

SUFFERING AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD
SESSION 6 – JULY 8, 2018
JOHN PIPER VIDEO SERIES
John Piper and Mark B. Talbot
Why Do We Suffer If God Is In Control? Parts 1-2

Why do we suffer if God is in control?

As you might recall, I set up the video last week by reading Romans 8:28: “And we know that God works all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”. If God is sovereign, and people do suffer, and suffering is ultimately for our good, then God must have control even over the bad that happens—and, He has a purpose for it. How does that work? Let’s pick up Part 2 of our session with Mark Talbot. (Fast forward to start at video 4, Chapt 9)

Key points from Mark Talbot...

- * God ordains evil by willing that evil people, things, events and deeds exist and persist.
- * While God sustains us in our sins, He is not the source of our sins.
- * Though God has ordained everything including our free choices, that does not remove or lessen our guilt nor our liability to be punished for our sins. (Gal 6:7)
- * Human intentions, choices and actions are sometimes wicked or evil, although God’s intentions, choices and actions are always good. (Gen 45:7-8, 50:20)

So, if this is true, what should we be sure of when we suffer?

- * No one suffers anything at anyone else’s hand without God having ordained that suffering. (Heb 1:3; Eph 1:11)
- * When we hurt each other, God will call us to account. (Gen 9:4-6; Deut 32:35; Ps 94)
- * Whatever God is accomplishing as He actively carries along all things, it will be just and right. (Rom 8:28)
- * We will not always know what God is accomplishing through the evils that we suffer or do. (Ps 88; Ecc 7:14)
- * Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:38-39)
- * In the glory of heaven, answers will be clear. (Ps 30:5)

But what about the suffering of God’s children, the saints? From another chapter in the book, John Piper assure us that—

1. Suffering deepens one’s faith and holiness.

Heb 12:10—“He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.”

2 Cor 1:8-9—“For we do not want you to be unaware of our affliction, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength...so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”

READ Rom 5:1-5 Suffering brings about perseverance, character and hope. “The sufferings of life provide lessons of faith that cannot be learned elsewhere.” God wants to “wean us from the world and set our hope fully on God alone.”

2. Suffering makes your cup increase.

“By enduring suffering with patience, the reward of our experience of God’s glory in heaven increases.”

2 Cor 4:17-18—“For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of

glory far beyond all comparison..."

"There seems to be a connection between suffering endured and the degree of glory enjoyed." Paul sums it up in Rom 8:18 saying, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed."

Matt 5:11-12—"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

3. Suffering is the price of making others bold.

God uses the suffering of some to awaken others and make them courageous.

Phil 1:14 tells us that Paul's imprisonment has caused others, "trusting in the Lord... to have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."

The execution of Wycliffe missionary Chet Bitterman in Columbia in 1981 caused such an awakening that applications for overseas service with Wycliffe Bible Translators doubled overnight and lasted for years.

4. Suffering fills up what is lacking.

The suffering of Christ's messenger ministers to those he is trying to reach and may open them to the gospel. Think back to our speaker Nate Saint and how the gospel flourished in Ecuador only after his father, Jim Elliot and three other missionaries were murdered by those same tribesmen.

2 Cor 1:5-6 says, "For just as our sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort..."

Col 1:24 says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I do my share in behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

5. Suffering enforces the command to go.

The suffering of the church, of individual saints, is used by God to reposition them in places they might not otherwise go.

Acts 11:19 says, "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution...made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word..."

6. The supremacy of Christ is manifest in suffering.

God means for us to rely wholly on Him.

In 2 Cor 12:9-10, God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness," to which Paul declares, "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Suffering with faith, hope, trust and even joy proves to the world that our treasure is in heaven, not on earth. The supremacy of God's worth shines brightly through the pain that His people gladly bear for His name.

John Piper sums it up this way. "Gratitude for gifts does not prove that the giver is precious. What proves he is precious is glad hearted readiness to leave all those gifts just to be with the giver. So, worship means cherishing the preciousness of God above all that He does or doesn't do for you. God knows it would be very hard to bring the nations or a neighbor to love God from a lifestyle that communicates from a love of things. Therefore, God ordains in the life of the messenger, that suffering 'sever' one's bondage to the world so that he may cling only to his Creator. When only peace and love and joy survive this 'severing', we are fit to say with authority and power, "My hope is in God." (1 Peter 1:21).

While reading a novel recently, I came upon a quote from a 19th century Russian poet, novelist and Christian (Dostoyevsky).

The darker the night, the brighter the stars.

The deeper the grief, the closer to God.