

**Compare and contrast the approaches of Luke
and Paul to relationships between God's Spirit
and suffering**

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The Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts and Paul

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1 The Contemporary Church and Suffering

Suffering is a subject that Christians struggle to engage with in helpful ways. Many of our responses sound self-centred and can range from denial to triumphalism to pessimism. Suffering is sometimes linked to failure and sin or the personal attacks of the evil one but the emphasis is on the individual rather than the Spirit in us.

In contrast to this, we find that Luke and Paul have a very different attitude to suffering and in fact often link it with the Holy Spirit. They do not seem to ask why God lets suffering happen but to look at what he is doing through the presence of his Spirit when suffering happens.

In this short paper, we cannot possibly exhaustively exegete all of Luke-Acts and the Pauline epistles. We will select passages that give a flavour of the differing emphases and perspectives of the two authors to enable our comparison.

2 Suffering and the Spirit in Luke-Acts

2.1 *Luke's Gospel*

2.1.1 Simeon

The first mention of suffering in Luke's gospel comes in the Spirit inspired prophecy of Simeon, Luke 2:25-35. Simeon is described as righteous, just like Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist (Luke 1:6). Elizabeth and Zechariah are 'filled with the Holy Spirit' and prophesy (Luke 1:41-45, 67-79), but Luke tells us that the Spirit was already upon Simeon.¹ This multiple endorsement by the narrator shows us that he is to be regarded as a reliable voice.² The Spirit leads him to the temple where he takes Jesus in his arms, blesses him and prophesies about the salvation that God will work through Jesus. All this builds on the joyful canticles in chapter 1 of Elizabeth, Mary and Zechariah in explaining the future work of Jesus.

However, as Mary and Joseph marvel at his words, Simeon blesses them, saying to Mary (vv. 35-36):

Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.³

In this strange blessing, Simeon begins the thread of suffering and persecution in Luke. Interpretations of the sword piercing Mary's soul have ranged widely⁴ but it seems best to read it as referring to the pain

1 'the imperfect tense... indicates an enduring possession of the Holy Spirit', Mittelstadt, *Suffering*, 35.

2 Hur, *Dynamic*, 110.

3 Scripture quotations from the English Standard Version.

4 Bock, *Luke 1*, 248-50.

Mary will experience watching the rejection of Jesus. The image of the broad, two edged ῥομφαία sword leaves no doubt that this will be a painful experience.⁵

The canticles, prophecies and narratives of Luke 1-2 outline the themes that will be important in the life of Jesus and the early church as it grows and they are validated by the narrator's description of righteousness of the speakers and the filling of each one by the Holy Spirit. As readers or hearers, we cannot help but recognise that there are connections with the historic action of God in the Old Testament, inversion of the social order, salvation and liberation. However, 'Luke's story of Jesus brings salvation triumph and glory to God but also opposition, which leads to suffering and persecution.'⁶ There will be, according to Simeon, a theme of division and rejection.

Tannehill describes four ways in which Luke reveals his overarching themes and purposes of his writing. First, 'previews and reviews' of past or future events highlight their importance. Secondly, the use of 'OT quotations and allusions... especially those at major turning points in the narrative and those that appear more than once'. Thirdly, 'commission statements' give an insight into what a character will experience or do. Fourthly, the words of 'reliable characters' will provide insight and interpretation to events that Luke has narrated.⁷ Mittelstadt argues that all four features are found in combination here in the birth narrative⁸ and we will see them independently and overlapping throughout the Luke-Acts narrative.

While it is clear that the theme of suffering is presented programmatically in the prophecy of Simeon, it is hard to make a solid assertion from this one passage of a close link with the Holy Spirit in Luke's thinking. The role of the Holy Spirit in Luke 2 is to validate the words spoken and to highlight of the importance of the theme of suffering throughout Luke-Acts. We could take one step further and suggest that the Spirit has a role of *predicting* suffering. However, as we keep reading Luke, suffering and the Holy Spirit become much more closely linked.

2.1.2 Sermon at Nazareth

For Luke, Jesus' public ministry starts with his teaching at the synagogue in his home town, Luke 4:14-30. Jesus reads from the scrolls presented to him from Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...' Tannehill identifies this as a programmatic commission statement,⁹ but it also meets his criteria of scripture quotations. It sets the ground for Jesus' ministry; Luke records fulfilments of tasks that Jesus says the Spirit is anointing him to do.¹⁰ Returning the scroll and sitting down in the customary position of teaching, Jesus' tone changes as he discusses their response and the mission of God to the Gentiles. Clearly this is also central for Luke's programme of the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire, but it is linked with rejection and the first attempt on Jesus' life.

