

[PATIENCE UNDER TRIBULATION; AN EXCELLENT SERMON ON SUFFERING: CHRIST'S ATONING SUFFERING, AND OUR SUFFERING.]

Sermon for the Second Sunday after Easter; 1 Peter 2:20-25

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil.

PATIENCE UNDER TRIBULATION.

1. This epistle lesson is a beautiful selection from apostolic teaching. Doubtless it was intentionally arranged for this Sunday; for Peter's concluding words, "For ye were going astray like sheep; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls," accord with the gospel selection about the Good Shepherd. Yet it might also properly serve in part for the text of a sermon on the passion of Christ; for the sufferings of Christ are here presented as an example unto us. In the preceding part of the chapter, Peter taught the Christians how, having obtained faith, they are to exhibit its fruits--good works in the various stations of life. Particularly does he admonish them to manifest the fruit of patience under crosses and afflictions.

2. When the individual accepts Christ and begins to profess his faith in word and life, invariably--it cannot be otherwise--the world, that eternal enemy of Christ and faithfully- obedient servant of the devil, will be dissatisfied. The world regards it contemptible, disgraceful, to live any life but one pleasing to itself, to do and speak aught but as it desires. Its rage is excited toward the Christian and it proceeds to persecute, to torture, even to murder him when possible. We often hear the wiseacre scoffers say that Christ could have enjoyed peace had he desired to. The same may be said of Christians; they could have peace and pleasure if they would but take advice and conform to the world.

3. What are we to do? It is a fact that to maintain and obey the truth is to stir up wrath and hatred. Even the heathen assert as much. But the fault lies not with the advocate of truth but with its rejecters. Is the truth not to be preached at all? Must we be silent and permit all mankind to go direct to hell? Who could or would heap upon himself the guilt of such negligence? The godly Christian, who looks for eternal life after the present one and who aims to help others to attain unto the same happy goal, assuredly must act the part he professes, must assert his belief and show the world how it travels the broad road to hell and eternal death. And to do so is to antagonize the world and incur the displeasure of the devil.

4. Now, since there is no escaping the fact that he who would confess Christ and make the world better must, in return for his service and benefactions, heap upon himself the enmity of the devil and his adherents, as Peter says--since this is the case, we must remember that it is incumbent upon us to have patience when the world manifests its bitterest, most hateful enmity toward our doctrine and toward our very lives, when it reviles and slanders and persecutes us to the utmost for our principles. Peter here admonishes and persuades Christians unto patience under these circumstances, and at the same time seeks to comfort them with tender and impressive words.

5. First, Peter reminds the believers of their calling--of their reason and purpose in embracing Christianity. He says, in effect: "Remember, belief in Christ necessitates confession of him, and the entire Christian Church is numbered in the holy, divine calling that stands for the praise of God and the promotion of his kingdom." An essential feature of this calling is the suffering of evil in return for good. It seems inevitable that Christians be

condemned in the eyes of the world and incur its highest displeasures; that they be destined to take up the gauntlet against the devil and the world. It is said (Ps 44, 22): "For thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter," or for the sacrifice. Sacrificial sheep were kept in an enclosure, not permitted to go to pasture with the others. They were not kept for breeding, but to be daily, one after another, slaughtered.

6. Paul would say: "What will you do, beloved Christians? Will you live in the world and not encounter any persecution because of your good deeds? Will you rage at the wickedness of the world, and in your rage become wicked yourself and commit evil? Understand, you are called to suffer persecutions; they are a consequence of your baptism, your Christianity. For these you renounced the devil and professed Christ. You are baptized unto the suffering of every sort of misfortune, unto the enduring of the world and the devil." You cannot escape the smoke when compelled to live in the inn where the devil is host and the whole house is filled with it. Again, if you would have fire, you must have smoke as a consequence; if you would be a Christian and a child of God, you must endure the resultant evils that befall you.

7. In short, the Christian, because he is a Christian, is subjected to the holy and precious cross. He must suffer at the hands of men and of the devil, who plague and provoke him; outwardly with misery, persecution, poverty and illness, or inwardly--in heart--with their poisonous darts. The cross is the Christian's sign and watchword in his holy, precious, noble and happy calling unto eternal life. To such a calling must we render full dues and regard as good whatever it brings. And why should we complain? Do not even wicked knaves and who opposes Christians often suffer at the hands of one another what they are not pleased to endure? And every man must frequently suffer injuries and misfortunes relative to body, property, wife and children.

8. Then, if you would be a Christian and live justly in your calling, be not so terribly alarmed, so filled with hostile rage, so extremely impatient, at the torments of the world and the devil. If you are unwilling to suffer and to be reviled and slandered, if you prefer honour and ease, then deny Christ and embrace the delights of the world and the devil. You will not, even then, be wholly free from suffering and sorrow, though it will be your prerogative not to suffer as a Christian and for the sake of Christ. At the same time, you will discover that even though you enjoy only pleasure on earth, it will be but for a brief time and ultimately you will find the bitter end of the pleasure sought.

