

ENDURE PAIN FOR JESUS' NAME
(SUFFER ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL)

I Peter 4: 19 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Most of us don't grow in Christ and learn very much from good health, money in our banking account, and happy days. We enjoy these things, but these things do not teach us many lessons. Paul Brand, the missionary surgeon to India, wrote in his masterful book, "The Gift of Pain," "I have come to see that pain and pleasure come to us not as opposites, but as Siamese twins, strangely joined and intertwined. Nearly all my memories of acute happiness, in fact, involve some element of pain or struggle." William F. Buckley said, "As an old man, looking back on one's life, it strikes you most forcibly—that the only thing that's taught one anything is suffering. Not success, not happiness, not anything like that. The only thing that really teaches one what life's about is suffering." C. S. Lewis noted, "Trials are not an elective in the Christian life; they are a required course."

In the region to which Peter was writing, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, there were at least 10 Gospel preaching churches in the early days before these churches planted other churches. In these areas, Jews that rejected Jesus persecuted the saints. The Roman government saw the Christians as a Jewish sect, and as atheists, since they refused to confess that Caesar was Lord. These Bible believing, born again saints would not worship Rome's foreign gods. Under Nero and other emperors of Rome, persecution was often intense. Without trials, there can never be maturity. God uses trials, pain, suffering, and discipline in our lives as believers to grow us, and to yield to His glory which is pain's intended result. In I Peter 4: 12, Peter says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." Was Peter not preparing these churches as a true shepherd for what was to come soon? Was Peter actually speaking about Roman Emperor Nero who blamed the Christians for burning Rome, and thus he burned alive many Christians making them living torches to light the Imperial Gardens of Rome at night? Peter was certainly talking about real trials and fiery trials and suffering ahead that was real.

Hard times and fiery trials develop our character. Discipleship in Christ is tough. Suffering is a promised part of the Christian life, even painful suffering. Believers in many other parts of the world understand the place of suffering in the Christian life much better than many of us in America. Persecution of Christians this week include these headlines on Thursday, January 20, 2022. 'Seismic Shift':

Afghanistan Is the New Number 1 Most Dangerous Place for Christians//Another Christian Girl Allegedly Forced to Convert/Marry Islam husband in Pakistan// China Upholds Christian's 7-Year Prison Sentence for Selling Bibles, Christian Books//Christian Widow, Daughter Beaten Unconscious in Eastern Uganda// Christian's Prison Term Changed to Death Sentence in Pakistan//Three Christians, Jailed in Southern Mexico Are Released//Muslim Extremists Kill Six Christians in Coastal Kenya//Three Christians Jailed without Trial in S. Mexico.

Living for Christ is the best life we can ever have, and it always includes suffering. We cannot escape it. Most of us don't think or like to think that way. When trials come, we are often surprised and shocked, and we don't think we deserve such trials, but Peter implores us in I Peter 4: 12, explaining, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." Peter continues in I Peter 4: 13 to contrast surprise with rejoicing. He writes, "But rejoice, insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." Many believers are used to thinking and judging, that persecuted believers have done something wrong to be so persecuted or to face huge painful trials. No, I Peter 4: 14 explains the opposite. We read, "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of Glory and of God rests upon you." Persecution and facing hard trials are evidence of our union with Christ. My friend, Joseph Tson, a Romanian pastor, whose wife Elizabeth. opened the door for my first missionary trip of 3+ weeks in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania, Joseph stood up to Ceausescu's repressions of Christianity. He said it this way. He said, "This union with Christ is the most beautiful subject in the Christian life. It means that I am not a lone fighter here. When I was beaten in Romania, Jesus also suffered in my body. It is not my suffering (merely). I only had the honor to share in His sufferings." Moving ahead in I Peter 4: 15, Peter says, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer, or as a meddler." Peter groups 4 kinds of sins for which we suffer or will suffer. Three of them seem to be "go-togethers, murderers, thieves, and criminals/evil doers." The fourth reason not to suffer for is to be "a meddler," a gossip, a talebearer, or a slanderer—one who gets involved in the affairs of others where we have no business. A meddler is a self-appointed overseer of you and me. He or she barges into our lives where they are not wanted or needed. They make our suffering worse by what they say or do. Peter says—if you are suffering for being one of these four—don't complain. In every church there are troublesome meddlers who are on the phone, writing emails, writing on Facebook about things that don't concern them. Gossipers try to make others look bad to make them look good. But God the Holy Spirit knew what He was leading Peter to write. Meddlers do belong in the same company with murderers, criminals, and thieves, because their murdering is by character assassination. Peter hurries on to say in I Peter 4: 16, "Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him/her not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that Name, which is the name of Jesus."