5 Bock, *Luke 1*, 248.

6 Mittelstadt, *Suffering*, 5.

7 Tannehill, 'Israel', 69-70.

8 Mittelstadt, *Suffering*, 44.

9 Tannehill, 'Israel', 70.

10 Mittelstadt, *Suffering*, 52, Table 1.

Initially, the hearers are ‘amazed’¹¹ at the power of his teaching but question his ancestry, whether his dubious family history could match the things he is saying. Their scepticism grows to outright opposition and anger as Jesus expounds his message of including outsiders and excluding insiders. He makes it clear that he is a prophet, linking himself with Elijah and Elisha. He tells them that they are no better, even ‘worse than Syrian lepers and Phoenecian widows.’¹² Jesus’ prophetic words ‘Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown’ are fulfilled as they try to throw him off a cliff.

At Nazareth, we see suffering linked to the *rejection* of the Spirit and Jesus. As a fulfilment of Simeon’s words, the actions of Jesus create a division between people and here it is directly the words of scripture and Jesus’ teaching ‘in the power of the Spirit’ (Luke 4:14) that is the focus of the rejection. For Luke, the themes of reversal of insiders and outsiders, and rejection of the Spirit anointed message of Jesus are to be developed later in the gospel and in Acts.

2.1.3 Preparing the Disciples for Suffering

In Luke 12, Jesus starts to teach his disciples on how they should live in the world and what they should expect when they do so.¹³ Jesus prepares them to share the rejection and suffering that he has already experienced and will experience more profoundly at the cross. In line with Luke’s missional priority throughout Luke-Acts,¹⁴ this section emphasises the importance of acknowledging ‘the Son of Man’ before men, fearing persecution, and rejecting hypocrisy.

There is a great deal of debate over what Luke means by blaspheming ‘against the Holy Spirit’ (Luke 12:10). It seems Luke sees this saying as having a wider application than Matthew and Luke, who place it in the context of opponents linking Jesus’ power with Beelzebub.¹⁵ Luke, by placing it in the context of mission and persecution, seems to suggest that denying the work and power of the Spirit is more critical than speaking against Jesus himself.

The next two verses are not directly linked to the blasphemy saying, but still in the context of acknowledging Jesus before others. Starting with ‘whenever’ makes it sound like a common occurrence to expect arrest and interrogation before councils, rulers and authorities. But the role of the Spirit in these verses is not so much the prediction of the persecution and suffering or even the object of the rejection, for it is Jesus that is the focus of both. Rather, the promised Spirit will *support* the disciples as they stand in court, teaching them what to say in their defence.

11 ‘Amazed’ rather than ‘marvelling’ - Bock, *Luke 1*, 414.

12 Bock, *Luke 1*, 419.

13 Bock, *Luke 2*, 1129; Tannehill, *Unity 1*, 240.

14 Tannehill, *Unity 1*, 1-2.

15 Bock, *Luke 2*, 1142-1143.

2.1.4 Conclusion

We have identified three themes in Luke that we will see developed in the Acts of the Apostles. Suffering is the result of the Spirit anointed message of Jesus being rejected. The Spirit is involved in predicting the suffering to come and in supporting the messengers as they share the gospel.

2.2 Acts

2.2.1 Peter and John Before the Council

The first time we hear that the good news has been rejected is in Acts 4, as Peter and John are arrested and taken before the Sanhedrin because of their preaching. In a clear fulfilment of the promise of Luke 12:12, as Peter stands up before the ‘rulers of the people and scribes’, he is filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 8). As the leaders listen, they are astonished at the boldness of Peter and John and the power of their defence and recognise ‘that they had been with Jesus’ (v. 13).

