



EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

Recently I read an article by Al Mohler, “The Quest for Theological Identity.” He said, “cultural Christianity is taking its final breaths.” What he means is this: culture and Christ are no longer friends; in fact, culture cannot tolerate an exclusive gospel that demands repentance of sin (lifestyle), or the belief that Jesus is the *only* way to God. In addition, the Bible’s teaching on creation, gender roles, and abortion is flatly rejected. For the Church, then, who sets the standards for life and love—Christ or culture? If you say, “It is culture” then James 4:4 says, “friendship with the world is hostility toward God.” On the other hand, if you say, “Christ and his Word,” then he says, “the world will hate you as it did me” (Jn. 15:18)! So choose wisely: the way of truth is always the path of suffering, but it is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17).



Dr. Mark Hassler (far right), our Associate Professor of Old Testament, is an archaeological supervisor at biblical Shiloh, the place where Joshua and the children of Israel set up the tabernacle when Israel conquered the land of Canaan (Josh. 18:1). He is a member of the Associates for Biblical Research, a ministry that seeks to use historical research and discoveries to support the inerrancy of Scripture. Last month, students, alumni, and friends of VBTS joined Dr. Hassler to unearth artifacts and architecture that had been buried for millennia. Their work included the formidable Canaanite perimeter wall that the Israelites faced when they entered the land. To learn more about this ministry, visit biblearchaeology.org. Do you want to go to Israel with VBTS next year? Contact us!





Truth for the Agora: *Sharing in Christ's Sufferings* ~ Rom. 8:17

Guest Author: Wesley T. Davey, Ph.D.

Romans 8 stands out as one of the most familiar chapters in Christian Scripture. Paul delivers line after memorable line of exalted prose as he articulates the nature of our freedom from condemnation, calls us to walk in the Spirit, champions the sovereign authority of the Father, and rhapsodizes about the victory that belongs to those in Christ. At the heart of this much-loved text, however, Paul embeds a jarring claim which seems to clang dissonantly with the otherwise jubilant tone: "If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, *if indeed we share in his sufferings* in order that we may also share in his glory." How do we make sense of Paul's startling condition in Romans 8:17?

Three contextual cues help to interpret Paul's remark. First, we must read the comment within the governing framework Paul set out in 8:1: "there is no condemnation for those *in Christ Jesus*." This concept of union with Christ pervades Paul's letters, and here as elsewhere Paul employs it not to communicate an abstract or mystical reality, but rather something concrete and material. To be "in Christ" means that Jesus's story becomes our own story: he traversed through suffering and death before receiving resurrection and glory, and so too must all who acknowledge his lordship. Importantly, the suffering to which Paul refers in 8:17 does not name a particular kind of adversity but includes every experience of hurt, misfortune, illness and emotional strain. For Paul, all suffering the believer experiences "in Christ" participates in Christ's suffering. Our suffering, then, is used by God to make the gospel legible to a watching world.

Second, we must read verse 17 in light of Paul's thesis in Romans 8 that God's Spirit empowers believers to live in a manner that brings him honor. Even as Paul insists that those "in Christ" conduct themselves in a way radically different from those outside of Christ, he also reiterates that this new lifestyle does not originate in our own moral effort; it derives from the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit "gives life" to mortal flesh, "puts to death" habits of the body, "leads," "adopts," "cries out" in petition, and "bears witness" to our sonship. Verse 17, therefore, does not establish a new law that will issue in our condemnation; instead the suffering that believers share with Christ is a Spirit-energized practice carried out by virtue of their familial relationship with God (as children and heirs) and covenant relationship with Christ (as co-heirs). In other words, sharing in Christ's sufferings is not a prerequisite for earning a covenantal and familial relationship with Him; rather it is the fruit of that relationship.

Third, we must read 8:17 mindful that the suffering to which we are called is surely a suffering *with* Christ. As we follow him into suffering—whether that suffering be sickness or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword—we do so always and only in the company of him to whom we belong. Christ bids us go nowhere he has not himself gone, nor where he himself will not still venture. As Paul goes on to declare in 8:37, it is "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Suffering, then, is not simply a commission for every believer because of union with Christ or a way of life for which we are trained by the Spirit, but it is an appointed means by which the bond between believers and the Triune God are more tightly forged. May we gladly take up our cross and follow him.