Prefacing I Peter 4: 19, Peter adds, in verses 17-18, "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; (with you and me, in God's discipline He ordains for us, or in allowing our persecution.) Read on, "And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the Gospel of God." Quoting from Proverbs 11: 31, Peter paraphrases. "If the righteous is repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!" Peter says in I Peter 4: 18, "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" This background sets up our message today, I Peter 4: 19, "Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will, entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." Peter finalizes this chapter on suffering, following his explanations, by giving us finally three directives to follow as we suffer and endure pain for Jesus. What are they?

WE MUST SUFFER ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD IF WE DESIRE TO ENDURE PAIN FOR JESUS' NAME. (I.)

Notice in verse 19, that Peter is only talking about one kind of suffering and no other now. This kind of suffering is suffering according to the will of God. Sometimes we bring trouble on ourselves. This week I read a letter from a prisoner in Florida who read Ray Pritchard's book, "An Anchor for the Soul." He wrote back to Ray, showing he knew the difference in suffering for our own sin, and suffering according to the will of God. He wrote, "Pastor Ray, how are you doing? I'm writing because I have chosen the wrong road in life. I do believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I read my Bible, not like I should, but I read it. I also take the time out of my day to read "Our Daily Bread." I really enjoyed your book. It gave me a better path for living in Jesus Christ. I was raised up in the church but as I got older, I thought I knew everything. I left my parent's home at a young age. My mother is a strong believer in Jesus Christ. She writes me all the time with encouraging words. I regret my path I've taken, but I done the crime, now I have to do the time. The Lord has been on my side through the whole thing. I have given my life to Jesus Christ. Without Him, I don't know where I would be. I've given my life to the One and only friend I have. Through it all, I can say God has not let me down. Truly yours, Gibrian." So, think with me about suffering according to the will of God.

Gibrian's grammar is bad, but his heart is according to the will of God. "I done the crime, now I have to do the time." God will bless any man, woman, boy, or girl who does not make excuses for our bad behavior. Gibrian started to suffer not according to the will of God, but today, his incarceration is according to the will of God. In the home for those of you children, teens, and college students who face discipline issues. When you admit you are wrong, and that you deserve and need discipline, even in receiving discipline, you are suffering according to the will of God. As adults, listen to me for a second. Did any of us grow up without pride trying to take us down? No, pride is always our enemy.

Some of us have sinned and come short of God's glory, but we forever bear the shame of our past; being so hard on ourselves that we forever punish ourselves when we remember our past sin. This suffering is not according to the will of God. When we suffer according to the will of God, we confess to God, to others as we need to do as well, and then weeping at the foot of the cross, we receive the gift of God's forgiveness, by thanking Jesus for paying the price for our forgiveness at Calvary. When we receive God's forgiveness, and live victoriously, even when the enemy comes to remind us of our awful sins in the past, we look to Calvary, and accept the tears again, not now as tears of shame, but as tears of thanksgiving to Jesus for paying the price we could never pay. That is suffering according to the will of God. When we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, that is suffering according to the will of God. When we hate the one who is attacking us or assassinating our character, that is not suffering according to the will of God.

Should we be called to die a martyr's death, that is suffering according to will of God. When God allows us like Job, to be refined in our faith and by fire, God is purifying our character, that is suffering according to the will of God. When we are

mocked for our faith, and we face issues at work that threaten our job because of our stand for Jesus, that is suffering according to the will of God. When we must live like Joni Eareckson Tada a life of suffering, and we take refuge in the Lord, seeking to honor Him, that is suffering according to the will of God. One mighty example of suffering according to the will of God was the mother of Dr. Paul Brand, missionary surgeon to India. He wrote of her, “For Mother, pain was her frequent companion, as was sacrifice...The rugged conditions in India, combined with many crippling falls and her battles as a missionary with typhoid, dysentery, and malaria, made her a thin, hunched over woman. Years of exposure to wind and sun in India, toughened her facial skin into leather and furrowed it with wrinkles as deep and extensive as any I have seen on a human face. Mother knew that as well as anyone. For the last 20 years of her life, his mother refused to keep a mirror in her house. She let God be her mirror so she could shine His light and glory through her.” Paul Brand’s mother kept faithful as a missionary unto death, suffering in aging, as we must all do, according to the will of God. Secondly,

WE MUST ENTRUST OUR SOULS TO A FAITHFUL CREATOR IN THE MIDST OF OUR SUFFERING. (II.) Notice verse 19a. Those who are suffering according to God’s will, must entrust their lives to a faithful Creator. Here again, Peter's confidence shines through. He believed, as we must believe with him, that God is in control of human history. The forces of evil unleashed against us as believers, can never go beyond the boundaries and purposes already established for them by God. Rather than fearing or complaining about persecution and persecutors, Peter counsels us to entrust our lives and our future to God, our Creator. If we will place our lives in His hands, we need not worry about what comes our way. God holds the deposit of ourselves in safe keeping—in the nail-scarred palms of His hands. He will care for us for our ultimate good.

