

Easy to Say, Difficult to Do - Ron Stullenbarger -

God's commands sometimes defy human logic. Take, for example, the command to rejoice in persecution. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matthew 5:10-12). It doesn't make sense until we realize the effect of praise -- it keeps us focused upon the Lord in the good things that He can bring out of hardship.

The apostle Paul faced greater abuse and suffering than most of us ever will. He was beaten, put on trial, and imprisoned, yet he looked beyond those difficulties to what the Lord was accomplishing through his life. That is, though he didn't rejoice that he was a captive, he was able to celebrate the great ministry he had among his prison guards.

If we believe that God is in control and keeps His promises, then we must trust in the principle of Roman's 5:3-5. *"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."* This passage assures us that our hardships have a purpose. Specifically, they develop our endurance, strengthen our character, and solidify our hope. Two immediate blessings of suffering are the deepening of our faith in the preparation for greater service to the kingdom. We are able to rejoice because we are maturing believers whom God can use for His purposes.

The Lord can bring good from our persecution, just as he did for Paul. But if we allow doubt to cloud our faith, we won't be able to rejoice in what He is doing in and through our lives. And if we can't rejoice, we are in danger of giving up before God's good work can be completed. Rejoicing keeps us focused upon the Lord and His purpose so that we may see our trial through to the end and receive our reward.