

Suffering and the Will of God

I.) Introduction

- A.) The Bible speaks often of suffering
 - 1.) "Suffering"
 - 2.) "Trials"
 - 3.) "Tribulation"
 - 4.) "Sorrow"
- B.) We experience suffering in life and know it is real
- C.) But the Bible also speaks often of joy
 - 1.) *Colossians 4:4* "Rejoice always..."
 - 2.) *James 1:2* "Consider trials joy..."
 - 3.) *1 Peter 4:13* "Keep on rejoicing..."
- D.) Aren't joy and suffering opposites?
 - 1.) Aren't they mutually exclusive? (alive/dead; heat/cold; fire/water)
 - 2.) Or does God's plan marry these two ideas?
- E.) Let's examine the doctrine of suffering and then practical tips for handling it

II.) God Wills Suffering at Times

- A.) *2 Corinthians 7:9-10*
 - 1.) Background = 1 Corinthians
 - 2.) "made sorrowful" = 3 times
 - 3.) Paul was not rejoicing in the pain of suffering
 - 4.) Paul rejoiced in the process of suffering
 - 5.) The church was made sorrowful "according to the will of God" = 2 times
 - 6.) So, suffering may be God's plan for us at times!
- B.) *1 Peter 2:20*
 - 1.) There are two types of suffering
 - a.) Godly, or divine, suffering = God's favor
 - b.) Sinful, or worldly, suffering = No favor
- C.) *1 Peter 3:17*
 - 1.) God's will at times is for us to suffer for what is right
 - 2.) God's will is not for us to suffer for doing wrong

III.) We Must Suffer Simply Because Christ Suffered

- A.) An argument from the greater to lesser
 - 1.) Christ (greater) suffered = undeserved
 - 2.) Christians (lesser) are to suffer = deserved
- B.) *Hebrews 4:15* (the flip side)
 - 1.) Christ understands us
 - 2.) We find comfort in this

- 3.) We are quick to claim this promise
- 4.) But we are slow to accept that we should suffer like Christ

C.) *1 Peter 1:21*

- 1.) We are called by God for this purpose
- 2.) Christ suffered for us
- 3.) We are left on earth to suffer for others

D.) *Philippians 3:10-11*

- 1.) Our goal is to know (experience) Christ fully
- 2.) We fellowship (join) with Christ in suffering
- 3.) This suffering is connected to salvation
 - a.) Christ's suffering led to His resurrection
 - b.) Our suffering leads to our resurrection

E.) *Romans 8:17-18*

- 1.) Our suffering with Christ leads to glory with Christ

IV.) How God Uses Suffering

A.) Suffering produces reliance on God

1.) *2 Corinthians 1:8-10*

- a.) The affliction in Asia (Demetrius = *Acts 19:23-41*)
- b.) Paul was burdened beyond his strength
 - i.) This is where God wants us
 - ii.) Humble and broken
- c.) Paul was trusting in God, not himself
- d.) Paul saw God's deliverance
- e.) Therefore, Christ is the object of Paul's hope

2.) When life goes well...

- a.) We are comfortable
- b.) We are content
- c.) We are independent

3.) Suffering shakes us up and forces us back to God

B.) Suffering produces Godly character

1.) *Romans 5:3-5*

- a.) We exult (rejoice) in suffering
- b.) Tribulation => Perseverance
- c.) Perseverance => Proven character
- d.) Proven character => Hope!

2.) *James 1:2-4*

- a.) We take joy in suffering
- b.) Testing => Endurance (perseverance)
- c.) Endurance => Maturity (perfect/complete)

3.) *1 Peter 1:6-7*

- a.) We rejoice in trials
- b.) Trials => Prove (refine) our faith
- c.) This leads to praise, glory and honor at revelation of Jesus

C.) Suffering produces repentance

- 1.) *2 Corinthians 7:10*
 - a.) Godly sorrow leads to repentance that is lasting and genuine
 - b.) This repentance leads to salvation
- 2.) *1 Peter 4:1-2*
 - a.) Suffering eliminates sin (ref: proving and testing faith in 1 Peter)
 - b.) Suffering causes us to live for God and not man (def: repentance)
- 3.) *1 Peter 4:19*
 - a.) We entrust our souls to God
 - b.) We do what is right

