

Introduction

I have experienced many kinds of suffering in my life. When I compare my suffering to what some others have experienced, it is pale. For example, when we lived in Iran, there were Dutch helicopter pilots that would take my father to the different wells that he was supervising. I occasionally flew with him, so I got to meet some of the pilots. One of them had been tortured as a young man during World War II. They had chiseled out his teeth, and pulled off his finger and toe nails. They experienced very painful suffering. I never experienced anything like that.

In one chapter of my life, I suffered more emotionally. I worked for a greedy man, and we did not share the same core values. Although I wanted to make lots of money for him, I wanted to do it while providing excellent customer service. I wanted people to have a very positive experience with our company. I believed, and still believe, that satisfied customers will keep coming back, and they will spend more on accessories than they otherwise would. The owner was not concerned about how people were treated, or on repeat business. When people had a bad experience at our business, I felt horrible on the inside, but my hands were tied by his policies. All week long I felt beat down. I would get built up again on Sundays, but each Monday started a new round of suffering.

In 1989, this owner put together a team to play in the Oldsmobile Scramble, a national golf tournament, where every team had to have a minimum combined handicap of forty-three. The problem with his team was their combined handicap was about thirty-five, well below the requirement. They turned in high scores, and did not turn in low scores, and they artificially got their handicaps to go way up so that they could play together. I knew what they had done, and I refused to sign their entry form. I was told to sign the form, or be fired. That was not a difficult decision for me; even though I was under financial pressure. We had just used all of our savings to buy a used fifteen-passenger van. Our station wagon only seated seven, and Karen was pregnant with David, our sixth child, so we had saved up and purchased a van with all of our savings. With a large family, hospital bills, house payments, and nothing left in savings, I told him that I could not sign and verify their handicap. So, my employment was terminated, and I packed up my personal belongings in my office and went home. I fasted for eight days seeking direction from the Lord. Then, I played in the North Florida PGA Section championship. I was weak, and had not practiced in months, but the Holy Spirit strongly supported me. I ended up winning by several shots, and my name was published all over Florida. I also won \$4,000.00, which greatly helped our finances. I received a call from the owner, and he offered me my job back, a promotion to become the General Manager, and gave me a \$5,000.00 pay raise. I believe his lawyer counseled him to do this to prevent a wrongful termination suit, which I would not have filed anyway. I suffered unjustly for doing what was right.

In 1 Peter 2:18-24, Peter talks about suffering for doing what is right. He said that this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. He said there is no credit if we sin and are harshly treated, but if we do what is right and patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. I experienced favor with God when I suffered.

(1 Pe 2:19–20) “For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. {20} For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.”

There are lots of different kinds of suffering. People suffer from accidents, and many times, through no fault of their own. People suffer from sicknesses and diseases. Some suffer from debilitating migraines. Others suffer from gout, arthritis, and other diseases. My grandfather on Karen's side of the family suffered greatly from bone cancer his last couple of years. My daughter, Kathleen, suffered from leukemia. She did not do anything wrong. She was a sweet, innocent, six-year-old girl when she was diagnosed. She took care of foster babies that lived with us. She was just a sweet, little girl, and got a terrible disease, and suffered from it and the treatment of it. Many people suffer from cancer and other diseases. It seems that more people today are suffering from auto-immune diseases. I don't recall as many people having problems with food allergies and auto-immune diseases when I was growing up. I suffered from a ruptured appendix, and that was the most pain that I have ever experienced. For several years I suffered from severe back pains. I could not find a position where I was not in pain, and I would frequently cry through the night. God healed me on more than one occasion, and in recent years, I have not had any issues with my lower back.

We have been looking at how the Thessalonians received the gospel message. We saw in Part 1 that they received the word of God, not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God which performs its work in us who believe. We live in a day and time that people do not accept the word of God as the word of God. Even in the church most people do not accept God's word for what it really is. Most of the church, including pastors, do not have a Biblical worldview. We have a lot to learn from the way that the Thessalonians received the gospel.

1. **They received the word of God as the word of God – Part 1** (1 Th 2:13)
2. **They imitated the churches in Judea – Part 2** (1 Th 2:14a)
3. **They endured sufferings – Part 3** (1 Th 2:14b-16)

(1 Th 2:13) "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."

