

*To endure suffering, Christians should treasure the gospel, share in the hardships it brings, meditate on “portraits” of faithfulness, and above all remember Jesus Christ and his chosen ones. To gain this eternal perspective, start by adopting Paul’s trustworthy saying on suffering.*

**Introduction** – First verse of the hymn “In Christ Alone.”

## **I. Treasure the Gospel Message**

### **A. Be strengthened by Christ’s grace (v. 1)**

No one ever found the strength to suffer for anything without first treasuring that thing. For your strength to withstand suffering, you must treasure something outside you, something bigger than you. As Paul attempts to encourage Timothy, he points him away from his natural characteristics (weak, timid, ashamed, youngish) to Christ and his grace. It is so important that we remind ourselves of grace every time we hear biblical encouragements to do something. Because if you don’t start with Christ’s grace you’ll try to find strength in yourself. As proud sinners we’re all prone to do this.

### **B. Entrust the “good deposit” to faithful teachers (v. 2; 2 Tim 1:14)**

Every church member must be able to identify people who are qualified to lead in stewarding the gospel. Ministry leaders and ordained officers are particularly responsible to treasure the gospel and hold it in trust for others. Because it belongs to God, no one but God has the right to change it, to claim authorship of it, or to definitively explain it apart from the Bible. Christians receive it as stewards receive the owner’s estate to manage.

## **II. Meditate on Faithful Examples**

### **A. Meaningful portraits (vv. 3-7)**

*1. Good soldier* (vv. 3-4). When a soldier enlists in the military he signs up for a particular job. And when that soldier deploys he should avoid being distracted by civilian life with its everyday matters. A good soldier does not get entangled in such things because they keep him from obeying his orders and pleasing his enlisting officer. Here Paul calls Timothy to be a good soldier, to shun everything that distracts him from his calling as a pastor, preacher, and Christian in order to pay intense attention to Christ.

*2. Disciplined athlete* (v. 5). The Olympics were a very important event to the Greeks, and they paid careful attention to whether the athletes kept the rules of competition. If an athlete broke a rule during a contest, he was disqualified. Moreover, there were athletic rules that even regulated training. An athlete could not cheat before the competition. So what does the athlete portrait show us about Christian living? Your duty is not depicted as one of leisure or spectator activity, but as fierce competition. To obtain the victor’s crown and not become disqualified, rigorous training is necessary, even required (cf. 1 Cor 9:24-27). Notice in this imagery that competing according to the rules involves suffering. Mark this well: without the willingness to suffer for Jesus, you will not obtain the goal God sets before you.

*3. Hardworking farmer* (v. 6). Contrast the farmer’s work compared to the soldier’s and athlete’s. Their reward is honor and glory. The farmer’s task is downright prosaic. Why does he do it? For the hope of the harvest (Dt 20:6; Prov 27:18). Farming is hard work, but the disappointments are framed by the many rewards. So also the longsuffering and unselfish Christian understands the blessing of suffering for Jesus’ sake, looking forward in hope to the

first share of his crop. The Christian's harvest is the enjoyment of seeing the gospel produce redemptive change in the lives of those who believe (Rom 1:13; Phil 1:22, 24). Holiness is also a harvest of righteousness (2 Cor 9:10; Jas 3:18). Holiness requires strenuous effort, even suffering, for the Christian. When it comes to becoming more like Jesus, the saying is true: no pain, no gain.

#### **B. The Apostle Paul (vv. 9-10)**

His strength comes from the gospel because he knows his own suffering leads to the salvation of others. Paul says he endured "everything" for the sake of the elect (cf. 2 Cor 11:23-12:10) precisely because he knows that God will, through his ministry, save some of them (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 1:11). Christians serve God with a confidence that through their laborious suffering God will save his chosen people. Your suffering is God's ordained means that others might receive eternal glory!

#### **C. Jesus Christ (v. 8)**

Remember Jesus! False teachers (such as Hymenaeus and Philetus; cf. 2 Tim 2:17) always distort the truth about Christ and the gospel. To remember Jesus Christ is to remember and hold fast to the truth about Christ, and to remember him as your Lord and Savior, not just a figurehead or example. Jesus is the God-man, fully divine (risen from the dead) and fully human (the son of David), two natures in one person forever, who died to reveal God's wrath upon sinners and who lives to forgive everyone who repents and believes in him. Suffering didn't defeat Jesus and it cannot defeat Christians either. Paul sets before Timothy the principle of humiliation before exaltation, death as the gateway to life, and suffering the path to glory. Jesus Christ is the best encouragement to your suffering.

### **III. Adopt a Trustworthy Saying**

#### **A. The path of suffering (vv. 11-12a)**

The first part of the saying speaks of dying and enduring with Christ. Death and endurance are parallel to each other. So "if we have died with him" and "if we endure" refer to Christians who have died with Christ in their conversion from spiritual death to life, and thereafter continue to suffer with Christ and for God's chosen ones. We die and endure together in union with Christ's suffering and death. But this dying and enduring leads to life and a king's reward. For the Christian, the path of suffering and death always leads to eternal glory. The saying is trustworthy. Put your trust in it.

#### **B. The path of giving in and giving up (vv. 12b-13)**

It's tempting to neglect the second part of the saying. Can't I just focus on the first part since it's more encouraging? No, because if you neglect the last part you lose the fullness of the gospel and become like the false teachers who gave up parts of the gospel they didn't like. In the second part of the saying, "if we deny him" and "if we are faithless" are parallel to each other. This is a warning against apostasy first and foremost, but also a warning to not give in and give up when you begin to feel intense suffering. There is also beautiful encouragement embedded between the lines in this second part. If you don't deny Christ, if you endure in faithfulness by his grace, you can be sure he will never deny you because he is faithful (Lk 12:8-9). While Timothy, you, and I are prone to weakness and wavering, Jesus is strong and he never changes. If we are faithless Jesus cannot respond in kind because he cannot deny himself. He is the Faithful One.

**Conclusion** – He who is the Savior from your suffering is also the Faithful One who will not deny himself by turning faithless. So we fear God and endure suffering, choosing the path of suffering, empowered by his gospel grace, to enter into eternal glory. When you begin to view your suffering through the lens of the gospel, remembering Jesus Christ and his elect to whom God wants you to give gospel hope, your suffering may not decrease, but you'll be able to endure it with humble and courageous strength.