

July 17th, 2016

## BORN BLIND SO THE WORLD WOULD SEE

John 9:1-7

This passage presents us with an excruciating tension. We have a man born blind—a man born into extreme suffering—and when pressed for an answer, Jesus says: this man was born blind so “...that the works of God might be displayed in him.” This man was born blind so the world would see Christ clearly. And this applies to all humankind. Men and women and children suffer horribly so that God might be on display. Our suffering is the theater in which the works of God might be seen by the world.

And immediately, this thought seems repulsive to the natural mind. How could a loving and powerful God subject His creation to suffering simply so that He could be put on display? Many Christians have sought to answer this question by stripping God of His sovereignty. The Scripture teaches us that God is **absolutely sovereign**—meaning—God “...does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (Dan. 4:35). God’s sovereignty means that no one can defeat His counsels (Proverbs 21:30); no one can thwart His purposes (Job 42:2); no one can resist His will (Romans 9:19). God sovereignty means that He rules over the nations (Psalm 22:28), and that He rules over every human heart (Proverbs 21:1). To strip God of His Sovereignty is to strip God of His Godness.

So it won’t work for us to say that God didn’t want for suffering to occur, but it was out of His control. This creates massive tension. If God is sovereign then why is there sin and suffering in the world? Why didn’t He simply withhold creation from those whom He knew would perpetrate evil? Or why didn’t He fix defective genes in the womb since He has seen them from before time began? The answer is on Jesus’ own lips, all these things occurred so “...that the works of God might be displayed.”

## *Doctrine*

There is no higher good in the mind of God than the display of God and He appoints suffering to achieve it

- ☆ The Man Born Into Blindness
- ☆ The Disciples' Moral Blindness
- ☆ The Christ Who Appointed Blindness

### I. The Man Born Into Blindness

9.1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth.

#### **The suffering of being blind**

Let's take some a moment and consider what this blindness represents. What would it mean to be born blind? It means that his parents were also affected. He was once a child with an incurable condition. Mothers how would you explain sight to a child who has never seen? If you think your seeing children are dependent upon you, imagine a blind child. This boy never saw his mother and father's loving face. This boy never saw colors, never saw a rainbow, a sunset, just complete darkness. The day was as night to him. He never beheld the glory of God in the heavens (Psalm 19:1). Being born blind in that culture meant abject poverty. Which is why we see in v.8 that this man was a beggar. His parents probably no longer had the means to support him as a grown man. Now as a man this has a particular sting because men find great meaning in their work because God wired us that way to have dominion over the earth. Instead darkness had dominion over him. The probability of him marrying was zero. What woman would marry a man who was a blind beggar, who would not be able to take care of her? Which meant no sex, no children, no family. He would never have descendants. His name would be cut off from the

earth. Now imagine the utter depression and loneliness that this life brings. And the stigma of every one suspecting that this blindness was due to a personal or family sin. The punchline is this: this blindness represents extreme suffering.

### **The promise of suffering to all Christians**

The Bible does not avoid the hardest issues in life, but rather addresses them head on. How do you deal with suffering? With disabilities? There are children in this assembly with significant disabilities. There are adults in this assembly with scars so deep that they haunt them daily. How do we interpret these events in light of a Sovereign God who loves us? How do we interpret the future sufferings that are invincibly coming towards us? These questions have to be answered, because the Scripture promises us that we will suffer. **Philippians 1:29** “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,” Paul tells the Christians in Thessalonica not to be moved by their afflictions because “...you yourselves know that we are destined for this.” (1 **Thessalonians 3:3**). The Apostle told the church in **Acts 14:22** “...that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” More suffering is coming. How do we interpret it? The disciples interpreted it wrongly.

## II. The Disciples’ Moral Blindness

9.2 And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

### **Three truths to consider first**

Before we look at how the disciples’ question reveals a moral blindness, let’s first consider two truths that their question reveals.

**Truth 1: Sin truly is the cause of all suffering.** If there had never been sin in the world, there never would have been suffering in the world. Misery has come because the entire human race has rebelled against God “...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your

life.” (Genesis 3:17) All sufferings come forth as a bitter consequence of the fall. The reason babies die is because they, like us, have inherited sin from our first father—Adam. Sin has tragic and horrible consequences.

