

The Matter of Suffering Considered - a Devotional by Rev. Keith Cobb

There are those who suffer for lofty and unknown purposes in the mind of God which God - in His sovereign and perfect freedom - chooses not to reveal to His people. This is plain in the story of Job, a man who suffered immensely simply because God was working a higher purpose than he ever knew, or that we even now know; after all, God never did give an explanation for Job's severe treatment, did He? Deuteronomy 29:29a says that *the secret things belong to the Lord our God*, and we humbly bow in worship as we ponder His sovereignty and His all-wise providence.

But Deuteronomy 29:29b says, *but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever*; may we not be found trying to peer behind veils He Himself has hung, but let us endeavor to understand fully those things He has put forward for our consideration and learning.

One, we know that the suffering of God's covenant people is not always directly traceable to a punitive rod in His fatherly hands; there are other reasons why God's people suffer...

In truth, much of the suffering of God's people is the simple consequence of their own *bad choices*; in other words, it is something brought upon themselves. Those suffering from heart disease who never consistently exercised and whose diet was named after the Broadway production *Grease* needn't ponder too long the mysteries of their suffering; theirs is neither mysterious nor meritorious, it is *consequence* suffering. And when they whiningly ask "*Why?!*" these don't even want to be given reasons; though they need counsel, they prefer comfort.

Still, it is our Lord Jesus who taught that some suffering is designed by God to be *personally and corporately revelational*, i.e., to indicate whether a conversion experience is authentic or counterfeit. In the parable of the Sower and the seed (Matthew 13.1-8; 18-23, *esp.* verse 21), it is persecution and/or affliction that reveals whether or not conversions are genuine. Such is the nature of suffering that it exposes our attitude toward God.

The Bible also teaches that suffering is a price to pay for having biblical convictions and standing for them; indeed there are times we suffer for *taking a stand* for God, as taught by:

- Jesus (Matthew 5.10-12; John 16.1-4, et al.)
- Peter (1 Peter 3.14; 2.20b)
- Paul (2 Timothy 3.12)

- James (James 15.1-8)
- John (1 John 3.13ff), and
- The writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 11.32ff).

But again, however, we can be cloudy in our judgment here. For instance, there are those who think they're being persecuted for righteousness' sake when in reality they are just disliked for having a bad attitude or an arrogance that is unbecoming, or because they are an annoyance or nuisance to busy people.

Yes, there are times suffering is directly related to discipline or punishment: **we are -if we are God's children by faith - *disciplined, but chastisement is always an evidence of God's love for us***, and to perceive it as such is the first step in receiving it as such.