

# Romans

## Bible Study

### Suffering

#### Romans 8:17—25

One misconception perpetrated by many Christians is that the godly believer will have a perfect life, free from disease, pain, troubles and suffering. Only those who are living in sin will experience these negative aspects of life while those who are spiritually mature and walking in the Spirit will be blessed with a utopian life. There are many verses that do promise deliverance, and many of those verses are taken by today's church and applied to an individual's situation. The problem is that these verses almost always are written to the nation of Israel as promises of what God will do for them if they obey His word. This is especially true of many Charismatics who fail to rightly divide Scripture and therefore misapply and/or allegorize Scripture to fit their doctrine. They connect blessings (health and wealth) with spirituality. However, instead of going over the troubled water, believers are told that we will be going through those turbulent waters.

#### **Guaranteed suffering**

Every person on this earth is suffering because of sin. When sin came into the world through Adam, it affected all of creation. We now groan daily because creation is groaning from the effects of sin. We all experience sickness and death along with physical and emotional pains. We sometimes find it hard to cope in a world where we are surrounded by the results of sin. All of creation is held in bondage to sin, death and corruption, which is why we are all affected negatively on this earth (Romans 8:20; Genesis 3:17—18). Suffering is universal and inescapable.

One "promise" given to members of the Body of Christ is that we will suffer. Paul was beaten three times with rods, whipped five times, stoned, shipwrecked, naked, cold, hungry, thirsty, in pain and weary (2 Corinthians 11:23—27). All these things happen during the first two-thirds of his 35-year ministry. There was still more of the same that was not chronicled. Does this mean he was living a life of sin, one that was displeasing to the Lord? Of course not. He was suffering because he was standing strong for the Gospel of Grace.

The day after Paul was stoned in Lystra he traveled with Barnabas to Derbe. When he went back into Lystra, he encouraged them to continue in the faith and warned them that they must go through many tribulations to enter the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:19—23). He certainly was a living example of what he was preaching. Suffering was not necessary to enter the Kingdom of God, however is inevitable for those who stand up for God. Suffering for God's sake is actually a badge of honor (Philippians 1:29).

Paul later wrote to Timothy about the sufferings he endured in that area and added that all those who live godly lives will suffer persecution (2 Timothy 3:10—11). He called these things the sufferings of Christ then said that along with the suffering comes comfort in abundance (2 Corinthians 1:5). This comfort came in the form of fellow believers who were concerned for Paul, and became a sharer of his ministry by giving and praying (2 Corinthians 1:7).

We also suffer as we resist temptation in order to live godly lives. We will be tempted to sin by allowing the fleshly desires to control us. God promised that He would make a way for us to escape these temptations, but there is no promise that He would remove the temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13). We need to bear up under the temptation in order to get through it. There is no promise that the temptation will be miraculously removed from us.

## **Paul, our example and pattern**

The connection between service and suffering is not any clearer than with the example of the Apostle Paul. He was operating within the will of God and we would probably consider him more “spiritual” than most people. Even though he had personally spoken with the Lord Jesus Christ and had a close relationship with Him, he suffered more than almost any other believer. If Jesus were the bridge over troubled water, Paul never comprehended the inner workings of that concept.

Since Paul is our pattern, we can study him to gain great insight into how we are to handle suffering. The first observation comes from Paul’s prayer as he was suffering from the thorn in the flesh. This thorn in the flesh was a messenger of Satan (2 Corinthians 12:7—10). His request was denied three times. Three times he asked for the Lord to remove the thorn, and three times the Lord told him that His grace was all he needed. Instead of removing our suffering, God gives us a way to deal with it and to move on. Instead of focusing upon his condition, Paul learned to focus upon Jesus Christ. Notice that Paul’s prayer was answered, just not the way he had hoped. God does answer prayer, but not always exactly in the way we pray. We should praise the Lord that He often answers our requests with a no because He knows the beginning from the end.

Second, God says that His grace is sufficient in order for us to endure the sufferings that we will encounter in this life. That means that we need to come to a deeper understanding of God’s great grace by studying Scripture, rightly divided. The greater our understanding of who God is, the better we will be able to serve Him. The book of Romans is an establishment book for the believer. If we don’t have a good grasp of what Paul is teaching us, we will not be able to serve Him properly. Paul has given us everything we need to live a life pleasing to Him, even under great stress and suffering.

A third thing we can learn from Paul is that God demonstrated His grace to Paul, while he was going through his suffering, by the people who were sent to him by God to comfort him (2 Corinthians 1:3—7; 7:4—7). Just when he needed it, God sent someone to Paul to help him through his suffering and to comfort him. Even though Jesus Christ Himself had been communicating with Paul, he obtained great comfort from Timothy and Titus and other believers who were toiling with him as they supported his ministry. This is why we need to be sensitive to other people’s needs (Romans 12:10, 15; Philippians 2:4; Galatians 6:2, 10)

Fourth, knowledge of his hope allowed Paul to have an eternal outlook that superseded his temporal condition. He raises our sights heavenward so that we are able to endure the sufferings of this earth. God doesn’t remove our pain, he gives us great hope as we understand our position in Him. Our hope is based on our future with Him. We can endure a great deal if we have hope. How are we going to learn about our hope unless we study Paul’s 13 books? Romans 12:12 shows Paul rejoicing in his hope of glory, making him able to be patient in tribulation. Scripture gives us great comfort because that is where we find our hope (Romans 15:4). When we study Scripture, the Holy Spirit can use what we learn to give us great comfort, joy and peace knowing we have a sure hope (Romans 15:13; Colossians 1:27). We are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13), seated in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), and already glorified (Romans 8:30). Those without this hope of glory are most miserable (1 Corinthians 15:9; Titus 2:13), while those who have this hope can endure much suffering knowing it is temporary (2 Corinthians 4:17).

There are things that we are incapable of handling on our own. God does not promise to remove the pain and suffering, but gives us other believers to comfort and encourage us, and gives us His word and the indwelling Holy Spirit to give us peace in times of unrest (Philippians 4:4—9).

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