

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

Well here's a news flash: as Americans, we don't like pain. If we're in pain, we don't put up with it. We've got Tylenol and ibuprofen for mild aches and pains. And there are oodles of prescription meds you can get to manage severe pain. Then there's cortisone shots. And did you know epidurals are not just for pregnant women about to give birth? I met a man who reportedly got a special epidural that could knock out his pain for up to three months. We Americans want everyone to be free of suffering "so they can be happy," as if that's the real First Commandment. Dr. Jack Kevorkian convinced a lot of people that it's ok to help someone else end their pain through an early death rather than doing the much harder thing—trust God while you manage the pain and wait for his timing! Never mind that medicines can effectively control pain for at least 85% of sufferers. Never mind that God reserves to himself the right to end our lives when he sees best. We often act like we are God. We get to decide.

But a painless life is a pipe dream. Painlessness is unlikely on this side of heaven. The big cause? You guessed it: sin. As long as sin exists in this world, sin will result in many rounds of misery. Although we often bring trouble on ourselves, the suffering caused by others is even harder to

endure. Ask those harmed by drunk drivers or by illicit drug use. Ask the households dealing with severe cases of COVID-19 because someone accidentally shared the virus. Ask people whose reputations have been smeared through social media.

So what do you do when your pain can't be eased without going against God's will? In our text for today, the apostle Peter presents us with GOD'S CHALLENGE: SUFFER PATIENTLY. Peter is writing to a group of Christians who were undergoing persecution at the hands of their government and neighbors and spouses, none of whom shared their faith in Jesus as Savior. According to the context, these verses are especially for the slaves in the churches. Just before our text begins, Peter writes, <sup>18</sup>"*Servants, be subordinate to your masters, showing every respect, not only when they are good and kind, but also when they are unfair*" (NET). But all of us non-slaves also find this passage helpful when we want to suffer patiently, as God challenges. This passage helps Christians who get razed for not going along with wickedness. It helps Christians who go out of their way to what is good, right, helpful, excellent—and then are criticized for it. It helps those who are ignored or left out because it is known they are practicing Christians.

But this challenge is for more than just believers who suffer religious persecution. Most of our suffering does not, at this time, come from our being Christians. Much suffering comes from others who are just being selfish, like those who shop or park or drive or listen to music like no one else matters. Somehow it's become ok with people across this whole generation, age 2 to 102, to be completely curved in on themselves. In the family, parents suffer when children don't honor and obey them as God's representatives. Children suffer when parents are inconsistent in their discipline, or when they discipline harshly, or when they are lax in discipline. In marriage, one spouse suffers when the other decides to manipulate instead of ministering to their partner's needs. In the classroom students suffer when a few talk out of turn and make it hard for everyone else to listen, or when some students make fun of others to get a laugh from their friends. On the job, supervisors suffer when they get flack for trying to keep workers accountable; or employees suffer when the management takes unfair advantage of them.

Take selfishness out of the picture and you still get suffering from ongoing illness or chronic old age. No matter the situation, we need GOD'S CHALLENGE to SUFFER PATIENTLY as much today as the Christians did in the first century when

they were suffering for their beliefs.

But Americans don't like to see you suffer patiently. They advise you to get out, or hire a lawyer to represent you, or find a way to get even, or call in the reporters and go public, hoping that sheer embarrassment will stop the perpetrator. Please don't misunderstand me: I'm not saying God wants you to suffer and do nothing about it. Certainly, if you're being abused, get help now. But if you're not being abused, stay and work out a solution. Don't say, "I don't have to put up with this. I'm out'a here." Besides you can't always change schools or get a new job. And don't abandon your family. It's often the right thing to remain in your situation even though you suffer.

Peter gives us three reasons to SUFFER PATIENTLY. First, <sup>19</sup>*"It is commendable if, moved by their conscience to please God, people bear patiently the pains of unjust suffering."* In other words, if you are accused of something you did not do, perhaps even punished for it, deal with it patiently, just to please God. Never try to get even. Let God deal with those who harm you, in his own way and in his own time. He will. He always does (see Galatians 6:7, Romans 12:17-19). Be patient.