CHRIST OUR PATTERN.

9. In the second place, by way of rendering more impressive his admonition, Peter holds up the example of our real Master, our Leader and Lord, Christ, who endured persecutions similar to ours, and himself suffered more than any. The apostle refers to him in a truly scriptural way--as of a twin or dual character. He presents him not as an example of a saint in the ordinary sense, but as the real Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, who suffered for us, making sacrifice for our sins in his own body on the cross. In this capacity, he is our treasure, comfort and salvation.

10. The apostle beautifully and strikingly points out the sublime perfections of our Pattern, in his suffering, by way of gently urging us to patience. He presents the chief points of Christ's endurance, examples of real patience; all our sufferings, when compared with those of Christ, are cast into the shade. "The passion of Christ," Peter would say, "the suffering of the Lord, is a surpassing, a preeminent and sublimely glorious thing, transcending every other instance of suffering; first, because it was for an example to us; second, because he suffered to save us; third, because he suffered innocently in all respects, never having committed any sin." In these three points we must leave to him alone the distinction, humbling ourselves before them; even had we suffered death in its every form, we must cry that all our suffering is nothing in comparison with his. Even if we could attain to the sublimest, the supreme, the most glorious degree of suffering, it would be but walking in his footprints, following his example; it would be but to fall far short of his suffering. He would stand preeminent--the Master. He would maintain immeasurable superiority and we would still be left to follow as best we could. The extent of his agony, the intensity and bitterness of his sufferings, no one on earth can

comprehend. And if it be beyond our comprehension, how much more is it beyond our power to imitate or experience. We may thank God we have it before us for an example to behold and follow. True, we fall far short of perfect following, but we may approach it in proportion to our sufferings, faith and patience; for one may exceed another in these things. Christ is an example, Peter says, for all saints; not for a certain few. Contrasted with Christ, all saints must with downcast eyes confess: "Intense, bitter, grievous as our sufferings truly are, when the sufferings of Christ our Lord are mentioned we will willingly keep silent; for no human example of suffering will compare with that of Christ."

11. Now, this one fact, that one so exalted as Christ himself, the only and eternal Son of God, has trod the path of suffering before us, enduring unlimited distress, agony transcending the power of humanity to experience--this alone should be enough to admonish and urge anyone to patiently endure affliction. Why, then, should we disciples, we who are so insignificant and inexperienced in comparison with our Master--why should we be at all troubled at any suffering for his sake? especially when all he asks of us is to follow him, to learn of him and to remain his disciples. Here, mark you, is the example set before the entire Christian Church, the pattern she is to follow to the extent of at least walking in Christ's steps, at the same time, however, remembering that her most intense sufferings are naught in comparison to a single drop of his shed blood, as we shall hear later.

12. Again, this example assumes its ineffable and inimitable character from the fact that Christ suffered not for himself, nor yet merely as an example, but in our stead. This act, to say the least, transcends all human ability. No saint can boast of equalling this example, can say he suffered for another as Christ suffered for our sins. No, here all boasting is summarily disposed of. In respect to atonement, Christ left us no example, for none can imitate him in that. He stands alone there. He alone was called to suffer for all men; for those individuals now called and holy, and for the still uncalled and sinners.

13. The atonement is the chief, the most exalted, article of the Christian doctrine. Faith alone apprehends it as the highest good, the greatest blessing, of our salvation, and recognizes that we cannot, by our works or our sufferings, do or merit anything in atoning for sin. The manner in which this subject is scriptural presented prohibits us from adding to it anything of human origin. But so the accursed popedom has done in the teachings of its pillars and supporters the monks, who regard the sufferings of Christ as merely an example to us. They pervert and render immaterial the fact that he suffered for us; they place the entire responsibility upon ourselves, as if we, by our own works or our suffering are to make satisfaction for our sins, to appease God's wrath and to merit grace. This is a doctrine not found in the Word of God, but is of their own trivial, self-selected, self-devised and false human teachings.

14. They have carried their untruthful, worthless inventions to the extent of claiming for the saints not only sufficient acquired merit for their own salvation, but a large accumulated surplus available for others, which they have bequeathed to the Pope, thus furnishing him with an abundant treasury. The Pope, through indulgences, is to distribute this excess, these superfluous merits, as he feels disposed, at the same time dipping out for himself and his shorn fat swine the riches of the world; indeed, the ecclesiasts distribute their own merits and works. This is the refined monastic chastity, poverty and rigid obedience of the orders--nothing but shameless falsehood and scandalous vice, practiced under that covering, both privately and publicly, with the exception of a few who were sincere in their desire to be monks, of whom I was one. These falsehoods the orders readily sold to the laity on deathbeds, and under other circumstances.