In Part 2 we saw that the Thessalonians imitated the churches in Judea. Paul taught them how the churches in Judea operated. The gospel he preached, and the principles he taught were in line with the apostles' teaching in Jerusalem. When he set up governments in the churches, he built according to the pattern of the churches in Judea. The Thessalonians received his teachings about the churches in Judea and they imitated them.

(1 Th 2:14) "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews,"

In Part 3, we are looking at how they endured the same sufferings as the Jews experienced in Jerusalem. We will define suffering. Second, we will look at the suffering of the Thessalonians and all believers. Third, we will look at the proper attitude in suffering. Fourth, we will look at the results from suffering.

They Endured Suffering

1. Definition of Suffering
2. Suffering of the Thessalonians and all Believers
3. Attitude in Suffering
4. Results from suffering

(1 Th 2:14–16) “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, {15} who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, {16} hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”

1. Definition of Suffering

When we think of suffering, we generally think of it negatively. We associate it with pain, anguish, hardship, persecution, and similar words. The Greek word that is translated as suffering is *pascho* (Strong’s G3958), and it is used ninety-four times. It means to experience a sensation, impression, or passion. Usually, it is to experience pain or hardship; however, occasionally it is used in a positive light. In Galatians 3:4-5, Paul asks them if they had suffered so many things in vain, and in this case, he is talking about the experiences with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had worked miracles among them, and it was by hearing with faith, not the works of the Law. Both the ESV and NASB have a note beside *suffer*: experience. The Galatians had experienced the work of the Spirit in their lives. But, most of the time the word *suffer* is used in connection with persecution, affliction, or pain.

(Ga 3:4–5) “Did you suffer (*pascho*, experience) so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? {5} So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”

I believe there are different types of suffering. Here are some of the types of suffering that people in the Scriptures experienced:

- Hardship (as a soldier): (2 Ti 2:3)
- Punishment for crimes: (Lk 23:41, 1 Pe 2:20, 2 Pe 2:13)
- Preaching of the gospel: (2 Ti 1:8)
- Proclaiming the word of the Lord: (prophecy): Ja 5:10)
- Righteous living: (2 Ti 3:12, 1 Pe 2:18-20, 4:19)
- Sickness or diseases: (Mt 4:24-25, 9:20, Ja 5:13)
- Spiritual warfare: (1 Pet 5:8-9, Rev 2:10)

There are also different categories of suffering. I believe that some suffering is according to the will of God. He allows us to suffer and it is according to His will. There is also some suffering that I do not believe is according to the will of God. For example, in 1 Peter 4:19, “those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” That implies that there is some suffering that is not according to the will of God. Peter wrote that we are to make sure that none of us suffer as a murderer, thief, or evildoer. I believe the suffering we experience because of our own sinful behavior or foolishness may not be the will of God. If we suffer for doing what is right according to the will of God then that finds favor with God. I do not want to bring on unnecessary suffering by violating God’s laws or the laws of the land. If I am going to suffer, I want it to be according to the will of God for doing what is right.

(1 Pe 4:19) “Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

(1 Pe 4:15–16) “Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; {16} but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

2. Suffering of the Thessalonians and all believers

How did the Thessalonians suffer? They endured sufferings at the hands of their own countrymen in the same way that the churches in Judea suffered at the hands of the Jews. The Jews killed the Lord Jesus, and the prophets. The Jews drove out the Christians. The Jews were hostile to all men, and hindered Paul from speaking to the Gentiles so that they could be saved.

(1 Th 2:14–16) “For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they *did* from the Jews, {15} who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, {16} hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”

Much of the suffering in churches in Judea was from persecution for being a Christian. Saul was guilty of persecuting many Christians. When Stephen was stoned to death, the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of Saul. Afterwards, a great persecution began against the church, and Saul ravaged the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women to prison. The churches met in homes, so Paul would find out where they were meeting and go after them. Many Christians suffered and were martyred for their faith. Paul knew too well the suffering that the churches in Judea had experienced because he had caused much of it.

(Ac 7:58–8:3) “When they had driven him out of the city, they *began stoning him*; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.... {8:1} Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. {2} *Some* devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. {3} But Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”

When Paul got saved, the Lord told Ananias that Paul was a chosen instrument, and he was going to bear His name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel, and that He was going to show him how much he must suffer for His name’s sake. Paul was going to suffer greatly for sharing the gospel.

