

# Truth in Grace

Truth in Grace Ministries

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## Badge of Glory

**Suffering According  
to the Will of God**



# Badge of Glory

**Dan's Desk**

## Suffering According to the Will of God

**T**he Bible exhorts us to an impossible life. For instance, can you imagine stepping out of the security of your boat and actually walking on water? I have contemplated that possibility while floating securely in a boat for tourists on the Sea of Galilee and I have drawn the conclusion that it is impossible. I couldn't do it. Yet, Peter did. On that very sea, he did the impossible—he walked on water.

Now obviously, the word “impossible” is a relative term when Jesus is part of the equation. When explaining the virgin conception to Mary, the angel concluded by saying “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Over and over Jesus demonstrated the truth of that statement to His skeptical disciples and walking on water was one of those occasions.

Yet walking on water appears to have been a mere illustration of the fundamental truth that those who put their trust in Christ and keep their eyes steadfastly fixed upon Him can experience a life that transcends nature. Physically walking on water was never repeated as one of the miracles of the early church as recorded in the Book of Acts. As far as we know, Jesus and Peter are the only ones who ever did it and furthermore, only on that one occasion. But there are scores of situations where the Apostles and early Christians experienced power from God to live lives that truly transcended their natural inclinations.

I'm not thinking here of the physical miracles that were unique to the Apostolic age, although these were certainly events that also transcended the laws of nature. Rather, I'm thinking of the ability to defy human expectation and the natural impulses of the flesh to live a supernatural life to the glory of God.

Peter was a coward prior to the cross, a servant to his fleshly impulses. Even though he loved the Lord, he could not live above his nature. Yet, when empowered by the Holy Spirit, he was a different man. He was able to deny the flesh and live according to the spirit. We are surprised at his boldness and awed by his self denial. Actually, I think he had come to learn the lesson that Jesus taught him on the Sea of Galilee—through the power of Christ he could live a life that transcends nature. He could walk on water.

So, how about you? Are you driven by the impulses of your flesh, a prisoner of your natural tendencies? Is there something that drives you crazy with its stranglehold on your carnal nature – a habit you can't kick, a secret sin that has you cowering in the closet, a personality trait that causes you trouble in your relationships with others? “If only I could be victorious in this area of my life” you say, “I could truly live my life to the glory of God.”

Well, let's spend a little time with Peter. He had first hand experience in these things, you know. And his counsel is wise, as well as prac-

tical. Maybe he can teach us how to have victory over the sins of the flesh.

### Exposing the Struggle

Peter confronts us with our carnal nature in 1 Peter 4 and lays out a strategy for overcoming our natural impulses. In verse 3 he is very blunt in telling us what he's talking about. He says,

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousels, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

That's a pretty good list for starters. “Sensuality” refers to any area of indulgence whereby we seek to please ourselves (including eating). “Lusts” was a big problem in Peter's day and it continues to be in our day as our society immerses itself in illicit sexuality. Alcoholism and the power of drink comes in third and “carousals”, the practice of always being on the make for some personal advantage, is fourth. A partying spirit with its desire for fun and fantasy is also mentioned, as well as “abominable idolatries” whereby we give all of our time, energy and resources to the pursuit of things, indicating that God is not first in our lives. All of this is “the desire of the Gentiles” or the way pagans live their lives in order to fulfill their fleshly desires.



Now you may not be guilty of all these things, but most of us would have to admit that we struggle with at least one or more of the items in this list. Even though we are Christians, the flesh continues to war against the spirit (Galatians 5:17) and we find ourselves struggling with the same old sins. We may attempt to wear the mask of outward perfection, but deep inside we know that life isn't right. We long for change and for a life of spiritual integrity, but somehow it seems so illusive. The high standards of life in Christ appear to be nothing more than a tease. We conclude that the Christian life truly is impossible.

### A Ray of Hope

It may be encouraging for you to learn however that God never intended to leave us trapped in the prison of our selfishness. He made provision through His Son for us to be victorious in this area of life as well. Our sins are forgiven through the shed blood of Christ, but overcoming the tyranny of the flesh is another matter. Yet, Peter assures us in this text that it is possible to live the impossible dream. He says, "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" (1 Peter 4:2).

