference to system testing], **with difficulties** [a reference to stress and disaster testing], **for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.** Thought has such a powerful effect on the believer's success or failure in the Christian life that thinking must be considered a major spiritual test. In all stages of the spiritual life and Christian growth, the believer will face the pressure of thought conflicts in his soul. Human viewpoint will conflict with divine viewpoint. False concepts will challenge Bible doctrine. Arrogance will intrude upon humility. Prosperity will compete with the PPOG. Fear will paralyze reason. These are essentially private conflicts which the believer must resolve in his own soul. Dilemmas, confusions, and unanswered questions motivate the positive believer to apply the resources of Bible doctrine he has learned. Concentration on doctrine accelerates his spiritual growth.

Thought testing may also exist when circumstances are overtly prosperous and tranquil. (Deu 6:10-12; Deu 8:1-14). When it comes to distresses or pressure and thought testing, a person is not always what he appears to be on the surface; the real person is the thought content of his soul. What you really are as a person is what you really think, not what you appear to be on the surface, not the way you are dressed or groomed, but what goes on inside your soul. You are not always what you appear to be on the surface. Some people can hide their thoughts and some cannot. People can hide their thoughts and become masterful at the practice of hypocrisy. The real you is the thought content of your soul. Your thoughts determine your true character. People use thoughts to justify their wrong doings, and speech to conceal their thoughts. People use thoughts to justify their wrong doings, and they use speech to conceal their thoughts. Learn to have more respect for honest arrogance than hypocritical humility. This is why courage and genuine humility are straightforward virtues, for they are virtues that hypocrisy cannot imitate. Hypocrisy is the ultimate form of wickedness and evil. Therefore, the mentality of the soul is the battlefield of the angelic conflict.

When the believer thinks evil, he is evil. He or she resides in Satan's cosmic system. From evil thinking comes evil motivation; from evil motivation, evil actions. **And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?" (Mat 9:4).** In contrast, thinking that is consistent with the truth has enormous repercussions for good. Salvation itself is appropriated by a right thought, by non-meritorious positive volition toward the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Mat 22:42). Mankind's great enemy is a thought called arrogance. Arrogance can inflate or deflate man's opinion of himself. He thinks he is better or worse than he actually is. Both self-promotion and self-depreciating distort and deny reality, which is the realm in which God's plan is effective.

God's grace deals with us as we are, but an egocentric believer who does not live in objective reality will never use God's grace provisions to advance in the PPOG. **For if anyone thinks he is something [arrogance] when he is nothing, he deceives himself (Gal 6:3).** There is a grim irony in arrogance. A person who thinks more of himself than he has a right to think is actually depriving himself of his greatest advantages, the benefits that come with the fulfillment of God's plan for his life.

**For I say through the grace of God which has been given to me, to everyone who is among you, stop thinking of self in terms of arrogance beyond what you ought to think, but think in terms of sanity** [for the purpose of being rational **without illusion, as God has assigned to each one a standard [of thinking] from doctrine. (Rom 12:3)**

Arrogance is illusion, unreality, and when perpetuated, arrogance becomes insanity. **Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1Co 10:12).** The divine commands that the believer must obey in order to consistently pass thought testing are summed up in Romans 12:2, **Stop being conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renovation of your thought, that you may prove what the will of God is, [namely] the good, the well-pleasing, and the complete.**

"The renovation of [one's] thought is accomplished over a period of time by giving Bible doctrine number one priority, by organizing one's life around the daily perception of the Word of God. The good, the well-pleasing, and the complete is the PPOG being executed. Only in the PPOG can the believer receive all the blessings God has prepared for him in prosperity or adversity. The pattern of right thinking is the humanity of Jesus Christ, who constantly lived and functioned inside the PPOG for His life. Therefore, we are told in Phi 2:5 **Keep on having this mental attitude in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.** Our Lord's mental attitude of humility was manifested by His total conformity and obedience to the plan of God the Father. **Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered (Heb 5:8).**

Humility, which is obedience to divine authority and orientation to God's grace, should be the attitude of every member of the royal family of God. Humility excludes false solutions to thought testing.