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A Bible Study

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When Thouble Comes

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The first word of Romans 5 is "*therefore*." It has often been said that "therefore" is always "*there for a purpose*." This one is no exception for it opens the door from the past into the wonderful present and glorious future given to us in Christ.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1, 2).

Notice the formula: "*being...we have*." It is because of *who we are in Christ* that we possess wonderful assets. In Christ we have a new identity, a new standing which has provided us a whole sheaf of spiritual blessings: justification, peace with God, access into grace, the hope of the glory of God--to mention just a few. To demonstrate that these blessings are more than theological rhetoric with no impact on the daily details of our lives, Paul goes on to declare:

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

"And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (vs.3-5)

Because we have been given eternal life we look forward even now to its glories--we "*reioice in hope of the glory of God*." But this is not simply "pie in the sky by-and-by."

No. We have eternal life as a *present possession*--we do not have to wait until we die to obtain it. It is a present reality in our lives and enables us to glory in tribulations also." In other words, the life we have in Christ is also adequate for the "nasty now-and-now."

In Christ we have been made part of a total victory program. We are "*more than conquerors through him that loved us*" (Rom. 8:37) and are made to always "*triumph in Christ*" (2 Cor. 2:14). This is the reality of our new standing in Christ. Yet too often we look about us and wonder if this victory program has really reached our lives; has it penetrated as far as us yet?!

We need to understand that the victory program of which members of the Body of Christ are a part is not the Pentecostal program of time past. Our program is not the deliverance program God gave the nation Israel in the past nor is it the program He will have for Israel when Christ comes back to restore His authority over this planet through the kingdom promised to that favored nation.

In that long awaited kingdom, God will deliver His chosen people from their enemies and establish them in their land. Jerusalem will be "the city of the great King (Matt. 5:35) and the whole "*creation it self also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*"(Rom.8:21).

The deliverance awaiting Israel--and, through her, the world--in her kingdom is not the same ministry and victory that God has for members of the Body of Christ. If we do not rightly divide the Word of truth at this point, we are going to be brought into despair. God's Word is going to become a burden rather than the blessing it is designed to be. It is going to actually become destructive rather than constructive in our lives because we are trying to claim promises and blessings God never made to us.

The old adage, "all the promises in the Book are mine," is simply *not* true. To base our lives on such an unscriptural viewpoint is not only *wrong* it is absolutely dangerous. Not one of us--or all of us together--is or ever will be able to force Almighty God to do something He has not promised us He will do. To claim promises made to others is to invite discouragement and disaster into our lives.

Take a test for yourself: look at Gal. 5:22, 23, where Paul lists the "fruit of the Spirit" in the dispensation of grace. The life that comes from the Spirit of God produces fruit in the believer. Paul lists those nine fruit--love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Notice that there is no "deliverance" in the list. There is no "I will deliver you from your problems; no "I will perform a miracle and you will have no more difficulties in your life." There is none of this! In fact, there is just the opposite.

One of the Spirit's fruit is *longsuffering*--the capacity to *endure*, to "suffer-long." In the present dispensation God makes no promise to miraculously eliminate our problems. There is no promise that He will manipulate circumstances so things will be easier for us. Rather, His promise is that we will be "*strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man*" (Eph.3:16) and thus enabled to cope with any extremity of life. Patience and endurance are hallmarks of the Spirit's empowering under grace. Col. 1: 11 puts it this way:

"Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

It is not "strengthened with might unto signs, wonders and mighty deliverances." We could quote verses all day long about the delivering power of God and how He promised to do things for Israel in her program. But what God promises members of the Body of Christ is quite different. Our promises are just as real, just as dynamic, just as victorious--they are just *different*.

When we take verses out of the Bible that are not directed to us, that are not about us; when we begin to read someone else's mail and claim someone else's promises, do we not commit spiritual larceny? The better course--the proper course--would simply be to take what God has given to us in Christ and let that be what is real in our lives.

Now when Paul says we can "*glory in tribulation also*" it is because we *know* some things--"*knowing* that tribulation *worketh* patience." Tribulations--the troubles, pressures and difficulties that come our way--are actually *productive* in our lives. As we have "*access by faith into this grace wherein we stand,*" The problems of life become productive--rather than destructive--by providing a context for our spiritual

growth and maturity in the application of grace to the details of life. Thus these spiritual qualities become active realities in our lives as we face problems by faith in God's provisions for us in Christ.

