“The Unbreakable Chain”

December 1, 2018

Romans 8:35-39

Do you know that the will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot sustain you? Three times the LORD tells us exactly what His will is.

One day some Jews asked Jesus this question “What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” Here’s His answer. John 6:29 *“****This*** *is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”*

What then is God’s will? That we believe on Christ.

Then the Apostle Paul says this. I Thessalonians 5:18 *“In everything give thanks: for* ***this*** *is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”*

What’s His will? That we constantly express our appreciation. In everything give thanks.

And the Apostle Peter handles it like this. I Peter 3:14 *“But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; (15) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:*

*(16) Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. (17) For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.”*

What does Peter tell us about His will? That it’s better to suffer for doing what’s right than for doing what is wrong.

To believe on Christ is great. To give thanks continually is greater. But, to *suffer* when you’ve done nothing wrong; that’s the greatest. Unfair? Unjust? Unwanted? Yet, it’s God’s will.

Today’s word is suffering. But I want to approach it with a question. If you knew that you had to suffer like Christ suffered, would you have become a Christian?

T. S. Eliot was a 20th century poet from St. Louis, MO. His family moved to Great Britain when he was 25. And in England T. S. Eliot became a writer; well-known for his essays and his poems. He once wrote this. “A Christian should think in Christian categories.”

For example. “We use four words to describe the history of the world; creation, fall, grace, and glory. Actually these are four stages that tell us *why* any particular thing was made in the first place (creation), *what has gone wrong* with creation (the fall), *how we find its correction* in the Cross of Christ (grace), and *what it will become in the end*, when everything is made new (glory).

These same four words tell a story, a complete story that stretches back to before the very beginning and leans for-ward all the way into eternity.” [Found on <https://g.chris-tianbook.com> “Christian Worldview” by Philip Graham Ryken quoting T. S. Eliot, page 34].

So, for the Christian there’s one large category that we all experience and we all have, at some time, found both confusing, complicated, and maybe even baffling. So, I’ve titled today’s sermon “The Unbreakable Chain.” Shall we pray?

Now, knowing that the LORD is neither confusing nor complicated, here’s the question. If you knew that you had to suffer like Christ suffered, would you have become a Christian?

Please open your Bibles to Romans chapter eight. The Bible is God’s way of reversing the way you think; of turning around *my* way of thinking to God’s viewpoint. And every time we read it, we should look for the reality instead of allowing ourselves to see things merely from our perspective. The reality is what God says.

One of the greatest things in the world is an artist; especially an artist with perspective. The artist simply sees things you can’t see. So, when you go to the museum and you stand in front of the artist’s work, *you* have to interpret it. Now, if the artist were standing right next to you while you stood looking at his painting, you could ask him “Why did you include that? Why did you use those colors? Or, what does *that* represent? What does *that* mean?”

And he would begin to point things out to you so you might better understand what you are looking at. Your Bible is your artist. *Your* life is the painting. And, the more you try to interpret without the Voice of the Artist, the less you see and understand. The more confusion reigns. And, as well, the more you *listen* to the Voice of the Artist, the more you see and the more you understand.

So, if you knew that you had to suffer like Christ suffered, would you have become a Christian?

There’s a backwards view on suffering that you might hold. And that is this. “Extract myself from it as soon as possible.” And the Bible way, the right way, to view it is like this. Romans 8:18 *“For I reckon (count true what is true; I see it from God’s point of view) that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*

Now, please find with me the 35th verse of this eighth chapter. And as we read it, remember what I said earlier. The Bible is *God’s* way of reversing the way you think and the way I see things. So, look for the opposite of the way most people view suffering. Romans 8:35 *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

*(37) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Sixteen things that some might say are the sixteen sides and sixteen sizes of suffering. They are actually examples of types of suffering; trouble, difficulties, persecution, distresses, etc. and etc.

Now, how should you read and how should you interpret these verses? Here’s how. Take a sheet of paper and write one column with all sixteen words on it. Then, after each word, simply write how you view it. *Then*, ask yourself how does *God* see it? I’m sure you’ll find that your view is off. Let me show you what I mean. Take Romans 8:35 “tribulation.” Tribulation is the Old English word for trouble. Does trouble *ever* separate you from the love of Christ?