What Peter is saying is that it is possible for us to live the rest of our lives doing the will of God rather than wallowing in the lusts of men. This is not a promise of sinless perfection, whereby we enter a state of spiritual bliss and never commit another sin. Rather, it is a positive statement of confident hope that we can be overcomers with regard to the lusts of the flesh and truly live our lives to the glory of God. Now that's good news.

So, consider what we have so far. Peter has laid out for us a contrast in these two verses – an alternative life style.

Contrast	
(verse 2)	(verse 5)
What you can be	What you were
Unlike	Just like
Everyone else	Everyone else
"Will of God"	"Will of Man"

### So How Does it Work?

We've been putting this passage on backwards, like putting on a coat—you put the back on first, then you button up the front. Well, having looked at verse 3 and then at verse 2, let's see how Peter introduces the subject in verse 1. He lays out a strategy for success in overcoming the problems of the flesh. Let's see what he says.

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... (1 Peter 4:1).

There are three parts to this process according to Peter. First consider how Christ did it; second, develop a mindset like He had; and third, accept suffering as a part of the deal. So, let's look at each one of these in turn.

### 1. Understand purity in Christ

First of all, Peter wants us to notice how Christ handled the pressures of temptation. Ultimately, He wants us to have the same mindset that Christ had, so obviously we need to know what that was. Now remember, the context here is how to live according to the will of God and not like the pagan world. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of someone who actually did that. So Peter calls our attention to Christ and sums up His approach in one phrase—"since Christ has suffered in the flesh."

We tend to think only of Christ's death on the cross as the time of His suffering, but really, His whole life was characterized by suffering. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8, KJV). In other words, a life lived to the glory of God rather than to the lusts of men is a life that includes suffering in the flesh.

Consider just one of the temptations in our Lord's life—turning stones into bread (Matthew 4:2-4; Luke 4:2-4). The Bible says He hadn't eaten for 40 days. That's approximately 6 weeks. Years ago, several Irishmen starved themselves to death in their protest against British rule, and it took them 60 days to die. So, after 40 days Christ was in a severely weakened condition and very hungry, but not in danger of dying yet.

Now when He said "no" to Satan's temptation (that He use His supernatural powers to turn the stones into bread) he continued to suffer the pangs of hunger.

Victory over the fleshly craving for food on that occasion did not include relief from the suffering. Indeed He accepted suffering as His badge of glory, the evidence of the fact that He had won over the temptation to satisfy His flesh apart from the will of God. He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

The good news in this story is that shortly after He committed Himself to the will of God rather than the lusts of men, He had an incredible experience of angels ministering to Him. (Matthew 4:11) He was strengthened and encouraged by the Father's messengers of mercy and He had the wonderful joy of bathing in the rewards of victory. All of the suffering was worth it—incredibly worth it.

So, Peter first of all has drawn our attention to Jesus in order that we will learn an important principle of victory over the flesh—we learn obedience by the things we suffer.

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## 2. Commit your mind and heart to purity

The next thing Peter tells us about victory over the flesh is that we have to develop a mindset with regard to whatever it is that we are trying to overcome. He says, “arm yourselves also with the same purpose” (v. 1). The word for “purpose” here is the Greek word “*ennoia*” which refers to a thought or insight of the mind, and in that sense a calculated purpose. “Arm yourselves” means that we set up our defenses and prepare

to do battle with the particular thing that is troubling us. In other words, we develop a mindset that prepares us to meet the temptation.

Let me illustrate this from the common experience of dieting, or trying to initiate a lifestyle change with regard to eating. This is tough, and if you’ve ever tried to do it, you know how difficult it can be. But one thing I have noticed about my attempts to be victorious in this area is that until I get a mindset of refusing to eat the things that are bad for me, I tend to vacillate between victory and

defeat. If I simply try to meet each occasion of temptation with a resolve not to eat the accursed thing (which by the way, is extremely attractive), I will most likely fail because the fleshly craving is too strong. Yet, if I get a mindset ahead of time that all sweets and fat laden foods are poison, when I meet the temptation, I am more likely to succeed. It’s the mindset that makes the difference.