Indeed, wretched mortals who had incurred a death penalty and were about to be publicly executed, they referred not to Christ for comfort, but counseled patience in their own well- deserved suffering and death; as if God would accept their pain as atonement for their sins if only they suffered patiently. Purchasing of merit was the ecclesiasts' chief doctrine, their strongest point. They fearlessly proclaimed it in public, and through its influence erected numerous churches and cloisters and satiated the avarice and cupidity of the Pope. And I too, alas, was one of these knaves until God delivered me. And now, God be praised, I am execrated and condemned by the hellish seat of the Roman dragon with its scales because I assailed this papal doctrine and

would not justify it.

15. Oh, the shameful abomination, that in the temple of God and in the Christian Church must be taught and received things which make wholly insignificant the sufferings and death of Christ! Gracious God! what can be said for human merit--for superfluity of human merit--when not one saint on earth has, with all his pains, suffered enough to cancel his own obligations; much less to be entitled to the honour of making his sufferings avail anything before God's judgment-seat, by way of remuneration or satisfaction for the mortal sins of others in the face of divine wrath? Note, Peter says Christ left us an example that we should follow his steps; which is but concluding that no saint ever wrought or suffered enough to warrant the claim: "I have accomplished the measure--reached the limit; Christ is no more an example and pattern for me." No; the saint ought to be ashamed to boast of his sufferings in comparison to those of Christ, and ought to rejoice in the privilege of being partaker of the divine pain, of sharing it so far as he can, and thus be found in the footsteps of Christ.

16. The theme of Christ's passion, then, must far outrank every other. His sufferings are like pure and precious gold, compared to which ours are as nothing. No one but Christ has suffered for the sins of another. No man has ever paid the price of his own sins, great or small. Even if man's suffering could avail aught for sin, the individual could not go beyond expiating his own sins. But Christ had no need at all to suffer for himself; for, as follows in the text, he had committed no sin. He suffered to leave us an example, but yet also to bring to man the great blessing of being able to say, "My sins and the sins of the whole world were atoned for upon the cross, blotted out, through Christ's death." Peter, Mary, John the Baptist, and every soul born of woman must include himself or herself in this statement, "Christ also suffered for you."

17. In the third place, Christ stands preeminent, above all others, in the affirmation of Peter, quoted from Isaiah 53,9: "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."

18. You may draw your own conclusions as to the eminence of such a one; for certainly there is to be found no other human being who has not at some time sinned in word or deed. "If any man stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man," says James 3, 2. But where is this perfect man, and what is his name? It is this Christ, he alone of all, James should have added. For Peter excludes all other individuals, in one class, saying, "Ye were going astray like sheep." And later on (ch. 3, 18) he tells us plainly, "Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous." This statement leaves no man innocent of sin, either in word or deed; and in word and deed is included man's whole life. Speech and action are associated in various Scripture references; as in Psalm 34, 13-14: "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good." But in speech is the greatest liability to error. In teaching, counselling, admonishing, consoling and censuring, and in confessing the truth, no one indeed will be found so perfect in his utterances as never to commit a blunder.

19. But Christ is the one perfect example in this respect. It is impossible for saints to attain to his faultlessness. Surely no man--unless he desires to be a liar and a true disciple of the devil instead of a child of God and a faithful Christian--will be presumptuous enough to put himself on an equality with Christ, will dare boast himself without sin in word and act. Christ alone has suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous; that prerogative can honourably and truthfully be ascribed only to Christ the Lord, and is his perpetually. No man is just and innocent in word and act. All must confess their sufferings, of whatever nature, to be the result of their own sins, and well deserved chastisement. For the fact of having escaped the eternal wrath, condemnation and punishment of God, they must thank this just one alone, he who, being himself blameless, voluntarily suffered to make satisfaction for the unrighteous, and appeased God's wrath. The sufferings of all saints, then, must be rated far below those of Christ the Lord. The saints must clothe and adorn themselves with his innocence, and with the entire Christian Church pray, "Forgive us our trespasses"; and they must confess the article, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

20. Now, let us sum up the three arguments Peter uses in admonishing Christians to patience in suffering. First: He says, "Hereunto were ye called." Though you do have to suffer much and severely, you have ever

before you the example of Christ, to the limit of whose sufferings you can never attain. You dare not boast even if you have suffered everything. Moreover, you are under obligation to suffer for God's sake. Second: Christ did not suffer for his own sake, nor of necessity; he suffered for your sake, and all from good will toward you. Third: He was wholly innocent--free from sin; internally--in heart--and externally--in word and deed. For where evil dwells in the heart, it cannot long remain concealed. It must manifest itself in words, at least. Christ says (Mt 12, 34), "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

21. Why, then, should you complain of your suffering or refuse to suffer what your sins really deserve? Indeed, you deserve much more than you receive--even eternal suffering. But God forgives you and remits the eternal punishment for the sake of Christ the Lord, desiring that you patiently endure the lesser suffering for the utter mortification of the sins inherent in your flesh and blood. To make such lot the less grievous to you, Christ has gone before and left you an example of perfect patience under the most intense suffering, an example equalled nowhere in the world. The Supreme Majesty, God's own Son, suffered in the most ignominious manner the extremity of torture, pain and anguish in body and soul, something intolerable to mere human nature; and that innocently, and for us condemned sinners--suffering for the sins of strangers. "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered threatened not."

