

# SUFFERING IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

IT IS  
FINISHED



JOHN 19:17-30

# STEPHEN PHINNEY

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Suffering in God's Sovereignty

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IOM America  
P.O. Box 71  
Sterling, Kansas 67579  
(602) 292-2985

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# SUFFERING IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

*It Is Finished*

**How often have we** said to ourselves, "God is in control" and then moments later pick up that "thing" we had just laid at our Lord's feet? After being in ministry all these years, I have clearly seen a difference between what the body of Christ says versus what we pronounce as Truth by our actions. The human mind is definitely the battlefield for Satan to war against us. He knows that in this field (which we call the mind, will, and emotions), mankind can be easily deceived. He also knows that one of man's greatest weaknesses is his own intellect, or lack of it. Certainly one of man's sinkholes is his own passion and desire to be in control of his own life. If we combine all these components together, we have a nasty battleground in which an indwelt Christian suffers in his ability to make an honest exchange within God's Holy sovereignty.

**In my mind**, I am a firm believer that God causes all things in my life to work together for the good. But when I am in the middle of suffering to believe otherwise, I most often fail to support what my mind believes.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

**So, what is going on here?** The simplest demonic forces know that the mind of man is the place to contend against the Truth of God. They also know that this battlefield, like all places of war, can be broken down and left to feel overwhelmed, depleted, and flat-out exhausted. The enemy is quick to deceive us into thinking that our battle is against the things according to the five senses of man. Satan knows that as long as we think in this fashion, we will fight by using the elements within those five senses. As long as we do that, we cannot make daily exchanges of our lives for His.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are

destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

**Here are the six points of deliverance:**

1. Know that we walk as mere men.
2. We are not to war according to our five senses (flesh).
3. The weapon we need is not found in our human resources.
4. The weapon we are given is Divinely powerful.
5. This weapon destroys all human and demonic speculation.
6. Deliverance is done by yielding every thought captive to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**"I know" that** these six points of deliverance are of God's perfect Truth. But it is in the "knowing" - without the living - that the enemy is able to taunt me. I know there is nothing allowed to happen to Bridal members of Christ that isn't managed by the Hand of God - not one thing. The "things" God does allow are to produce clarity of reason why the Body of Christ is remain on this defiled earth after Salvation, which is most likely our daily calling.

**I have found** the truest element of statements made in the Word like, "and we know" to be most challenging. The simple phrase "to know" seems to be one of the Truths fought the most in the entire Bible, at least for true indwelt Christians. Even though "I know" that all wars, or resolutions to wars, start with "to know" - I still find my flesh waging war against these simple principles of God. When we truly know something, it will literally becomes a part of who we are in due time. It is in what we know through our heart and mind that forms our identity and it is from our identity that all behavior springs forth. Keep in mind, I am not purporting that we memorize Truth to behold it! I do not believe that by the act of memorizing Truth we are able to make that Truth real in our daily experience - for I do believe that memorization without the Life of Christ creates hypocrisy and guilt. The only way knowledge is able to transform us is when the Life of Christ does the transformational living through us, by way of the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Keep in mind that the wordage of "to know" is an intimate word of expression - not by thought, but by heart and thought. In fact, it is the expression that is used to communicate the most intimate form of the expression of love in the Word - that of sexual intimacy.

**The next time you** read Romans 8:28, "and we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" - remember these four points:

1. **And we know** - The Truth of this verse is not proactive until we experientially know intimately the heart of God (1 John 4:7-8).
2. **God causes** - He will orchestrate all things for the good, but not necessarily for the good of everyone who reads this passage. The "good" being spoken of here has conditions connected to it.
3. **Those who love God** - It is only for those who love God. Love is evidenced through knowing the heart of God by way of obedience (1 John 4).
4. **His purpose** - This conditional guide is all-conclusive. The allotment of trials in one's life is fruitless unless they directly benefit God's higher calling.