Now, that’s what Peter is saying with regard to all areas of fleshly indulgence. If you simply wander into tempting situations without preparing your mind for what will inevitably happen, you set yourself up for failure. But if you arm yourself ahead of time with a mindset of resistance as Jesus did, you will be able to face temptation with a victorious spirit, again like Jesus did. Preparation is essential—for without it, you’re dead in the water.

So, commit your mind and heart to purity. Determine that you will do what is right no matter what the cost—even if it means you will suffer the

wrath of your flesh for that decision. Pray and ask the spirit of God to strengthen your resolve and then decide that it is more important to do right than to feel good. It’s a decision of your mind over the cravings of your flesh—and, no matter what, determine that you will not give in. That’s what it means to have a mindset—and it is the only way to develop a lifestyle of victory over the flesh.

## 3. Accept suffering as your badge of glory

Now there’s one more thing to understand here in order to get a true perspective on what is happening. Peter does not hesitate to tell us that suffering will be a part of the deal. He says, “because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1).

Again, let me remind you that he is not talking about sinless perfection. What he is talking about is what happens when you say “no” to some fleshly craving. The result of doing that is that you suffer. The flesh does not roll over and give in just because you have done the right thing. In reality, it continues to yell and scream at you, telling you that you are depriving it of what it wants (actually, it will try to convince you that it is really what it needs). So, you will still suffer the cravings of the flesh, even though you are being victorious over the temptation. That’s just the way it is.

Consider dieting again. When you are being victorious by saying “no” to some sweet thing, the craving doesn’t go away, does it? In fact, the craving may actually increase. Yet, as you are persistent in your resolve so that you enjoy a number of days of success, the cravings tend to subside and the victorious life becomes a little easier. Eventually, eating the right things becomes a way of life and even a carrot starts to taste wonderfully sweet. Furthermore, the new lifestyle of eating right begins to produce a better life—you feel good about yourself, you look better in your clothes, and you have more energy to do things. It’s all very good and you begin to conclude that all of the suffering was really worth it (cf Romans 8:18). The temptation to cheat is always there, but the suffering isn’t nearly as bad. Here’s the point. As long as you are suffering, it is an indication that you are winning. Suffering, therefore, becomes the evidence that you have “ceased from sin” (you haven’t fallen prey to your cravings). In other words, suffering becomes your badge of glory. It says, “I’m a winner. I’ve not yielded to the temptation.”

This is not readily understood by most of us in the area of spiritual things. We have somehow gotten the notion that a victorious Christian life is to be equated with a blissful life with no suffering. We think that if we please God, He is obligated to make life pleasing for us. But, that’s not

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the way it works. Paul says that even Spirit filled Christians groan with the pains of life, just like the rest of creation (Romans 8:23).

### Getting a New Perspective

Now the point Peter is making is that you need to factor this idea into your concept of victory over the flesh. You said “no” to the temptation, but now you are suffering the consequences of deprivation. You feel unfulfilled and unsatisfied—and the craving continues to haunt you. So, now you’re discouraged and you assume that God has abandoned you. But that is not the case. He hasn’t abandoned you. His great purpose is simply to help you through the suffering, not to take it away. (cf James 1:2-4)

Therefore, you need to change your perspective. In reality, the suffering that you are experiencing is indeed your badge of glory. As you look to the Lord for His strength and comfort, you will discover that He is there and that He is totally sufficient for what you are experiencing. Furthermore, it will be encouraging for you to realize that you can actually live above the natural inclinations and demands of your flesh. With

your eyes fixed upon Jesus, you can do the impossible.

So, what about the suffering? How do we handle that? Well, there’s an old saying in the realm of sports that we ought to remember when it comes to engaging in spiritual battles – “No pain, No gain; No guts, No glory.” Pain is how you win and suffering is a part of the deal. But there’s another thing you can do. You can commit your situation to a loving and faithful God who will give you the courage and strength to handle the suffering. Peter concludes this text by telling us to do exactly that. He says,

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful creator in doing what is right. (1 Peter 4:19)

So, the choice is yours. You can stay in the boat and remain fearful and defeated. Or, you can step out in faith with your eyes steadfastly fixed on Christ and have the incredible experience of living above your nature—you can walk on water. And, by the way, wear your badge of suffering with honor. It is the gold metal of one who is victorious. 🏆

## A Word from the Word

# The Temptation of Christ

**Was Jesus Christ able not to sin or was He not able to sin?** This is a question that is often raised with regard to the temptation of Christ. In theological terms, it goes this way. Was He *peccable* (He was able to sin but He didn’t) or was He *impeccable* (He didn’t sin because He wasn’t able to sin)? If He was impeccable, what does that say about the nature of His temptation? If He couldn’t sin, was He really tempted?

