

The Suffering Doctrine - Part 1

by Tim Greenwood

For nearly 1700 years, the devil has put sickness and disease on members of the Body of Christ. He has burdened them with poverty. He has oppressed them at every turn. And they haven't even fought back - because they thought they were suffering for Jesus.

Over the years, this unscriptural doctrine of suffering for God by submitting to such works of the devil as sickness, lack and oppression has become the sacred cow of sacred cows when it comes to religious tradition.

But it's time that we knocked this sacred cow in the head. It's time it was slaughtered, cut up and eaten for dinner so that the Body of Christ can rise up - more than conquerors and put this "doctrine of devils" - under our feet, where it belongs.

Some people become really defensive when it comes to this particular doctrine. They're protective of it because they learned it from their dear, old grandmother, or from the Sunday school teacher who taught them their first Bible stories.

But these saints came by the suffering doctrine honestly. It's been passed down from one generation of Christians to the next since about 300 A.D.

How it Started

Let's look back at history, and see how it all started.

At the time, the Body of Christ was suffering persecution in far greater scope than Christians today have ever known. Roman emperors, in an attempt to gain political popularity, began striving to out-do one another by slaughtering Christians in increasingly horrible ways.

One emperor fed a group of them to the lions. Another tried to put on a more spectacular show by burning them at the stake...and so it went.

You can imagine what happened at the meetings the believers were having at that time. Their sermons, their prayers and their discussions all began to focus on one topic - suffering and persecution.

Unaware, for the most part, of God's power to protect them, those early Christians didn't know how to believe Him for deliverance. Instead, they simply trusted God to get them through the suffering, to give them strength to endure the pain without denying Jesus. They took some of the things different ones had written and armed themselves with the Word of God - and they got good at it!

Their faith eventually grew so strong in this area that many looked forward to the opportunity to prove His power in the face of lions, fire, or at the edge of a sword.

One of the most famous stories that came down from that day was about a believer who had been sentenced to burn at the stake. He promised the other believers - who would be watching his execution - that if the power of God were enough, he would hold up one finger for them to see.

When the day of his death came and the flames engulfed him, his fellow believers looked intently to see what his report would be. Sure enough, through the smoke, they saw him lift his hand and hold up not just one, but *two* fingers. He wanted them to know that the grace of God was more than enough!

For those early Christians, honoring God in the midst of persecution and suffering became the primary focus of their faith. It became the center point of their Christian walk. Then, suddenly, the persecution ceased. A new emperor took power and put a stop to it. And suddenly, those believers didn't have anything to talk about or pray about.

Often after fighting a monumental battle for their lives - and after winning that battle - people have difficulty refocusing on what to pray about! And it was at this point in history - when the persecution stopped - that this doctrine of "glorifying God" through suffering, sickness and poverty began.

It quickly grew into a major religious dogma. The problem was [and is now] that it wasn't based on the Bible. It was born out of the misdirected fervor of those early Christians, who had so focused on glorifying God through persecution, that they didn't know what to do when the persecution stopped.

So they replaced the lions and the burning stakes with all kinds of trouble and pain - mostly sickness and disease.

Their intentions were good. They loved God. But the fact is - that there is no comparison between suffering from burning at the stake because you refuse to deny the Name of Jesus, and suffering from sickness or poverty. Those two kinds of suffering are just not the same thing.

Let's Look at What the "Suffering Doctrine" is About

The "Suffering Doctrine" of religious tradition is a destructive counterfeit of the true Bible teaching on the suffering that the believer must be prepared to go through.

The suffering doctrine has these basic suppositions: Since suffering happens and since God runs and controls everything - then suffering is either authored by God or allowed by God. If God authors or allows suffering it must be:

- as the punishment (loving correction, discipline) of His children,
- so that He can have opportunities to demonstrate His faithfulness to us in hard times,
- so we in turn can demonstrate our trust in Him in spite of adverse circumstances or
- to test our free will and make a way for us to grow spiritually.