**Truth 2: We do suffer for our sins.** We know this experientially. When we sin knowingly, we often suffer for it in one way or another. Jesus had told the crippled man that He healed in John 5:14 that he ought to stop sinning so that nothing worse would happen to him.<sup>1</sup> Often times in life, when we suffer we can trace it directly to a sin that we committed. Or we can trace it to a sin of another perpetrated against us.

### What’s the problem with the disciples’ question?

The disciples want to know who *caused* this man’s blindness. But the only *causes* they have in view is the man’s sin or His parents’ sin. Notice they say “... who sinned, this man or his parents, *that* he was born blind?” The word “that” show us that they had a cause in mind. And the options that they present to Jesus show us how a glimpse into their hearts. ‘He’s blind and suffering *because* He sinned or His parents. Period. There is no other possible reason for this man

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<sup>1</sup> **Truth 3: Children can be given over to the sins of their parents.** Consider what God said to Moses in Exodus 34:7b “...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children to the third and fourth generation.” Children are often enslaved to the same sins as their parents and God says this is a judgment from Him. The entire human race stands guilty before God, so anyone on whom He does not give grace is ruined and without hope. So if God gives men and their children over to the same sins, who can accuse God of any injustice? If someone were to object with Ezekiel 18:20 “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself,” I respond that there is no contradiction. Exodus 34:7 doesn’t say that children will be punished for their father’s sins, only that they will be given over to their father’s sins, which is perfectly just for God to do. He doesn’t owe grace! Ezekiel 18:20 is correcting the Israelites who began to say that their fathers had eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are now set on edge (18:2), meaning that they thought that they—being innocent—were suffering for their father’s sins. (Calvin, Institutes, II.VIII.XX) But the prophet corrects them by saying that they are not innocent but are in fact guilty of the same sins. Each man will die for their own sins. Being punished for your father’s sins and being given over to your father’s sins are two entirely different things. Therefore this truth should make more clear the line “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear.” If God has given us over to the sins of our ancestors but has instead shown us grace, we ought to tremble before Him recognizing it came from His good pleasure alone. Also see John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 366

suffering.’ This view has already been dealt with in the Bible, but these disciples had forgotten. In the book of Job, we see God permitting Satan to wreak havoc in Job’s life though Job feared God and walked in His ways. Satan took all his wealth, then his children, then his health, and finally his wife turned against him. And the only category Job’s friend’s had was ‘Job, you must have some secret sin in your life, *because innocent people don’t suffer*’<sup>2</sup> During our Job series, we called this view Christian Karma. It says that your actions *always* determine your fate. Which means that if you look at one’s fate you can determine what they did. If bad things are happening to you, it’s because you did bad things; if good things are happening to you, it’s because you did good things.

This view commits a logical fallacy called affirming the consequent.

P1. If you drop stuff, it breaks

P2. It’s broke

∴ You dropped it<sup>3</sup>

Do you see the problem? Is there any other explanation for the stuff being broken? Or *must* the only explanation be that you dropped it?

Now when this is applied to human beings in their suffering, this becomes the perfect recipe for spiritual abuse. These disciples were taking it for granted

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<sup>2</sup> In fact this spoken by Eliphaz in his opening remarks in Job 4:7 “Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off?” Now what is the main problem with this rhetorical question? It condemns Jesus Christ as guilty.

P1. No one who is cut off is upright

P2. Jesus was cut off (Isaiah 53:8)

∴ Jesus is not upright

<sup>3</sup> <http://seekingthecitythatistocome.weebly.com/home/it-is-for-gods-glory-that-it-is-broken>

that this blind man was a worse sinner than them.<sup>4</sup> The question exposed their self-righteousness. The reasoning of Christian Karma is always lingering in our shadowy hearts: ‘If we are not blind and suffering like this man—which we know was caused by sin—then we must be doing really good.! I’m not suffering because I’m not broken like him. I’m not suffering so I must be doing right.’ And again we are right back to seeking to take the credit, seeking to be the hero, seeking to be our own Savior.<sup>5</sup> The poem of Invictus is the anthem of every human heart:

