

Difficult Truths & Deep Love: Pondering Sovereignty, Suffering, and the Promise of Heaven

Desiring God 2010 National Conference

Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God

[October 01, 2010](#) / by [Randy Alcorn](#)

The following are notes taken during the session.

All Things Work Together for Good

We will focus on one of the greatest verses in scripture, Romans 8:28. It's insensitive though to throw Romans 8:28 at a person in a way that minimizes suffering. Jesus wept over suffering and the ugliness of death. Scripture never minimizes pain and suffering as we look towards the resurrection. However, God does cause all things to work together for good for those who love him.

Some might say that verse sounds cruel to them. However, God is all sovereign and he can fulfill the promise of this verse. Once we see what this verse truly means, then we will see God as lofty and all glorious.

It's staggering, the pain that there is in this world. But the worse things are, the greater the redemptive story needs to be to make things right. The story of our redemption in Christ has a glorious ending as shown in Ephesians 2:7, "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

What would you know of the grace of God if sin and evil and suffering had not entered the world? What you know of God's mercy? What would you know of his patience? What would you know of his compassion? There are attributes of God that we would never have known, celebrated, and praised him for throughout all eternity had there not been great suffering in this world. We will become more like Christ, God will be more glorified for all of eternity, and we will experience greater good than we ever would have if all of the bad stuff had not happened.

Heirs with Christ

God has never retracted his original intention of righteous people to rule over the earth for all of eternity. Romans 8:16-17 says that "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if 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."

We are heirs of the king and our family business is ruling. We will have a resurrected body, in a resurrected world, in a resurrected culture in the new earth. We will rule the earth to the glory of

God. Daniel 7:27 gives us a picture of this coming reality: "the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them."

Romans 8:16-17 talks about how we need to suffer in order to reign with him. The life of ease is a detriment to the development of people of character and Christlikeness. God does give us many good gifts, but God doesn't want the world to come to be ruled by people unless they are Christlike. We make a huge mistake of thinking that God is simply preparing a place for us, without preparing us for that place. God is preparing us to rule righteously as servant kings over the world He has for us. Suffering directly relates to ruling as God's heirs over his kingdom.

Afflictions Prepare for Glory

Every time we look at Romans 8:18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us," we should compare it to 2 Corinthians 4:17, "This light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." If you want to know what Paul considered light and momentary affliction, read 2 Corinthians 11: imprisonments, beatings, near death, lashes, stoned, shipwrecked, toil, hardship, sleepless nights, etc.

Jesus said in Matthew 13, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father." This begins here and now and continues throughout eternity. Do not think that God wants you to wait until you die to become like Jesus. In this life we are to become more like Christ. It happens through suffering and it happens through adversity.

It is the Spirit of God that helps us believe the word of God is true in saying that all things work together for good. Nothing will separate us from the love of Christ because God is working all things together for our good (Ephesians 1:11 and Romans 8:28). The best is yet to come. That is the promise of God paid for by the blood of Jesus. When you're in the middle of suffering and you doubt that Jesus cares for you, picture him stretching out his scarred hands and showing you proof of his love for you.

Topic: [Suffering](#)

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