

**THE FELLOWSHIP OF SUFFERING**  
(FROM CHAPTER 10)

### INTRODUCTION

Next week = last lesson: “The Fellowship of Serving & Socializing”

*Philippians 3:8, 10* — “For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.”

Christians suffer:

- *Persecution* — “The lifestyle philosophy of living ‘in the world but not of the world’ will ultimately lead to suffering in some form: social rejection, loss of job promotion opportunities (or even the job itself), or misunderstanding from family and friends.” (JB)
- *Martyrdom* — “It is commonly reported that more people were martyred for the cause of Christ in the twentieth century than at any other time in history.”
- *Trials* — the many troubles of life, and the difficulty of living by faith within them

### THE FELLOWSHIP OF SUFFERING WITH CHRIST

#### 1. *This involves suffering with Christ in obedience.*

##### *The privilege of partnering with Christ —*

- Consider 1 Timothy 1:12-16 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-20. What an incredible privilege is ours, for we are spokesmen for Deity, ambassadors for the King of Kings, and co-laborers/partners with our Lord! Such responsive and obedient ministry “for His sake” has its share of suffering, but that suffering is *honorable*.
- *Colossians 1:24-27* — As a servant of the gospel, Paul willingly faced this suffering so that others might come to know the hope of the gospel and thereby continue in the

faith (v. 23) and be reconciled to God (vv. 21-22). He willingly sacrificed his own temporary comfort and convenience for the everlasting glory of gospel fruit; he endured wrongdoing, so that they might escape God’s wrath (cf. 2 Timothy 2:10—“Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”). Paul suffered, not redemptively, and yet in some way as a substitute for others—he bore shame and affliction, so that they might hear and respond to the gospel. His obedience to Christ led Him through suffering, but it was *fruitful*.

- **Illustration:** What joy he must have had to write that and have faces filter across his mind that he had suffered for and seen saved! And, what a welcome he must have received to eternity!
- Indeed, what a privilege to experience fellowship with Christ in such *purposeful* suffering!

#### ***The submission of identifying with Christ —***

- Suffering for Christ and His mission is God’s will (JB). We are called to this!
  - “Identification with Christ and, in particular, labor on behalf of Christ inevitably result in suffering.” (JB) Cf. *Matthew 10*; *1 Peter*
  - *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.”
  - In a very real sense, then, we must recognize that our willingness to experience suffering “for the sake of Christ” is related to the deeper heart issue of whether we will submit to or rebel against God’s will for His followers.
  - Submission to God’s will in this area allows us to experience fellowship with Christ who also faced such a grim path, yet yielded as He prayed, “Not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). There is fellowship with our Lord as we submit to His missional calling upon our lives.

- This path of suffering is vitally necessary in our redemptive journey.
  - *Romans 8:17* — “If [we are] children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.”
  - *1 Peter 4:13* — “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.”
  - “If we desire to experience the totality of fellowship with Christ, we must expect to experience the fellowship of His sufferings.” (JB)
  - **Illustration:** How can we really consider ourselves serious disciples/followers if we forsake Him when the "going gets tough" or when we ardently avoid any such pressure? Are we not fair-weather and fickle friends?

#### ***The practice of exemplifying Christ —***

- While His suffering and death were primarily atoning, God’s Word teaches us that His suffering and death also serve as a prototype for believers.
  - *1 Peter 2:21* — “For even [unto suffering] were ye called, because Christ also suffered for [huper] us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps”
  - *1 John 3:16* — “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for [huper] us, and we ought to lay down our lives for [huper] the brethren.”

**Application/Discussion:** How different is this attitude and how ignored this perspective is among today’s typical 21<sup>st</sup>-century middle-class Christian! How do we respond to the argument (perhaps personally expressed) that this is an idealistic goal? *Indeed, it is not a normal perspective, and it is indeed idealistic. “However, the Bible is a book of idealism on a strictly human plane. None of its commands can be carried out apart from the enabling work of the Holy Spirit.” (JB)*

Let us then pray (from *The Valley of Vision*):

“Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly,  
 Thou has brought me to the valley of vision,  
 where I live in the depths but see thee in the heights;  
 hemmed in by mountains of sin I behold Thy glory.  
 Let me learn by paradox  
 that the way down is the way up,  
 that to be low is to be high,  
 that the broken heart is the healed heart,  
 that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit,  
 that the repenting soul is the victorious soul,  
 that to have nothing is to possess all,  
 that to bear the cross is to wear the crown,  
 that to give is to receive,  
 that the valley is the place of vision.  
 Lord, in the daytime  
 stars can be seen from deepest wells,  
 and the deeper the wells the brighter Thy stars shine;  
 Let me find Thy light in my darkness,  
 Thy life in my death,  
 Thy joy in my sorrow,  
 Thy grace in my sin,  
 Thy riches in my poverty  
 Thy glory in my valley.”

#### **2. *This involves suffering with Christ in communion.***

“The Lord Jesus Christ does not leave His people to suffer alone. The universal testimony of those who have suffered for the sake of Christ and His church is that they have experienced a deep fellowship, an intimate communion with Him in the midst of their sufferings.” (JB) How?

- In suffering, we learn of the character of Christ in new ways and to greater depths; we discover “that Christ is faithful, that nothing can separate them from His love, and that His grace is sufficient for their weaknesses.” (JB)
- In suffering, we can respond as did the apostles—“rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name” (Acts 5:41)

**Application:** Christ graciously allows His followers to experience suffering, so that they might know Him (Jeremiah 9:23-24; Philippians 3:7-11)! Believers may experience a depth of fellowship with Christ that they would never know apart from suffering. The grim prospect, then, is that some will experience suffering, but will fail to enjoy the rich fellowship that Christ offers solely within that context. Don’t just “grin and bear it”—look for Christ!