(Ac 9:15–16) “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; {16} for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

When Paul came to Thessalonica, he faced much opposition. Paul, Silas, and Timothy suffered and were mistreated in Philippi, and when they came to Thessalonica, they preached the gospel amid much opposition. Paul suffered for the gospel.

(1 Th 2:1–2) “For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, {2} but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.”

Paul said that the Thessalonians had suffered just like the churches in Judea. When Paul, Silas, and Timothy came and preached the gospel, the Jews became jealous and took some wicked men from the market place and formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They attacked the house of Jason, and dragged him and some other believers before the city authorities. Jason and the other believers were baby Christians, probably less than a month old in the Lord, and they were already being persecuted. They experienced persecution from the very get-go.

(Ac 17:5–8) “But the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. {6} When they did not find them, they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; {7} and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” {8} They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things.”

Paul wrote that they experienced suffering from their own countrymen. Their own countrymen simply refers to people from Macedonia. These could be Jews and they could also be Gentiles. It appears from the text that the Jews brought some wicked men from the market place, and these evil men may have been Gentiles or Jews. This mob was not from another city or country; they were from Thessalonica, their own countrymen, and they attacked the Christians.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy left Thessalonica and went to Berea. When the Jews in Thessalonica heard that they were proclaiming the word of God to them, they went to Berea and agitated and stirred up the crowds there. These Jews were extremely hostile towards the Christians. If they went to Berea to pursue Paul, they most likely continued to be hostile towards the new believers in Thessalonica.

We do not know if any of the Thessalonians were put to death, but Paul said that they endured the same suffering, so it is likely that some of them were imprisoned and put to death. The Thessalonians were suffering for being Christians, and for sharing their faith. We know that the persecution did not stop them from evangelizing. People all over Macedonia and Achaia heard the word of the Lord, the gospel, preached to them by the Thessalonians. They shared their testimonies with others, of how they had turned from idols to serve a living and true God.

(1 Th 1:8–10) “For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. {9} For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, {10} and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

There is a teaching that Christians are not going to suffer. I have had some people in churches that I have pastored that believed that way. They believe that the Holy Spirit will warn them in advance about any negative situation, so that they do not experience hardship or suffering. Unfortunately, the Scriptures do not support that wishful thinking. God tells us in 2 Timothy 3:12 that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” That should be the desire of every Christian, to live a godly life. Therefore, we should expect to suffer persecution.

(2 Ti 3:12) “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

Jesus said that “a slave is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...” Jesus was persecuted, and suffered. According to His words, we are also going to be persecuted. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

(Jn 15:20) “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

When Paul was saved, God told him that he was going to suffer for His name’s sake. God was not warning Paul so that he could escape suffering. He was prophetically telling him that he was going to suffer for the name of Christ. It was God’s will for Paul to suffer for the gospel.

(Ac 9:15–16) “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; {16} for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

It was not just Jesus and Paul who suffered. In Romans 8 we find that the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, and if we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him. We are going to suffer as God’s children.

(Ro 8:16–17) “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, {17} and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.”

In 2 Corinthians, Paul wrote that the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance. The good news is that just as the sufferings are in abundance, so is the comfort of God in abundance. I do not think that there is a special breed of Christians in the 21st century that are exempt from suffering. Just as the sufferings of Christ were abundant in the early church, they will also be in abundance today.

(2 Co 1:5) “For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

When Paul wrote the church of Philippi, he said that it had been granted for Christ’s sake for them to suffer. They were going to experience the same conflict that they saw in him. All believers are going to suffer. The sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, and it has been granted to us to not only believe, but to also suffer for His sake.

(Php 1:29–30) “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, {30} experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.”

Paul told the Thessalonians in advance that he, Silas, and Timothy were going to suffer and be afflicted. Just as he had told them, it came to pass. After they had left and were in Athens, they sent Timothy to strengthen and encourage them in their faith, so that no one would be disturbed by those afflictions. Pastors need to talk about suffering for the gospel. Pastors need to warn in advance about suffering so that they are not disturbed by the afflictions. Pastors need to strengthen and encourage the saints in their faith so that they are not disturbed by the afflictions that come. The teaching that we will not suffer does not prepare saints, it gives false security. Instead, we need to forewarn people, encourage them, and help them have the right attitude.