**The emphasis of** this verse is not on the human, but rather on God and the calling He has placed upon the True believer. When we accept the choosing of God and become born-again, we become lovers of God and partakers of His higher calling. When we use this passage like a comfort Band-Aid, it becomes irrelevant. We earth dwellers classically make the Scriptures all about us. As humans, oftentimes our world becomes as large as our pain and suffering. Even though God understands this, for He created us, He is still obligated to break us of this nasty habit. Everything is for His Divine purpose. We are mere tools for His service; favored tools for certain, but still - tools. This is why we are called bond-servants of Christ. All of our joys, pains, and sufferings are for His benefit and He uses these sufferings for our great exchange - something I believe Job understood rather well!

**Let's review** the life and works of Job once again. In Job 3:1, we find these challenging words, "Afterward Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth."

**In this most intimate** passage, we find that in the presence of his "friends," Job concludes his sufferings are to assist in cursing the day of his birth. In fact, the next 25 verses are filled with his self-life sentiments. Was it appropriate for him to come down on himself to this measure?

Did Job have a "self-esteem" problem? Was he feeling sorry for himself? Or, was he, in his deplorable state, connecting with God's reality?

Job was more in touch with God's reality than most self-proclaimed Christians who, by the way, cover their pain with classic Christian clichés. Warning: the following verses may be offensive to some readers:

"For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal. 6:3).

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3).

"For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude" (1 Tim. 4:4).

"For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2).

"For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:4).

"If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

"I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody" (2 Cor. 12:11).

**All of these** passages are extremely powerful! Job was demonstrating the Truth of God's conclusion of man - we are NOTHING and NOBODIES - aside from God that is. When we as God's Divine Creation begin to think that we are SOMETHING, we start demanding the treatment of a self-indulged, spoiled child. Job was concluding such a reality. I think there might be a reason why the first writings of God were focused on this topic. Yes, chronologically, the book of Job was the first to be penned by God. The Alpha of man's existence was in "Not I, but Christ" and its Omega finishes with the same.



**The popular teachings** found in many of our churches today are "Christ and I." I believe this to be the most dangerous demonic doctrine walking the halls of our churches today. This self-loving, build a positive self-esteem, "I have rights" religion that has plagued the Bride of Christ is sickening - psychobabble at its best. This feel-good gospel teaches people to love themselves by establishing boundaries in an effort to avoid "fellowshipping in His sufferings." This "feel-good gospel" is not what I find written in the Word of God. God is clear regarding the Truth of man's pride (thinking more highly of himself than he ought). OK - God is clear about Steve Phinney's pride about me thinking more highly of myself than I should. Ouch!

"But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7).

**Self-relevance, or self-love**, is a living and active foundational lie at the base of this not-so-new emergent and lukewarm church of our postmodern world. The fact is that lukewarm people don't realize that self-relevance and self-love are the building blocks to self-destruction.

"He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal" (John 12:25).

**Jesus could not** make it any clearer to us. If postmodern "Christians" are duped into loving themselves, they will end up losing by missing the True Gospel of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, those who understand what it means to hate their own lives will find Eternal Life. I know this is in direct contradiction to almost every self-help "Christian" book on the market today, but it is irreversibly TRUE.

**I am slowly**, but certainly, getting to the point of being able to say, "I hate myself/flesh." I really think this is what Job was saying in our passage. It is the most honest and healthy perspective we can adopt, at least in light of the frailties of man. Believing this does not erase the importance of being a child of God or the Bride of Christ. It brings proper perspective to the humble position of being a Bridal member of Christ and to what Jesus Christ did on the Cross. It is this simple and profound Truth that forms the need for the Exchanged Life.



**With this knowledge** of Truth, I can now understand Paul's message of Truth to the Romans:

"For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me" (Rom. 7:15-17).

**Could this be** the same conclusion Job came to in chapter three? Could this be a Hebrew way of declaring what the Lord was sharing with us through Paul?

**Job's friends may have** been ready to pounce on him with chapters of the worldly fables, such as Job feeling sorry for himself. But God knew exactly what he was expressing.