If God is NOT the author of the suffering then He still allows it as a natural result of our tenure in "the devil's world" where he is its author. Therefore, if we suffer, it must be God's will that we suffer and:

- We should be content with the assurance that God (through His GRACE) will help us get through it.
- We should be content with the assurance that God will NEVER ask us to bear any burden which we are unable to bear (even if it KILLS us).
- We should be content with the assurance that our suffering WILL end when we DIE. (As opposed to the unbeliever whose suffering will never end.)

This doctrine - as doctrines go - sounds very religious, lofty, perhaps even pious. But I contend that it falls into a unique category of doctrines - "the doctrine of demons."

The Subtle Danger of This Doctrine is Twofold

- 1) It places the believer in a state of non-resistance to the Devil and his darkness, and
- 2) It places the blame (whether called that or not) directly or indirectly on God.

The fruits of this teaching have been - among others:

- premature death
- unnecessary suffering
- the belief that God has left, abandoned, or forsaken us
- loss of faith
- living in hypocrisy, (i.e., believing a sickness is God's will, yet seeking to be rid of it medically)

The primary error of the teaching *is in the primary supposition itself!* The supposition that God is running, controlling everything - which is simply not true.

God the Father is on His throne in Heaven, Jesus is seated there at His right hand, and the Holy Spirit is here with us on earth. The functions of the Holy Spirit are, among others, that of comforter, counselor, teacher, reminder, spokesman, provider of power and giver of divine gifts.

The Father and Jesus have ALREADY done all they are going to do until Jesus returns and gathers His saints. The Father sent His only begotten Son to redeem us from the curse of the law. And, the Father sowed His singular seed (Jesus) into the earth for the express purpose of producing and harvesting an abundant crop of sons of God! Sons that look like, act like, and talk like Jesus!

Jesus came here, lived a sinless life, destroyed the works of the Devil wherever he found them and produced good works in their place. He taught and trained students to teach others to be just like Him. He voluntarily and systematically took upon His own body the full curse of **every** sin, sickness, disease, dysfunction, perversion and pain, paying the full and final penalty for us.

He did this by taking it upon his body and carrying it all to the cross of Calvary where He became the Atonement for us, by shedding His own blood and dying for us, and thereby redeeming us from the curse of the law.

Then according to plan, he was buried. Three days later - having defeated the Devil - the Father resurrected Him from the dead. After this He gave His followers last minute instructions.

First, to go and wait for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, He told them that once they received the Holy Spirit and power, to go into all nations - teaching, preaching, healing, and baptizing those that believe.

Then he told them that those that did believe, and were baptized, would speak in tongues, not be hurt by deadly things, cast out demons in Jesus' name, and heal by the laying on of their hands - just as the other followers of Jesus did.

Jesus set up an ongoing system to train and equip believers - to continue to: act as Jesus did, say what Jesus said and do what Jesus did. The Father sent the Holy Spirit with the same power and the same gifts that He had provided for Jesus in the earth.

Jesus, after His resurrection, proclaimed - "All authority has been given to me!" And then turned around and said that we were to have the same dominion and authority - by the power of attorney - of His Name! The Name of Jesus!

What I am saying is that God the Father delegated running of things here on earth to Jesus! And that Jesus delegated the management of this earth to us! So, who is supposed to be running things here on Earth?

We are!

The Suffering Doctrine - Part 2

The Sovereignty of God

Over the years, the unscriptural doctrine of suffering for God by submitting to such works of the devil as sickness, lack and oppression has become the sacred cow of sacred cows when it comes to religious tradition.

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There are many theories and viewpoints concerning the doctrine of suffering within the church. We discussed some of these in part one. Another supposition of this doctrine and religious tradition concerns the sovereignty of God.

The supposition is that since God is sovereign, He can do ANYTHING he wants - including: breaking His own promises, lying, and contradicting Himself in His own Word.

Now the proponents of "the suffering doctrine" don't just come right out and say this directly. They couch it all in really religious sounding terminology to make it sound better. But it's still what they're saying when you boil it all down.

Is God Sovereign?

Yes - God *is* a sovereign God! And our sovereign God has made many sovereign promises and covenants. And our sovereign God keeps His sovereign promises.