22. To further emphasize and make effectual in us the example of Christ's patience, Peter proceeds to analyze it, to show it in its true colours, to mention the details and make plain how it differs from any other example of suffering. He has told us before that Christ did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Why, then, did the Jews persecute and crucify him--put him to death? Inquire into his entire life history and you will find that no one could justly impeach, nor could convict, him for any sin. He himself appealed to his enemies to prove aught of sin in him. No one could show an injury he had ever done to anyone, or a wrong he had ever taught or practiced. On the contrary, he had gone about to bring to the Jewish nation the grace and salvation of God. He had revealed God's Word, opened the eyes of the blind, healed the sick, cast out devils, fed great multitudes when hungry and lacking food. In short, in all his life, there was nothing in word or act but truth, goodness, beneficence and a disposition to aid. In return for the good he wrought, he was compelled to receive the ungrateful reward of man's hatred and condemnation. His enemies were moved solely by obdurate, diabolical hatred, and could not cease their persecutions until they brought him to the cross, where he was disgracefully hung up nude between two murderers, being lifted up as unworthy to touch the earth and to live among men.

23. Christ was under no obligation to endure disgrace and ill-treatment. He might have refrained from his benevolent ministrations when he saw the futility of his efforts with the Jews. But he did not so; even in his sufferings upon the cross he charitably prayed for his enemies. He had authority, he had power enough, and he would have been justified in the action, had he revenged himself on his furious enemies, invoked evil upon them, and execrated them as they deserved to be execrated; for they had treated him with gross injustice before all the world, as even the testimony of his betrayer and his judge and all creatures admitted, and had bitterly reviled him when he hung upon the cross. But he did none of these things. He bore with ineffable meekness and patience all the ill-treatment his enemies could heap upon him. Even in his extremity of anguish, he benevolently interceded for them to his Heavenly Father, to which act the prophet Isaiah (ch. 53) offers a tribute of high praise.

24. Notice, we have here in all respects a perfect and inimitable example of patience-- patience of the most exalted kind. In this example we may behold as in a glass what we have yet to learn of calm endurance, and thus be impelled to imitate that example in some small measure at least.

25. Not without reason does Peter applaud the fact that when Christ was reviled he reviled not again, and when he suffered he threatened not. Though to endure undeserved violence and injustice is hard enough, that which more than aught else naturally renders suffering grievous and makes men impatient is to experience the monstrous unfairness of receiving the mean and vexatious reward of ingratitude from individuals who have enjoyed one's favours and greatest benefactions. Base ingratitude is extremely painful for human nature to endure. It makes the heart flutter and the blood boil with a spirit of revenge. When no alternative presents, an

outburst of reviling, execration and threatening follows. Flesh and blood has not the power of restraint to enable it to remain calm when evil is returned for favours and benevolence, and to say, "God be thanked."

26. Mark the example of Christ, however, and there learn to censure yourself. Beloved, how can you complain when you see how infinitely greater was the grief and how much more painful the anxiety endured by your beloved Lord and faithful Saviour, the Son of God himself, who yet bore all patiently and submissively and, more than that, prayed for those instrumental in causing that agony? Who with a single drop of Christian blood in his heart would not blush with shame to be guilty of murmuring at his sufferings when, before God, he is so sinful and is deserving of much more affliction? Wicked, unprofitable and condemned servant must he be who does not follow his Lord's example of endurance but presumes to think himself better and nobler than Christ; who with inimical spirit murmurs, complaining of great injustice, when he really deserves affliction, and when he suffers infinitely less than did his dear, righteous, innocent Lord. Beloved, if Christ so suffered in return for the great blessing he conferred, be not too indolent to imitate him in some degree by suffering without anger and reproaches. Less reason have you to be angry and reproachful from the fact that you, too, were one whose sins brought Christ to the cross.

27. But you may say: "What? Did not Christ revile when (Mt 23) he called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, murderers, serpents, a generation of vipers, and even more severely rebuked them?" I reply: Oh yes, we would gladly follow Christ's example here; we could cheerfully revile and accuse. It is much easier than being patient. We would need no Master to help us in this. But note what Peter says: When Christ was about to suffer death, having fulfilled the obligation of his ministry--having proclaimed the truth, rebuked falsehood and been brought to the cross therefore--and being about to conclude his mission by suffering, he reviled not; as a sheep for the slaughter, he permitted himself to be executed and opened not his mouth against his calumniators and murderers. See Isaiah 53, 7.

