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THE DOCTRINE OF PAIN

Dear Brethren,

I write this article with the help of others from the long past and some today that have understood this most important of subjects. The principle has never changed. As I share my experiences that I have and am living through. I pray you are encouraged and if you are going through pain at this moment then you will not feel alone.

What I have learned and want to share is that pain is part of a divine plan that can only be understood by experiencing it and over coming it. Please walk with me through this dark tunnel of pain until one day we arrive at a place where there will be no tears or pain. I understand more than ever the man of God who said: When you have had no experience of pain, it is rather hard to experience joy.

We talk little on this subject as most look at physical and emotional pain as some thing to be avoided and a negative part of our fragile human make up. I want to look at this subject and present why God made us in this special way to be able to experience pain. What would life be without pain? Some would say great, but it would not be great as it would be disastrous, even deadly.

In my many trips to India I have seen leprosy in its worst form. I remember one night we were praying for the sick, a man came on the stage and the brother with me laid hands on his head to pray. I was on the opposite side holding the man steady, he was frail. I watched in horror as the fingers of the brother penetrated the skin of his head, there was a putrid infection and decomposing skin around his skull. But also to my amazement the man did not flinch as he felt nothing.

At night as I would walk the streets and I could see the rats as they climbed from one sleeping person to the next looking for a leper. They would feed upon the fingers, noses and toes of the sleeping lepers the person would not wake up as they felt nothing. When you see lepers without ears, toes or fingers it is the thought that the disease is the cause. But there are no symptoms as these because of leprosy. The problem is that the people who suffer do not feel any pain. Their nerve endings are deficient. They can be opening a bottle or cutting bread and cut off a whole finger and not feel a thing. It is infections that cause and kill because of this disease.

God gave pain for a reason. Physical pain alerts us that some thing is wrong and we must take care of it right away. Otherwise we would ignore the problem and eventually die. God knew well what he was doing when he created us with the sensation of pain. It is a blessing not a curse. We are wonderfully made and pain that is physical or emotional is a part of it. Many who believe in a loving God do not know how to interpret pain. They only see the small picture at the moment they are experiencing it. But God sees the end of the story of our life and as we understand this we can see a larger picture and the why of pain and what God is trying to do in our lives.

Can pain be good for me? Can suffering be a part of the God we know? The Bible cries out from all parts a big yes. We rejoice as we see the end of the stories of our Biblical heroes lives. But what if we had been suffering with them at the time they were going through pain.

We would not know what the end of their pain was and we would ask WHY this pain on your servants. Whether it was Job getting his boils licked by dogs or Paul floating on a piece of wood in the sea for days. At that moment it would be confusing but with what we know now it becomes very clear why the pain had to be experienced. And it is also this way with us and God has the same reasons today for what we are experiencing as he did back then for these great men.

But must it hurt so much? Pain is not God's big error in creation. Pain is a gift that nobody wants. It is a gift for surviving life on a very violent planet. The same nervous system that conveys messages of pain carry also the messages of pleasure It holds so true that only those we love and take pleasure in can cause us pain. The pain of death of a loved one. The pain of divorce and betrayal. The pain of loneliness that follows has a motive. No animal can suffer these pains but we can as being made in His image. And don't think God does not suffer. It is a part of our divine make up and His.

Think, of a world without the pain of loneliness. We have a sense of need. This is why we have love and friendship. This inner need keeps us all from becoming hermits. Do we not need the power of loneliness to pry us away from isolation and push us towards others?

I meet brethren periodically that were in this ministry. Some for short amounts of time and some for long periods. Many times they talk of the long nights of doing guard or dishes for over a hundred of us and the helper not showing up. They talk of broke down old vehicles on the side of the road and food being scarce. Or how the brother that slept beside them smelled or the sister who snored. At times they were fearful that God would not supply or protect them and asked what was their future going to be and the darkness of wondering and many times doubting. I ask was it really that bad. Many times there response is *it was the best time in my life or I have never had such an interesting or meaningful life since.* With all the hardship, misunderstanding and pain came a lesson. Huddle together for and strive for a common goal. To develop faith with courage and how to share the little you had, and most of all having hope that God was there by your side.

Pain develops hope, we just do not realize it at the moment we are experiencing it. God made us complicated creatures, didn't He?

