

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
THE CHILDREN OF GOD & THE SPIRIT OF GOD – Chapter 8

LESSON 26 – SUFFERING AND GLORY – Romans 8:17-18

This lesson shows us the role of suffering in the Christian life. Understanding the Biblical reasons for suffering can lead to spiritual consistency and maturity.

There are many words in Scripture that talk about suffering...affliction, anguish, distress, grief, misery, pain, tribulation and on and on. We also find various metaphors that depict suffering...refining fires, overflowing waters, and birth pangs. All of these try to suggest to us what it feels like to suffer.

C. S. Lewis explained suffering like this, “Now God, who has made us, know what we are and that our happiness lies in Him. Yet we will not seek it in Him as long as He leaves us any other resort where it can plausibly be looked for. While what we call ‘our own life’ remains agreeable, we will not surrender it to Him. What then can God do in our interest but make ‘our own life’ less agreeable to us, and take away the plausible sources of false happiness.”

How does suffering fit within the broad context of the Christian life?

The Relationship of Suffering to the Christian Life

Paul teaches that our ultimate reigning with Christ will be preceded by our suffering with Him. Suffering and glory belong together. They did in the experience of Jesus and they do in the experience of His people as well. It is only after we have shared in His suffering that we will enter the eternal glory of God. Suffering and glory are welded together and cannot be broken apart.

The Reality of Suffering in the Christian Life

There is suffering that is the direct result of our sinning and there is suffering that we endure for Christ’s sake... suffering that comes directly from professing Christ in a world that rejects Him. Beyond that, there is suffering that happens simply because we live in this imperfect world. Paul is being realistic here. There is no reason to think that Christians will be free from troubles in this life so it is important that we learn to how to bear them.

“We must not water down the call to suffer. We must not domesticate all the New Testament teaching on affliction and persecution just because our lives are so smooth. It may be that we have not chosen to live in all the radical ways of love that God wants us to. It may be that our time of suffering is just around the corner. But it will not do to take our own comfortable lives and make them the measure of what we allow the Bible to mean.” – John Piper

The Reasons for Suffering in the Christian Life

Suffering Proves the Reality of our Faith

Both Peter and the writer of Hebrews connect suffering to the reality of a person’s faith. If you are suffering as a Christian...and because you are a Christian, it is one of the surest proofs you can ever have of the fact that you are a child of God.

Suffering Promotes Our Dependence on God

Scripture clearly tells us that we learn to trust God more when we suffer than when we don't. This is a primary purpose of suffering...to stop us from relying on the world and to put our total trust in God.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

Suffering Purifies Our Relationship with God

When we suffer, we are quickly able to focus on the things that are priorities...those things that have the greatest value in life. When we endure suffering, the beauty of the soul outlasts any pain we experience.

Philippians 3:8 & 10, "What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ...I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..."

Suffering Prunes Us for Greater Effectiveness

For the grapevine, suffering is a way of life...the path to greater fruitfulness. The only way the vine produces a greater harvest is if the old branches are pruned away. So God does His pruning work in our lives to produce an even greater spiritual harvest.

John 15:2, "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Suffering Provokes Courage in Other Believers

When we read about the courage and sufferings of others for the cause of Christ, it bolsters our own courage in the face of the struggles we go through. From the early church to our modern day, there are those who've given all...including their lives...for the cause of Christ. There may be a time in America when we are put under persecution and have to suffer for our faith and we should draw strength and courage from those who've gone through this before us.

Suffering Provides Opportunity to Witness

Suffering for the sake of the Gospel has often been used to bring non-believers to Christ. Look at the examples we have in the lives of Peter, Paul and the other apostles as well as the examples of people we know in our own lives. Taking a stand for Christ in spite of great suffering always opens the door to share Christ with those who don't know Him.

The Response to Suffering in the Christian Life

Two aspects of the Christian life are necessary to equip us to endure suffering and allow it to accomplish its intended purpose in our lives.

Preparation

Paul in his day knew he had to be prepared to suffer.

Acts 14:21-22, "They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said."

Again, there may be a day when we are persecuted for our faith. The time to decide to remain faithful to God regardless of what happens in this life is NOW. Decide here and now if you will pledge your allegiance to Christ. We have to make the preparation now...before we face whatever difficulty is coming our way.

Dedication

For this closing part of our lesson, I'm going to share some words from the great British preacher Charles Spurgeon. They were written for preachers but apply to all of us...

"Serve God with all your might while the candle is burning, and then when it goes out for a season, you will have the less to regret. Be content to be nothing, for that is what you are. When your own emptiness is painfully forced upon your consciousness, chide yourself that you ever dreamed of being full, except in the Lord. Continue, with double earnestness to serve your Lord when no visible result is before you. Any simpleton can follow the narrow path in the light: faith's rare wisdom enables us to march on in the dark with infallible accuracy, since she places her hand in that of her Great Guide." – Charles Spurgeon