Part of the answer to these questions lies in the meaning of the word “tempted” as found in the New Testament. It is the Greek word **peirazo** which can be used in two senses. Sometimes it is used to refer to temptation with evil or enticement to sin. For instance, in Galatians 6:1 it says, “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted (**peirazo**).” Here “tempted” (**peirazo**) is in parallel with “trespass,” which is a reference to sin. This is the way we normally think of the word “tempted.” We are tempted to sin.

But there is another way this word is used in the Scriptures. Sometimes it simply refers to a trial or a test. Sin is not the objective here but rather, an opportunity to prove one’s character or intent. For instance in Hebrews 11:17 it says, “By faith Abraham, when he was tested (**peirazo**), offered up Isaac...” God was not trying to get Abraham to sin. He was giving Abraham an opportunity to prove his unwavering trust in God’s promise to give him a seed. Strictly speaking it was a test, not a temptation.

So how does all of this relate to the temptation of Christ? Well, on that occasion in the wilderness, it appears that there were two things going on. Matthew 4:1 says, “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (**peirazo**) by the devil.” Both the Spirit of God

πειράζω

Matthew 4:1

and the devil were involved in what was going on and each of them had a different purpose with regard to the temptation.

First, the devil was obviously tempting Jesus for the purpose of causing Him to sin—to act contrary to the will of His Father. Satan knew that God couldn’t sin, neither could He be tempted with evil (James 1:13). He had fully known the character of God prior to his own fall. But now God had become a man in the person of Christ, and the devil had already proven that man was peccable. When man was tempted to sin, he had succumbed to the evil. Satan had seen it in the Garden of Eden and he had observed it thousands of times in Adam’s posterity. At this point then, the devil thought God had weakened Himself by the Incarnation—the union of a human nature with the divine nature. So, he tempted Christ with evil. It was the first use of “peirazo.”

This was not the purpose of the Spirit of God, however. When Christ was led by the Spirit into this confrontation with Satan in the wilderness, the Spirit was not watching with fear and trepidation wondering if Christ would come through. It was true that the Son of God had taken upon Himself a human nature, but it was also true that He still retained His divine nature. Furthermore, this union was accomplished in one Person. So, the Spirit knew full well that Jesus, as God, could not sin.

Consider an illustration. Take a thin wire that is easily bent to represent the human nature. It is truly bendable or peccable. But now weld this

*continued on back*

*The Temptation of Christ • continued from inside*

wire to a large steel rod that is not bendable. It is solid and strong—a fitting representation of the divine nature. Now the fact that they are welded together means they are now one rod (like Jesus is one Person). The wire still retains its identity as a wire, but now it is no longer subject to being bent because it is welded to the rod. A bendable (or peccable) element is welded to a non-bendable (or impeccable) element—and the result is unbendable (or impeccable).

Well, this is the way it was with Christ. A bendable human nature was placed into union with an unbendable divine nature and the result was an unbendable person. Now the Holy Spirit knew this, so His purpose in the wilderness was simply to put Christ to the test as an opportunity for Him to demonstrate His awesome power over Satan's temptation.

General Motors puts their cars on a test track and videos the results for later advertising. Not to break them down and destroy them, but to demonstrate to the riding public the reliability of their product. Even so, the Spirit of God led Christ into the wilderness, not to potentially destroy Him, but to demonstrate to the riding public that He is perfectly reliable to be their Savior and to see them safely to heaven. It was the second use of “**peirazo**.”

So, even though Christ felt the full force of Satan's temptation in His human nature (which is peccable), He did not and could not sin because He was also God (which is impeccable). The temptation was real but the ability to overcome it was infinite. As a Person therefore, He was definitely impeccable. The temptation was not a roll of the dice in the wilderness to see who would win—Satan or Christ. It was a demonstration of Christ's power as the Son of God to be our adequate Savior. Satan meant it for evil but God meant it for good—the two uses of “**peirazo**.” 🌳

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