What are you going through right now that is so troubling you that you feel separated from God? What’s your problem?

Does trouble *ever* separate you from the love of Christ? The answer is “no, it doesn’t separate us.” But who here hasn’t felt *far* away from the LORD when you found yourself in trouble? And, what is your deepest wish when you have trouble? “Get me out of this as soon as possible.”

Now, did Jesus ever face trouble? When He walked the streets and hillsides of Judea, did the LORD face trouble? When was the last time you read through the Gospels just looking at the troubles that Jesus encountered?

Yes, He did. From the very first day of His life, Herod, the King of Judea gave an order to kill every boy under the age of two. Mary and Joseph took Him to Egypt.

And how about his brothers and sisters? Did they give Him any trouble? John 7:1 *“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. (2) Now the Jew's feast of tabernacles was at hand. (3) His brethren [His brothers, James, Joseph, Judas, Simon] therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest.*

*(4) For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to the world. (5) For neither did his brethren believe in him.”*

The very ones in His own family didn’t believe what He was saying.

Do problems, trouble, suffering, or pressure knock you off balance? I want to tell you *why* that happens? It’s because you see things *backwards* from the way things really are.

And how does God see things? Look again at Romans eight at verse thirty-six. Romans 8:36 *“As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”*

Do you like the concept of a Shepherd with his sheep? Does that idea bring you comfort and joy? Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we who believe on Him are His sheep. So, what is Paul saying here? Isn’t he saying that the LORD’s sheep are counted as sheep for the slaughter and for His sake aren’t we killed all the day long?

Here’s why many of us so often can’t see things clearly. Our perspective overshadows what the Bible teaches. We don’t think we deserve suffering. We don’t’ think we need suffering. And, some of us think that we should only suffer if we’ve done something wrong. And so, when trouble or distress or grief come into our lives, we begin to accuse and blame and get worried and feel threatened and begin to plead with God to remove it.

But God’s Voice tells us that’s not always the case. Look again at the Word. Romans 8:35 “*“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”*

That’s what the Artist says. The key to success, especially when it comes to trouble and distress; suffering, is this. God allows suffering as part of His personal love for you. The sooner you resign yourself to *His* will; the sooner you present your body to Him as a living sacrifice; the sooner you surren-der your will to His will, you discover that God personally and perfectly loves you. And suffering, even the death of a Christian, in no way diminishes God’s sovereign, faithful, one-to-one love for you.

So, do you have suffering backwards in your heart today? Do you think that the best goal for you in suffering is to quote “get out of that pain and trial”? Or, are you ready for a deeper experience of God’s love for you?

Let me illustrate this with a child. A child gets hurt and does what? Cries? Yes. But, what else? He or she goes to either Mom or Dad for the one thing they need more than a band aid. They need that parent’s comfort, his love and his time and his interest and his help.

If you’re a sheep; a Christian, then your suffering is the suffering of a sheep. Romans 8:36 *“As it is written* *for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”*

So, stop saying you don’t deserve this grief. Stop feeling like you are being picked on by people or life. Stop thinking backwards.

The quote says *“For Thy sake we are killed all the day long and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”* Yet, have you ever seen a flock of sheep? They’re eating; they’re resting; they’re playing; they’re enjoying the pasture, the sun, the wind, the world into which God has placed them. And do they worry that tomorrow or even today are they thinking they’ll be taken to market to the slaughter?

Folks, if you can’t or won’t suffer today’s hardships, then you simply aren’t letting the LORD have *His* way in your will. We want life easier than that of a sheep on its way to the town butcher. Some of us take medicine instead of letting God correct our characters. Some of us complain instead of letting God work out His will upon us.

So, how can we live the life of a sheep? Be content whether you are being abased or whether you are abounding; whether you are suffering or if you are problem-free. And every time you experience the pains and suffering of life, go to your Father and receive His comfort and care. Go to His Word Romans 8:37 *“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Why do we suffer? Listen to what the Artist says. We suffer for *His* sake. We suffer with *Him*. II Timothy 2:7 *“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (8) Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: (9) wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.*

*(10) Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (11) It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: (12) If we suffer, we shall also reign with him…”*

II Timothy 3:10 *“But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, (11) Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. (12) Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”*

Philippians 1:28 *“And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. (29) For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; (30) Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”*

And, one more thing. When a child resists his parent, when a child thinks he knows better than his parent, when a child feels he’s suffering because the parent has required something of him or her, then that child will suffer twice as much. Why? Because the one thing we all need; the one thing every child needs everywhere, is his Mom or his Dad. The parent always perfectly loves that child even when the child resists and doesn’t see that love.

