

Must I Suffer In Order To Achieve Salvation?

Romans 8:16-17 says "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him." Does this mean that we must endure pain in order to achieve salvation? *Yes it does!* This does *not* mean however, that you must beat yourself with chains and whips. Suffering can come in many forms. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me'" (Matthew 16:24). Self denial can be very painful; it hurts to give up chocolate for Lent and it hurts even more to give up other selfish desires every day of our lives. Hebrews 11:24-26 gives a beautiful Old Testament example for us to follow: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; he chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. He considered the reproach of the Anointed greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the recompense."

Suffering does not necessarily mean that it is physical pain we must undergo; it could be emotional pain, or a combination of the two. Here are a few verses of sacred scripture which may help in this understanding:

- Philippians 1:29 says "For to you has been granted, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him." This means that we must live the life of Christ, doing what He wants us to do. In making these choices, it may be emotionally painful to lose friendships and deny ourselves sinful pleasures. Peer pressure can be most convincing, especially for the young, and doing what is right can be very painful. If the gang then turns on you because of your exercise of conscience, physical pain may also be the result. "In fact, all who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Timothy 3:12)
- "For whenever anyone bears the pain of unjust suffering because of consciousness of God, that is a grace. But what credit is there if you are patient when beaten for doing wrong? But if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps." (1 Peter 2:19-21) Although Peter is addressing Christian slaves, the advice also applies to us as we should all be slaves of Christ.
- "But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you. Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame our good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. For it is better to suffer

for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil." (1 Peter 3:14-17)

- "But whoever is made to suffer as a Christian should not be ashamed but glorify God because of the name. For it is time for the judgement to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, how will it end for those who fail to obey the gospel of God? 'And if the righteous one is barely saved, where will the godless and the sinner appear?' As a result, those who suffer in accord with God's will hand their souls over to a faithful creator as they do good." (1 Peter 4:16-19)

However, we are assured that our suffering will not be more than we can endure in 1 Corinthians 10:13 "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it."

As Paul so graphically put it in his letter to the Colossians (1:24): "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church". This doesn't mean that Christ's suffering in His Passion was insufficient; He perfectly accomplished the work the Father gave Him to do. What it means was most clearly explained by St. Thomas Aquinas "(F)or the merits of the Passion to be applied to us, we need to cooperate by patiently bearing the trials God sends us, so as to become like our head, Christ."

Christ did not do it all so we don't have to do anything, we must join with Him and live His life. "If we have died with him we shall also live with him, if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him he will deny us. If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." (2 Timothy 2:11-13) When we suffer pain, either physical or emotional, we should look to the crucifix and remember the suffering that Jesus the Christ endured in our behalf and offer our pain for Him to use as He sees fit. Simply say "Jesus, this is for you, put it in my pain bank."