

Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The TREE OF LIFE weekly teaching summary from the week ending March 01, 1998

Tree of Life 03/0198

The Doctrine of Suffering and Solutions.

Tree of Life for 03-01-98

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Our study in Philippians 1:29-30 has now brought us to the look into the doctrine of Suffering and Solutions. This passage brings out a special type of suffering which is for the cause of Christ's sake, hence for the cause of the advancement of the Philippian congregation to spiritual maturity. As a part of God's grace He has given to the spiritually adult believer the privilege of going through undeserved suffering to excel his spiritual growth. It happened to Paul and now Paul is identifying its presence in the Philippian congregation. Of course this type of undeserved suffering only happens to spiritually adult believers who are advancing steadily in God's plan. The believer will never reach spiritual maturity unless he is able to handle undeserved suffering and keep his mouth shut. It is this undeserved suffering which gives the believer the final thrust in reaching the divine objective, which is to know and glorify God!

So the corrected translation of verse 29 reads like this, "**Because to you it has been graciously given with reference concerning Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer on behalf of Him.**" Undeserved suffering is the great mantle bestowed on the spiritually adult believer. Such sufferings are of high honor and are highly decorated due to the fact that they offer many distractions and obstacles to overcome. In verse 30 Paul goes on to state, "Since you have the same conflict such as you have seen in me and now you hear through me." Paul, having gone through undeserved suffering now sees his favorite congregation advancing and being affording the same privilege. Paul at this time is at spiritual maturity

and the Philippian congregation was steadily following in his footsteps and advancing through undeserved suffering.

Every form of suffering has a reason and an explanation. If we do not understand its reason now, we will see the perfect justice behind it in the future. Suffering is actually the greatest thing in our lives when viewed in the light of spiritual growth. Suffering is like a responsible parent. The discipline and restraints of childhood imposed by one's parents are thereafter replaced by the discipline and restraints of the adult life enforced by suffering. Suffering challenges the believer to go beyond pettiness, beyond the blame game, and beyond bitterness. It challenges us to learn and utilize divine assets. Suffering is also designed to deplete our human resources and confront us with our total dependence upon the grace of God. Jer 17:5 tells us that cursed is the man who trust in flesh!

Suffering not only serves to warn and restrain us, it is also a teacher and a motivator. The result of using God's provisions in times of suffering will increase the believer's love for God and that is what accelerates spiritual growth. Even self induced misery is designed for our benefit so that we do not consume ourselves. Misfortune is not always introduced to injure us, it's often a better friend to us than prosperity. Pain not only discourages us from going in the wrong direction it aids in driving us in the right direction. Therefore, the solution to suffering is not to erase it from one's life. Rather than eliminating suffering God gives us far greater benefits by offering us the power to handle suffering and keep on advancing in His plan. When it comes to suffering the believer needs to understand how to trust God. And each installment of suffering increases the believer's trust in God... if we rely on His power and His provisions.

The first step in solving any problem is rebound and isolating the sin or problem, i.e., not dwelling on it and not feeling guilty about your failure. This insures the filling of the Spirit enabling the believer to operate in the faith-rest drill. Only then can we accurately apply the solutions offered to us through the word of God. A confusing and complicated situation must first be reduced to utter simplicity through claiming the promises of God or the rationales of God, Hebrews 4:1-3. Of course the promises of God are not designed to solve problems but to bring the believer to a place where he can **THINK!** Apart from thinking there is only emotional reaction and panic, the antithesis to the application of doctrine. These promises raise the shield and stabilize the mind. Once the believer is able to think he can step back and look at what the word of God says and decide whether or not he will apply God's word to the situation. No matter what you are facing always remember that many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivers him out of all of them, Psalm 34:19. When

the mind is stabilized by divine viewpoint the believer can deal with any complexity life has to offer! When you understand the opportunity that suffering offers for spiritual growth and that God is the One who allowed it, you will even be able to pray for those who persecute you, knowing it is not flesh (man) who wages war against you but the kingdom of darkness. Now, don't get carried away and think just because you have some challenges in your life and difficulties with people that you are at spiritual maturity! We all have suffering, it is the one sure thing in life. And, suffering never leaves the person as it found him! The issue is will we rise to the challenge and grow through it stronger spiritually and deeper in love with God or will we buckle under its weight and whine about it?