28. It is necessary, then, to make a distinction here. Reviling--or pronouncing execrations and threats--is of two kinds. In one case it is official and pronounced of God; in the other, without authority and comes from man. It was one of the duties of Christ's office on earth, and one now incumbent upon those called to bear that office after him, to assert the truth and censure the evil. Such a course is essential to the honour of God and the salvation of souls; for if the truth were to be ignored, who would come to God? Official chastisement is a work of divine, Christian love. It is a parental duty imposed of God. God has implanted in the parent nature intense love for the child; at the same time, if parents are godly and have proper affection for their children they will not connive at, or let pass unpunished, the disobedience of the latter. They must chastise, both with reproof and with keen rods. These are official strokes--love stripes--enjoined of God, and their infliction is our duty. They are not injurious, but beneficial. Solomon says (Prov 13, 24): "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." And Jesus the son of Sirach says in Ecclesiasticus: "He that loveth his son causeth him oft to feel the rod, that he may have joy of him in the end."

29. So everyone may, and should, reprove when official duty or his neighbour's case requires; it serves to reform the subject. To quote Solomon again (Prov 27, 6): "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are profuse [deceitful]." Reproofs and stripes prompted by love and a faithful heart are beneficial. On the other hand, an enemy may use fair and flattering words when he has enmity and deceit at heart, preferring to let you go on to ruin rather than by gentle reproof to warn of danger and rescue you from destruction. The faithful, conscientious physician must often, of necessity and with great pain to the patient, amputate a limb in order to save the body. Paul, too, commands pious bishops to be urgent in season, out of season; to reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering. 2 Tim 4, 2; Tit 2, 15. By our silence to commend or to encourage to evil the wrong-doer would not be to manifest one's love to the offender, but rather to give him over wholly to death and the devil.

30. It was this love and sincerity of heart which prompted Christ in his office to censure and rebuke, for which he merited only wrath and hatred; as we say, he sought his stripes. But the duty of his office required such action on his part. His motive was to turn the transgressors from their blindness and malice, and to rescue them

from perdition; and he could not be deterred by the consequent persecution, cross and death which awaited. But having fulfilled his official duties, and the hour of his suffering having arrived, he suffered patiently, permitting his enemies to heap upon him all possible evil in return for his manifested love and blessings. Instead of angrily reviling and execrating while, suspended from the cross, he endured the most shameful calumnies, he, with strong cries and with tears, prayed, "Father, forgive them." It was, indeed, a heart of unfathomable love that, in the midst of extreme suffering, had compassion on its persecutors and blessed them in greater measure than parent can bless child or one individual bless another.

31. Observe, then, the distinction between official and unofficial censure and rebuke; the former is prompted by love, and the latter by wrath and hatred. The world, however, is artful and cunning enough when it hears this distinction, to pervert and confuse the two, exercising its own revenge under the name of official zeal and reproof. For instance, if a preacher is disposed to act the knave, he can easily give vent to his personal anger and vengeance in his pulpit utterances, censuring and rebuking as he pleases, and then claim it is all in obedience to the demand of office and for the good of the people.

Again, a judge, a mayor, or other prominent official, desiring revengefully to satisfy a personal grudge, can more successfully accomplish his object under the title of the office he bears and the obligations imposed upon him for the punishment of the wicked than in any other way. This practice now frequently obtains since the world has learned to use the Gospel to conceal its malice and knavery, to adorn it with the name of a divinely appointed office. It ever uses the name and Word of God to cloak its infamy. But who is vigilant enough to elude such knavery and to make the children of the devil honest? Let him who would be a Christian, then, take heed how he shall answer such accusation. Assuredly God will not allow himself to be deceived. He will, in due time, relieve the innocent victim of injustice, and his punishment will seek out the wicked. Peter says, further
"But committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

32. Who revealed to Peter the nature of Christ's thoughts upon the cross? The apostle has just been saying that Christ reviled not nor thought of revenge, but rather manifested love and good-will toward his virulent enemies. How could Christ approve such malice? Truly he could not endorse it. Nor could he commend his enemies for crucifying him and putting him to death upon the cross without cause. No such conclusion may be drawn. The devil and his adherents must not construe the passage to mean license to heap all manner of torture and distress upon Christ and his saints as upon those who must not only patiently bear these things, unmoved by revengeful desires, but must render gratitude to their persecutors as if their acts were praiseworthy. No; this can by no means be permitted. Could I be said to suffer innocently if I am obliged to confess I am well treated? Several times in this epistle Peter admonishes Christians not to suffer as evil-doers, thieves, murderers. But if I suffer innocently and am unjustly treated, I am not to justify the ill-treatment and strengthen the enemy in his sins; for, so doing, I would approve his conduct and assume the guilt attributed. That principle would be pleasing to the Pope and the devil and to tyrants; they would willingly have it obtain. They are not wholly satisfied even to murder the innocent; they would prefer to be justified in their action--to have us confess to wrong-doing. But that is something no Christian heart will do; it may be left to the devil.

