

21. Learning to Rejoice in Suffering

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our children learn to recognize false teachers. We saw that false teachers try to transform themselves by their own efforts. As a result, there is no change in their hearts. We concluded that section by seeing that they will be judged according to their works. Paul then began to talk about the suffering that he had experienced as he served the Lord. As a result, in our topic today, we are going to learn about some of the suffering that Paul experienced. We are also going to see that Paul gives us an example when he suffered so that we can show our children how to rejoice even when they experience suffering.

The false teachers that came to Corinth had boasted about many things that they could do. As a result, Paul chose to respond to their boasting by sharing about his sufferings. Before speaking about his sufferings, he said in 2 Corinthians 11:16-21, “I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly, since you *yourselves* are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours *you*, if one takes *from you*, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. To *our* shame, I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold--I speak foolishly--I am bold also.” Paul said that he could also choose to boast if that was what the Corinthians desired.

Paul told the Corinthians that he could act like a fool and boast about what he had experienced. In Proverbs 26:5, we read, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” Paul knew that he needed to apply that verse in this situation. In these verses, we see that Paul told the Corinthians that what he was going to say was not according to the Lord. Instead, he was going to speak like a fool and boast like many of the false teachers were boasting. Paul did this to show the foolishness of boasting. He said that many boasted according to the flesh. The word translated “flesh” speaks about the human nature. “To boast about the flesh” means *to boast about what we can do through our own efforts or through our human strength*. In contrast, Paul boasted about his weakness.

Paul said that, by their choices, the Corinthians who were choosing to follow false teachers were showing that they were glad to put up with fools. Those particular Corinthians thought that they were wise. However, Paul said that those false teachers were actually bringing them into bondage. Paul had experienced similar false teaching in the region of Galatia. Galatians 2:4-5 says, “And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” Paul was willing to stand strongly against any false teachers because he knew that their goal was to bring new Christians into bondage.

Paul went on to give several things that false teachers do to bring people into bondage. They devour you (take your money for themselves). They take advantage of you. They exalt themselves and boast about the things that they have done. They humiliate you to lift up themselves. Paul

said that he was too weak to take advantage of the Corinthians like that. Paul said that he would now speak boldly about what he had suffered.

We go on to read about those sufferings in the following verses. 2 Corinthians 11:22-29, “Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. Are they ministers of Christ?--I speak as a fool--I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness--besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” Paul said that like the false teachers he was a Hebrew. He was from the nation of Israel. He was a descendent of Abraham. He did serve Christ.

However, Paul was also very different than the false teachers. The false teachers were taking advantage of the Corinthians. In contrast, Paul was suffering for Christ. Paul worked long hours. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, “For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” Paul worked night and day to share the Gospel.

Paul also experienced physical suffering. He had been beaten with 39 lashes five different times by the Jews. Three other times he had been beaten with rods. One time, he had been stoned. Acts 14:19 says, “Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” Three different times he had been shipwrecked. One of those times, he had been in the water for a night and a day before he was rescued. He spent much of his time traveling from place to place to take the Gospel to others.

The word that is translated “perils” means *danger*. That word is used nine times in the New Testament and eight are in these verses. The one other use of peril is in Romans 8:35 where we read, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” Here, we see that danger cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Paul had often experienced the danger of drowning. He often faced danger from robbers as he traveled. Paul often was in danger as other Jews tried to kill him. Paul also was often in danger from Gentiles like the silversmiths in Ephesus that wanted to kill him. Paul was in danger in many different cities. He was often in danger when he was in the wilderness. He also often faced danger as he traveled by sea.

Paul also experienced much physical discomfort as he served Christ. He experienced sorrow and hardship. He often did not get enough sleep because of his concern for the Christians. He often experienced hunger and thirst. He often spent time in fasting so that he could use that time to pray

for the needs of others. It was during one such time of fasting and prayer that the Lord called Paul to go from Antioch to other Gentile cities. Acts 13:2-3 says, “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.” Paul also had times when he was cold because he lacked adequate clothing.

In addition to these physical troubles, he continually had the pressures that were a result of a deep concern for all of the churches. This was clearly shown by his prayer life for all of the churches. Ephesians 3:14-19 says, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height--to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Many times, in the letters that Paul wrote to the churches, he told the Christians that he prayed for them without ceasing. Paul also had a great concern for each Christian that was weak. He was filled with indignation when someone caused a weak Christian to stumble.

Paul went on in 2 Corinthians 11:30-33 to say, “If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.” Paul said that if it was necessary for him to boast that he would boast about the things that caused him to be weak.

In these verses, Paul gave one additional illustration to show why he was often weak and without strength. When Paul was in Damascus, the Jews became very angry because Paul preached the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Acts 9:23-25 says, “Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.” Here, we see that the Jews become so angry that they persuaded the ruler of the city to arrest Paul. The Lord protected Paul as the Christians helped him to escape from the ruler of the city.

In spite of all that Paul suffered, he continued to rejoice in the Lord. After being beaten and thrown into the inner prison at Philippi, Acts 16:25 says, “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Then, from imprisonment in Rome, he wrote to the Philippians in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” Paul modeled for the Christians what it meant to rejoice in suffering. In the same way, we want to model for our physical and spiritual children what it means to rejoice when we suffer. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to rejoice when they suffer by your example.