

Suffering Motif in the Epistle to the Hebrews¹

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Abstract

The rising popularity of the prosperity gospel in many Christian circles tends to obscure the question of the reality of suffering in the Christian experience. Prosperity theologians claim that those who accept the Gospel will always experience affluent lives. The inconsistency between the prosperity theology and the presence of hardships in the Christian life calls for a reevaluation of the theme of suffering based on a biblical viewpoint. The suffering motif is deeply embedded in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The book of Hebrews presupposes the reality of suffering and offers key answers on why Christians experience hardships in life, even though they are faithful to God. With this perspective in mind, this paper examines a major issue in the Epistle to the Hebrews: how does the book of Hebrews explain the presence and purpose of suffering in Christian life? Using a synthetic approach, this paper found that the presence of sufferings is an integral part of Christian life and in line with the divine plan. Sufferings function as prophylactic against spiritual laxness and apostasy, motivating believers for further endurance and faithfulness; they escalate anticipation of the promised eschatological reward. Thus, Christians should have a healthy and positive outlook in the midst of their suffering experiences.

Keywords: *Prosperity gospel, suffering, endurance, faithfulness, eschatological reward*

Introduction

Suffering is part of human experience. It has various causes that include economic, social, natural, political, and religious factors; these propel human efforts to find solutions and answers to the issue of suffering. Experiences of hardship, toil, and even persecution because of one's beliefs are perennial problems that are particularly true in South Asia. Studies have shown that the highest level of human suffering is in the South Asian region (Lyons & Yu 2012). They pointed out that "the relatively high levels of suffering in South Asia likely reflect the economic turmoil, war, conflict, domestic terrorism, or separatist movements that have afflicted many of these countries in the past decade." They further state, "most South Asian countries currently have higher levels of unemployment and corruption and lower levels of college education than the rest of Asia." Krausz (2018) adds religious persecution, which is getting worse in Asia, to the causes of suffering. While state governments are actively trying to find effective solutions to the problem, Christians – particularly in Asia – endeavor to find answers based on a biblical perspective. A biblical understanding of the theology of suffering, particularly among Christians in Asia, is a need that should be addressed.

The resurgence of the prosperity gospel in the middle of the 20th century appears to offer answers to the human dilemma of suffering (Bowler, 2013; Coleman, 2000). The basic premise of the prosperity gospel states that sin is the cause of poverty and hardships (Bowler, 2013), while faith in God and good works brings financial blessings and physical well-being (Hunt, 2000; Walton, 2009). However, prosperity theology proponents encounter numerous criticisms and opposition from mainstream evangelicals because their theology fails to account for the reality of suffering in the lives of faithful Christians, even from ancient times (apostolic and post-apostolic periods) down to the present age (Biema & Chu, 2006; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011).

The Book of Hebrews offers a broad biblical perspective on suffering (Young, 2003; Kasemann, 1984; Stevenson-Moessner, 2003). In this paper, I have chosen the Epistle to the Hebrews because while many scriptural passages deal with the concept of suffering, the Epistle to the Hebrews appears to encapsulate the major motifs and themes of suffering in both the Old and the New Testament. The recipients of the Epistle themselves had deep experiences of hardship and persecution, making the

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message of the Epistle relevant to those who are suffering even during the contemporary period. While prosperity theology tends to obscure major biblical teachings on suffering, the theme of suffering in the Epistle to the Hebrews contributes to a proper understanding for the reason and purpose of suffering in the Christian life.

Statement of the Problem and Methodology of Research

This paper examined the theological motif of suffering in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Using the synthetic approach, it analyzed the various historical and parenetic elements in the book, and provided a synthesis of the book's various themes related to the motif of suffering. The outcomes of the research point to the reason, reality, purpose, and eschatological hope that suffering contributes to the lives of Christians.