Whether we chose for God's plan or against it, discomforts and pressures await us so why not go where divine solutions abound? The most critical issue in the believer's life is how does he solve his problems, especially the problem of ignorance. The proper and accurate solution lends no power if we do not know how to apply it to our lives. The word of God has all the answers; a solution for every problem we face, but answers must first be learned. Then you must learn to unite the new doctrines with the existing doctrines in your soul in order to gain strength enough to contribute to your spiritual growth. Predestination is an aggressive plan and must be handled in such a way for it to be effective. The Christian's purpose in life is to know God as He has revealed Himself in His word and this takes aggressive dedication! Positive volition toward God's word is more than a passive interest. The believer must take the offensive and deploy the divine assets in order to attain the goal that God has set before him. And, if you truly desire God's highest and best you must expect suffering. To advance spiritually requires suffering. Even when the suffering is due to the law of volitional responsibility it can be turned to blessing through adherence to the commands of God, but if we continue to react we go backwards.

Our suffering generally originates from nothing more than poor decisions. But this is not a reason to feel condemned since it is natural that we all at times harbor poor judgment being that we share in the fallen state of Adam. The issue is how to rebound, adapt, and not blame others or self, but become flexible and make the proper adjustments. Intelligence is no protection from making wrong decisions and experience affords us no help either. It is the principles of Bible doctrine which should be the foundation for all our decisions! Without divine intervention there is no way we could handle the adversities of life, 2Corinthians 12:10. Truth is word and deed, not just that which you know but also that which you apply. Truth is knowing and living in what the word of God says. Only then do we see doctrine working, that is what motivates us to forge forward through trials

and difficulties. Our comfort in affliction is God's word which revives us, Psalm 119:50. Our comfort is not getting out of the situation but applying doctrine in the situation. God is our strength and our help, Psalm 46:1. Our strength is not money, a spouse, friends, getting even, etc. Prosperity is not that which offers us growth, prosperity is the time when we enjoy our growth. It's adversity which brings on the growth! Therefore, suffering in your life is part of God's plan in that it allows you to appreciate Him and what He provides. Suffering is designed for our good and for God's glorification.

Predestination is designed by God to sharply focus the believer's attention on the provisions of God. Remember the divine objective: to get to know God as He has revealed Himself through His word. Jer 9:23-24 informs us that God delights in that we know Him. Suffering reminds us that we know nothing and are nothing apart from God's grace.

There are five categories of suffering which we need to cover in our study of Suffering and Solutions:

1. Self Induced Misery also known as the Law of Volitional Responsibility
2. Divine Discipline
3. Providential Preventative Suffering for spiritual growth
4. Momentum Testing for spiritual growth
5. Evidence Testing to glorify God, this is when the believer is entered as a witness for the prosecution (God) in the appeal trial of Satan.

This week we took a look at the Law of Volitional Responsibility or what is also known as self induced misery. This law tells us that we are the ones who cause ourselves tremendous anguish both within our own souls and in our overt circumstances. Why? Because of the natural law that a person's decisions have natural and logical consequences. This law is as solid as the law of gravity yet many weak believers still endeavor to beseech God to suspend this law in their case. The law of volitional responsibility cannot and will not be ignored. There are laws of human consequences in which each individual's thoughts, decisions, and actions establish the trends in his life. We have a free will and because of this we reap the consequences of the decisions made by our own free will.

The law of volitional responsibility also pertains to the spiritual life. When we follow divine protocol we are blessed, and when we violate divine protocol we suffer, it's that simple. In light of this law we are never to blame another person for our unhappiness. And, if you allow another to rule over your happiness and are brought under the power of their actions then you enter into sin according to 1 Corinthians 6. Our decisions and actions must be compatible with the word and plan of God, not with what others are doing to us. It is a natural law that what you invest in, you will receive back, Galatians 6:7-8. We receive the consequences of the wrong

we do and without partiality on God's part, Colossians 3:25. Proverbs 1:31 warns us that we will eat of the fruit of our own ways and will be consumed by our own devices. If we invest in the wind we will reap a whirlwind, Hos 8:7. Then why does man continue time after time, generation after generation to make wrong decisions and sow the wind? The answer is ARROGANCE! Arrogance does one common evil to us all, it deceives us, Jer 49:16. An inflated opinion of self is a great enemy to the believer. Arrogance creates an illusion which serves to constantly undermine one's happiness in life. That is why Rev 2:4 reminds us to never forget from whence we came and from what we are made of.

The arrogant believer thinks that his suffering comes forth from no where. He never once considers that it comes from his own bad judgment and negative decisions. In arrogance and ignorance the believer will falsely blame his misfortune on other people, on his environment, on childhood trauma, bad luck, the devil and even on God. Psalm 25:9-10 tells us that the humble will learn God's word rather than look for excuses. Arrogance is the big promoter of suffering. The arrogant believer's consequences take him by complete surprise and so he seeks for someone to blame, never considering the responsibility to lie with himself.