God didn't put sickness and disease on you to teach you something! He didn't kill your family members, or sabotage your business. Would you do that to your kids?

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The Word says that God is not a man - that He should lie. (Ouch!) But that's pretty plain isn't it?

The Will of God

Yet another supposition of this doctrine and religious tradition is that we (mankind) cannot know the will of God because He is so mysterious. Well, lets look at what the Word of God has to say about that.

Ephesians 1:9 says, "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself." Does that sound like we can know the will of God?

How about this one? Ephesians 5:17: "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Paul here says that you are "unwise" (i.e. mindless, ignorant, unbelieving, and foolish) if you do not understand the will of God.

Ephesians 6:5-6 says this: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

Now Paul is saying that not only can we know what the will of God is, but that we should be DOING the will of God from our hearts. That pretty much nails it, don't you think? I don't know about you, but this "will of God" thing sounds pretty important to me.

So What Is the Will of God?

Now I don't want to get too theological or scientific for you, but how would you express your will to me? You'd tell me, right? Using words, right? And if I were away and you wanted to send your message to me, you would write it down, using words, right?

So then, your written word would be your will right? Is it too deep for anyone to grasp that God's Word - His written Word - the Bible - **is** the will of God?

Again, Ephesians 5:17 says: "Don't be ignorant, but understand what the will of the Lord is." The definition of a "fool" is someone that is ignorant - on purpose! So it should be pretty clear that we can know the will of God - if we read the Word of God.

Let me add this, If you think that God has some secret, mysterious, individual "will" for your life - outside of his general will, you are mistaken. Now He does have a plan for you - just like you have plans for your kids. But that plan is within the general will of God. Plus, that plan *does not* include God making, causing or allowing sin, sickness, disease, poverty, and lack to be a part of your life.

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God is a good God! He says that it is His desire that everyone receives salvation. Plus, He also says that it is His desire that we be in health and prosper, even as our soul prospers.

So then, if God is not the author of suffering, who is?

Satan is the Destroyer

In His Word God describes Satan as "the destroyer." Scripture says that Satan comes only - to steal, kill, and destroy. That describes Satan - *not* God!

God didn't put sickness and disease on you to teach you something! He didn't kill your family members, or sabotage your business. Would you do that to your kids?

Perhaps they are rebellious and refuse to obey you. So you punish them with sickness or physical pain to teach them a lesson. Is that what you would do? No! If you as a parent were to do that to one of your children, they would take away your kids and throw you in prison!

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You would never do that. And don't you agree that God our "Father" is a much better parent than any of us?

What if I walked up to you, and stuck my nose in your face and told you that "Your dad is responsible for my sickness"? Wouldn't you consider that as an insult? Well, that is exactly what religious tradition is saying about our Father in Heaven! They dress it up and make it sound religious at times, but that is basically what they are saying.

Why is it when someone gets sick or dies and others ask why, religious people suddenly feel obligated to start making excuses for God? They begin to justify how God apparently comes to steal, kill, and destroy - to teach us something. They say we can never know what God is going to do, because He's so mysterious.

It never occurs to most people that Satan would use organized religion and religious tradition to perpetuate lies about God - but he does.

What makes this "suffering doctrine" a doctrine of demons, is the fact that it removes the blame from Satan and removes the blame from us - and places it squarely on God. Which is a lie! And then it twists scripture to support that lie.

God is a **good** God! And only good - all the time!

He is now and he always has been. And if anybody tells you differently, they are perpetuating a lie of the devil. I don't care how "pretty" or "religious" they make it sound or how they weave it into other teachings.

Now I don't want to receive any nasty letters, and I'm sorry if I just blew holes in some of your best sermons, but we need to know these things! It's time the whole concept of suffering is shown for what it really is...a destructive lie from hell.

A little strong you say? A little sharp? Maybe. But remember, Jesus called the religious leaders of his day "vipers," "snakes in the grass," "sowers of stumbling blocks," and "hypocrites."

Why? Because they should have known better. And we should too!

The Suffering Doctrine - Part 3

In the first two parts of this teaching series, I have examined how Satan has deceived many into thinking that human suffering is authored by God. What makes this "suffering doctrine" a doctrine of demons, is the fact that it removes the blame from Satan and removes the blame from us - and places it squarely on God, which is a lie!

