

**We shouldn't be surprised by suffering**

- I. Suffering isn't an unexpected anomaly of the Christian life. Rather, our sufferings are promised trials sent by God to prove the genuineness of our faith in Christ and prepare us for glory, 1.6-7; 4.19; Heb 12.5-11.
  - A. Our suffering is according to the will of God, out of love, to purify us, because we're followers of Christ. The cross of Christian suffering is the legacy Christ left His church. That means Christian suffering is a promise and a blessing, Phil 1.29.
  - B. But even if we know this theologically, it's hard for us to understand and accept. It's hard for us to submit and rejoice. It's hard for us to lay out our lives for Christ's sake.
  - C. One of the major reasons for this is that we don't prepare for the suffering Christ said we should expect and are therefore surprised by it, Acts 14.22; 2Tim 3.12.

**How to prepare for suffering**

- I. Anticipate suffering, Acts 20.22-23; 2Tim 3.12.
  - A. It's a basic, inescapable ingredient of the Christian life and there's no good reason at all to think we can get out of this world without bearing a cross for Christ's sake, Acts 14.22.
  - B. We knew when we began following Christ that He was calling us to a suffering condition, Lk 14.25-33. And we know this is God's usual way with His people, Heb 12.6. So we need to live every day in anticipation of God's call to suffer for Christ's sake.
- II. Deny self so you can take up the cross, Mk 8.34.
  - A. *Where self is renounced, the cross is easily borne* (Ambrose). It's our sinful love of self that makes the cross so unwelcome. A proud resistance to Christian suffering is a tell-tale sign of a sinful insistence on self-preservation. We need to deny our:
    - 1. Self-opinion, Prov 3.5-6.
    - 2. Self-reasoning, Prov 3.7-8.
    - 3. Self-excellencies, Phil 3.7.
    - 4. Self-will, Phil 4.11-12.
    - 5. Self-comforts, Lk 14.26.
    - 6. Self-ends, Mt 6.10.
- III. Set yourself against your sins as your greatest burden, Rom 7.24-25.

- A. When our greatest burden is the pestilent presence of sin in our hearts and lives then we welcome those afflictions and crosses which God sends to humble us and make us more holy.
- IV. Be careful to preserve your inner peace with God, Rom 5.1-3.
  - A. The way to find happiness in suffering is not by finding relief from the suffering but to rest in your peace with God in suffering.
    - 1. If you're sure of God's love, God's forgiveness, and Christ's mediation, you won't be afraid of any suffering, Rom 8.38-39.
- V. Humbly and cheerfully submit to your present sufferings, Phil 4.11-13.
  - A. It's a great help to being prepared to carry a great cross when we can cheerfully submit to whatever lesser ones God's bringing now. But if we can't bear lesser troubles, then how do we expect to bear greater ones?
  - B. There's way too much to do under the weight of a heavy cross to honor God to just then be trying to learn to bear one for the first time.
- VI. Regularly renew your self-resignation to the Lord, Mt 6.9-10; 26.39.
  - A. When you took Christ for your Lord and Saviour and set out to follow Him wherever He led, you renounced yourself and gave up all, Mt 4.18-22. Will you go back on that now?
  - B. Renew your resignation to lay all you are and have at His feet.
  - C. There's no better time to do that than when approaching the Lord's Table, in which you're reminded that He gave up His all for you, 2Cor 8.8-9; Eph 5.1-2; 1Pet 2.21.
- VII. Store up provisions against a season of suffering.
  - A. Store up in your heart all the comforts and consolations that you receive from God along the way, 2Cor 1.3-5.
  - B. Store up in your heart all the wonderful experiences you've had of God's faithfulness and kindness to you, Ps 42.4.
  - C. Treasure up God's precious, soul-supporting, and soul-reviving promises, Mk 13.31; Isa 55.10-11.
- VIII. Grow in grace, 2Pet 3.18.
  - A. We're not born into the Christian life strong in faith like Abraham, Moses, and Elijah. We need to grow daily in grace. And if we don't, then God's rebuke of us is just, Heb 5.12-14.
- IX. Set before you the example of your holy brethren and prepare to trust God for the grace to honor Him as they did, Heb 11; Acts 5.41.