I thank whatever gods may be  
 For my unconquerable soul...  
 I am the master of my fate:  
 I am the captain of my soul.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The disciples were morally blind to the truth that specific suffering isn’t necessarily connected to specific sin. There is not a necessary 1:1 correlation between our sin and our suffering; or between our righteousness and our tranquility (cf. 1 Timothy 5:24-25) And nothing makes this more clear than the gospel. Who suffered more than Jesus Christ? No one. And yet He was the sinless, Lamb of God (John 1:29). Who was more righteous than Jesus Christ? No one. And yet He lived His life as a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3).

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 Calvin says “They are false interpreters, therefore, who say that all afflictions, without any distinction, are sent on account of sins; as if the measure of punishments were equal, or as if God looked to nothing else in punishing men than to what every man deserves.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, Vol. XVII*, (Grand Rapids, MI,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 265

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 Henry says “The sinfulness of the whole race of mankind does indeed justify God in all the miseries of human life; so that those who have the least share of them must say that God is kind, and those who have the largest share must not say that he is unjust; but many are made more more miserable than others in this life who are not at all more sinful. Not but that this man was a sinner, and his parents sinners, but is was not any uncommon guilt that God had an eye to in inflicting this upon him.” Matthew Henry, *Unabridged Commentary On The Whole Bible*, OSNOVA’s Kindle Edition, location 244397

<sup>5</sup> It is simply inescapable that Jesus is trying to correct us here. If we don’t see ourselves in the sandals of the disciples, isn’t it because we think ourselves to good or too smart to be making such a mistake? “Jesus who sinned, these disciples or their parents that they were born such idiots?”

<sup>6</sup> by William Ernest Henley <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/invictus/> accessed on July 16th, 2016

The people that suffered and died in Nice, France this week: were they worse sinners than us?<sup>7</sup> Certainly some of us had those thoughts flash across our minds—they're godless pagan partiers...they're politics are all screwed up... didn't they learn from last time?...they shouldn't have opened up their borders...serves them right.' Jesus had similar tragedies in his day. Pilate had killed some Galileans and Jesus' disciples came to him and told him about it. Jesus responds in **Luke 13:2** "Do you think that these Galileans were *worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way*? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."<sup>8</sup>

Tragedies and suffering are tests for us. How do we view those who suffer? Are we looking for causes in the person so that we can find blame? Do we know that this is attractive to us, because we want to feel better about ourselves? Jesus wants to show us a better way.

### III. The Christ Who Appointed Blindness

9.3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

#### The main show

Jesus immediately rejects the exclusive categories of the disciples. This man was born blind *that the works of God might be on display*. Notice, Jesus does not deny that this man sinned or his parents. This man was a sinner and so were his parents. And it is even possible that their sin contributed to his blindness as a secondary cause. But for Jesus, this isn't the main show. God had ordained that this man would be born blind *even if* their sin was related.

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/16/world/europe/nice-france-truck-attack-what-we-know.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/16/world/europe/nice-france-truck-attack-what-we-know.html?_r=0)

<sup>8</sup> Jesus continues "Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Luke 13:4-5

God's primary cause of making the man born blind is the main show, and the man<sup>9</sup> and his parent's sin, if there was any, was only secondary at best.

### **An objection<sup>10</sup>**

At this point many will feel uncomfortable with this notion of God. Many simply cannot imagine that God had planned on this man suffering from all eternity. So they will say that this verse does not teach that God *planned it* but rather that God can *use it*. God uses suffering, He does not plan for it. But this won't work. **First**, because the disciples, in essence, asked the question "why is the man blind?" If Jesus simply says "I can use this," it doesn't answer the question. **Second**, because it only moves the problem back one step. Does not God know all things? Can He not see birth defects? If so, then why doesn't He stop them? That nagging question remains for those who deny that God planned this from eternity. **Third**, the Scripture tells us specifically that God makes men blind. **Exodus 4:11** says "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"