(1 Th 3:1–4) “Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, {2} and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, {3} so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. {4} For indeed when we were with you, we *kept* telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.”

3. Attitude in Suffering

What should our attitude be in suffering? Here are five scriptural exhortations. First, we should have the attitude of Christ. In 1 Peter 2:21-23, Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example to follow in His steps. The example is to have the right attitude and responses when we suffer. Christ suffered righteously; He committed no sin and there was no deceit found in His mouth. When He was being reviled, He did not revile in return. While He suffered, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. When we suffer, we are not to suffer for wrongdoing, but to suffer for righteousness. While suffering, we are to continue walking uprightly. We are not to sin, revile, or threaten.

(1 Pe 2:21–23) “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, {22} who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; {23} and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;”

Later on in Peter’s letter, he wrote that “since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” In our suffering, we are to follow the example of Christ, who suffered in the flesh, but did not sin. We are to arm ourselves with the same purpose. The word arm is *hoplizo* (Strong’s G3695), and means to equip with weapons. Having the same attitude, purpose, and determination to walk uprightly in the midst of persecution is in essence, arming ourselves. Our suffering should be a reminder that we are not to live for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

(1 Pe 4:1–2) “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, {2} so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.”

Second, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus, who endured the cross. He is our example, and we are to fix our eyes on Him, and keep entrusting ourselves to Him.

(Heb 12:1–2) “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, {2} fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Third, we are to keep entrusting ourselves to God. We should press in and draw closer to God, and trust in Him to help us to endure, persevere, and get through it.

(1 Pe 2:23) “and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;”

Fourth, we are not to be shy away from suffering, but to join with Him in suffering. In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he encouraged not to be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, but to join him in suffering for the gospel. I believe there are many who do not share the gospel because of fear of rejection, loss of friendship, or persecution. Those are natural feelings, so Paul encouraged Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel. That is a word to all of us, not just Timothy. Don't shy away from being a witness for God; embrace the suffering.

(2 Ti 1:8) "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,"

Fifth, we are to rejoice in our suffering. In Acts 5, the apostles were put in jail, and during the night an angel opened the gates of the prison and told them to go speak to the people in the temple, which they did. When the Sanhedrin Council found out that they had escaped, they had them arrested again. After flogging them and ordering them not to speak in the name of Jesus, they released them. The apostles went on their way rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name, and they kept on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Their attitude was not to escape suffering; they rejoiced that they could suffer for Christ.

(Ac 5:18-42) "They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail... {40} They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and *then* released them. {41} So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name. {42} And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ."

4. Results from suffering

Why would God allow His children to suffer? Why would He call us to suffer? Why would He do this? There are a number of reasons for allowing us to suffer. In 2 Thessalonians, God tells us that when we have perseverance and faith in the midst of our persecutions and afflictions, we are considered worthy of the kingdom of God. Our sufferings are just a test of our faith. In Romans, Paul wrote that if we suffer with Him, we will be glorified with Him. The first result is that we will be glorified with Him in the kingdom of God.

(2 Th 1:4-5) "therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. {5} *This is* a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering."

(Ro 8:17) "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*."

The second result is that there are rewards. In Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith chapter, Moses endured ill-treatment with the people of God, and considered the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. There is a reward for suffering and enduring.

(He 11:24-26) "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, {25} choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than

to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, {26} considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.”

In Revelation 2, John speaks of one of those rewards; we will receive the crown of life, also known as the martyr’s crown. God tells us not to fear what we are about to suffer. When we remain faithful unto death when we suffer, we will be given the crown of life.

(Re 2:10) “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

The third result is we will be perfected (matured). In Romans 5, Paul said that we exult in our tribulations because it brings perseverance. Perseverance brings about proven character. Proven character brings about hope. Our lives are going to be changed and we are going to become more Christ-like through suffering.

(Ro 5:3–5) “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; {4} and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; {5} and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

In a parallel verse, James tells us to consider it all joy when we encounter various trials because the testing of our faith produces endurance. Endurance and perseverance are one and the same. The same Greek word, *hupomone* (Strong’s G5281), which means to remain under, to endure, or to persevere, is used in both verses. The testing of our faith produces endurance, but that is not all. We are made perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. The Greek word for perfect is *teleios* (Strong’s G5046), and it means to reach a goal, to finish, complete, or to mature. God’s goal for us is maturity, and the trials in our lives help mature us. If we lack wisdom, He will also give that. We grow, and become mature and wiser because of our suffering. The body of Christ desperately needs to become more like Christ, to become mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ.