**Discussion:** *Why do some experience suffering for Christ, but not fellowship (i.e., intimacy, joy, peace, etc.) with Christ in that suffering?* (1) because we allow anger, hurt, resentment, and self-pity to control our thoughts, instead of seeking comfort and encouragement in fellowship with the Savior and in the privilege of suffering for His sake—we walk by sight instead of by faith; (2) because our suffering is due, not to the offense of the gospel, but to the offense that comes from our own lack of wisdom and gentleness in sharing Christ (1 Peter 3:15—“with gentleness and respect”).

### 3. **This involves suffering with Christ in agreement.**

Learn to view sin “in terms of its effect on God,” not merely “in terms of its effects on us or our family or friends” (JB). In this way, we will suffer with Christ.

**Illustration:** Abortion—“Is it not God’s heart that is most grieved and filled with pain over this crime? Is it not His law that is broken and the children created in His image who are killed?”

**Application:** Let us pray the prayer of missionary Bob Pierce, “God, break my heart with the things that break Your heart.” We must begin to see sin from God’s point of view, and “as we join in His grief, we will also in this small way enter into the fellowship of His sufferings.” (JB)

## 1. **The basis of this fellowship of suffering**

### a. **Our union with Christ (objective fact)**

Acts 9:4-5 — Saul is persecuting believers, and Christ confronts him this way: “And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”

- “Jesus so closely identified with His people that persecution of them was essentially persecution of Jesus Himself, even though He was then seated at the right hand of His Father. This is a profound truth, one that we do well to ponder in times of trial ourselves. We are so intimately united with Christ that what affects us affects Him.” (JB)
- In other words, when He commands His church to “weep with those who weep,” He does that, too! As 1 Corinthians 12:26 will tell us, when “one member [of the body] suffers, all suffer together,” including the Head!
- So, our own suffering is felt by Christ, and suffering with other believers is indeed suffering with Christ.

### b. **Our union with other believers (objective fact)**

1 Corinthians 12:25-26 — “The members [should] have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together.”

Romans 12:5 — “So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (NIV, “So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”)

**Discussion:** How does Romans 12:5 and its illustration of the body and our understanding of how a parent/child relationship work help us understand the way mutual-ownership within the spiritual community ought to work? “*Parents tend to so identify with our children that their hurts become our hurts. Often we feel that we would rather experience pain ourselves instead of having to watch our children suffer because we so identify with them. This feeling is a natural response to the fact that they are*

a part of us.” (JB) “Paul would say that this identity with the hurts and pains of others should be just as true in the body of Christ as it is in our family relationships. In fact, he said it should be just as strong as is the empathy among the various parts of the physical body.” (JB) “The reason we don’t experience this family-like empathy with our suffering brothers and sisters in Christ is that we have not yet been fully gripped by the truth that we are in a community relationship with them.” (JB)

**Application:** “Once again we are faced with the fact that our contemporary view of fellowship, which usually includes only Christian social activity or perhaps sharing the Word of God together, fails to do justice to the biblical practice of *koinonia*....Fellowship at times may involve blood, sweat, and tears as we stand side by side with our persecuted brothers and sisters.” (JB)

## 2. The practice of this fellowship of suffering

### a. Concerned devotion (identifying, feeling)

Hebrews 10:32-33 — “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners [*koinonia*—NIV, “stood side-by-side”] with those so treated.”

- “They literally had fellowship with them in their sufferings. Through this relationship, they shared in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.” (JB)

*Romans 12:10* (NIV) — “Be devoted to one another in [brotherly] love.”

- “Because we are all family members, we should express the same quality of love for one another that the members of a devoted, warmhearted human family show for each other.” (JB)

1 John 3:17 — “But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?”

- “The love we are to express within the body is actually the love of God abiding in us.” (JB) God loves the suffering believer through our manifested love to them.

**Application:** (1) This needs to start within our own midst—as we learn of brothers and sisters among us who are suffering (perhaps as we are scrolling through our Facebook feed), we need to cultivate with the Holy Spirit a heart of compassion that identifies with their hurt, feels their pain, is concerned with their struggle, and is devoted to them as a loving brother or sister; (2) We need to dependently strive for a heart of compassion and awareness that “remember[s] those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since [we] also are in the body” (Hebrews 13:3).

\*\*Consider live streaming *Secret Church* (radical.net/secretchurch).

\*\*Consider attending a *Frontline Experience* conference (by Frontline Missions; frontlinemissions.info).

### b. Fervent prayer

What to pray? “Asking God to intervene in their [suffering] or grant them a special measure of His grace to endure them.”

How to pray? No perfunctory, routine (indifferent) praying; but, intense, urgent (earnest) praying (**Illustration:** like a parent for a hurting child; cf. Colossians 1:29-2:1 “agonizing”)

**Application:** “We have a responsibility to pray, [not for every single suffering believer in the world, but] to pray for some, either individually or as groups.” (JB)

\*\*Pray for the believers in the most persecuted area of the world, those in the 10/40 window.

\*\*Pray for Pastor Saeed Abedini, who is still incarcerated in Iran and being treated for injuries from beating (facebook.com/PrayForPastorSaeedAbedini).

c. ***Tangible relief***

Emphasis of Lesson 6

*1 John 3:17* — “But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?”

*Galatians 6:10* — “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

*Philippians 4:14* — “Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble.”

**Illustration:** Moldavian couple who just joined our church and with whom we partnered in 2005(8) to help a starving village

**CONCLUSION**

*Philippians 3:8, 10* — “For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.”