THE TRUE SOURCE OF TROUBLE

It is important to understand where tribulations come from and why they find their way into our lives. The problem can be a seeming blessing or an apparent threat. Whatever the difficulty--pain or prosperity, poverty or abundance, whether we "abase or abound"--we must learn to respond properly. If we are to do so, understanding their true source is essential.

There are basically three sources from which troubles arise. We need to be clear about these things so as to be in the "*know*" in this important area of life. First, however, we need to establish a basic truth:

"THERE HATH NO TEMPTATION TAKEN YOU BUT SUCH AS IS COMMON TO MAN..." (1Cor. 10:13).

Think about this. No trouble comes into our lives except that which is "*common to man*." Thus we know something: there are no "*special testings*" from God going on in our lives. God has not singled us out for some special trial (or punishment) in order to teach us lessons which we would not learn unless He inflicted those things on us.

While the idea of "special testing" is often used to make believers feel "special" to God in the midst of trials, the Bible is very clear that this is simply not correct. *We are* very special to God and that fact has been abundantly demonstrated in tangible terms *at Calvary*. Reread Rom. 5:8 and see where it is that God demonstrated His great love for us. He points to the cross of Christ--not to our troubles--as proof of His love and care for us.

When we consider the problems we face, we must remember that God says what is happening in our lives is the common lot of all mankind. What is happening has happened (and no doubt is happening) to countless others.

One other point: We have all experienced the phenomenon of trouble causing things to look really big in our perception. When we are having a wonderful time, time passes quickly. On the other hand, if we are having problems, time seems to pass

ever so slowly. Trouble has the effect of magnifying events and making things seem large--thus making our perceptions of them go in slow motion.

This can be an advantage. If we have sound doctrine in our heart, that doctrine gets magnified too! So if we put in our heart an understanding of trouble's source and how we have been equipped to deal with it in a way that builds us up, then that knowledge is also enhanced when trouble comes. Thus what human viewpoint sees as destructive turns into something that becomes productive. Then,

"...OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION, WHICH IS BUT FOR A MOMENT, WORKETH FOR US A FAR MORE EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY" (2 Cor.4:17).

With this in mind, lets look briefly at the three sources of trouble in our lives.

A FALLEN CREATION

Rom. 8:19-22 gives an insight into something that by our own experience "*we know*" to be accurate:

"For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

"For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.

"Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

The history of creation can be set forth in three parts: first, God said it was *good*. Then, because of the fall of man, He cursed it and it has been *groaning* ever since. One day it will be *glorious*, having been delivered from the bondage of corruption by the return of Jesus Christ. We currently live in the *groaning* stage.

We know by *experience* that "*the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*" And what of the claim made by some that believers are exempt from this common lot of creation? Paul answers in the next verse of Romans 8:

"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom.8:23).

Far from being exempt from the "pain and travail" of life in a fallen creation, we "which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves." And what are we waiting for? A deliverance from pain and suffering when we claim it aright? A healing program available if only we believe enough? No! We have something *far better*. You see, the healing program for our "vile bodies" is "the adoption"--the "redemption of our body." It is at the Rapture that the healing program for the Body of Christ will be accomplished. It is then that our Savior:

"...shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:21).

At present we live in a fallen creation, a creation cursed by sin. This explains why, as the hymn writer says, "Change and decay all about I see." The reason there is decay and death in the world is because there is sin in the world. The world is held in "*the bondage of corruption*" because of man's sin. This is the reason there are calamities and unexplained horrors about us.

There are many things that are going to happen simply because we live in a world cursed by the corruption of sin. Because of this fact and based on Rom. 8:22, 23, we can make a prediction: If the Lord tarries, we are going to get sick, suffer pain and eventually die. Why? Because God does not love us or have our best interest at heart? Far from it. Rather this is the common lot of all creation "*until*" 'Christ returns to deliver creation into His Kingdom glory.

Notice Paul's explanation that this groaning is "until now." The time when "sorrow and sighing shall flee away" and creation will be delivered into "*the glorious liberty of the children of God*" is the kingdom reign of Christ (e.g., Isa. 35). In order for the present dispensation of grace to be extended, He must *postpone* that day of deliverance.

