

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

“Feed My Sheep”*: *First and Second Peter
Lesson 5. Living for God

Why do some people have an easy time through life, and others have sorrow and pain? Or, to ask the question in a more pointed way, Why do good people have to suffer?

There is a phenomenon that it seems every sincere believer in Christ must experience. You must learn what to do when it seems that God is against you. Many in the Bible had to wrestle with that problem. Take Peter, for example, he writes: “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1).

As Jesus hung on His cross, everything was against Him: His friends had all forsaken Him, one had betrayed Him, another had denied Him, and His own people were crucifying Him, and it appeared as though the Father in heaven had turned a deaf ear against Him.

And there have been others, all through history: Abel served God faithfully, yet had to endure murder for it by his own brother; Noah had to endure 120 years of unrelenting sunshine without a cloud in the sky because he believed what God had said—a rain flood was coming. Finally in that last week as he and his family were inside the ark, his faith was severely tried as the people outside were laughing and ridiculing him—“where’s the rain, you fool?”

Abraham waits 25 long years for the fulfillment of God’s promise to give him a son through whom “all families of the earth [shall] be blessed” (Gen. 12:3), and then when the lad grows up a bit, Abraham is told to offer him as a sacrifice.

David, anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king of Israel, for ten years is driven into the wilderness by an insane king Saul, David apparently forsaken by God; on one occasion his own loyal followers threatened to stone him.

Jeremiah has to endure 40 plus years of continual rejection, only at the end to see his beloved Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed; more than once he was tempted to give up in despair.

Paul has a “thorn in the flesh” that troubles him; three times he begs the Lord to deliver him from it, and He says, No, Paul, don’t pray about it any more; “My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:8, 9).

And let's not forget Stephen: he realized the blessing of the Holy Spirit as he preached his last sermon only to have to kneel down and feel those stones pelting him.

And there are the Waldenses and other faithful Christians in the Dark Ages who served God and had to die as martyrs. What do you do when it seems God has forsaken you? You still believe Him.

We conservative Christians are steeped in the idea that we must be punished for our sins, we must pay the price. But the Bible teaches an idea known as the gospel, a concept of good news that says that Christ has already endured the punishment for our sins. He has paid the price, "exhausted the penalty" Ellen White has said [1], because "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). "His own self bare our sins in His own body ... by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). "Christ ... hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (3:18).

The suffering that Jesus endured was for our sins, the just for the unjust. His suffering included not only verbal and physical abuse, but death. The New Testament includes the concept that those who accept Jesus as their Saviour enter into His suffering and death. This concept can be described as solidarity on the part of the repentant sinner and his Lord—a shared identity, a corporate experience—a beautiful idea embedded in the 1888 message.

Peter says, "Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind" (1 Peter 4:1). The apostle Paul gives a similar admonition: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:5-8). That death is our death.

Having described the believer as having entered into the experience of suffering and death to sin in solidarity with Jesus, Peter then says, "He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1). Peter is not saying that physical suffering for the cause of Christ automatically absolves us from all sin. Rather, he suggests that we suffer corporately in Christ's suffering and that we die corporately in Christ's death. Because Jesus died once for all for sins (3:18), when we accept Him, we die to sin in solidarity with Him.

What does that mean for the suffering Christian? Christ has already borne our fate. The punishment is over. There is now no fearful looking for judgment; if only you can hear and believe this good news. According to John 3:16-19, the only thing you have to be afraid of, is your own unbelief.

We may think that our sorrows are not a fellowship with Christ in His sufferings; but they are. We can claim His participation. "God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the

glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as coworkers with Him. Not Enoch, who was translated to heaven, not Elijah, who ascended in a chariot of fire, was greater or more honored than John the Baptist, who perished alone in the dungeon. ... Of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor.” [2]

The secret is to discern wherein our sufferings are like His for us to share His sufferings, to sense how His heart is touched with the tremendous weight of grief around the world. Oh that we could long for Christ’s coming for His sake, not ours.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 340; *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 139.

[2] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 224, 225.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/WjoySwbWHMU>

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