The Theme of Suffering in the Epistle to the Hebrews

The theme of suffering in Hebrews has been rooted in the suffering of Jesus, but is not in any way detached from the experiences of the audience.^a This is made evident by the linguistic data in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Young (2003) observes that all four appearances of πάσχω (to suffer) in Hebrews refer to the suffering of Jesus (2:18; 5:8; 9:26; 13:12). Two of the three appearances of πάθημα (a suffering) refer to Jesus' trials, and the other one points to the readers' past ordeals (2:9-10; 10:32); one of the two occurrences of συμπάθησαι (sympathize with) refers to Christ (4:15) (Young, 2003). The discussion of Jesus' suffering serves as the basis of the book's theological theme of suffering, and on the practical level shows the book's pastoral concern — to inspire readers to remain faithful in the midst of persecution and hardships. As Jesus suffered, believers are also subject to hardship and persecution, and as He has been exalted because of His suffering, believers through their suffering would share with Jesus in His glory (Nelson, 2003). Koester (2002) pointed out that the theme of suffering in the Epistle to the Hebrews is grounded on three series of arguments. These are: (a) Jesus received glory through faithful suffering — a way that others are called to follow (2:10-5:10); (b) Jesus' suffering is the sacrifice that enables others to approach God (7:1-10:25); and (c) God's people persevere through suffering to glory by their faith (11:1-12:24). This leads to the author's exhortation to readers that they should not abandon their faith, but rather focus their faith on Jesus, who endured the most painful suffering of all (Miller, 1987).

The author of Hebrews appears to be thoroughly acquainted with the plight of his intended readers (Schreiner, 2015).^b Internal evidence explicitly states that the epistle points to the past, present, and future sufferings of the audience. Hebrews 10:32-39 outlines the hardships and persecutions that readers experienced in the past. Ellingworth (1993, p. 544) points out that Heb. 10:32-39 could be divided into two sections, or periscope, as most scholars agree: vv. 32-35 refer mainly to the past, while vv. 36-39 point forward to the future. The audience of Hebrews experienced persecution in the past, and had to expect them in the future. Between the past and the future, the admonitions in v. 35 and at the beginning of chap. 12 imply that persecution and hardship are also present realities.

The description of their endurance in Heb. 10:32 (ὑπεμείνατε; aorist active indicative, 2nd person plural, meaning "you endured") points to the great conflict of suffering that they previously experienced (πολλήν ἄθλησιν). The use of ὑπεμείνατε in this context conveys the idea that the letter's audiences "have already resisted steadfastly the hostile attacks of serious persecution" (Hauck, 1967a, p. 588). The πολλήν ἄθλησιν that the audience experienced includes public exposure to abuses and persecution (v. 33), suffering with those in prison, and seizure of their property (v. 34). Historical evidence indicates that they suffered shame and social marginalization, verbal abuse, reproach and insult. However, they have not yet reached the point of shedding their blood (Heb. 12:4; DeSilva, 2000, p. 504). The appearance of οὖν (therefore) in verse 35 points to vv. 32-34. The admonition Μὴ ἀποβάλητε has been rightly paraphrased by Bruce (1990, p. 271), "You showed your courage in those days ... do not abandon it now." The "now" concept in v. 35 implies the idea that the persecution and suffering did not stop in the past, but continues as a reality at present. Moreover, readers should

expect more hardship and suffering in the future for two reasons: first, suffering has been compared to parental discipline (Heb. 12:8-12; Dyer, 2018; Small, 2017), and secondly, chapter 11 states that persecution and suffering are experientially present among those who publicly manifest faith in Jesus. In view of their experiences, chapter 11 and the beginning part of chapter 12 (vv. 1, 2) admonish readers to endure hardships and trials by not falling away from their faith, because reward awaits them in the future. The parenesis in Hebrews serves as a prophylactic against the believers' inclination to become sluggish, apathetic, and eventually fall away from their faith in the face of persecution, suffering, and hardships (Whitlark, 2012).

Suffering and the Pilgrim Motif in Hebrews

A number of authors have noted that the motif of sufferings is closely knit with the wilderness and pilgrim theme in Hebrews, and the alien concept in the context of the Roman social order (Dunning, 2009; Johnson, 1978). For example, the discussion concerning κατάπαυσιν (rest) in Hebrews 3 and 4 is set against the backdrop of Israel's experience in the wilderness after they went out of Egypt. It was there that those who hardened their hearts to rebellion died in the wilderness and failed to enter the promised rest. In this context, Heb. 3:7-4:11 emphasizes the need of perseverance and faithfulness by the Christian community.