Thus we continue to live in a sin-cursed world, not because God does not love us but because His dispensational purposes are being carried out. Because He continues

to extend His grace to a needy world, we are going to have problems and ultimately be overtaken by sickness and death. But that grace has transformed our infirmities into "*light afflictions*" which "*work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*"

BAD CHOICES

A second reason we experience problems is the simple fact that we--and others--often make bad choices. Most of us do not think we do--but we too often do! And our choices have consequences.

God is often blamed for evil things which happen to people when the fact is we have this inherent drive to do things our own way. Prov. 14:12 records the repercussions:

"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

But why doesn't God stop these calamities brought on by our bad choices? Well, how would we have Him do so? Should he kill everyone--for "all have sinned"? Should He take away the free will of man--making us mere automatons?

God allows bad things to happen because He allows free will to be exercised. The only option would be for people to be robots--which, of course, would destroy His purpose of having made us in His likeness and image. There are all kinds of hardships brought about by the exercise of free will. The fact is we too often make bad choices!

Gal. 6:7-8 makes our responsibility for our choices quite clear:

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

My friend, no one is going to mock God. "*Fools make a mack at sin,*" the Book says (Prov. 14:9). To think we can live in sin, pleasing ourself and ignoring what God's Word says and have no consequences to face is to play the fool indeed. Sin will get you every time. The law of the harvest is always the same: We reap what we sow.

The Word of God declares, "*Be sure your sin will find you out*" (Num. 32:23) for "*they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same*"(Job 4:8).

"*He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.*" And this is written to believers--not lost folk. The plain fact of life is that if we sow to the self-life our lives are going to fall apart, disintegrating about us in tragedies and hardships.

If we face what really happened, we will be forced to admit that there are many problems in our lives caused by bad choices-sinful, uninformed, bad decisions. Whether made by us or others, there they are and by God's grace we can face them honestly, set matters aright and proceed on with a "*walk in wisdom.*"

GODLY LIVING

A third source of trouble is a bit more salutary than the above, but it is no less real.

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

When we desire to live "godly in Christ Jesus"we must remember that this world is no friend to grace. We will find that the world will not love Christ living in us any more than it loved Him living here in person. We can get along in the world--on the job, in our neighborhood, during recreational activities, etc.--as long as it is *us* living. But when it begins to be Christ living in us the same world is going to react to *Him* the way they reacted when He was here--and remember, they hated Him "without a cause."

We are not talking about religion or simply doing "good works." We are talking about having Christ living in and through us. As we come to understand who God has made us in Christ and allow His life--His attitudes and His actions--to find expression through our lives, we are going to "suffer trouble."Col. 1:24 is an illustration of this in the life of Paul:

"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church."

A PROPER RESPONSE

Trouble is going to find its way into our lives. "*Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward*"(Job 5:7). While we would hope that most of those problems would come from that third reason, come they will. And we must be prepared for them—we must "*know that tribulation works*" for us. Grace frees us to realize that our troubles are not the result of God punishing us but rather can be used as a context for His grace to train and discipline us to walk by faith. Paul reminds us:

"...God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

All kinds of hardships come into our lives and with them God is faithful: He desires us to trust His provision for us in Christ and allow Him to train us by transforming our minds by the discipline of grace. The issue isn't being "delivered" from our problems; the issue is being "*able to bear it*"--strengthened "unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

How else could God cause us to "*escape*" the trouble by enabling us to "*bear it*"? Obviously we are not delivered *from* the problem in the sense of the difficulty being taken away. Rather, God makes the trouble productive by equipping us to deal with it in a proper manner so that we are built up to grow stronger in our inner man. Our "tribulation" becomes the *context* in which by faith we apply the sound doctrine of God's grace. Thus *tribulation* produces *patience*--staying with God's truth even under great pressure--which produces *experience*--practical skill in applying the Word to the circumstances of life--which produces "*hope*--and hope maketh *not ashamed*." Thus confidence and maturity is produced in our lives as we walk by faith. All this equips us for more effective service. 2 Cor. 1:4 tells us of "the God of all comfort:"

"Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

There is little practical value in having sound doctrine in our heart if we never go through any problems that cause us to draw on that truth and have it come forth in our lives to God's glory.

Just so, problems are not meant to destroy us--they are not God's attempt to punish us or get even with us for our sins and failures; He has already dealt with our sins at

Calvary. Rather, they offer an opportunity to have the truth of God and the life of Christ come forth through our bodies of flesh to His glory when trouble comes. Let's walk by faith in the riches of God's grace to us in Christ! .
