

HOW TO SUFFER WELL

“Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:3). The Lord Jesus alerts His followers that they all will suffer (2 Tim 3:12) for the world hates Christ and so the world will hate Christ’s own (John 15:18-20). So how, then, must we suffer well? What should we as believers mark upon our minds and set upon our souls so that we would triumph and persevere through suffering?

1. Know your lot

Remember who you are. You belong to Christ: the Prince of Peace who came unto His own but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). Remember that if your Master has suffered so you too will suffer (John 15:20). Indeed, Christ has set the example for believers to follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:21). What is the lot of believers? What is the God-given, divinely-distributed portion for the people of God? It is to remember that Paul said: we have been destined for afflictions (1 Thess 3:5) and to not be afraid of what believers are about to suffer (Rev 3:10). The lot in the Christian’s life is suffering which produces an eternal weight of glory. If Christ, our Captain, suffered, then we as His soldiers can expect nothing less. If Christ, our Forerunner, has suffered, then let us embrace the same calling.

2. Follow your Master

Christ Himself endured the cross, despising its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2). He followed the Father in all things (Luke 2:49). Jesus relentlessly gave Himself to the Father’s will (John 4:34). The examples of endurance that God provides comes in Hebrews 11 as the author lays forth all those who lived by faith and gained approval through their faith. They all looked to the Lord Himself by faith (Heb 11:6). The Lord Jesus knew what it was to suffer for He Himself died and has come to life (Rev 2:8). He reassures the church in Smyrna that in their suffering, He walks with them and knows all about their tribulation and their poverty (Rev 2:9). Christ calls His people to follow Him through the course of suffering. He Himself suffered and has paved the way for all of His followers to trail behind Him with persevering resilience. Just as Christ did, all believers are called to be faithful till death and Christ Himself will give the crown of life (Rev 2:10). Christ suffered and then He received glory. So it is with every believer. No greater blessing could be given to a child of God than to follow Christ and suffer for Him!

3. Consider life's brevity

When the waves of life’s sufferings come crashing down on a believer’s head it can be difficult to see the sun through the thunderclouds above. Yet it is there. After the storm comes the rays of sunlight that beam through the blue skies. So it is with every follower of Christ who suffers. The thunderclouds of suffering — however many there may be, and however severe they may be, and however long they may remain — shall one day pass. This life of suffering and pain shall not endure forevermore. Indeed, those who endure and overcome in Christ will not be hurt by the second death (Rev 2:11). The bonds and afflictions of life are afflictions, to be sure, and yet they are pictured as being momentary, light afflictions (2 Cor 4:17). They are momentary. Yet Paul spent nights and days in the deep, with shipwrecks, without food, without clothing, running for his life, in dangers on the sea and on dry land. And still, Paul describes the life of suffering as *momentary*. Why? Because life is brief. We are here today and gone tomorrow. We are but for a brief moment. When a Christian suffers, let him affix his heart to the future certainty that, when this brief life passes, God will assuredly wipe every tear from his eyes (Rev 7:17). Life is short. Heaven’s glory soon comes!

4. Proclaim Christ courageously

How did the Apostle Paul conduct himself when he found himself imprisoned for the cause of Christ in a cold cell in Rome (Phil 1:13)? He assured the believers that his imprisonment has served to make the cause of Christ known *throughout the whole* praetorian guard and to everyone else (Phil 1:13). No one could shut Paul up! He proclaims Christ even in the suffering and endured confidently whatever Christ brought His way as a divinely-graced and providentially-bestowed opportunity for gospel proclamation. The gospel spreads through *proclamation*. It must be spoken. It must be declared. It must be announced. This was, in fact, Paul's ambition. With all boldness, he said, he wanted Christ as always to be exalted in his body -- whether by life or by death (Phil 1:20). When the Romans did put Paul in jail (in his first Roman imprisonment) he gave himself to "explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus ... from morning until evening" (Acts 28:23). Indeed, Acts concludes by stating that Paul spent two full years in his own quarters preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered (Acts 28:30-31). Let every suffering saint take this to heart. View the times of trouble as gifts from God's benevolent hand for you to capitalize on the opportunities to proclaim a most satisfying Christ that far surpasses the pleasures, comforts, and hopes of *this* world.

5. Look to heaven's glory

A day will soon dawn when every child of God will see his God in his flesh and shall behold with his own eyes (Job 19:26-27). O how the believer can shout with joy: "my heart faints within me" (Job 19:27)! The outer man decays and let it decay day by day. But the inner man, by God's grace, is being renewed day by day for the glory of God (2 Cor 4:16). All of this momentary, light affliction is producing for believers an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (2 Cor 4:17). This means that every believer who feels though he is drowning in the dregs of despair or in the iron-cell of abandonment must anchor his heart, his eyes, his mind, and his will to the divinely promised word that an eternal weight of glory is soon-coming. It's an eternal weight of glory. It's a glory that cannot be surpassed! It cannot be exchanged! It cannot be trumped. This weight of glory that God gives to His triumphant saints is eternal and unfading. Believers must allow sufferings to wean their hearts off of this world and plant them deeply in the next. Elsewhere Paul affirmed that all the sufferings of this present age are not even worthy to be compared with the glory that *is sure* to be revealed to us (Rom 8:18). Yes believers groan and long for that full redemption but, until that day, let suffering believers look to heaven's sure and sweet and satisfying and splendid glory. It is sure to come! Look for it! Hope for it! Anchor your heart there! And when the paws of the trials of this age seize, look to heaven's glory!