While the idea of pilgrimage has not been explicitly mentioned in Hebrews 3 and 4, the wanderings of Israel are obviously implied in these chapters. The author utilizes the Old Testament account of Israel's experience as the basis for his exhortations to attain the heavenly rest (Johnson, n.d.). Psalm 95:8-11 (cf. Heb. 3:7-11) alludes to what happened in the wilderness for forty years. The people of Israel were tested, and they manifested rebellion. Psalm 95:8 uses the names of Meribah and Massah to signify their rebellious attitude. These two names are traceable to the account of Exod. 17:1-7 after Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin and pitched their tents in Rephidim. The absence of water in the place led the people to murmur against Moses, and tempted the Lord. After the Lord had provided water through the rock, Moses called these places "Massah" (means testing), and "Meribah" (means quarrelling). The names given to these places show their acts of rebellion, opposition, and doubt as shown in Exod. 17:7. God was sorely displeased, and He swore that they would not enter the promised rest. In the Old Testament, entrance into the land of Canaan is the entry into the land of rest. It is typological to the entrance into the heavenly rest referred to as κατάπαυσιν in Hebrews 3 and 4. In these chapters, the escalation of typological fulfilment is present in the discussion of the theology of rest in the book of Hebrews.

The writer of Hebrews used past events as a strong warning that the Jewish Christian audience not fall into the danger of apostasy. Thiessen (2007) rightly argued that the readers' present situation is an extension of Israel's wilderness period. The readers are at the doorstep of the land of rest; thus, they should manifest endurance and faithfulness.

The wilderness pilgrimage of God's people includes the experience of hardships along the way. Moving beyond the wilderness account of God's people under Moses and Joshua, the author of Hebrews argues that those who suffered in the past were just strangers and pilgrims on the earth. The author goes back to the patriarchs, tracing the history of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They have been described as pilgrims on earth (11:13), wanderers in the deserts (11:38), who desired a better country that is heavenly (11:15). God is pleased to be called their God because He has prepared for them a city (11:16). Suffering in the context of the wilderness experience implies the reality of hardships in the pilgrims' lives, and calls for endurance and abiding trust in God. Schreiner (2015, p. 492) rightly points out that Heb. 10:32-34 serves as a window that exposes readers' sufferings, with an admonition not to cast away their confidence (11:35). Just as rebellion, apostasy, and lack of faith prevented the people of Israel who left Egypt from entering the land of Canaan, readers of the book of Hebrews were exhorted not to harden their hearts, because it would result in the loss of their salvation.

The preservation of their faith through perseverance and steadfastness in the midst of hardships has been exemplified in the person of Jesus, as the true wilderness community. Biggs (2003) rightly emphasizes that,

Christ was the true wilderness community, the archegon or Pioneer who went before his people into the wilderness and suffered through trials and temptations, but did not sin and ultimately overcame (Heb. 4:15). Christ persevered in the wilderness and overcame sin, death and the devil on behalf of his people (Heb. 2:14ff; cf. Luke 4:1ff). Christ has entered the rest, passed through the heavens and has been seated at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven (Heb. 4:14-16; 9:24). When we suffer as a church in these last days, we must always keep in mind Christ's example of suffering and his work as our sure guarantee for our persevering, because we can approach the throne of grace with confidence and receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb. 4:16).

The typology between Jesus and the people of God in the Old Testament serves as an encouragement to the recipients of the book of Hebrews. Parallels can be seen between what had happened to Israel from Egypt onwards, and events in the earthly life of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew, for example, applied the words of Hos. 11:1 to Jesus (cf. Mat. 2:15). The context of Hosea's statement refers to the people of Israel, but Matthew sees Jesus as the true Israel of God. Paul and Matthew should be seen synoptically by pointing out that the crossing of the Red Sea in the Old Testament typologically points to the baptism of Jesus, as well as the believers' baptism (cf. Matt. 3:15; 1 Cor. 10:1, 2). Jesus' fulfilment of all righteousness in His act of baptism implies that He has performed and achieved the righteousness that the people of God in the Old Testament failed to attain (Ladd, 1993, p. 184). While the stay of the people of Israel in the wilderness for forty years was characterized by rebellion, apostasy, and lack of faith, Jesus' stay in the wilderness for forty days demonstrated His submission, obedience, and unwavering trust in God. Where the people of God in the Old Testament failed, Jesus became victorious. Once again, the escalation of typological fulfillment – as well as the contrast between human failure and Jesus' victory – is clearly elucidated. Picking up from this concept, the author of Hebrews assured the believers that in the midst of their sufferings, they can look vertically and horizontally to find strength, comfort, and hope. They can look up and come boldly to Jesus, who as their High Priest, sympathizes with the believers' fate and gives victory. As pilgrims, they can look horizontally to the heavenly country that God has prepared for them (11:16), the reward (11:26), and a better resurrection (11:35), all of which are founded on the better promises of God (11:40). These will prevent the readers from getting discouraged to the point of falling away from their faith.