**When we are suffering** permissible suffocation, we are tempted to curse something or someone, you know - find a "sin eater." We discover in our passage that Job was not about to curse God. In his rightful mind, he put things into perspective by placing the curse on the day of his birth. A wise move if you ask me.

**Job's conclusion** was that joy should not be shouted over the day he was conceived. He was reckoning that no life brings joy, except for the life of his God. Therefore, he was not about to rob God of His Glory in his allotment of permissible suffering. Behind his despair was a reality check of who the Who is in all things - even in the sufferings of his mortality. His confession brings Paul's words in Galatians 6:3 to life in a fresh and honest way: "For is anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself."

**In Job 3:11**, he questioned the mission of his own life: "Why did I not die at birth, Come forth from the womb and expire?" Sooner or later, all of mankind must embrace the purpose of all things working together for the good and our calling here on earth. Job was right in the middle of processing one of the most important reasons for his existence. In this passage, he confessed to the full humanness of his earthly soul. God set the stage for a life lesson that will be preached for all Eternity.

**I have been told** that the book of Job is one of the most preached books on the topic of suffering. Most of the teachings I have heard, or read, typically are candy coated with the emphasis being placed on humans - not the upward calling or purposes of God. When we look past our human reasoning and look into the original meaning of Job's sufferings, we can actually find the True Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**The afflictions** brought upon Job are similar to the afflictions he (Satan) is allowed to bring upon Jesus during His time on earth. Not once did you hear, or see, Jesus turning His focus to human suffering. Rather, He consistently turned to His Father to gain strength to endure the permissible sufferings allotted by God. There was one occasion where He asked the Father to allow this cup of suffering to pass before Him, but concluded with, "yet not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Job, too, was in this same garden, being positioned to shift his focus from his will to that of His loving Father.

**In Job 3:20**, Job asked the question: "Why is light given to him who suffers, And life to the bitter of soul, Who long for death, but there is none, And dig for it more than for hidden treasures, Who rejoice greatly, And exult when they find the grave?" (verses 20-22).

**I don't know if** you have ever been in such a suffering position that you were begging for death - I am not ashamed to say that I have, many times. When you are there, only one question is begging to be asked - "Why?" The light of God's life and message is found in these moments. The light of His true and sobering Gospel is best preached when darkness covers us like the grave. It is the clearest, brightest, and easiest to see when this darkness shades us like the suffocation of death. Job was about to discover this!

**In 3:23**, Job's human interpretation of the "hedge" appeared to be negative and restraining. I am not sure if he was fully aware at the time that this "hedge" was still protecting him. The reason Job was wondering why he was still alive, or was alive from birth, was because of God's Holy hedge of protection. God's permissible measurement of affliction is still within the "hedge." Remember God said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life" (Job 2:6). It appears Job hadn't realized it yet, but God was continuing to show acts of mercy and love by sparing his life. In the last chapter of Job, we are given the reasons why.

**Job said, "For what I fear comes upon me, And what I dread befalls me"** (Job 3:25). This was not a proclamation of self-fulfilling prophecy! It was a reality statement of how he was feeling. Did he feel that he could lose all that he had in his years of prosperity? I hope so. God gives and He takes away. He just wanted Job to know that he came into this world with nothing and thus, would be leaving with nothing. He brought Job to a point of repenting, from dust to ashes, regarding the expectations of man. If you have read on, you know that this is exactly what happens.

**Finally**, in verse 26, he states: **"I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, And I am not at rest, but turmoil comes."** This is the heart of Job's life lesson: being at rest; not being anxious for anything; but in everything, letting his requests be known unto God (Phil. 4:6). In conclusion of Job's honest appraisal, he knew that: **"He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal"** (John 12:25).

**It is after** this life changing confession that Job had to endure the most difficult part of his journey of suffering - the emergent counsel of his friends. Job, being at the lowest point of his existence, would even make things worse. His honest confession before these "brothers" was used as a weapon to rub his face into the ashes of his demise.

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