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The Bare Bones Series
Sonship Suffering

Session 1: The Purpose of Suffering

In this Bare Bones study on Sonship Suffering, we are skipping to the end of the doctrine where we learn how to patiently endure sufferings to the glory of our heavenly Father as His adopted sons and daughters. For this reason, I often refer to the doctrine as Sonship Suffering. We will present the doctrine through a series of principles.

<u>Principle #1: Suffering Has a Purpose</u>

Suffering is an experience of evil. There are many different kinds of sufferings in the world. Some are just inconveniences while others are life changing, but they all have purpose.

Even though suffering is an experience of evil, we can choose what to do with our suffering. We can grow from it, and increase our ability to deal with adversity, or we can be defeated by it and sink into despair. Knowing the purposes of suffering will help us respond to suffering properly, so that we profit from suffering instead of being defeated by it. So, let's look at these purposes.

Actually, sufferings themselves do not strengthen us, but they are the opportunities for us to be strengthened as we respond to them in a godly manner, (in the way God has provided).

As we respond properly to suffering, we are strengthened in two particular ways. Firstly, we are strengthened to withstand the effects of the suffering in our inner man.

This strengthening of our inner man results in an ever-increasing ability to withstand the effects of sufferings. What are those effects? They are the mental pains and emotional injuries which lead to anxiety, fear, resignation, depression, anger, grief, etc. The result of this strengthening is that the things which used to

wound us, and from which we had to recover, are affecting in ever-decreasing ways.

We are talking about a process that takes time and effort. The more times we respond properly to our sufferings, two things happen: 1) the less time it takes us to recover, and 2) the less impact those sufferings have on us, until finally, they just don't affect us anymore.

This first benefit of responding properly to our sufferings concerns what is not happening; we are no longer being injured the way we used to be. This is our ability to "take a hit." Think of this as a defensive strengthening.

Secondly, in addition to becoming increasingly impervious to the effects of suffering, we are, at the same time, strengthened to become "more than conquerors."

Think of this as our ability to "hit back" against the effects of suffering. Being more than a conqueror is our offensive strengthening.

> Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [37]Nay, **in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.**

What does it mean to be "more than a conqueror?" It means we have come through our sufferings stronger and more capable of handling adversity than before the sufferings began. What does it mean to be more capable of handling sufferings?

It means we are using our sufferings to increase our edification. It means we are taking the attacks which were meant to defeat us, and we are using them 1) for our good.

Being more than a conqueror means we have learned how to use suffering for our good, by taking that which was supposed to injure, destroy, or discourage us, and turn it to something that strengthens, builds and encourages us.

What are some examples of how our suffering accomplishes good in us? Firstly of all, it edifies unto godliness in a myriad of ways; things like: 1) we love God for allowing our sufferings. That sounds strange, doesn't it? But, this is something we can do only when we have His perspective on the things which are being accomplished through our suffering.

Secondly, we experience the truth of Romans 8:28 by seeing the bigger picture of our sufferings.

> Romans 8:28 And we know that **all things work together for good** to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

Looking at a few of the ways that suffering is for our good, it may have become apparent that becoming "more than a conqueror" is an advanced status for a son or daughter who not only understands the Father's bigger picture of sufferings, but is also engaged in responding to sufferings out of that understanding. It is not natural to love God for allowing sufferings in our life. Neither is it natural to respond to sufferings like they are working together for our good; for these are things we must learn from the doctrine and then put it into practice.

Paul mentions being more than a conqueror in Romans 8, even before we become Simple Sons by the education proper given in Romans 12-15. This is not because he expects that this is a reality for us in Romans 8, but because this is where the doctrine is heading, and it ought to be a motivation for us. Paul's more advanced epistles will begin to build the doctrine in our souls so that it becomes a practical reality.

As we gain sensitivity to the suffering of others, we get involved in helping them both physically and spiritually so they too can be strengthened by their sufferings (The office of mercy, etc.). We understand that our suffering has eternal ramifications.

We will discuss the ways in which this is true under the point: Suffering prepares us for eternity.

Now we turn our attention to the second issue: how suffering can be used to accomplish God's will.

God did not ordain Satan's prideful desire to be like the Most High, nor Israel's religious leaders' hatred of His Son. But even as Jesus suffered and died under their hands, God used the obedient and intelligent sufferings of His Son to bring salvation to the world. And because Jesus did that, He has made it possible for us to turn our sufferings into that which accomplishes good for us, and also carries out the will of God.

This is part of the great mystery of suffering which Jesus accomplished for us and makes possible to us as members of His body. In our next major subpoint, we will explore another way that our suffering has eternal ramifications.

To be more than a conqueror means that by going through the suffering, all kinds of good things are taking place in us, and we are looking at our suffering as a way to accomplish God's will.

Suffering is never just about our physical bodies, but it always has a spiritual dimension to it. Sometimes this is easy to see, like when we are persecuted for our faith. Another example would be when we are made to suffer because we refuse to do evil. The spiritual dimension is readily seen in these examples.