Suffering and the Believer's Identity with Jesus

Another important concept that is closely attached to the readers' experience is their identity with Jesus. Believers are united with Jesus through His suffering. Believers are to trust and follow the same pathway of suffering that was illustrated by Jesus (Young, 2003, p. 54). The suffering of Jesus is a major theme in the book of Hebrews. Because He suffered, believers could look to Jesus and be encouraged because He has been presented as superior over the prophets (1:1-3), angels (1:4-2:18), Moses (3:1-6), and the priesthood (4:14-7:28). He is the Mediator of the new and better covenant (8:10-18), and has identified Himself with them.

The suffering and death of Jesus has huge implications in the lives of the audience of the book of Hebrews. The believers' identification with Jesus through their sufferings will allow them to appropriate for themselves the benefits of what Jesus has accomplished through His suffering and death. The suffering and death of Jesus has happened that "He might taste death for everyone" (2:9). We notice that the pericope in Heb. 2:5-9 quotes Ps. 8, which points to the incarnation. Jesus has been made perfect through sufferings (2:10). Believers who become one with Him are sanctified and are considered as His brethren (2:11; Guthrie, 2006). Through His death Jesus was able to destroy him (Satan) who has the power of death (2:14), and give freedom to those who were in bondage (2:15). Through the suffering that Jesus has gone through, He becomes a merciful and faithful High Priest who is able to help those who are tempted (2:13, 17-18). Rhee (2012) rightly states:

Jesus fulfills the destiny of mankind as the representative (2:5-9) and remains in solidarity with humanity by (1) calling believers "brethren" (2:10-13); (2) identifying himself with humankind

in flesh and blood (2:14–15); and (3) offering help when tempted (2:16–18). The emphasis of the doctrinal section of 2:5–18 is that Jesus is qualified to become a merciful and faithful high priest due to his identification with humankind (2:17–18).

Having a High Priest who was tempted in all points yet remained sinless, believers can come boldly into the throne of grace to obtain grace and mercy in times of need (4:15-16; Long, 1998).

Jesus' sympathy for our weaknesses and temptations is emphasized, since He was identified with us in our humanity (2:17-18; 4:15; 5:7-8). Since believers became partakers of the heavenly calling, they can enter into God's eschatological rest that is far superior to what Joshua gave to Israel when they entered the land of Canaan (3:1; 4:8-11; Weiss, 1996). The completion of Christ's salvific work and the believers' identification with Jesus are strongly emphasized in chapter 4. Moore (2014) argues that in Heb. 4.10 the substantival aorist participle ὁ εἰσελθὼν should be translated "the one who entered," and that its implied subject is Christ. Thus, the One who became victorious and entered God eschatological rest could bring the believers to the eschatological rest through their identification with Him. Through suffering, Jesus was made perfect and became the author of eternal salvation (5:9). Through the blessings of the new covenant, the believers' labors and works of love will always be remembered by God (6:10), and God's immutable promise becomes the hope of every believer (6:10-20). Those who became one with Jesus experience the writing of God's law in their minds and hearts, and God shall remember their sins no more (8:7-12). As the intercessor between God and man, He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (7:25). Jesus became the Mediator of a new and better covenant because through His blood, He appears in the very presence of God for us (9:11-15, 24). Through His sacrifice, Jesus sat down at the right hand of God waiting for the time when His enemies will be made His footstool (10:17).

By remaining faithful to God in the midst of hardship and persecution, believers receive the promise of great rewards (10:32-36). To prevent the audience from falling away from their faith, the author of Hebrews set before his readers both positive and negative exhortations. These exhortations emphasize the great importance of remaining in the faith and the catastrophic outcome – the terrible judgment of God – if they fall away (Rhee, 2012, p. 373). The author uses three positive exhortations using subjunctive verbs — NASB renditions given (1) "let us draw near" (προσερχώμεθα) with a true heart in full assurance of faith (10:22); (2) "let us hold fast" (κατέχωμεν) the confession of our hope without wavering (10:23); and (3) "let us consider" (κατανοῶμεν) how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (10:24). The warning using the negative Ἐκουσίως γὰρ ἀμαρτανόντων ἡμῶν μετὰ τὸ λαβεῖν τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τῆς ἀληθείας, οὐκέτι περὶ ἀμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία [For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins], (10:26) implies the great consequence of falling away from the truth. Falling away cannot be an option, because before them are the great cloud of witnesses whose example of steadfastness in the midst of sufferings and afflictions serves as an example of how to run with endurance (chaps. 11 and 12; Croy, 1998, pp. 162-214). The ultimate model of endurance is Jesus, and this is the very reason why the author exhorts his readers to focus their eyes on Him who endured the cross (12:2).

