



"You can only come to the morning through the shadows."
—J.R.R. Tolkien

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A Look at Christian Suffering (Part Three)

The apostle Peter provides valuable insight on the place of Christian suffering:

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward [God](#) one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps ([1 Peter 2:19-21](#))

Peter's choice of words makes suffering a *requirement!* God called us to emulate [Jesus Christ](#) in doing good, and because of the anti-God bent of [the world](#), some suffering is guaranteed to result from doing the right thing. It often offends our sense of justice to see the wicked prospering while the righteous endure hardship and grief. In the long term, God's justice will be served, but in the meantime, we may need to adjust our expectations for leading a comfortable or easy life. If we have been called by God, we must follow the example of Christ, which epitomized unjust suffering while always doing good.

Later, Peter returns to suffering, but this time the subject is suffering in general and not specifically religious persecution:

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from [sin](#), that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. ([1 Peter 4:1-2](#))

He suggests that, since Christ suffered for us, we should put on this attitude as we would a piece of armor. This attitude or guiding principle has a couple of elements. One is that Jesus was so determined to do the Father's will that, after He drank of the cup, He suffered rather than turn back for the sake of self-preservation. Thus, in our own lives, we must also have the attitude that the Father's will is what matters the most. If doing His will leads to some sort of suffering, then we are sharing the fellowship of Christ's suffering.

A second element is the relationship between suffering and sin. In verse 2, Peter points out that suffering is a way for us to cease from sin. Just as our sins caused Jesus to suffer so we could have life, so our sins and those of others will lead to suffering in our lives and in those around us. Yet, if we approach that suffering with faith—that is, with belief, trust in God, and obedience—then our suffering can be used to a good end. The presence of suffering reveals that at some point God's royal law of liberty—His perfect law of love—has been transgressed, thus suffering can serve as a powerful teaching tool to increase our understanding of how God wants us to live.

Sometimes our suffering has little to do with what we believe, and it may not even be directly related to an action or failing on our part. It may be what we consider "undeserved." However, if we commit ourselves to Him who judges righteously, and He decides that we must drink from this cup, we can trust that the suffering will accomplish good somewhere, at some time, even as Christ's wholly undeserved suffering has accomplished an overwhelming amount of good.

Maybe it will teach us an aspect of God's way that we could not learn from simply reading about it. Perhaps it will allow us to identify more closely with our Savior. It may allow us to sympathize with another member of His Body in his suffering. It could be a means to test our trust in Him or even a way that He has decided to keep us humble and submissive to Him.

Whatever the reason—and we may never fully understand it in this life—if we approach it with [faith](#), we can trust that God will strengthen us as we suffer and He will cause the circumstance to bear good fruit. Part of that fruit will be abhorrence of whatever sin caused the suffering, and in this way, part of God's law will be written indelibly on our hearts. Part of the New Covenant, which He signed with His own blood, is that He promises to write His law on our hearts. Therefore, part of our keeping of the covenant is to allow Him to keep those terms and to trust Him as He faithfully carries out His work in us.

Even though what we suffer can, at times, weigh us down tremendously and threaten to overwhelm us, approaching it in faith provides a couple of answers. [I Corinthians 10:13](#) states, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

"Temptation" should not be limited to simply an encouragement to break one of the Ten Commandments. While that is included, there are other temptations, such as those to let down in our walk with God or to jettison the faith, [hope](#), and love we have been given. When pressure mounts, we are often tempted to compromise—not to do what we know to be right and good—to get some relief.

At times, the Greek word translated as "temptation" can imply "adversity"—suffering! Yet, as Paul explains, God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, especially if He is supplying the spiritual strength to bear it. Either He will make us stronger to bear up under the adversity, or He will make a way of escape. If we approach our adversity with faith, we can trust His intervention on our behalf.

Beyond faith in the moment, a long-range view will also help us keep suffering in the right perspective. Simply put, it will not last forever, and what God has in store for us in the resurrection is far superior to what we are experiencing now. The more real God and His promises are to us, the more meaning Paul's encouragement in [II Corinthians 4:16-18](#) will hold:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary [affliction](#) is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (*English Standard Version*)

Yes, we are called to suffer—even seemingly unjustly at times—but all of these experiences serve a good and definitive purpose: our becoming glorified members of the God Family.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Faithfulness of God \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh, focusing on Romans 9-11 and Ephesians 1, answers the question often posed by Herbert W. Armstrong, "Why are we here?" God does not treat people equally. As Solomon once observed, all seems to be vanity and the same things happen in a cyclical, circular fashion. Like the Greeks, the Hebrews believed that things happened in repeatable cycles, but that time is lineal, and heading toward an ultimate purpose. Solomon, as diverted and confused as he became in his later life, losing a sense of purpose, nevertheless retained the most important aspect of God's instruction, "Fear God and keep His commandments." If we do not know the final purpose or outcome, we must push on regardless, taking care how we conduct our lives. We have to know the will of God, enabling us to form a reciprocal relationship with Him. God has a very real concern for us, promising to never leave us. We have to strongly believe this promise of His faithfulness, making an effort to build a relationship with Him in meditation, prayer, and Bible study, spending quantity and quality time with Him. God knows each of us by name, considering us His special treasures. We are here now (the Israel of God, a group who has remained faithful to God's covenant unlike physical Israel, who broke the covenant of God) because God did what He did and elected us to this opportunity.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Faith to Face Our Trials](#)

by Pat Higgins

Life sometimes seems to be one trial after another. However, Pat Higgins asserts that God has revealed an astounding facet of our relationship with Him that should give us the faith to soldier on despite our many trials.

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