33. But the Papists will say: "However, it is written, You must suffer and not revile; you must thank God for persecution and pray for your enemies." That is true; but it is one thing to suffer patiently, the while wishing your enemies well and praying for them, and quite a different thing to justify them in their conduct. I must cease not to confess the truth and maintain my innocence, both in heart and with my lips. But if men will not accept my word, my heart must tell me I have suffered injustice. Rather should I endure ten deaths, could my enemies inflict them, than to condemn myself in violation of conscience. So, when Peter made this little statement about Christ not reviling nor threatening, which was true, he did not mean that Christ justified his persecutors in their treatment of him. But what are we to do? If we do not justify our enemies when they make us suffer, they will do even worse things to us; for they desire the name and the credit, in the eyes of the world, of having done right by us. Yes, as Christ has somewhere said, they would have it thought they do God great service by murdering us. Now, who is to judge and decide the question?

34. Peter declares that Christ committed the matter to him who judges righteously. How should he do otherwise, knowing that his persecutors treated him unjustly and yet maintained the contrary? There was for him no judge on earth. He was compelled to commit the matter to that righteous judge, his Heavenly Father. Well he knew that such sins and blasphemies could not go unpunished. No, the sentence was already passed, the sword sharpened, the angels given orders, for the overthrow of Jerusalem. Previous to his sufferings, on his way to Jerusalem, as Christ beheld the city, he announced its coming doom and wept over it. Therefore, he prays for his enemies, saying: "Dear Father, I must commit the matter to thee, since they refuse to hear or to see the wrong they do. Well I know they are rushing into thy wrath and thy terrible punishment, but I pray thee to forgive them what they do to me." And so they would have been forgiven had they afterward repented at the apostles' preaching, and had they not further sinned in persecuting God's Word and thus brought upon their unrepentant selves ultimate punishment

CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE IN SUFFERING.

35. Observe, as Christ did, so should we conduct ourselves in our sufferings; not approving or assenting to whatever may be heaped upon us, but yet not seeking revenge. We are to commit the matter to God, who will judge aright. We cannot maintain our rights before the world; therefore we must commit our cause to God, who judges righteously and who will not allow calumny of his Word and persecution of believers to pass unpunished. We must, however, pray for our persecutors, that they may be converted and escape future wrath and punishment; and so we do. If it is possible for some of the bishops and other Gospel-persecuting tyrants to be converted, we will heartily pray and desire that their conversion may come to pass. But if it be impossible, as now, alas, is to be feared, since, after having been much admonished and often prayed for and having enjoyed the best advantages, they wittingly rage against the known truth--if so, then we must commit them to God's judgment. What more can we do?

I am persuaded that the intolerable persecution and calumniating of the Gospel prevalent today cannot be permitted to pass with impunity. It must ultimately meet the coming judgment upon the Papacy and Germany. Of this there can be no doubt. But it is ours to continue preaching, praying, admonishing and beseeching, in the hope of effecting repentance. Then, if our enemies still refuse to turn from their evil ways, if they perish in their impenitence, what can we do but say: "Dear God, we commit the matter to thee. Thou wilt punish them; thou canst, indeed, most terribly."

36. Such, mark you, is the example of Christ, presented to the entire Christian Church--set up as a pattern for her. Hence it is the duty of the Church, as Peter elsewhere tells us, to arm herself with the same mind which was Christ's, to suffer as Christ did and to think: If Christ, my Lord and Leader, has suffered for me with so great meekness and patience, how much more reason have I to submit to suffering! And what can it harm me to suffer when I know it is God's will? Not because the suffering in itself is so perfecting and precious, but for the sake of the dear Saviour who suffered for me. I know, too, that my persecutors thus commit most abominable sins against God and incur his wrath and punishment. Why, then, should I be impatient or desire revenge? I am already too highly honoured of God in the fact that my sufferings meet his approbation and that he will perfectly avenge me of mine enemies. What can it advantage me for them to bum eternally in hell? I will rather pray and use my utmost efforts for their conversion. If I fail and they are determined to persist in their course, I must bring the matter home to God--must commit it to him. "Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness."