Jesus' despising of shame seems to be set in contrast with an audience of contemporary Roman society, where honor and shame were given a significant value. The author of Hebrews emphasizes that honor in God's sight is of supreme importance, even though it may be disgraceful in the eyes of the society. The example of Old Testament characters in Hebrews 11 affirms the author's argument (DeSilva, 1994). More emphatic is Jesus' example, which vividly shows that looking at the future reward motivates believers to persevere in the midst of hardships (12:2-3). As Jesus suffered outside the gate, believers should go to Him outside the camp, because their lasting city is not earthly, but the city to come (Heb. 13:12-14).

Suffering as God's Discipline and Sonship

Believers received assurance that what they had been suffering is evidence of sonship, for God chastens those He loves (12:3-10). This chastening appears painful, but at the end they will bear fruits of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). Jones (1985) keenly observed that the link between Heb. 12:3-11

and Heb. 12:1-2 shows the pattern of sonship—the Son and the sons. Peeler (2014) insightfully points out that the continuous theme of the Son and the sons is interwoven in the very texture of the epistle to the Hebrews. A number of references in the book of Hebrews points to the suffering of the Son. As the Son, Jesus shared with the human race His body of flesh and blood (2:13). Jesus as the Son became perfect through suffering (2:10). As the Son, Jesus learned obedience from the things He suffered (5:8). Jesus as the Son endured the cross and despised the shame (12:2). Such suffering led Him to sit down at the right hand of God. Just as the Son of God endured suffering by persecution, the sons of God are admonished to remain steadfast in the midst of suffering. Ultimately they will share the glory that Jesus has received from God (2:10).

The context of the pericope dealing with God's discipline (12:3-11) are the marathon and the wrestling match in the Roman arena. The readers are exhorted to run with endurance (v. 2), with their eyes focus on Jesus who endured and despised the shame (v. 2). Unlike Jesus who suffered on the cross, the believers have not yet reached the point of giving their lives, so the admonition is for them not to become weary and discouraged (v. 3).

To show the readers the reasons and purpose of suffering, the author quotes Prov. 3:11-12. He applies this Old Testament quotation in the context of the hardships and persecution that the audience suffered. The meaning of the word "discipline" in Proverbs and Hebrews is not limited to punishment alone; it is much broader in its concept. The Hebrew word (מִנְיָן) alongside its context conveys the idea of discipline as training in obedience in order to provide guidance and instruction (Spellman, 2011). God's chastisement in the form of suffering is for His people to become partakers of His holiness (v. 10), and to bear the peaceable fruit of righteousness (v. 11).

Suffering and the Call for Endurance

Endurance is another theological theme in the book of Hebrews (Miller, 1987, pp. 136-137). The exhortation for endurance (ὑπομονή) was addressed to readers who were suffering persecution. The readers have already manifested endurance in their previous trials (10:32), but were encouraged to remain steadfast at present to receive the promise (10:36). In the metaphor of the race, the author uses ὑπομονή for the prize that is awaiting them (12:1-2). Endurance in the context of Hebrews is one of the character traits needed to obtain the reward. The eyes of the readers should be fixed on Jesus who – as the model of endurance – had shown them that joy awaits those who endure and remain faithful.

Even though the Greek word ὑπομονή (endurance) appears only in the latter part of Hebrews, the concept of the word is pervasive throughout the book.^c Miller (1987) rightly observes that the verbal concept to "remain" (μέν-) underlies theological themes that include endurance in suffering. Hauck (1967b, pp. 574-588) pointed out that ὑπομονή, being rooted in the verb μένω (stand fast), has two dimensional views — the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical dimension points toward God, while the horizontal aspect points toward the world. In the Old Testament, later Judaism, and the New Testament, the idea of the vertical dimension of ὑπομονή emphasizes the idea of "waiting on God," or "to cleave to God." The horizontal meaning of ὑπομονή is "to endure," "stand fast," and "bear patiently." These ideas are not foreign in the book of Hebrews, since the readers are suffering persecution and trials of their faith. The author of Hebrews admonishes his audience to wait on God and stand fast. Miller (1987) pointed out that ὑπομονή means inclination to God's promise. He summed up his concept as follows:

The linking of faith with endurance is especially noteworthy in Hebrews, where faith is seen as the means of endurance. The readers, who have already endured suffering (10:32), still have need of endurance for the race ahead (10:36; 12:1, 7). Their attention is therefore directed toward Jesus, who in carrying out his High Priestly sacrifice by enduring the cross (12:2,3), is the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith.