Here's a second reason Peter

encourages us to suffer patiently: <sup>21</sup>“*To this you were called.*” God has made it our calling in life to do good to others and, if need be, to suffer for it. Showing love is what we believers are to be all about (John 13:34-35).

“Who does God think he is, asking us to maintain such high standards?” He’s only challenging us to act like he did. That’s the third reason for us to suffer patiently: Christ suffered patiently. He didn’t retaliate. He didn’t call people names. He didn’t sass back. We want to be like Jesus. Think of a little child trying to walk in the footsteps of their daddy as he walks ahead? Since we get the credit for Jesus’ perfect life, God is challenging us to walk in Jesus’ footsteps.

Now it’s no big thing to suffer as a direct result of something you’ve done wrong. If you suffer a hangover... If you suffer a parking ticket or a speeding ticket... If you suffer poor health from too much smoking, sitting, working, eating... If someone puts you in your place because you got too big for your britches... If you’re short of money because you did too much shopping or gambling... who is going to erect a bronze statue of you for bearing up under pain that you deserve?

But what if as a parent you endure a lot of grief when your almost-grown-up children rebel and treat you with

dishonor. What to do then? It’s not like a spanking would work. So parents suffer patiently in spite of their efforts to raise wise children. They still correct and admonish, but they do it patiently.

Sometimes the shoe is on the other foot. In an attempt to solve future problems, parents or teachers over-discipline. Children still have to do what their parents and teachers say, even if they think it’s unfair or that they’ve been disrespected. The wise often learn to suffer patiently from childhood.

The courts can seem too lenient on law-breakers, but occasionally someone gets a “bum rap.” What do you do if you have been falsely convicted? You serve the sentence patiently and strive to please God every minute of your jail-time. That’s what Joseph did when Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him of attempted rape.

Even if someone twists your words so that it looks like you said something you never intended, or if someone misunderstands your actions as evil when in fact they came from a godly heart, **GOD’S CHALLENGE: SUFFER PATIENTLY.**

What could ever motivate you to take up God’s challenge? Consider what the Savior did for you. He suffered willingly as your example. <sup>22</sup>“*He never sinned, nor was [He] found to be*

*deceitful when He spoke.”* Jesus did nothing to deserve the suffering he underwent. <sup>23</sup>“*When others [verbally] abused Him, He did not abuse them in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten.*” What an example Jesus set for us! He took up God’s challenge and passed with flying colors!

But Jesus is more than our example. He also is our enabler. Usually being an ‘enabler’ is a bad thing. But Jesus enabled us to follow his example. Peter reminds us how: <sup>24</sup>“*He Himself carried our sins in His body on the cross... By his wounds, by his suffering patiently, you have been healed.*” Did you hear that good news? Jesus has taken all our sins on himself, including the times we got even or pouted or talked back or called names or assassinated character—Jesus carried all that away from us. Now we are free to SUFFER PATIENTLY just like he did. When we are suffering, Jesus wants us to think of his Good Friday suffering and say, “Mine isn’t near as bad as his. I’m going to bear up under this, patiently, like Jesus did, because I know it pleases my God.”

As often as we fall short of this challenge, we remember that through Jesus’ suffering, we’ve been forgiven. When we act like sheep and wander away—... You know how sheep wander, don’t you? They get their noses buried down in the luscious green grass as they move around, eating

without looking where they’re going, and before they know it, they clatter over a cliff, or bumble into a bramble bush, or blunder near a hungry predator. So sheep need a shepherd to think for them while they eat. The shepherd walks around keeping them together and safe. | We are like sheep. We get so wrapped up in our day-to-day responsibilities that, before we know it, we’ve wandered away from God again. God could say, “I’m tired of rescuing that one.” But instead Jesus comes looking for us. He finds us and brings us back to him through someone who helps us see our wrong and leads us to repent of our sins. He cares enough to do this for us again and again, now that he’s invested his life and death in us. The risen Good Shepherd watches over us every day, walks around us, keeps us together and safe. He does this through his Word as we read it ourselves or as someone else speaks it to us. This is the same Jesus who encourages us to suffer patiently, especially when we suffer for doing good.

God’s Word wouldn’t lay this challenge before us unless God himself were willing to help us. So then go forward in life with confidence, and suffer patiently. Do good to those who make you suffer. This is God’s good and gracious will for you.