37. Peter's is the true preaching concerning the passion of Christ. He teaches not only the merit in Christ's sufferings, but introduces both themes--its efficacy and example. Such is Paul's custom, also. In this verse Peter presents Christ's sufferings in the light of a sacrifice for sin. They constitute a work acceptable to God as satisfaction for the sins of the whole world and effective to reconcile him to men. So great is God's wrath toward sin that none but that eternal one, the Son of God, could avert it. He had himself to be the sacrifice, to allow his body to be nailed to the cross. The cross was the altar whereupon the sacrifice was consumed--wholly burned--in the fire of his unfathomable love. He had to be his own high priest in this

sacrifice: for no earthly mortal, all being sinners and unclean, could offer to God the sacrifice of his beloved and wholly sinless Son; the boasting of the priests of Antichrist in regard to their masses, to the contrary notwithstanding. Now, by the single sacrifice of God's Son, our sins are remitted and we obtain grace and forgiveness; and this fact can be grasped in no other way than through faith.

38. Peter mentions the ultimate object of the divine sacrifice made for us, what it accomplished in us, the fruit Christ's passion shall yield; for he would not have the Christian Church overlook that point, or neglect to preach it. Christ, he tells us, took upon himself our sins, suffering the penalty. Therefore, Christ alone is entitled to be called a sacrifice for all our sins. It was not designed, however, that after the sacrifice we should remain as before; on the contrary, the purpose was ultimately to work in us freedom from sins, to have us live no longer unto sin but unto righteousness. Now, if in Christ our sins are sacrificed, they are put to death, blotted out; for to sacrifice means to slay, to kill. Under the Old Testament dispensation, all sacrifices had to be presented to God slain. Now, if our sins are put to death, it is not meant that we are to live in them.

39. Therefore, the saving doctrine of remission of sins and of Christ's grace cannot be so construed as to admit of our continuing in the old life and following our own desires. According to Paul (Rom 6, 1-8), enjoying grace and remission of sins does not give license to live in sin. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? The very fact that we may be reckoned dead unto sins means they may no longer live and reign in us. In Christ's holy body were they throttled and slain expressly that they might also be slain in us.

40. Be careful, then, what you believe and how you live, that the efficacy of Christ's sufferings may be manifestly fulfilled in you. If, through faith, you have rightly apprehended his sacrifice, its virtue will be indicated in the subduing and mortifying of your sins, even as they are already slain and dead through his death on the cross. But if you continue to live in sins, you cannot say they are dead in you. You but deceive yourself, and your own evidence is false when you boast of Christ in whom all sins are put to death, if sin remains vigorous in you. We naturally conclude it is inconsistent for sin to be dead in us and yet alive; for us to be free from sin and yet captive or fast therein. This fact has already been sufficiently pointed out.

41. It is ours, Peter says, not only to believe that Christ has, through the sacrifice of his own body, put to death sin and liberated us therefrom--a thing the combined sacrifices of all mortal bodies could never have effected--but, sin being put to death by him, to endeavour to become ever more and more free from sin's sway in our bodies, and to live henceforth unto righteousness, until we shall be completely and finally released from sin through death. Therefore, if before you believed on Christ you were an adulterer, a miser, a coveter, a maligner, you ought now to regard all these sins as dead, throttled through Christ; the benefit is yours through faith in his sacrifice, and your sins should henceforth cease to reign in you. If you have not so received the sacrifice, you cannot boast of Christ and faith. Though Christ has died for you, though your sins have been put upon him and reckoned dead, still you are not rid of those sins if you do not desire to be, if you do not, through faith, apprehend Christ and his blessing, nor in your life and conduct follow his example.

42. Now you will say: "But you teach that we are all sinners, that there is not even a saint on earth without sin. And surely we must confess the article, 'I believe in the remission of sins,' and must pray, 'Forgive us our debts.'" I reply, most assuredly you never will attain sinless perfection here on earth; if such were the case you would have no further need for faith and Christ. At the same time, it is not designed that you should continue as you were before obtaining remission of sins through faith. I speak of known sins wittingly persisted in, in spite of the rebuke and condemnation of conscience. These should be dead in you; in other words, they are not to rule you, but you are to rule them, to resist them, to undertake their mortification. And if occasionally you fail, if you stumble, you should immediately rise again, embrace forgiveness and renew your endeavour to mortify your sins. "By whose stripes ye were healed."

43. It seems as if Peter could not sufficiently exalt and make impressive Christ's sufferings. He brings in nearly the entire Fifty-third chapter of Isaiah in the attempt. Note how, in regard to the efficacy of works, he always significantly introduces the two themes at the same time--how he carefully distinguishes between performing

human works in obedience to Christ's example, and receiving by faith the merit of Christ's work. First, we have, "Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree . . . by whose stripes ye were healed." This is the vital part in our salvation. Christ alone could fully accomplish the work. This doctrine must be taught in its purity and simplicity, and must so be believed, in opposition to the devil and his factions. Only so can we maintain the honour and the office of Christ wherein is anchored our salvation. But the second part of the doctrine must not be overlooked. There are false Christians who accept only the first part and make no effort to reform themselves; but, being liberated from our sins and in a state of salvation, we may not again defile ourselves therewith. Where these two principals of the Christian doctrine are not maintained in their proper relation, injury must result to the truth in two respects: they who are occupied solely with their own works corrupt the true doctrine of faith; they who neglect to follow the example of Christ retard the efficacy and fruit of that faith. "For ye were going astray like sheep."