As we continue through Acts, ‘boldness’ will be a theme that shows the presence of the Spirit.¹⁶ It highlights how the apostles have changed – Peter had declared his readiness for death and imprisonment (Luke 22:33) but failed to follow through with it. But now, after Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit, Peter does not fail and deny Jesus, but boldly proclaims him in court.¹⁷

Upon their release, Peter and John go to their friends to pray (Acts 4:23-31). In their prayer, they attribute the words of Psalm 2:1-2 to the Holy Spirit, interpreting them as a prediction of the rejection of Jesus and hence of themselves. But their prayer does not even hint at fear or complaint at the situation, no questioning of why they should be facing arrest at all. As they praise God and ask for boldness to continue their witness, their prayer is answered and they are ‘all filled with the Holy Spirit’ (v. 31).

Atkinson uses the passage to point out that the filling of the Holy Spirit was not just for the Apostles (like Peter earlier in the chapter) but on all the church¹⁸ - the whole community was filled with the Spirit, all of them ‘continued to speak the word of God with boldness.’ Menzies recognises the connection again with Luke 12 as he compares this passage with a similar Spirit filling of Paul and his companions after persecution in Acts 13:52. He describes the event as ‘the Spirit comes on upon a persecuted band of disciples in order to equip them with boldness for the task of mission’, suggesting that both passages were ‘penned... with the promise of Luke 12:12 in mind.’¹⁹

2.2.2 Apostles Arrested Again

It is not long in Luke’s narrative before opposition rises up again in Acts 5. In a jealous response to the ‘signs and wonders’ performed by the apostles and the conversions to Jesus, the High Priest has the apostles thrown in jail. When an angel sets them free, they go back to the temple to preach and are taken back to the council to be questioned. Peter names the Holy Spirit as a fellow witness to the exultation of the executed

¹⁶ Dunn, *Acts*, 70.

¹⁷ Tannehill, *Unity 2*, 70.

¹⁸ Atkinson, *Baptism*, 62.

¹⁹ Menzies, *Empowered*, 259.

Jesus, which enrages them (vv. 29-33). They are only calmed by the highly respected Pharisee, Gamaliel,²⁰ who dissuades the council from killing the apostles.

Here we have another example of the Holy Spirit being linked to the rejection of Jesus. The council are angry at hearing both of Jesus the Messiah and the Holy Spirit who witnesses through the signs and wonders performed, alongside the apostles' teaching. The 'redundancy' of repetitions highlight to us that we are to expect to see things like this though the rest of the narrative of Acts; they set 'patterns of behaviour' of what we should expect an apostle or another spirit-filled character to face.²¹

Mittelstadt highlights the fulfilment in Acts 4-5 of the predictions of persecution that Jesus made in Luke's gospel.²² The increasing threats are counteracted by the support of the Spirit. The apostles are warned against preaching the name of Jesus and they leave the council rejoicing that they are 'counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name' (Acts 5:41). The hint of Jesus that rejection and suffering would be a regular and inevitable result of witness is expanded to mean that they are doing what they have been told to, being faithful witnesses. The positive summary (v. 42) shows that, for Luke, the mission is on track.

2.2.3 Stephen

Luke repeatedly emphasises that Steven is spirit-filled, highlighting him to us as especially reliable.²³ His speaking and acting in the Spirit (Acts 6-7) is what results in his arrest and trial before the council. There, he embarks on a powerful speech designed to highlight the rejection of God's servants from the time of the patriarchs and Moses.²⁴ Throughout her history, Israel has rejected the way God has set out and the Spirit, her 'worship has always been flawed.'²⁵ At the climax of his response to the charges, he spells out their problem and predicts his demise - 'You stiff-necked people... you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.' (Acts 7:51-52). Steven links himself with the rejection of the prophets, especially Moses, and Jesus, 'the Righteous One'. Here, as in Luke 4, we see the rejection of the Spirit and his message.

Steven sees a vision of 'the Son of Man', which helps us connect the Spirit in him with the promise of Luke 12.²⁶ As he speaks and later is dragged out to be killed, the Spirit is there, supporting him. Luke goes out of his way to show to us that Steven, the first martyr to die witnessing to Jesus, is blessed and that his death is not a failure or a mistake. As we will see with Ananias and Paul, visions are a fulfilment of the Acts 2 sermon of Peter and Joel's words, that in the Spirit's outpouring '... your young men will see visions ...'²⁷ This endorsement of Steven is further enhanced by his dying words that echo Jesus' use of the same Psalm

20 Dunn, *Acts*, 72.

21 Tannehill, *Unity* 2, 75.

22 Both Luke 12 and 21:10-19 - Mittelstadt, *Suffering*, 98-99.

23 Mittelstadt, *Suffering*, 103-104.

24 Mittelstadt, *Suffering*, 106-108.

25 Dunn, *Acts*, 90.

26 Tannehill, *Unity* 1, 245.

27 Hur, *Dynamic*, 105.

on the cross (Luke 23:46, Psalm 31:5). Luke wants us to see that the death of Steven and any martyr is an example of good witness and in no way a failure. It is in fact a fulfilment of a promise of Jesus.