The phrase, “entrust or commit your souls to Him is a technical Greek word, used for leaving money on deposit with a trusted friend. Such a trust was regarded as one of the most sacred things in life, and the friend was bound by all honor to return the money intact. The Greek word for entrust, **paratithemai** ought to be our directive and plan for life. It is the same word Jesus used from the cross as He died, when He said, “Father, into Your hands I commit/commend or entrust My spirit.” (Luke 23:46) We must entrust our lives as a sacred deposit with our trusted Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. When we as Christians commit our souls to Jesus, we leave our souls in a safe place. God is a faithful Creator, and we can surrender our lives as pliable clay to His hands to fashion us as He chooses. Peter tells us here that God is a Faithful Creator: So much of the agony we put ourselves through in times of trial and suffering have to do with our disregard of God’s faithfulness, or of His place as Creator. He is our sovereign Creator, with the right to do with us as He pleases. He is faithful, and He will only do what is ultimately best for us. This is the only time in the New Testament where God is described as the “Faithful Creator.” God wants us neither to doubt His interest or His love or His ability to help us in our times of being in the fire of affliction. Thirdly,

WE MUST CONTINUE DOING WHAT IS RIGHT IN THE MIDST OF OUR SUFFERING. (II.) Notice verse 19b. Peter again urges his readers to

continue to do good. This means by obediently doing what is good, we share in His purpose. God wants us to live lives of obedient holiness. That is the reason we were placed here on earth, in our marriage, in our family, in our school, and in our work. Regardless of pressure, persecution, rejection, or being ignored, our task remains the same. We must continue to do what is right! Chuck Swindoll says, "If we view life as a schoolroom, and God as our instructor, it should come as no surprise when we encounter pop quizzes and periodic examinations. Maturity in Christ is measured by our ability to withstand the tests that come our way without having them shake our foundation or throw us into an emotional tailspin." Vance Havner, that great Southern Baptist prophet and evangelist, who went Home to Jesus at age 84, once said, "At the Nicene Council, an important church meeting in the 4th century A.D., of the 318 delegates attending, fewer than 12 had not lost an eye or lost a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith. Judgment begins at the household of God and Christians do suffer for their faith-17

Today, God has called me to prepare us for suffering ahead, to prepare us for sicknesses that may take us Home to Him, for our spouse's funeral, for our child's illness, for company layoffs, for marital struggles, for infertility, for miscarriage, for relational strife in our extended families, and so much more. It's not a question of if, but when. Notice the "when" in I Peter 4: 12. God may desire a discipline for us to endure. If God wants to humble us, or to educate us, it is for His blessed purpose for which He created us. If He crosses our wishes or thwarts our efforts, it will only be because in His divine will, He is unwilling to let us ruin ourselves in purposes that do not align with His purposes. God is out to subdue our selfishness and self-will to lead us into Himself, so our lives are hid, with Christ in God.

We remain God's children when we disobey, but in our disobedience, what we must expect is that He must respond to us differently from when we were walking in obedience. Now He must discipline us until we willingly surrender to His will. That is His way of keeping us. As we repent of sin, God's keeping of us is so we entrust our souls to Him as He brings us back to holy living--to conform us to the image of His own dear Son. God's trying of us will make us come forth as gold as Job confessed in Job 23: 10. A clay pot sitting in the sun will always be a clay pot. It has to go through the white heat of the furnace to become porcelain. Oswald Chambers said, "To choose to suffer means that there is something wrong; to choose God's will, even if it means suffering, is a very different thing. No healthy saint ever chooses suffering; he chooses God's will, as Jesus did, whether it means suffering or not." Charles H. Spurgeon life verse was Isaiah 48: 10, saying, "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." Peter doesn't want us confused about our suffering as believers. As the hymn, "How Firm a Foundation states, "I only design thy dross to remove and thy gold to refine." Robert Leighton in the mid 1600nds said, "Adversity is the diamond dust heaven polishes its jewels with." Christians, we do not suffer because we are less justified. God doesn't tether His love for us to our works for Him. God's love is tethered to the immovable anchor of the Father's love for His Son, our Lord Jesus, and we are His choice Bride. Our glory is near!