### **The display of the gospel of Jesus Christ**

So when Jesus says "'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him'" we have to understand Him to mean, that **this man's suffering was planned by God from all eternity in order to display the works of God**. So I am driven to ask—what works of God are on display? The works of Jesus. Jesus' works are the works of God. Meaning, it

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry notes here that the disciples had enquired "Whether this man was punished thus for some sin of his own, either committed or foreseen before his birth. Some think that the disciples were tainted with the Pythagorean notion of the pre-existence of souls, and their transmigration from one body to another. Was this man's soul condemned to the dungeon of this blind body to punish it for some great sin committed in another body which it had before animated? The Pharisees seem to have had the same opinion of his case when they said, "Thou wast altogether born in sin (v.34), as if all those, and those only, were born in sin whom nature had stigmatized." Matthew Henry, Unabridged Commentary On The Whole Bible, OSNOVA's Kindle Edition, location 244376-244386

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/why-was-this-child-born-blind>



is the gospel that is on display. This man was born blind so that the gospel of Jesus Christ would be on display for all to see.

### **Jesus is the light of the world**

John chapter nine is an illustration of everything Jesus said in John chapter eight. Jesus connects the healing of this blind man to his sermon in John 8. Look at v. 4, Jesus says “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” Night is coming, meaning—‘Soon I will stop healing people and start dying for people. My hour is quickly coming for my light to be extinguished.’ And then He says in v. 5 “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” There it is. **This man was born blind so that the world would see that Jesus is the light of the world when He heals him.** Jesus causes spiritually blind beggars who are groping around in the darkness of their severe suffering to see. But not to see merely physically to see that He is the only light of life. That apart from Jesus Christ, there is only suffering, and darkness, and depression, and abandonment.<sup>11</sup>

And this is what is illustrated in this healing. Before Christ passed this man by, he was basically waiting to die. No hope. No meaning to his suffering. Stigmatized by all as a sinner by birth,<sup>12</sup> cursed as an outcast. That’s a picture of all the human race apart from Jesus Christ. Friend, this is you if you do not know Jesus Christ savingly. You’re blind. Not only are you walking in the darkness now, but your future is one of suffering. You know that God exists.

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<sup>11</sup> **Luke 4:18** “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and **recovering of sight to the blind**, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

**Acts 26:15-18** And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you **to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light** and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

<sup>12</sup> v.34—They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

(Romans 1:19-20) And your own conscience tells you that you are guilty before Him (Romans 2:15). If you do not come to His light, you will walk blindly into eternity. That's why hell is called the "gloom of utter darkness"<sup>13</sup> because Jesus Christ is not there.

But consider the grace of Jesus Christ in this passage. Jesus took the initiative with this man. There is no record of this man calling on Him.<sup>14</sup> Jesus saw him and anointed his eyes with the mud made from his saliva. And He told him to go and wash.<sup>15</sup> And when he washed He came back seeing. God is sending you these words today to wash your spiritual eyes. They may be muddy words, but will you see? Turn to the light of Jesus Christ. Don't walk in the darkness any more. He desires that you would "...turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that [you] may receive the forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Jesus]." (Acts 26:18)

Why was this man born blind? So that we would see how miserable and blind we are apart from Jesus Christ. It is not *just* that this man was born blind, all of us were born blind. Why was this man born blind? So that the saving gospel of Jesus Christ could be displayed as having the only power to bring us out of the darkness and into the light of life.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jude 1:13

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 65:1 "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that was not called by my name."

<sup>15</sup> The significance of the pool—Matthew Henry location 244483

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Henry—"He was born blind that our Lord Jesus might have the honor of curing him, and might therein prove himself sent of God to be the true light to the world. Thus the fall of man was permitted, and the blindness that followed it, that the works of God might be manifest in opening the eyes of the blind." Matthew Henry, Unabridged Commentary On The Whole Bible, OSNOVA's Kindle Edition, location 244408

## Application

Our Doctrine: There is no higher good in the mind of God than the display of God and He appoints suffering to achieve it

When I was first introduced to the doctrines of grace, I learned that there are two basic theologies in the world—man-centered theologies and God-centered theologies. Here’s the difference: man-centered theologies defines *good* as “whatever secures the highest happiness for man, irrespective of God’s concerns.” A God-centered theology defines good as the greatest display of God.

