

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, October 5, 2011 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANS “A Christianity That’s Catching – A Study of 1 Thessalonians”

Leading Out In Your Faith – Part 1
“When Your Comfort Zone Gets the Squeeze”
1 Thessalonians 3:1-8

*“Our All-Good and Faithful Lord has included suffering in His plan for each one of us.”
– Dr. Charles Swindoll*

How do you respond to statement? What do you think he is saying? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Why would God “include suffering in His plan for each of us? For what purpose? Share your thoughts and response. _____

In our comfort-at-any-cost society, things like affliction, pain, persecution, hardship, and other forms of suffering are viewed as enemies. Many of us who are Christians are frequently surprised, even angered, when we have to endure such difficulties. Unlike the message conveyed by Isaac Watts in his hymn, “Am I A Soldier of the Cross?,” numerous believers hope to be “carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease.” But that is an unrealistic and unbiblical expectation. Repeatedly throughout Scripture we are informed that there is no escape from life’s brutal blows. We are also told that we should not view all of them as unfair attacks against us. Indeed, our all-good and faithful Lord has included suffering in His plan for each one of us. On the road to glory there must be some barriers to confront and some mountains to scale. Whether we like it or not, the path to the crown is by way of the cross we must bear. **Mark 8:34** reminds us, *“Then He (Jesus) called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”* The section of 1 Thessalonians that we are going to zero in on here will help us to better understand our sufferings and teach us how God wants us to respond to them in order that our faith, in answer to the pain and suffering, may be contagious in the world in which we live. After all, the world is looking for help in the midst of pain and hope in the midst of suffering. Jesus is the answer!

I. TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT...

Whenever we pass through a time of real struggle and pain, we usually find ourselves experiencing tension between acceptance and resistance.

- **Acceptance** – On one side of the coin, we place our hands in God’s sovereign and loving care, realizing that He never makes mistakes. We know that there is a good purpose for everything He allows to pierce our lives. Right? Romans 8:28, “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*”
- **Resistance** – On the flip side, however, we tend to fight against the intrusion of suffering, vowing never to give up the hope that we can endure, even overcome, the parasite that is draining our life from us.

Usually we find ourselves responding on both sides; we plead for God to exercise mercy and healing, while trying to rest in His loving control. And through it all, we often ask, “Does any of this have to happen at all?” “Can’t suffering and the resultant tension be avoided altogether?” Scripture plainly answer NO! The Biblical response is that suffering is both inevitable and essential. Let’s briefly consider just a few of the many passages that touch on these points.

1. **Suffering is inevitable** – Since sin first entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), suffering has been an inescapable part of life. This does not imply that all suffering is a result of a person’s own sin... that every time you get sick or have a pain you must have done something wrong! It does imply that much suffering flows from the fact that sin has entered the human race and has directly affected the life and the flow of things. Indeed, suffering is one thing that we all have in common. Not even Christians are exempt from experiencing the pangs of suffering. Let’s look at three passages that make this clear.

- (1) **Philippians 1:29** – “*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*” This passage refutes the faulty notion that all suffering is the result of personal sin. On the contrary, we may experience hardship for doing what is right, for carrying out God’s desired will:

- Matthew 26:36-46 – Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane... Was Jesus’ anguish in the garden, his suffering a result of his personal sin or was he suffering for doing what was right and carrying out God desired will?
- Matthew 27:45-56 – Jesus on the Cross... Was Jesus’ agonizing death on the cross the result of his personal sin or was he suffering for doing what was right and carrying out God desired will?
- Acts 5:12-42 – The Apostle are Imprisoned... Were the Apostles persecuted and imprisoned as a result of their personal sin or was their suffering for doing what was right and carrying out God desired will?
- Acts 7:54-8:3 – The Stoning of Stephen... Was Stephens’ stoning. the result of his personal sin or was he suffering for doing what was right and carrying out God desired will?

- (2) **2 Corinthians 4:8-10** – “*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carrying around our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.*” Do you know how contagious that can be? These kinds of believers leave the world scratching their heads and wondering, “How do they do that... how do they endure that? Here we learn that part of the Christian life includes, affliction,

perplexity, persecution, and near-knockout blow. Why? So that the *“life of Jesus... may be manifested in our body.”*

- (3) **1 Peter 4:12-16** – *“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happened to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name”* These verses teach us not to be surprised when affliction comes upon us. In fact, if we are suffering because we are Christians, then we should *“rejoice,”* as Peter says, realizing that we *“blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests”* on us. Our difficult, painful times can be evidence that we are being obedient to Christ and His commands. And since we live in a world where there are many people who are still in rebellion against God, it should not surprise us when we are victimized by them simply because we are citizens of God’s everlasting kingdom.

2. **Pain is essential** – Even though we want our comfort zone intact and free from pain, God will often invade and squeeze it for our own good and growth. In fact, suffering is essential to our maturing process in Christ. Let’s look at two passages that confirm this truth:

- (1) **Essential for instruction... Psalm 119:67,71,75** – *Psalm 119:67, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your Word.” Psalm 119:71, “It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.” Psalm 119:75, “I know, O Lord, that Your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.”* Many times God will use the tool of affliction for the purpose of instructing us more fully in His ways and training us to follow Him more completely. It’s difficult when God must make us to “lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2a), but many times there is no better way for Him to gain our attention.
- (2) **Essential for evaluation... Ecclesiastes 7:13-14** – *“Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God had made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.”* Another purpose of adversity is evaluation. Suffering should cause us to take a scrutinizing look at ourselves as we really are. That’s the idea tied up in the use of the Hebrew word translated here as “consider.” Though a self-evaluation will not guarantee what route our future will take, it will help us to understand where we have been and what improvements we can make.

To be continued...

Next time we will consider the Thessalonians as an example of suffering by digging a little deeper in the book of 1 Thessalonians, looking at 1 Thessalonians 3:1-18. (Next study 10/19/11)