(Jas 1:2–5) “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, {3} knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. {4} And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. {5} But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

What will produce this maturity and proven character? We need to be in the word so that we grow and mature. We need equipping. There are many things that help us grow to maturity, and suffering is just one of those things that God uses. He allows suffering because it helps us to become mature in our faith.

Christ is coming back for a pure bride, one without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. He is coming for a bride that is holy and blameless. He allows us to suffer because it is helping us to become that pure bride.

(Eph 5:27) “that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”

The fourth result is we will find favor with God. In 1 Peter we discover that when we do what is right and suffer for it, this finds favor with God. I have prayed for God's favor many times in my life. I love Psalm 67, because it is a prayer that God would bless us and cause His face to shine upon us. I want His blessing and favor. One of the ways that we find favor with God is through suffering for doing what is right. At the opening, I mentioned that I was fired for not signing a false handicap card for the owner. I suffered for doing what was right. God gave me favor and even though I did not prepare for the biggest tournament of the year, I won it by four shots. I lost twenty-five pounds fasting, and was weak, but I had God's favor.

(1 Pe 2:20) "For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God."

Conclusion and Applications

The Thessalonians suffered, just like the churches in Judea suffered. They suffered from their own countrymen, similarly to how the saints in Judea suffered from the Jews. It is not just the saints in Jerusalem, and the saints in Thessalonica, all believers are going to suffer. Christ suffered, giving us an example to follow in His footsteps. We are to have the same attitude as Christ had. We are to suffer for doing what is right. We are to suffer for preaching the gospel. We are to arm ourselves with the same purpose, which is walking uprightly. There is a cloud of witnesses that went through many different trials, afflictions, and suffering. We are to fix our eyes on Him, and keep entrusting ourselves to Him. There are rewards for enduring the suffering that God allows in our lives. Our lives become more like You. We mature in our faith and become the pure and spotless bride that You are coming back for. There will be rewards in heaven, and there will sometimes be rewards here on earth, particularly when we find God's favor for doing what is right.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for Your word. Jesus, thank You for Your example for us to follow. Thank You for enduring hostility so that our sins could be forgiven. Help us to have the same joy when we experience suffering. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on you. Help us to keep entrusting ourselves to you. Help us to encourage and strengthen one another so that we are not disturbed by any afflictions that we suffer. Help us to stand firm in You. Use the suffering in our lives to help us mature and be more like You. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

How The Thessalonians Received the Gospel – Part 3

Introduction (1 Pe 2:19–20, 1 Th 2:13-16)

1. **Definition of Suffering** (Ga 3:4–5) Hardship: (2 Tim 2:3, 1 Pe 4:15-19)
 - Punishment for crimes: (Lk 23:41, 1 Pe 2:20, 2 Pe 2:13)
 - Preaching of the gospel: (2 Tim 1:8)
 - Proclaiming the word of the Lord: (prophecy): Ja 5:10)
 - Righteous living: (2 Tim 3:12, 1 Pe 2:18-20, 4:19)
 - Sickness or diseases: (Mt 4:24-25, 9:20, Ja 5:13)
 - Spiritual warfare: (1 Pet 5:8-9, Rev 2:10)

2. **Suffering of the Thessalonians and all believers** (1 Th 2:14–16, Ac 7:58–8:3, 9:15-16, 1 Th 2:1–2, Ac 17:5-8, 1 Th 1:8–10, 2 Tim 3:12, John 15:20, Ac 9:15–16, Ro 8:16-17, 2 Co 1:5, Php 1:29–30, 1 Th 3:1-4)

3. **Attitude in Suffering** (1 Pe 2:21–23, 4:1-2, Heb 12:1–2, 2 Ti 1:8, Ac 5:18-42)

4. **Results of suffering** (2 Th 1:4–5, Ro 8:17, Heb 11:24-26, Re 2:10, Ro 5:3-5, Jas 1:2–5, 1 Pe 2:20)

Conclusion and Applications