We can see this in how the world defines the problem of evil. The world says that since there is evil in the world God must either be: all-powerful but not good—since He doesn’t stop evil; or all-good but not powerful—since He can’t stop evil. But what is the problem with this false dilemma? The word “good” is pre-loaded to mean “whatever secures the highest happiness for man, irrespective of God’s concerns.” Scripture directly contradicts this definition in one striking example. **Matthew 26:24** “The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” The highest happiness for Judas would have been for him not to have been born. But He was born. Why? Because his existence and betrayal brought about the greatest display of God.<sup>17</sup> There is no higher good in the mind of God than the display of God and He appoints suffering to achieve it.

But some may think it unfair. Some may think it unfair that God would bring suffering to man purposely in order to display Himself. But let’s consider the facts. 1) God didn’t owe us existence. But He created us after His own

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<sup>17</sup> “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” Romans 11:33

image and very good in order to be in relationship with Him.<sup>18</sup> 2) God gravely warned our first parents not to eat of the fruit lest they die, but they ate it anyway.<sup>19</sup> 3) God fashioned all of history so that man could find their way back to God. Acts 17:26-27 say that God determined where we would live and when we would live that we “...should seek God, and perhaps feel [our] way toward him and find him.” 4) God has written His glory in the heavens that we would undeniably know His existence.<sup>20</sup> 5) God has written His law in on our consciences that we would know what pleases and displeases him.<sup>21</sup> 6) God has sent prophets and apostles declaring the work of Christ to all the nations.<sup>22</sup> 7) Lastly He has sent Christ who in His earthly ministry proclaimed openly “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” (John 7:37-38)

What is not fair? What’s not fair, *humanly speaking*, is that God would let anyone of us into heaven. What’s not fair is that all of us are not in hell right now. What’s not fair is that the spotless Lamb of God took on the hell-stained sin of treacherous rebels like you and me and was slaughtered on a Roman cross. The ultimate suffering that God uses to display His glory, is not our suffering, but the suffering of His only beloved Son.

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1:26, 31

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:19-20

<sup>21</sup> Ecclesiastes 3:11; Romans 2:15

<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 1:1; John 20:21; Acts 1:8

Our Duty: Recognize that God appointed suffering to wean us off the breast of self-dependance<sup>23</sup>

Even though God the Son suffered more than the accumulative sufferings of all of mankind, the Father does not therefore look at our suffering as trivial. And neither does Jesus. **Hebrews 4:15** “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Jesus wept when Lazarus died.<sup>24</sup> God the Son sympathizes with our suffering, and yet He appoints it anyway because it serves our greater good. God uses the fire of suffering to wean us off of the drug of self that we might cling to Him alone. Paul says this in **2 Corinthians 1:8-9** “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. *For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.* Indeed, we felt that we had received *the sentence of death.* **BUT that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.**”<sup>25</sup> God appoints our suffering so that we would find more satisfaction in God and less in ourselves and what this world offers.<sup>26</sup>

Malcolm Muggeridge was a Christian journalist who had been through the fire of afflictions and suffering in his own life. He died at the age of 87, and this is what he wrote about his own experience with suffering:

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<sup>23</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, (Colorado Springs, CO,: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 265

<sup>24</sup> John 11:35

<sup>25</sup> A catalog of Paul’s sufferings are found in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 “Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

<sup>26</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, (Colorado Springs, CO,: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 265

“Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolate and painful, with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained. In other words, if it ever were to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo jumble...the result would not be make life delectable, but to make it too banal or trivial to be endurable. This of course is what the cross [of Christ] signifies, and it is the cross more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ.”<sup>27</sup>

Looking back on my very short life here, I can say with all truthfulness that God has used affliction and suffering to continue to get me to die to my self and cling closer to Christ. The bigger the thorn, the closer He draws me to Him. And that gift in ineffable.

