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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“PROVEN IN SUFFERING”**

**First Peter 1:6-12**

{1 Co 1:18; Ro 1:16} Consider the cross of Christ. It **“is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to [those] ...who are being saved it is the power of God,” “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”**

? *Do we have faith in the Gospel of the cross?*

{Jas 2:19} I am not asking if we *give intellectual assent* to it. **“Even the demons [do] that – and”** they **“shudder.”**

{Mt 7:21} I am not asking if we *confess it* with our lips. **“Not everyone who [calls Jesus] ‘Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

I am asking: Is the cross of Christ **“the power of God” “to...us,” “for” us**, in *us* and among *us*?

{2 Ti 3:5} Or do we “[have] **a form of godliness, but [deny] its power**”? There are some who believe in the cross as historical event and theological truth – yet their lives are not substantially different because of it!

? This is not an invitation to judge others; it is a summons to examine ourselves. Does my belief in the cross transcend faithful doctrine and words of testimony? *Is the cross of Christ “the power of God” in me?*

✪ We have several criteria for self-evaluation, based on the documented impact the cross has on Jesus People. The one we are looking at today is faith proven in suffering.

If the cross of Christ is **“the power of God”** in me, then my faith will be proved in suffering.

□ Please turn with me to First Peter 1:6-12.

■ In verse 6 Peter acknowledges the reality of Christian suffering: **“In all this you greatly rejoice”** he says – **“all this”** being the blessings outlined in verses 3-5 – **“though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”**

A couple of things stand out here.

✍ 1<sup>st</sup>, Christians are not exempt from suffering.

Π {1 P 1:1-4, 9} These are **“God’s elect... chosen”** by a work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for **“new birth into a living hope.”** They **“are receiving ...the salvation of [their] souls”** – and some of them **“have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”**

Π {Jn 16:33; 1 P 4:12} Messiah himself forewarned us, **“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”** Later on, Peter will advise his readers not to be **“surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come... as though something strange were happening to you.”**

✍ 2<sup>nd</sup>, Christian suffering is not unnecessary.

Many translations render verse 6: **“You may have had to suffer.”** What Peter actually says is, **“If it is necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.”**

LORD YHWH is all-knowing and all-pervasive. Nothing catches him off guard or takes him by surprise.

Sovereign God is all-powerful and in control. He has granted us freedom to disobey; yet no one can ultimately thwart his will.

The Triune God is kind and merciful and full of love. His intentions are perfectly honorable.

This is the same God who knowingly allows, and sometimes actively initiates, my situations of hardship.

Is the cross of Christ **“the power of God”** in me? If so, I will trust God that my suffering is necessary. Hardships will not destroy my faith.

■ Moving forward, in verse 7 Peter addresses God’s purposes for Christian suffering: **“These” “trials” “have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”**

✎ One divine purpose for hardship is to prove our faith.

Of course, God knows us inside and out. What is more, he has perfect foreknowledge. He has no need to learn about us through testing – but we do.

Some of us underestimate our faith. We are terrified that hardship will destroy us. Then it hits, and it hurts – yet we stand firm in faith. We need testing to encourage us!

Some of us overestimate our faith. We foolishly assume that hardship poses no threat to us. Then it hits, and it hurts – and our faith crumbles. We need testing to bring us to repentance!

✎ Another divine purpose for hardship is to refine our faith.

Peter *contrasts* faith and gold and says they are unlike. Of the two, **“faith is of greater worth.”**

{R. Dunn} Peter also *compares* faith and gold and implies that they are alike, in that they both gain value under fire. God allows, and sometimes initiates our fiery ordeals; but he **“is not an arsonist; He’s a refiner.”** Suffering burns the false faith out of us, and what remains is more precious by virtue of its purity.

✎ A third divine purpose for hardship is to win praise, glory and honor.

II {1 P 4:11} Christian suffering can glorify the Son and, through him, the Father and the Spirit. This should be our goal in times of trouble. As Peter writes later, **“To him be the glory and the power forever and ever.”**

Yet suffering can also bring glory to us.

Romans 8:17-18: **“If we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ...our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”**

Second Corinthians 4:17: **“our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”**

II First Peter 4:14: **“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”**

Did you catch that phrase, **“because of the name of Christ”**? All suffering is an opportunity for

the proving and refinement of faith – but not all suffering will “**result in [our] praise, glory and honor**” at Christ’s return.

For example, being scorned for witnessing in ways that are authentic, respectful and kind will bring me “**praise, glory and honor.**” Being scorned because I am hypocritical, self-righteous or obnoxious will not.

Enduring hostility in faithful pursuit of godly justice, mercy, and peacemaking will bring me “**praise, glory and honor.**” Enduring hostility to protect my political and economic interests will not.

II As Peter observes in 2:20, “**How is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, *this is commendable before God.***”

Is the cross of Christ “**the power of God**” in me? If so, suffering will prove my faith genuine, refine my faith, and win me praise, glory and honor.

■ In verses 10-11 Peter points to the model of Christian suffering. The prophets sought “**to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he *predicted the sufferings of Christ.***”

● {Mt 16:24} These “**sufferings of Christ**” are not only historical fact and theological truth: they are the basic pattern for discipleship. Jesus declares, in the clearest possible terms, “**Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**” A bit later in 2:21 Peter will affirm that “**Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.**”

Our calling is not to suffer for the sake of suffering, not to suffer by provoking persecution or imitating the Lord’s physical agonies or as a self-initiated act of noble sacrifice. “**The sufferings of Christ**” are exemplary because he entered into them selflessly, in obedience to God, trusting his Father to accomplish his perfect plan by means of his ordeal.

Is the cross of Christ “**the power of God**” in me? If so, I will follow the pattern of faith established by Jesus in his suffering.

■ Finally, in verses 6-9 Peter describes some the unexpected benefits of Christian suffering.

◆ In verse 8a he commends his readers: “**Though you have not seen**” the Messiah, “**you love him.**”

{1 Jn 5:3; Jn 14:15} What is this love? It is not mainly a matter of feelings; it is, first and foremost, **steadfast obedience.** “**In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands.**” Therefore, Christ directly challenges us: “**If you love me, keep my commands.**”

It may seem counter-intuitive, but tribulation does not diminish a disciple’s love for Master Jesus. Those who have been through the fire testify that the opposite is true: hardship actually amplifies our love for the Lord.

◆ Again, verse 8a: “**and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him.**”

We discussed this earlier with verse 7. Testing proves and refines our faith.

◆ And verses 6 and 8b: **“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” “You... are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy...”**

{Heb 12:1-2} Look to **“Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame.”** We rejoice in our suffering, not because of the suffering itself because of what Sovereign God is doing by way of our suffering. There are good works that our Father must accomplish through hardship.

{Php 3:10} Moreover, there is profound joy in innocent suffering because it draws closer to the Messiah. As Paul writes, **“I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”**

If the cross of Christ is **“the power of God”** in me, my faith will inspire greater love and obedience to Jesus, it will strengthen my trust, and it will give me inexpressible and glorious joy in and through suffering.

Sisters and brothers, consider the cross. **“To [those] ...who are being saved it is the power of God,” “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”**

Do we have faith in the Gospel of the cross?

Is the cross of Christ **“the power of God”** in you and in me?

May our faith be proven in suffering!