God desires us all to solve the problems of suffering as well as the problems of prosperity through the doctrinal thinking found in our own souls. Hence the doctrine in your soul becomes the basis for not only perpetuating your relationship with God but also with others. Utilizing the problem solving devices does not mean that your suffering will disappear, but that you are empowered with the ability to handle the suffering and move forward in the spiritual realm. Doctrine affords us the ability to persevere through adversity. Being a Christian does not make negative consequences go away. On the contrary, every believer will become intimate with not only individual suffering but collective suffering.

The law of volitional responsibility explains both individual and collective suffering that man brings about himself. With so many individuals operating in the world, all sinners and each with a free will, a certain amount of suffering inevitably overflows into one's life from the decisions of others. Such collective suffering is not suffering for blessing. David gives is a perfect illustration of the effects of collective suffering in 1Samuel 21 cf Psalm 55 when due to his wilful sin the whole city of Nob was wiped out. Then hundreds died in the city of Gath because he faked being crazy, 1Samuel 21:11-18. And thousands died on the battle field because he failed in his military responsibilities. He purposely disobeyed God's command about the ark and men were killed in 2Samuel 6:1-13. David also rejected the promises of God and numbered the people causing 70,000 people to die, 1Ch 21! Okay then, what of all the innocent people who die or suffer due to another person's decisions? Innocent or guilty, the

believer must apply the divine solutions available in God's plan through one's own good decisions. If, on the other hand, you become bitter you only end up bringing even more misery upon yourself.

In actuality there are no innocent parties since man by nature is a flawed and imperfect creature. Each human, excluding the humanity of Christ, is genetically related to fallen Adam. We are therefore both genetically and environmentally handicapped, and along with our volitional flaws we are the creators of our own suffering. Human weakness, ignorance, and arrogance equals suffering! But always remember, that what God has provided is greater than what any man can do to us, Psalm 56:10. A single principle of grace is far more powerful than the unavoidable law of volitional responsibility. If we apply God's solutions to our suffering, regardless of how the suffering was brought on, we reap the blessings. Positive consequences follow a positive decision. Even though we may be the cause of our own pain, or our bad situation, such circumstances now offer us the opportunity to utilize divine assets and witness God's provision in action thereby guiding us to a stronger growth in God's grace! Again, this has nothing to do with suffering for spiritual growth, this is merely life and learning how to handle it.

Under the category of collective suffering due to your own decisions, what is your responsibility or obligation to those who are hurt by your sins or harmed by your bad judgment? Of course your first obligation is to rebound before God and though this does not erase the negative effects of your actions it places you back in the power sphere and armed again with the ability to make positive decisions from a position of strength. Again, back to those who were hurt by your decisions. Every situation is different and each believer must apply doctrine for himself, but here are some biblical principles to guide us into that application.

We must not be insensitive, nor should we allow ourselves to be enslaved to anyone's implacability. We are not to ignore the just cause of anyone who suffers due to our bad decisions but neither should we be motivated by fear or a guilt complex! If you can legitimately relieve one of some form of hardship that was caused by you, do so, Galatians 6:1-3; Matthew 5:41. Now there is a balance to keep in mind. Once nothing more can be done we must leave the situation in the Lord's hands for the solution as we press on in our own Christian life, 2Samuel 12:13. Inevitably the believer lives his life as unto the Lord, not unto people, but this is not to ignore the human dimension of the suffering one causes. Predestination demands the virtues of humility, personal love for God, and impersonal love toward others.

So, there is a certain amount of suffering you will go through because of the bad judgment of another but this collective suffering need not be

compounded through bitterness on your part. The key is application of Bible doctrine. The believer, though responsible for most of his suffering, can reverse the trend through good decision based on the application of Bible doctrine. Once you enter into obedience to God's commands you free the omnipotence of God to bless you. God has one way of doing things and divine protocol is based on precision and accuracy. God is not the author of confusions or sloppiness, 1Co 14:33. God's plan is accurate and organized but also entails suffering. To misuse prayer is to ask God to suspend the laws of volitional responsibility and to be totally divorced from reality. In fact, the removal of suffering might deny the believer a special blessing available to him only through handling that particular case of suffering! No one can devastate your life more than you can. The ignorance and confusion of the believer who has never learned the protocol of the Christian life or who fails to apply it only serves to intensify his suffering. Knowledge of God's word and application of that knowledge is the only solution. And since there is no way to avoid suffering in life application of God's word is the only logical solution. Especially in light of the fact that after the believer is knee deep in the suffering brought on by his own volition and has still not rebounded, God comes in with some divine discipline! Not of course, for the purpose of making you pay but at some point, in your self destructive process, God must intervene with His own discipline. He does so for the purpose of causing us enough pain to wake up and get back on track spiritually.

For a more in depth study of Suffering and Solutions up to the point of the Law of Volitional Responsibility get tapes 0190-209 through 214.

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