Our Delight: Suffering is an expression of God’s love because it brings us into intimacy with Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup>

Suffering as a Christian is one of the ultimate evidences that Father loves us. Some of us are going to suffer horribly in our lives. Some of us are going to feel as the Apostle Paul did of being “...utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despair of life itself.” Some of our deaths will make other people cringe at

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid* pg. 265-266

<sup>28</sup> I asked in the introduction: ‘How could a loving and powerful God subject His creation to suffering simply so that He could be put on display?’ We know God has ***the right*** to put Himself on display, because He is God. He is absolutely supreme. ***And yet*** God has labored through 66 books of the Bible constantly telling us of His kind heart. **Exodus 34:6** “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” ***So how can God subject us to suffering in order to display Himself, all the while having this suffering be an expression of His kind and loving heart?*** This section is the answer.

our suffering. What do we do with this? We take it as an evidence of God's love towards us. Please turn to the Apostle Paul's words from Philippians 3:7-8:

“But whatever **gain** I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss *because* of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the **loss of all things** and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”

What is Paul saying here? He's saying that the most valuable thing in the universe is to know Christ more. He counted every scrap of gain that he had as dung<sup>29</sup> (that's the word for rubbish). Meaning his comfort, his health, his reputation, his easy living, his pain-free life—he is willing to trade all of it for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus more intimately, more deeply, more personally. He is saying “bring on suffering if it makes me know Christ more.” Look at v.10

“...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and *may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*”

Did you catch that? Paul is saying He want so know Christ and share in His sufferings! He wants to become like him in his death! What in the world would compel Paul to say such an outrageous thing—‘I want to share in His sufferings?’ Paul knew that to share in Christ's suffering was to know Christ more, and knowing Christ is the supreme treasure in all of existence.<sup>30</sup> **Meaning that suffering makes you know Christ more personally than you would have if you never suffered at all. How?**

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<sup>29</sup> σκύβαλον *skybalon*—any refuse, as the excrement of animals, offscourings, rubbish, dregs  
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4657&t=KJV>

<sup>30</sup> Psalm 63:3 “Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.”

**Are you depressed?** Christ was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief— (Isaiah 53:3) You are sharing in his sufferings.

**Do you have enemies?** Jesus was hated and despised and rejected by men— (Isaiah 53:3). You are sharing in His sufferings.

**Are you lonely?** Jesus was abandoned by all of his closest friends— (Mark 14:50). You are sharing in His sufferings.

**Are you sorrowful and scared?** Jesus was sorrowful unto death in the garden of Gethsemane, and sweat blood before his execution— (Mark 14:34; Luke 22:44). You are sharing in His sufferings.

**Have you been abused?** Jesus was mocked, beaten, and tortured so that His body could no longer be recognized as a man— (Isaiah 52:14). You are sharing in His sufferings.

**Are you dying?** Jesus gasped for breath, with blood gushing from his open wounds and hung until He finally suffocated to death. You are sharing in His sufferings.

Suffering is the ultimate gift to know Christ more— His love, His sacrifice for man, His obedience to the Father— such that to suffer is to know Him more. Suffering— as a Christian— is intimacy with Christ. God loves us so much that He appoints our suffering that we might have a greater intimacy with His Son. This changes everything. Instead of saying “Why me Lord? Why must I suffer such?” We say “Why me Lord? How could you have loved me so much as to grant me the gift of suffering that I might know Your Son more!” Once we see this truth, instead of wishing our suffering away, we will proclaim “I would not trade my suffering for all the wealth of the world. God gave it to me that I could taste and see the all surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Email from Jon Harms: “Conclusion - ***The death, burial, and resurrection*** of Jesus Christ are going to flip the entire order of creation on their head, so radically so that even the curse will come under the dominion of Jesus Christ and will be used as a blessing. We will look at others suffering for the sake of Christ, and no longer ask “How is this fair?” Instead, we ourselves will long for the fruit of suffering - that we would fellowship in Christ suffering and see him more clearly. Again, let me reiterate that if we take our eyes off the ***the death, burial, and resurrection*** of Jesus Christ, then our hearts will slip back into accusations of meaningless sufferings from an arbitrary God.”