

Suffering for Godliness Sake

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

About This Series

This series examines one of the most challenging and frequently misunderstood aspects of the Christian life in the Dispensation of Grace: the sufferings of Christ. Drawing from 1 Corinthians 4:8–17 as its doctrinal foundation, Keith Blades addresses the ungodly thinking that causes believers to shrink back from following Paul’s pattern, identifies the three categories of suffering a member of the Body of Christ will encounter, and exposes the corrective and instructional doctrine God has designed to make believers first willing, and then able, to endure as a spectacle before the world. This study prepares believers for the deeper treatment of endurance found in 2 Corinthians, and ultimately for the mature rejoicing in Christ’s sufferings described in Philippians.



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Lessons at a Glance

Lesson	Core Focus
Lesson 1	The ungodly thinking of the Corinthians; the three categories of suffering; the doctrine designed for each
Lesson 2	The spectacle of 1 Corinthians 4:9–17; Paul’s four-part corrective doctrine; willingness to enter the arena

Lesson Summaries

L1

The Three Categories of Suffering *Understanding What We Will Face and Why*

- The passage — 1 Corinthians 4:8–17 — is the foundational doctrine to the entire body of 2 Corinthians; it must effectually work within you before 2 Corinthians can be properly understood or applied.
- The Corinthians’ problem was ungodly thinking: they wanted to be popular, respected, and socially acceptable, so they soft-pedaled the gospel and embraced the wisdom of the world.

Three Categories of Suffering in Our Epistles (Romans–Philemon)

- Category 1 — Sufferings of This Present Time (Romans 8:18–23): caused by the bondage of corruption in creation and in our bodies; unavoidable; not to

be met with “Why me?”

- The doctrine designed for these sufferings is Romans 8:18–39 — not Psalm 23, not Nehemiah 2.
- **Category 2 — Sufferings from Your Own Stupidity (2 Timothy 2:25):** self-inflicted through ignoring doctrine and “opposing yourself”; completely avoidable and should be avoided.
 - Example: 1 Corinthians 7:25ff — ignoring Paul’s counsel not to marry during present distress produces avoidable “trouble in the flesh.”
- **Category 3 — Sufferings of Christ:** arise from Satan’s policy of evil against those who follow Paul’s pattern and practice sound doctrine; avoidable in the sense that you can stop, but ungodly to want to avoid.
 - Progression of maturity: 1 Corinthians 4 makes you willing → 2 Corinthians teaches you how to endure → Philippians 3:10 brings you to wanting and rejoicing in them.
- Each category of suffering has a specific body of doctrine designed by God to handle it; the effectual working of the right doctrine produces the right result — not counseling, tranquilizers, or the Psalms.
- The goal of this passage is not merely information: the words are designed to “read you,” produce reproof and correction, and make you willing to open the door and follow Paul’s pattern.

L2

Made a Spectacle *The Corrective Doctrine of 1 Corinthians 4:9–17*

- Paul’s corrective doctrine begins in verse 9 with the gladiator analogy: God has set the apostles forth last in the arena, “appointed to death,” made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.
- A spectacle has two aspects: (1) a sight for the morbid amusement of the crowd, and (2) an object of wonder and awe if it survives and does not collapse under the opposition.

Four Things Paul Does in Verses 10–13

- Verse 10 — He contrasts: “We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ”; what the Corinthians were doing was commensurate with avoiding the spectacle entirely.
- Verses 11–12a — He catalogs: even “unto this present hour” the ongoing realities of hunger, nakedness, buffeting, no fixed dwelling place — the spectacle is not a temporary inconvenience.
- Verses 12b–13 — He demonstrates the second aspect of the spectacle: “Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat” — the excellency of God’s word at work.
 - The power operating Paul is what produces the wonder: something greater than what the world brings to bear is working in him, putting on display the excellency of God’s word.
- Verse 14 — Paul warns as a father, not shames: he knows the reproof produces shame, but reminds them the purpose is warning so they do not stop following the pattern.
- Verse 15–17 — The distinction between instructor and father: 10,000 instructors in Christ can repeat Romans doctrine, but Paul has begotten them through the gospel — he appeals as their father.
 - A believer who only circles back to foundation doctrine (Romans) is standing on the launchpad but never moving; the foundation is meant to launch godly living,

not to be revisited indefinitely.