D.) Suffering produces opportunities for ministry

- 1.) *Colossians 1:24*
 - a.) We can serve Christ and others through our suffering
 - b.) Paul rejoices in his suffering
 - c.) His suffering benefited the church
 - d.) His suffering continues Christ's (Christ=gospel; Paul=evangelism)
- 2.) *2 Corinthians 1:6-7*
 - a.) We can comfort others through our suffering
 - b.) Shared sufferings leads to fellowship and understanding
 - c.) (People often feel alone during suffering)
 - d.) We have an opportunity to relate with & encourage these people
 - e.) *Ephesians 3:13*
- 3.) *1 Peter 2:11-12*
 - a.) We can evangelize through our suffering
 - b.) Abstain from worldly behavior
 - c.) Instead, practice excellent behavior (different)
 - d.) The world will persecute this person
 - e.) This gives an opportunity to witness
 - f.) This is the point of Peter's letter
 - g.) "How can you act that way? What is it with you?"
 - h.) *2 Peter 2:8-10*

E.) Suffering reveals God's glory through us

- 1.) *2 Corinthians 4:15*
 - a.) Paul's suffering in ministry brought about evangelism
 - b.) Evangelism glorifies God
- 2.) *1 Peter 4:14-16*
 - a.) This is suffering for ministry sake
 - b.) Not suffering for sin
 - c.) How we handle this suffering glorifies God
- 3.) *Romans 8:18*
 - a.) Suffering is temporary
 - b.) The results of suffering may be eternal

V.) Practical Tips for Handling and Counseling Those Who are Suffering

- A.) Prepare for suffering, it will come
 - 1.) *1 Peter 1:13; 4:12*
 - 2.) It's not a matter of 'if' but 'when'
 - 3.) Be proactive, not reactive
- B.) Differentiate between Godly suffering and sinful suffering
- C.) Remember, suffering is temporary
 - 1.) *1 Peter 1:6; Romans 8:18*
 - 2.) It may feel like it will last forever, but it won't
- D.) However, suffering can last a long time
 - 1.) Be patient
 - 2.) Be understanding
- E.) Grieving and struggling during suffering are ok; doubting God's goodness and disobeying Him are not
- F.) Suffering is not a contest!
 - 1.) It is not a matter of who's suffering is most severe or who suffers the most
 - 2.) This breaks unity
 - 3.) All suffering is valid
- G.) Don't minimize someone's suffering
 - 1.) "It could be worse"
 - 2.) Quickly sharing your experience of worse suffering
- H.) No one is alone in suffering
 - 1.) Christ
 - 2.) The church
- I.) Avoid temporary 'fixes'
 - 1.) Alcohol and drugs
 - 2.) People and relationships
 - 3.) Distractions
 - 4.) Denial
- J.) Seek God's purpose in suffering
 - 1.) Brokenness and reliance
 - 2.) Character
 - 3.) Repentance
 - 4.) Ministry
- K.) Have an external and long-term perspective
 - 1.) Can someone else be served?
 - 2.) How will this impact me in the long-term?
- L.) Remember that Christ is the ultimate answer/comfort for suffering

M.) Basic Counseling Tips

- 1.) Set a time limit per session (45 minutes – 1 hour)
- 2.) Set a session limit (about 6)
- 3.) Be CAREFUL with women!!!!
 - a.) Attachment to you
 - b.) Appearances (right or wrong)
- 4.) Don't try to 'fix' the problem
 - a.) People want to be heard and understood
 - b.) People want to be validated
 - c.) Listening and understanding go a long way
- 5.) As you navigate the situation, help them come to an understanding of what actions they need to take
 - a.) "Here's what you need to do" vs. "What do you think will help"
- 6.) Ask open-ended questions
 - a.) Not questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no'
 - b.) "what do you think..."
 - c.) "how can you..."
- 7.) Remember to direct them to Christ!
 - a.) This may be obvious for you, but not for them
- 8.) Recommend they read Scripture
 - a.) *Job*
 - b.) *2 Corinthians*
 - c.) *1 Peter*
 - d.) *Philippians*
- 9.) Maintain their privacy unless required by law
- 10.) PRAY, PRAY, PRAY!!!