44. Here Peter bluntly and clearly points out the fact I have stated, that liberation from sin and death was effected not by our works and merits, but by Christ's wounds and death alone. Forgiveness cost you nothing, Peter teaches; no blood, no wounds. You were powerless in this direction. You were but miserable, erring, lost sheep, separated from God, condemned to hell and unable to council or help yourselves. In just such condition are all they who are out of Christ. As Isaiah the prophet says more plainly in the chapter from which these words are taken (verse 6): "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." That is, whatever our lives, whatever our intent, we but turned farther away from God. As it is written (Ps 14, 3): "They are all gone aside; they are together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

45. That men are prone to go astray like sheep is clearly exhibited in their conduct; history proves it. It has ever been the case that when mankind was divided into various idolatries or false services of God, into superstitions numerous and varied, even when God's people thought to have attained the perfection of holiness--then one ran here and another there, ever seeking and seeking to come upon the road to heaven but getting farther and farther from it. It was exactly the case of the sheep straying from the flock and lost to the shepherd: the farther it runs and the more it follows the voice of strangers, the farther astray it goes. It continues to wander and to flee until it finally perishes, unless it hears again the voice of the shepherd. Let no one, then, dare boast of having himself found the right way to heaven, of having merited God's grace and the remission of sins by his own manner of life. All men must confess the truth of Scripture testimony that we were but erring sheep, fleeing ever farther from our Shepherd and Saviour, until he turned us back to himself. "But are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

46. You have now heard the voice of your Shepherd, who has brought you back to himself, from your erring and idolatrous ways. It was not your own effort that effected your return; it was accomplished at the cost of your Shepherd's wounds and shed blood. Be careful, then, Peter would say, to live not like erring and lost sheep; but, being converted--turned back--follow your beloved Saviour. In him you have a godly Shepherd who faithfully pastures and cares for you; and also a loyal Bishop who ever watches over and guards you, not permitting you to stray.

47. Immeasurably gracious, and comforting are these words. But the meaning of the word "bishop" has been miserably obscured and perverted by our idolatrous priests and episcopal frauds. Likewise have they perverted and corrupted the terms "ecclesiasts," "Church," "divine service," "priest," etc., by their antichristian rule. Only those have right to the name "ecclesiast" who have been redeemed from their sins through Christ's wounds, and who live holy lives. But the Papists have taken the name away from true Christians and applied it to the Pope's besmeared, and shaven headed ones. Again, when we hear the word "bishop" we think only of great, pointed caps and of silver staves. As if it were sufficient to place in the Church such masks, such carved and hewn idols! For they are nothing better; in fact, they do more harm. According to the Scriptures, a true bishop is an overseer, a guardian, a watchman. He is like unto the householder, the warder of the city, or any judicial officer or regent who exercises constant oversight of state or municipal affairs. Formerly there were bishops in each parish, deriving their name from the fact that their office required oversight of the Church and the guarding against the devil, against false doctrines and all manner of offences. Paul, too (Acts 20, 28), reminds

the bishops of their office, saying: "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops (overseers]." And overseers should bishops still be, as in fact all godly preachers and careers for souls are. But in all Popedom the office now is but a mere name, to the sin and shame of the entire Christian Church.

48. Now, Christ our Lord is that faithful Guardian, that true Bishop, who above all others is entitled to the name (with him office and name are identical), and who bears it with due honour, to our eternal happiness. For, standing at the right hand of God and showing his wounds, he unceasingly intercedes for us before the Father; and moreover, on earth he rules, sustains, nourishes and protects, through his Word, his sacraments and the efficacy of the Holy Spirit, the little flock that believe in him. Were he not present with and watching over us here, the devil would long ago have overthrown and destroyed us, and also the Word of God and the name of Christ. And such is the case when God in wrath turns away his eyes from the world to punish its ingratitude. Then immediately everything falls into the devil's power. Therefore, pure doctrine, faith, confession and the use of the sacraments are dependent for their perpetuity solely upon the vigilant guardianship of our beloved Shepherd and Bishop.

49. Comforting, indeed, is it to have in Christ a priest so faithful and righteous; though, alas, the worthy name of "priest" also has been subjected to shame and contempt because of the Pope's disgraceful, shaven, shallow-headed occupants of the office. Comforting, indeed, it is to be the happy lambs who have a welcome refuge in the Shepherd and find in him joy and comfort in every time of need, assured that his perfect faithfulness cares for and protects us from the devil and the gates of hell. Relative to this subject, the entire Twenty-third Psalm is a beautiful and joyous song, of which the refrain is, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

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