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The What-Abouts

"Well Tim, what about in the Old Covenant where it said GOD smote this one and that one, and God DID this and God did that?"

This one's a little more complicated, so rather than go into fine detail, I'll generalize to keep this as simple as possible.

The Hebrew language prior to 1948 was, for the most part, a dead language and had to be resurrected. Much has been learned about the language, but some things are still unclear.

Dr. Robert Young, the author of Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible, an outstanding Hebrew and Greek scholar, states in his work, 'Hints and Helps to Biblical Interpretation', "Active verbs frequently express a permission of it." i.e. the active or causative voice is frequently used in English translations where the permissive voice should have been used."

And many, if not all, of those were only "permitted" due to the fact that His direct intervention would go against what he had already spoken.

Cause and Effect

A good example of this is in Deuteronomy 28:1-13, where the blessings of hearing and obeying God's law are listed. On the other hand, verses 14-62 list the curses of the law.

Note that one is either under the blessing or the curse - there is no middle ground - no neutral zone. Note also that the blessings are listed **first** and that they are conditional to hearing and obeying. Now let's say that I fail to hear and obey. This is stepping out from under the blessing and into the curse.

God did not change, move or take any action at all. I was the one that changed and made the move. The curse is the **lack** of being under the blessing. God is not executing the curse - He doesn't have to!

OK, if I say to you: "If thou shalt flip the light switch to the 'on' position, thou shalt be blessed with abundant light. But, if you do not flip the light switch to the 'on' position, thou shalt live in utter darkness, and shall stumble and fall and suffer injuries, and become frightened, frustrated and confused, and be unhappy and blind and on and on..."

Now, if you don't turn the light on - am I the one who causes your potential injury? Am I the one who causes you to be blind, unhappy, frightened, frustrated and confused? NO! I'm not directly involved at all. I just spoke the rule or law into existence and made it legally binding on you, on myself, and on everyone else!

In fact, if it became a spiritual law, I would not even be legally able to remove the effects of the darkness from you. For, they are the automatic penalty for not hearing and doing what I said.

In other words, when it says, "The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he has consumed thee from off the land..." the "Lord" is really passively doing **nothing** - one way or the other. And may even be legally constrained from action by His own Word.

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Now remember, Jesus the Redeemer, has redeemed us **from** the penalties (the curse) by paying (or taking upon himself) each and every penalty (curse) **for** us.

In my little example of the light switch, Jesus would have paid each and every one of the penalties for you not turning on the light. He would have voluntarily suffered the blindness and injury and taken upon himself the fear, frustration, confusion and unhappiness for us - allowing us to step into the light!

We no longer have to pay the penalty (or suffer) anything that Jesus paid (or suffered) for us! This was called the Atonement. In the Old Testament, God's law required hearing and doing - and the penalty for not hearing and doing was death.

God also spoke into existence an atonement, (a way to escape - by the sacrificial shedding of blood to cover up your transgression). But this atonement was only temporary because of the impurity of the less-than-perfect sacrifice.

However, Jesus was the perfect (permanent) sacrifice. And He paid for and carried the entire curse to the cross - for us. And if he did - then we are no longer required to carry or suffer any of the penalties of the curse.

Explaining the "What-Abouts"

"Yeah, but what about Job and Paul's 'thorn in the flesh?'" Well, I have an hour-long tape called the "What-Abouts" that goes into great detail about these two. But here's Job in a nutshell.

Job opened the gate in the hedge of protection around him by allowing fear to rule over him and by allowing the words of his own mouth. God just points it out. Satan attacks with the goal of forcing Job to curse God. Satan fails and God restores to Job double his losses in every area.

What about Paul's "thorn in the flesh?" If you ask a religious person what the "thorn in the flesh" was - they tend to speculate all kinds of things. Bad eyes, arthritis, stuttering, sickness, disease, and so on. And then they tell you that they don't really know for sure.