- The critical juncture is willingness: every arena has an entrance; verse 9 is designed to bring the believer to the point of being willing to walk through it — instruction in righteousness only follows from there.
- Timothy is sent to bring the Corinthians into remembrance of Paul's ways — Paul's confidence is in the effectual working of God's word: once the sufferings begin, 2 Corinthians will provide the consolation.

Key Doctrinal Distinctions

The Three Categories of Suffering Are Not Interchangeable

Keith distinguishes three entirely separate sources of suffering, each requiring its own body of doctrine: the Sufferings of This Present Time (unavoidable; handled by Romans 8:18–39), the Sufferings from Your Own Stupidity (avoidable; handled by heeding Paul's counsel), and the Sufferings of Christ (avoidable but should not be avoided; handled by 1 Corinthians 4 through 2 Corinthians and beyond). Applying Psalm 23 or any non-Pauline scripture to the Body of Christ's suffering is not only ineffective — it is the wrong doctrine entirely.

Ungodly Thinking vs. Godly Thinking About the World's Response

God has not placed members of the Body of Christ in this world to be popular, embraced, or socially acceptable. The Corinthians' adjustment of the message to avoid the "filth of the world" response was not pragmatic wisdom — it was ungodly thinking. Godly thinking recognizes that the head of the body was not popular, and the members should not expect to be either. The adversary's outrage at the mystery of Christ ensures that the arena will never be a friendly place for a member of the Body faithfully following Paul's pattern.

The Two Aspects of Being a Spectacle

Being made a spectacle (1 Corinthians 4:9) involves two distinct aspects: first, it is a sight for the morbid amusement of a hostile crowd. But second — and this is the aspect the doctrine is designed to produce — it becomes an object of wonder and awe when the believer endures by the excellency of God's word and does not collapse. The world, the angels, and men witness something operating in a believer that is greater than what the adversary brings to bear. That display of the power of God's word is the purpose behind the sufferings of Christ.

Instructor in Christ vs. Father: Moving Beyond Foundation Doctrine

Romans doctrine establishes a believer's identity in Christ — it is the foundation and launchpad. But a believer who only ever revisits that foundation has 10,000 instructors available and goes nowhere. Paul relates to the Corinthians as their father, having begotten them through the gospel, and he calls them to follow his ways — to move from established identity into the practice of that identity, which involves the sufferings of Christ. Foundation doctrine is not the destination; it is the capacity from which godly living is to be launched.

Key Scripture References

1 Corinthians 4:8–17	The foundational passage for the series; Paul's corrective doctrine on the sufferings of Christ for the Corinthians and for us
Romans 8:18–23	Sufferings of This Present Time — caused by the bondage of corruption; unavoidable in the present dispensation
Romans 8:35–37	Sufferings of Christ — from Satan's policy of evil; neither separation nor conquest, but overcoming through him who loved us
2 Timothy 2:25	Opposing ourselves — the basis for understanding Category 2 suffering (sufferings from one's own stupidity)
1 Corinthians 7:25ff	Example of self-inflicted suffering: ignoring Paul's counsel about marriage during present distress produces avoidable trouble in the flesh
Philippians 3:10	The mature expression: wanting the fellowship of Christ's sufferings — the destination of progressive growth through 1 and 2 Corinthians
2 Corinthians (series)	The doctrine of endurance for the sufferings of Christ — the epistle Paul wrote when the sufferings began in Corinth
Romans 8:18–39	The body of doctrine specifically designed by God to handle the Sufferings of This Present Time

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