Thus, suffering in Hebrews is closely attached to a call for endurance, since the audience of Hebrews – having suffered persecution because of their faith – needed encouragement and a model

on which they could fix their eyes. Such endurance, which focuses on Jesus, needs to wait patiently on God and endure hardship under the pressure of trials and persecution.

Suffering and the Promised Reward

The Epistle to the Hebrews often links the experience of suffering with the future reward. Cunningham (1997, pp. 337-338), who analyzed and made a study of the theology of persecution in Luke and Acts, argues that persecution is evidence that Christians are legitimate heirs of God's salvific blessings. The same line of argument has been followed in the book of Hebrews. There is a consistent appearance of suffering-reward motif all throughout the epistle. Jesus' suffering and death crowned Him with glory and honor (2:9), and made Him perfect (2:10); He destroyed him who has the power of death (2:14), He has able to release those who are in bondage (2:15), He has become a merciful and faithful High Priest (2:17), and He is able to aid those who are tempted (2:18). He was able to enter God's rest (4:10), He became the author of eternal salvation (5:9), He became the Mediator of the New Covenant (9:15), and He sat down at the right hand of God awaiting until His enemies are made His footstool (10:13; 12:2). Having their identity with Jesus, Christians also share the same suffering-reward experience. Through suffering, the Christian audience may enter the eschatological rest promised to God's people (4:9; 10:36) just like Abraham, who obtained the promise (6:18). They have a better and an enduring possession in heaven (10:34) and a great reward (10:35). Though they endure hardships on earth, God has prepared for them a city whose builder and foundation is God (10:10, 16). The present sufferings of Christians assure them that they are the sons of God, and by enduring the chastisement of God, their suffering will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness (12:11).

Summary

The Epistle to the Hebrews explicitly teaches that suffering is part of the Christian experience. The suffering motif in Hebrews should be viewed positively because of its divine purpose and future reward. In most parts of South Asia, poverty, persecution, economic recession, political turmoil, natural calamities, and social disorder are lesson books that teach profound truth, particularly for Christians. Suffering signifies that Christians are wanderers and pilgrims of this world. As they move forward to the land of rest, they are the extension of the wilderness experience of the people of God in the Old Testament. Secondly, the believers' identification with Jesus makes suffering part of their lives. Jesus suffered, and believers in Him will experience the same.

Suffering affirms that Christians belong to God. Sons are disciplined by their earthly parents because they love them. God's holy purpose for Christians calls for their experience of trials, pains, and hardships to make them bear fruits of righteousness.

Suffering is a call for further endurance. Through suffering, believers were led to focus their eyes on Jesus and wait patiently on God's promises. Lastly, the "no pain-no glory" concept harmonizes with the noble purpose of suffering. All throughout the epistle of Hebrews, rewards await those who would endure until the end. Suffering highlights the rewards of those who will remain faithful because their assurance comes from the One who never errs nor break His promises.

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Endnotes

- ^a References to the suffering of Jesus in Hebrews is frequent, both direct (cf. Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 5:8; 9:26; 13:12) and indirect (cf. Heb. 2:9, 14; 5:7; 9:15–16, 27–28).
- ^b It is beyond the ken of this paper to discuss the recipients of Hebrews. It assumes that the intended readers are Jewish Christians although there is a possibility of the presence of Gentile minority. However Thomas Schreiner states that “The meaning of the letter is fundamentally the same whether it addresses Jews or Gentiles, and thus the interpretation and biblical theology offered here do not rest on the identity of the addressees” (Schreiner, 2015, p. 8).
- ^c cf. Heb. 10:32, 36; 12:1. See the calls for “holding fast until the end” (3:6, 14; 4:14; 6:18), and the need for “longsuffering” in order to receive what is promised (6:12, 15).