That's when I ask them, "Why don't you know?" And while they are still starring at me like a cow at a new gate - I say, "the Bible tells you what it is, right in the same verse that mentions the thorn!" Guess what? Most have never read it, or have simply read right over it. Primarily because they were "told" what it said in school or in seminary.

"Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. 12:7).

What was the thorn? The Bible says it was a messenger of Satan - a demonic spirit - sent, (not by God) to buffet him (beat him up). And not surprisingly, what happened everywhere he went? He got beat up!

And when Paul (still learning to walk in faith and in the authority of Jesus' name) asked God to make that spirit go away - three times - God told him to do it himself - with the power, authority, and anointing that he had already been provided with. Later in scripture it tells how Paul finally got it and overcame that spirit and was able to teach and preach without disruption.

A Scriptural Suffering

Now the Bible says that there is a very real, scriptural suffering that every serious believer must face. The Apostle Paul talked about that suffering. He said:

I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ [the Anointed] Jesus my Lord [and His Anointing]: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ [the Anointed One and His Anointing]. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ [the Anointed One and His Anointing], the righteousness which is of God by faith. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death.

(Phil. 3:8-10)

Paul said he wanted to know the fellowship of Jesus' sufferings. Clearly if Paul had a part in Jesus' sufferings, then we do too. So we need to find out what Jesus suffered - and what our part is.

"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). So, what *did* Jesus suffer - in obedience?

Isaiah 50:5-6: "The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious (obedient), neither turned my back - away." (i.e., Jesus didn't twist and squirm to avoid the lashes, blows and other violence to his body.) "I (obediently) gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame (reproach) and spitting."

Philippians 2:8: "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

From these verses, we see that he suffered martyrdom, through torture and death by execution. Now, Christians do not have to suffer martyrdom unless they "choose" to. It's a decision.

What Else Did Jesus Suffer?

Jesus also suffered persecution - religious persecution - from the religious bigwigs of His day as well as demonic persecution. He also suffered rejection from his nation, his town, his friends, his family and his followers. He also suffered insult, slander, discrimination, betrayal, false accusation, religious and racial hatred, ridicule, etc.

In addition, as we will see later, Jesus also suffered the resisting of all the temptations and pressures that come from every direction. These are the sufferings that every Christian (that is doing anything for Jesus) can expect to suffer.

Is There More?

Jesus became the perfect sacrifice of all sacrifices. He was not only the Passover Lamb, but was also the Atonement - or scapegoat - upon which was placed all the sins, perversities, evils, faults, iniquities, mischief as well as the punishments and curses for the people.

At the cross, God the Father, placed all of these things upon Jesus including the full "curse of the law."

Since Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, and atonement - and we are not - we as Christians **do not qualify** to suffer anything that was included as part of that sacrifice. And that includes *everything* listed in the "curse of the law."

As I've said, some people have mistakenly decided that sickness and disease are their part of Jesus' suffering. They say, "I guess this is just my cross to bear!" But that can't possibly be true.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God (or God breathed), and is profitable for doctrine (instruction: the function or the information), for learning (teaching), for reproof (proof,

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conviction: evidence, to convince/charge of a fault, blame, censure), for correction (a straightening up again, rectification), for instruction (education or training, nurture), in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect.

(2 Tim. 3:16-17)

The Word says - that scripture is used to point out fault, correct, and to discipline. Not sickness, disease, and poverty!

Does God Discipline His Children?

The answer is "yes," but what does discipline really mean? And what is said about it in the New Covenant?

People tend to think about the word "discipline" primarily in terms of punishment. But, what is the root word in "discipline?" Disciple!

Jesus was the teacher and the disciples were the students or learners. Discipline primarily refers to education and training. And, even when "correction" may be implied by the context, that "correction" need not imply a "spanking" or "punishment," but rather a paradigm shift, course correction, or a pointing in the right direction.

In Ephesians 6 and Hebrews 12 we can read how God tends to guide and nurture His children - a far cry from corporal punishment.

The primary context of these whole passages is that Father God is a *good* and *loving* Father who educates and trains His children. The suffering doctrine is a doctrine of demons, not of a loving and caring God. And it's time we change our thinking for good on this issue. **TGM**

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