But, is this true for all kinds of sufferings? It is, for every suffering has a spiritual dimension. You may be wondering how there is a spiritual dimension to having your car break down, or having a migraine headache, but know this, there is a spiritual dimension to every kind of suffering. To see it, we must learn to see below the surface of the suffering itself.

When we respond to our experience of suffering properly, it helps prepare us for eternity.

The experience of suffering can help us prepare for the time when we leave this earth and enter the heavenly places, where we will labor with God as members of the one new man. And how does suffering prepare us for eternity? By transforming us. Suffering is part of the process whereby we are conformed to the image of God's Son.

We learn to share in His victory over the sufferings by allowing His life to be lived in us, and as a result we share in His exaltation; we are "joint heirs with Christ."

It is our Apostle that connects being joint-heirs with Christ with our ability to "suffer with Him." People spend a lot of time trying to understand the "why" of suffering. We long for an explanation that helps it all make sense. I would like to tell you that I have all the answers, but I don't. But I do know some things which I think are enough for us to move forward.

And here is what is at the core of what I have learned: Suffering is never for nothing. And that is important because it helps answer the question of "why." As we progress through this study, we will learn that no suffering is meaningless for the believer in Jesus Christ.

In what ways does our suffering have meaning? Firstly, God allows sufferings because actions are meant to have consequences. So, some of the things which we suffer are the result of our own actions, sometimes in ignorance, sometimes by accident, or sometimes on purpose.

Why are there consequences? Because consequences are meant to temper our actions. In a senate sub-committee hearing in the state legislature of Louisiana, I once heard a man argue that penalties have no measurable effect of reducing crime. But tell that to guy who is speeding and comes up behind a State Trooper. The point is consequences are meant to mitigate our actions so that the world doesn't go crazy. When actions have consequences, it makes a difference in how people behave. Thinking that God should override the consequences of our actions to alleviate suffering would be like living in a cartoon world, where nothing really matters. A world without consequences would be impossible to navigate in reality.

We need our actions to have consequences because we are creatures with a free will. That is part of what it means to be made in the image of God.

Whenever you give people free will, you are taking the risk that they will exercise their will in ways that cause others to suffer. So, why give us free will? Because without free will, nothing has meaning.

For example, which kind of wife would you rather have: the wife with a free will or a robot wife? When you come home from work, if the robot wife greets you with

a kiss, what is the meaning of the kiss? It has no meaning. It is simply programming. If God were to populate the world with "robot people," then nothing would have meaning.

Secondly, God allows suffering so we might see the results of our sin and it might motivate us to holiness. Our sins, even what we may consider to be "little sins" all have a cumulative effect to produce this present evil world.

When we look around the world and see the suffering, and the tragedies, and the evil that men do, God means for us to see what sinners have made of this world. This is what happens when we abandon God and go our own way. Satan has hatched a clever plan of diverting our attention from our culpability for the kind of world we live in, to convincing us it is God's fault for not interfering or intervening. What we don't realize is that God won't interfere for some very good reasons, but I promise you that if He did, the world would hate Him for that too.

Again, it is not the sufferings themselves, but the spiritual work that is done in our inner man as we respond properly to our sufferings, that is what completes us/perfects us.

God allows sufferings because there are some things which cannot be done in us apart from suffering. Even as I say that, I want you to know that I do not believe that God is orchestrating the personal sufferings you may be going through.

But also understand this; God is not using disasters to punish us. We live in a dispensation of grace where God is not imputing men's sins unto them.

> 2 Corinthians 5:19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, **not imputing their trespasses unto them;** and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

What does that mean? It means that God is not actively punishing the sins which men commit during their lifetime. Yet, many believers in Jesus Christ believe that the things they are suffering are a punishment from God.

For example, at the Boston Cancer Center, 22% of the cancer patients said they believed God gave them cancer to punish them for their sins. In a poll of 600

ministers from all denominations, almost 40% believed God punishes people today by sending sufferings their way. And, a survey of every major world religion revealed that every religion believes that God is actively punishing people for their sins. For example, the four major tenants of Buddhism are about suffering.

It is for these reasons that I want to emphasize that God is not doing that in this dispensation of grace. Yes, we do suffer, but not because God is ordaining a punishment for us.

But I want to come back to the point of this principle: Suffering is never for nothing. God does something amazing with our sufferings. He is able to do this because of the sufferings that Jesus went through. Because of Christ's righteous response to all His sufferings, and through His atoning work on the Cross, God can redeem suffering. What does that mean? It means that God took the evil of suffering which is designed to destroy, and He redeemed it, so that it can be used to accomplish His purposes instead. How wonderful is that!

In our next session, we will look at an important aspect of how our sufferings work to perfect us. I think this is something that Satan has kept hidden because once you see it, it will change the way you look at the sufferings in your life.

Major Points from the Lesson