

Personal Tribulation

A 2-Lesson Study by Keith Blades | Enjoy the Bible Ministries®
Study Overview & Lesson Summaries

About This Series

This two-lesson study by Keith Blades addresses one of the most practical and pressing concerns of the Christian life: how to handle personal tribulation. Rather than offering platitudes or general encouragement, Keith establishes the proper dispensational framework first — showing why Israel walked by sight while the Body of Christ walks by faith — and then equips believers with the specific doctrines God has provided for each category of suffering they will face. The goal throughout is not merely to cope with hardship, but for the inner man to glorify God in the midst of it through the effectual working of His word.



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Lessons at a Glance

| Lesson | Core Focus |
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| Lesson 1 | The dispensational foundation: walking by faith, not by sight — and introducing the three sources of personal tribulation |
| Lesson 2 | The doctrine for suffering: how God’s word divides soul and spirit, and the specific provisions for the sufferings of this present time and the sufferings of Christ |

Lesson Summaries

L1

Walking by Faith, Not by Sight *The Dispensational Foundation for Personal Tribulation*

The Foundational Dispensational Distinction

- Israel was given a covenant to walk by sight — God promised to do visible marvels among them so that they would literally see the work of the Lord (Exodus 34:10)
- The Body of Christ is called to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) — God does not covenant to work visibly in our circumstances
 - Two verses more opposed to each other cannot be found: Exodus 34:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:7 represent two entirely different operating programs

The Outward Man and the Inner Man

- God’s design for the Body of Christ is not to preserve the outward man, but to

renew the inner man — the outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16)

- God's word is designed to effectually work within the inner man — this is the only true comfort available to a believer in the dispensation of grace

Three Categories of Personal Tribulation

- Category 1: The sufferings of this present time — plain hardships from living in a sin-cursed world under the bondage of corruption (Romans 8:18)
- Category 2: The sufferings of Christ — opposition experienced for conducting oneself faithfully as a member of the Body of Christ, from Satan's policy of evil (2 Corinthians 1)
- Category 3: Our own plain stupidity — self-inflicted tribulation from opposing ourselves by ignoring doctrine (2 Timothy 2:25)
 - The third category is likely the most common but also the most avoidable — and the most embarrassing

L2

The Doctrine for the Suffering Saint *God's Provisions for the Sufferings of This Present Time and the Sufferings of Christ*

How God's Word Works: Soul, Spirit, and Body

- Hebrews 4:12 — the word of God is quick and powerful, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow
- When circumstances afflict, the soul receives the impact and appeals to the spirit; the spirit, having no answers, sends anxiety back — a vicious cycle that builds fear and despair
- God's word enters the spirit with truth and effectually works there, dividing the spirit out of the soul's turmoil and producing rest (Psalms 94:19; 116:7)

Doctrine for the Sufferings of This Present Time (Romans 8:18–39)

- "I reckon" — to count something to be true and operate upon it regardless of what circumstances indicate; the same language as "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin" (Romans 6)
- The doctrine of the glory to be revealed in us — not merely the rapture, but a comprehensive doctrinal occupation with what God is going to do; the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared
 - Becoming preoccupied with the sufferings starts a downward spiral: misery → despondency → despair → hopelessness
- Verses 26–27: The Holy Spirit has a special ministry for when the believer does not know what to pray for as he ought
- Verses 28–30: The certainty of God's counsel — nothing can thwart all things working together for good
- Verses 31–39: God is always for you — the doctrinal goal is to be fully persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of God

Doctrine for the Sufferings of Christ (2 Corinthians 4)

- The treasure in earthen vessels — God intends for the excellence of the power to be of God, not of us; the fragility is by design
- Troubled, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8–9)
- The spirit of faith — the spirit preoccupied with what God says, so that even in the midst of satanic opposition the believer speaks and acts from settled

confidence in doctrine

- The progression in Paul's letters: from 'endure the sufferings' to 'I take pleasure in afflictions' (2 Corinthians 12) — this is the fruit of doctrine effectually working

Key Doctrinal Distinctions

Walking by Sight (Israel) vs. Walking by Faith (Body of Christ)

God covenanted with Israel to work visibly in their national and individual circumstances — they were given signs and expected to see the work of the Lord (Exodus 34:10). This meant they were designed to walk by sight. The Body of Christ, by contrast, operates in a dispensation in which God works without visible confirmation. The believer today walks by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). This distinction is foundational: it explains why seeking signs or visible proof of God's activity in one's circumstances is a confusion of programs, not a mark of faith.

Three Categories of Personal Tribulation

Keith identifies three distinct sources of personal tribulation, each requiring its own doctrinal treatment. The sufferings of this present time (Romans 8:18–23) are the common hardships of living in a sin-cursed, creation-groaning world — unavoidable and not personal. The sufferings of Christ (2 Corinthians 1) are the specific opposition the believer encounters from Satan's policy of evil because of faithful Christian conduct — only experienced by those who conduct themselves like the Apostle Paul. The third category is self-inflicted tribulation through opposing ourselves (2 Timothy 2:25) — entirely avoidable, the most common, and the result of ignoring or failing to apply sound doctrine.

Effectual Working of God's Word: Doctrine Does Not Remove Suffering

A critical distinction in this series is that God's word is not designed to eliminate suffering or remove the believer from hard circumstances. Rather, the doctrine God has provided is designed to effectually work within the inner man so that the spirit is stabilized even when the soul is under pressure from outside affliction. The outward man perishes; the inner man is renewed. The practical result is the pattern Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4: troubled, yet not distressed — the expected outcome of suffering does not occur because doctrine is working within.

The Doctrine of the Glory vs. the Blessed Hope

Romans 8:18–25 is frequently read as a passage about the rapture ("the blessed hope"), but Keith teaches that its primary purpose is doctrinal comfort for the sufferings of this present time through the doctrine of the glory to be revealed in us. This is not merely the promise of a glorified body — it is a comprehensive revelation of what God is going to accomplish in and through the Body of Christ, designed to so occupy the believer's mind that the sufferings of this present time are genuinely not worthy of comparison. Learning this doctrine adequately is the precondition for being able to say with Paul: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life... shall be able to separate us from the love of God" (Romans 8:38–39).

Key Scripture References

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| Exodus 34:10 | God's covenant with Israel to perform visible marvels — the basis for Israel walking by sight |
| 2 Corinthians 5:7 | "For we walk by faith, not by sight" — the operating principle for the Body of Christ today |
| Hebrews 4:12 | The word of God divides soul and spirit — the mechanism by which doctrine stabilizes the inner man under affliction |
| Romans 8:18–39 | The comprehensive doctrine for the sufferings of this present time: the glory to be revealed, God's counsel, and the certainty of God's love |
| 2 Corinthians 4:7–18 | Treasure in earthen vessels; troubled yet not distressed — the doctrine for the sufferings of Christ |
| 2 Corinthians 1 | The sufferings of Christ and the comfort of the God of all comfort — doctrine shared between Paul and the Corinthians |
| 2 Timothy 2:25 | "Opposing ourselves" — self-inflicted personal tribulation through failure to apply sound doctrine |
| Psalms 94:19 | "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul" — a tribulation saint experiencing the dividing of soul and spirit |
| Psalms 116:7 | "Return unto thy rest, O my soul" — the soul at rest through the working of doctrine; quoted by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 |

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