Who so ever finds his life will loose it, and whosoever looses his life for my sake will find it. What a paradox. The god of self-fulfillment, modern ego building messages and seeking earthly security go contrary the gospel of loosing your life. Today many say to find your life and fulfillment is in you and to seek earthly fulfillment by material gain. Avoid sacrifice, pain and service to others at all costs. Look to your needs and what you are. Brethren that try to get around this principle that Jesus laid out are always full of self-doubt. As Jonah learned the hard way. You can run, but you cannot hide from pain. Because of our freedom we demanded in the garden we introduced something new to our planet. Rebellion against the original design God had planned for us.

We saw pain come on the scene at the moment of human rebellion and the desire for freedom. Man suffered emotional pain for the first time and was expelled to a life of physical pain and anguish. But let us remember God suffered also as He knew that He would loose His Son and His creation would live under the design of rebellion and pain. God had other plans but we wanted it our own way. But even though man blew it God made a way to set things right. He made a new paradise with no pain in place of the paradise lost. There is displeasure with this planet and humanity the way it is acting toward God.

C.S. Lewis said: God whispers in our pleasure but shouts in our pain. SOMETHING IS WRONG. Pain emotional or physical halts us in our track and forces us to reconsider other values. Those who want this world and its pleasures must plug their ears to God, as pain is a loud cry. And it is God's mercy not His wrath that is permitting it. This world is in a supernatural slumber. At times we are so enchanted with the world that we consume our life with trivial things that have no meaning in eternity or for the pleasure of a loving God. Pain is the only thing that will shake us out of our apathy. And God can do it to an individual, church or people. Truth is that the periods of the sharpest suffering and pain had been the greatest times of spiritual growth for the church and individuals.

Pain always purged sin and developed character in the brethren. Something we need desperately today. It may seem very against much teaching today but pain, poverty and suffering teach us a dependency on God. Greed and worldly ambition are hard forces to be dealt with in our character. But God knows just what to do.

What is the essence of this discourse? Well pain as we all know protects our physical bodies. God speaks to humans through pain. Pain exposes our needful state as humans. It is hard to find pride, greed, and lust in a person suffering pain. They know they need help and it will not come from themselves but from God and others who love Him dearly. Dependency breeds humility! It goes against our proud nature to ask for something and we do not want to humble ourselves and do it.

I knew a sister who refused to get out of the car and ask for directions. She would rather stay lost. Many are just like that spiritually and it is the same principle of pride that God wants to deal with. Many times it is only pain that will brake us before God. Pain does not come normally in a general sense in our lives. But it comes in a specific way and in spurts. It is like a fire storm. In a moment we are reduced to a bed or the fire storm of nerves that over takes us in an emotional cloud of sorrow and grief. It could be because of death, betrayal or a moral failure.

What is our reaction? Do we blame God? Our reaction to the pain will determine our out come. Jesus used tragedies of pain and calamities that took place to point to eternal truths, relevant for all. "Unless you repent, you too will all perish". Not a popular message today. But then afterward He shares of Gods restraining mercy. Tragedy should alert us to make ourselves ready in case we are in the next "tower" that is going to fall.

In Job, we see him and his friends discussing pain and suffering. Some blame Job for his pain. His wife is more direct. Don't suffer all this pain. Just curse God and die. Some feel this is a valid response when they are suffering pain. We meet people all the time who have turned their backs on God because of some pain. And it is usually emotional. But Job, could not bring himself to do that. We can see the frustration as he reflects. Pain happens to good people. But what did he do in the mist of his pain? An example for us all. He glorified the Lord of hosts.

Brethren, life is unfair. I have found that out first hand but it is no excuse to turn your back on Jesus who still is loving us through our pain. Why, because He knows oh so well pain as he suffers with us. You never have to go it alone when you have Jesus living in you.

I would not be writing this right now if this were not the case. I would probably be in an asylum with a total nervous break down somewhere. Jesus is close to us in pain. I know as He has kept me and comforted me with His word and presence. Also an inner voice of comfort that says: I understand well as I know your pain well and will be right here with you. I will cry with you as I am suffering more than you as you are my beloved child. Oh, Jesus is so great!

If a world of perfect fairness (Eden) did not produce what God wants in us then His alternate plan is what we see daily in this corrupt world we are living in. The creation is moaning in pain for liberation and the day is near. Oh, I feel it. Pain is valuable in our life and even essential for us to be a valuable instrument in Gods kingdom. The best example is Jesus. His earthly end on the cross, the stripes he bore, and the pain He endured for what reason?

There is redemptive power when we understand His mission in our lives of pain.

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