2.2.4 Paul's commission

We first meet Saul, who would later be called Paul, at the stoning of Steven in Acts 7. Chapter 8 tells us of the furious persecution he unleashed on the church in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, but Acts 9 tells us of his conversion (as does 22:6-16, 26:12-18). The emphases of the three re-tellings show us that Luke intends the story to be 'principally an account of Paul's commissioning as a missionary'²⁸ rather than a pattern for normal conversions.²⁹ As Ananias lays his hands on Saul, he says that he has come 'so that you may ... be filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 9:17), but we are told a little of the commission that Saul is receiving - a reversal of the fears of Ananias and of the persecution that Saul had meant to bring to Damascus.³⁰

...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. (Acts 9:15-16)

There are dimensions of an *apologia* in Luke-Acts – for Jesus, the church and the imprisoned Paul.³¹ In light of that, Luke may be aiming to show that the persecution and suffering that Paul faces is with him from the outset of his mission, even before, in his commissioning. This commission acts as a preview of the trials at the end of Acts,³² and as we have discussed previously, the vision Ananias sees and his description in Acts 22:12 as 'a devout man according to the law' validates him as a reliable source in Luke's narrative. We can be certain that this commission is from God, that it has a wide scope and that it will certainly involve the kind of persecution that Saul had meted out on the church previously.

2.2.5 Paul and the Ephesian elders

The rejection and persecution of Paul is seen throughout the book of Acts, but his speech to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17-38) gives a clear summary of how it is to be understood. Paul makes it clear that his suffering is due to the rejection of the message he bears, but the Holy Spirit is not highlighted as the source of the message. Rather, the Spirit both constrains Paul to go to Jerusalem and warns him of the suffering he will face there (vv. 22-23).

Like the previous passage we examined, the Spirit is shown as having a directing and commissioning role for Paul in Acts, setting Paul on a path of suffering because of the rejection of the message of Jesus. The support of the Spirit in that suffering is not mentioned here, but his role in predicting suffering is seen again.

28 Menzies, *Empowered*, 214.

29 Tannehill, *Unity 2*, 118-9.

30 Tannehill, *Unity 2*, 117.

31 Witherington, *Acts*, 73.

32 Tannehill, *Unity 2*, 118.

2.2.6 Conclusion

We have seen the same themes of prediction, rejection and support in Acts that we identified in Luke's gospel. The suffering that the church faced in Luke's narrative was always as a result of their sharing of the gospel, and as promised by Jesus, the Spirit supported them, making them bold to keep up their witness even to death. One new theme is the Spirit's commissioning of Saul/Paul to a missionary life especially marked by suffering. Suffering is a mark of righteousness and obedience to the Spirit, not of failure.

3 Suffering and the Spirit in the Pauline Epistles

As we distinguish between Paul the character in Luke's narrative and the Paul who is the author of many of the epistles in the New Testament, we must explore the different emphases that Paul has when he writes describing his suffering and the Spirit's role in it.

3.1 2 Corinthians

It is easy to see that one of the main themes of Paul's second canonical letter to the Corinthian church is his suffering. In 2 Corinthians, Paul sets out how his apparent weakness and fallibility is in fact a glory to him because of Christ and the Spirit. The link between his suffering and the Spirit is clearest in chapters 2 to 5.

Hafemann's exegesis of the suffering and Spirit themes in 2 Corinthians focusses on 2 Cor 2:14-3:3, a passage where Paul is justifying his apostolic ministry in similar inverted terms to his 'boasting' in chapters 11-12, revelling in his weakness, suffering and death. Using the apostolic 'we',³³ Paul paints a picture of himself being led as a slave in a Roman triumphal parade. He is presented as 'the victim of defeat',³⁴ a captured slave being led to death by the triumphant Christ. The triumph was a ritual celebration of the victory of a general that both glorified him and presented thanks to the deity who had given the victory,³⁵ culminating in the sacrifice or execution of the prisoners of war.³⁶ Paul is used to spread the 'fragrance of the knowledge of [Christ] everywhere', like the incense from an offering. In fact Paul describes himself as a sacrificial aroma, a hint to the Old Testament sacrificial system.³⁷ Paul continues his description of his apostolic ministry by discussing his work in Corinth. His 'sincere' work among them means that they do not need 'letters of recommendation' for his authority to be accepted by the church. The only letters they need are themselves – 'written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God' (2 Cor 3:3).