Can you see with me the unbreakable chain between you and God? It’s His love. His unbreakable love. His perfect, eternal, personal love that, even when suffering comes upon you, that love oversees even that; right up to the very point of death itself.

He says that *nothing* can separate us from His love. He says we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. And then He adds we are more than conquerors through Him Who loves us; verse thirty-seven.

Romans 8:37 *“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

The Christian conqueror is the one who suffers hardship and trouble and grief and disappointment; yet, finds all he or she needs in the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

How much do you love Him? Do you love Him to the degree of only loving Him when things go well? Or are you a Christian conqueror who loves His Father even though you are in pain and can’t do what you’d like to do? Who here is living in light of the unbreakable chain?

Do you pray for patience? Look to His love to provide it. Do you pray for your family and friend to be saved? Look to His love to reach their hearts. Are you always thinking of yourself and your problems? Look to His love. Are you afraid? Look to His love. Are you in need? Look to His love. Are you letting His love accomplish His will in you today? Herein is love; not that we loved Him; but that He loved us. We love Him because He first loves us.

When I read the life of Jesus, I see Him often suffering at the hands of men. They reviled Him. They hated Him. They despised Him. They rejected Him. They attempted to dissuade people from believing Him. They falsely accused Him.

Now, does anyone here think that Jesus, even for one minute, doubted His Father’s faithful love? Who here thinks that unbreakable chain of God’s love was broken when Jesus suffered as He did; when He died at the hands of cruel Roman soldiers?

Will things go wrong today? Will things go wrong tomorrow? Will you have trouble this week? Will you have someone in your life giving you grief this week? Yes, yes, yes, and yes. But will you let that break the unbreakable chain between you and God; His mighty love? No. You see, the conqueror is the not the one who conquers others; but the one who conquers himself. And the greatest conquering occurs when you live inside the depths of God’s love.

How can you love your spouse? How can you love your children? How can you love your parents? How can you love your Church family? How can you be patient? You can’t; apart this conquering love. Marriage, family, friendships, when other people are unreliable, when other people fail, when you are tempted to get angry or to retaliate, when someone asks for and needs your time and your help, your money, conquer each thing with His love.

Now, there are many other aspects of suffering, such as the purpose for it and how and when to alleviate it. So, there is a lot more that the Bible has for us on this topic. But let me close with this.

[Samuel Trevor Francis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Trevor_Francis) was a lay preacher, actually a London merchant, a Plymouth Brethren born in 1834 and died in 1925. As a boy, Samuel Francis was quite unhealthy. One day, though, as a teenager, Samuel Francis heard a sermon on “Man’s Ruin And God’s Remedy.” He heard these words “do you do believe on the LORD Jesus Christ?” It came as a question. He answered “I do believe.” And he says that at that moment he was born again and experienced what the Bible calls the New Birth.

Samuel Francis wrote books full of poems and many of them were set to music and, as well, he heard many of them sung in Church on Sunday morning.

He also became a lay preacher and preached all over London and many other places for some 73 years of his life. He died in a nursing home at the age of 92. Many of his poems were sung. One of his poems that was put to music and is right here in our hymnal. Please find it with me; number 352. Samuel Francis clearly understood the words of Romans 8:35-39. [Found on <http://gospelhall.org> “Biography 73 – Samuel Trevor Francis].

[Read the words of the hymn].

“O the deep, deep love of Jesus” Here’s a group called Selah singing it. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hzYKovRsJ8>

So, in conclusion, let me remind you of this. What you dwell on is what makes you or breaks you.

Each morning as you begin your day this week, reflect as follows:

Reflect on the Trinity. Who is the Father? Who is the Son? Who is the Holy Spirit? Your Father is your Heavenly Father Who cares for every single aspect of your life. He is for you. Jesus is your Savior and your Life. And the Holy Spirit has made your body His Temple.

And the greatest thing you will ever know is the love of God. Dwell on that love every morning this week and see what a difference it makes.

Hymn # 256 “Love Has Come”