Paul's apostolic ministry is characterised by affliction, sufferings and even death (2 Cor 1:3-10), the very opposite of the 'super-apostles' of 2 Cor 11:5 and the conception of many today of victory in the Spirit's power. Rather, Hafemann argues, his suffering and the ministry of the Spirit are the 'twin-pillars' of Paul's ministry.³⁸ Both his bringing of the Spirit to them with the gospel and his suffering validate him as a true servant of God.

33 Hafemann, *Spirit*, 15-17

34 Findlay, 'St. Paul's use of ΘΡΙΑΜΒΕΥΕΙΝ' in *The Expositor* 10(1879), 404 cited in Hafemann, *Spirit*, 19.

35 Hafemann, *Spirit*, 31.

36 Hafemann, *Spirit*, 36.

37 Hafemann, *Spirit*, 49; Harris, *Corinthians*, 248.

38 Hafemann, *Spirit*, 219-221.

In chapter 4, Paul continues to explain his message and methods in the context of this suffering ministry. The weakness and worthlessness of his physical appearance (v. 7, also 2 Corinthians 10:10) is completely contrasted with the treasure and power of God that is in him.³⁹ As he lists the trials and sufferings he has endured (vv. 8-10), the antitheses emphasise that he is delivered by God.⁴⁰ Verses 10-11 show how that happens – he carries the ‘dying of Jesus’ in his body so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in his body. Paul’s use of νέκρωσιν in v. 10 rather than θάνατον (which he uses in v. 11 for his own death) shows that he means to speak of the tortured process of Jesus’ dying rather than the state of death.⁴¹ The result of Paul’s identification with the dying of Jesus is the life of Jesus that is appearing in them. The Spirit that is at work in both is the same Spirit that transforming them into glory (2 Cor 3:18), the Spirit of faith. As Paul believes, he speaks, and that speaking leads to suffering and then to more faith, in a cycle.

The contents of that faith is the resurrection of Jesus (v. 14) and of Paul (vv. 14, 16-18).⁴² This resurrection is both a future hope and present reality.⁴³ However, the present reality is hidden, ‘unseen’, in the ‘inner nature’ - ‘it is precisely because his outer man is decaying that his inner man is being renewed day by day.’⁴⁴ As we move into 2 Corinthians 5, the eschatological hope of Paul in the future resurrection is guaranteed by the Spirit (v. 5). Because of the ‘down-payment’ of the Spirit, Paul is ‘always of good courage’, just as the antithetical list above showed.

3.2 Romans 8

We cannot examine Paul’s argument in the whole of Romans 8 in this paper, let alone the entire epistle, but we can look at the themes of suffering and glory in verses 14-39. Romans 8 is titled ‘Life in the Spirit’ in the ESV and in the early part of the chapter, Paul has set up the dichotomy of flesh/Spirit and talked about the hope of resurrection because of the indwelling Spirit.

Verses 14-17, speak of being led by the Spirit and his witness to the fact that we are children and heirs of God, ‘provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.’ Adoption was a metaphor that anyone in the Empire could understand, but especially those who lived in Rome. The adoption of an heir by the Emperor (‘the son of a god’) brought great joy.⁴⁵ Adopted heirs like Octavian (who later took the honorific Augustus) inherited not just the title and honour that went with the family name but also the struggles and battles (for example with Mark Anthony). In the same way, our adoption as children and heirs of the true God means we inherit the suffering of Christ as well as the ‘glory that is to be revealed to us.’ Our suffering is the same suffering as that of Christ, making our lives into a ‘cruciform shape’ which we are led into by the Spirit.⁴⁶

39 Savage, *Power*, 165-6.

40 Harris, *Corinthians*, 342.

41 Savage, *Power*, 172, see also Barrett, *Corinthians*, 139 who renders it ‘killing’.

42 Savage, *Power*, 181-2.

43 Witherington, *Corinth*, 389-91.

44 Savage, *Power*, 183.

45 Hoek, *Suffering*, 40-41; Jewett, *Romans*, 509.

46 Hoek, *Suffering*, 67.

As Paul's argument developed, we find creation groaning because of its 'bondage to decay', longing to 'obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.' We too groan as we wait for 'our adoption as sons', which is 'the redemption of our bodies'. The Spirit is the firstfruits of this eschatological redemption. This refers to the Old Testament ritual of offering the first portion of each crop to God in a gesture of thanksgiving and trust that the rest of the crop would follow. The Spirit gives a taste to us of what the redemption will be like, tells us that it has started and is a guarantee that it will come.⁴⁷ Our suffering here, like that of all creation, is not as a result of our missionary activity and the rejection of the message of Jesus which we bear but is a natural result of the broken sinful state of the world.

The graphic image of the Spirit 'shouldering the burden which our weakness imposes on us'⁴⁸ is the pinnacle of Paul's argument – the Spirit too groans, along with Christians and the whole creation. The divine takes his place with the creature, groaning in intercession on our behalf. This is something different to the support that the Spirit gives suffering Christians in Luke-Acts and Paul's identification with Christ's suffering in 2 Corinthians.

Paul returns to his family image in v. 29, speaking of those who are foreknown and 'predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.' That being conformed is linked to the sufferings of Christ,⁴⁹ but it is also to the glory of the eschatological hope that Paul has been writing of.⁵⁰

3.3 Conclusion

Paul, in 2 Corinthians, links suffering with identification with the dying Jesus and the resurrection life both present in the inner life and future too. This is grasped and lived through the Spirit of faith and comes from a life of faith and speaking of that believing. The Spirit acts as a guarantee of the resurrection life to come as well as transforming Paul through the cycle of belief, speaking and suffering.

In Romans 8 we have seen the Spirit leading those who are sons of God into suffering with Christ, a Spirit of adoption, testifying to their heir-hood. The children of God have a cosmic position as all creation groans in its oppression, as we groan for the eschatological redemption and the Spirit groans on our behalf, in our weakness. We have the image of us suffering with Christ and the Spirit suffering with us, all the while longing for the fulfilment of the resurrection. But Paul does not link the suffering with the rejection of the gospel message. Rather, in our lives we are an inaugurated taste of the redemption to come through the resurrecting life of the Spirit, as we act as the groaning voice of creation in her suffering and the Spirit does the same for us.

47 Dunn, *Romans 1*, 473.

48 Dunn, *Romans 1*, 477.

49 Jewett, *Romans*, 529.

50 Moo, *Romans*, 534-535.

4 Rethinking Suffering

We have seen some differences in the way Luke and Paul link suffering with the Holy Spirit. Luke, with his mission emphasis, has only ever described suffering and the response of Christians to it in terms of persecution because of rejection. The Spirit predicts this suffering, inspires the message that is rejected, supports persecuted witnesses and even specially commissions some to a life of suffering evangelism. In Paul's epistles, we have found that suffering can be a mark of witnessing and his apostolic commission. But in Romans, Paul expands the idea of suffering to include the bondage of all creation, including Christians, and the yearning for eschatological redemption.

Suffering in both Paul and Luke is not personal or individual. On the one hand it is because of identification with Jesus and the Spirit-inspired but rejected gospel; on the other it is because we identify with the groaning of all creation. The question 'why is this happening to *me*?' is not on their horizons. Either way, our identification with a bigger story in our suffering brings great hope, for the Spirit is with us. The promise of the support of the Spirit when we are persecuted is to keep us from being anxious (Luke 12:11-12). And as we identify with a groaning creation, Paul says that the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning when we cannot express our suffering in words. All the suffering we have explored is underwritten by the remarkable idea of a suffering God. We suffer with Christ and the Spirit suffers with us.

Rather than explaining away suffering, Paul and the apostles recorded in Acts think it is something to be celebrated, an honour. Persecution is a response to the gospel and rejection is what Jesus and the apostles experienced. The authentic response to it is thanksgiving and prayer for boldness. Suffering that is not persecution is an opportunity to join with the Spirit in interceding for the redemption that we hope for to come. The deep groaning that Paul writes about can only come from experience; it is a unique opportunity to join in with the Spirit's work.

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