

**Mark 8:31-38** He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Christian Friends:

“No pain. No gain.” Athletes say that. They know they must push their bodies to the point of pain in practice. Only then can they expect to gain the victory in competition. So, “no pain, no gain,” means that if you want something good, you have to work. You have to make sacrifices.

That’s true in sports. It’s also true for getting good grades. It’s true for going on a diet, investing money, or succeeding in your career. Unless you work hard and make sacrifices, you will not have success.

There is, however, one notable exception to the “no pain, no gain” rule. That exception is your salvation. Thankfully, you do not have to work for your salvation. You do not have to suffer any pain to get God to forgive your sins. But that does not mean your salvation was free or easy. No, it cost Jesus his life. Jesus had to suffer pain on the cross. Jesus had to suffer the punishment of God’s law. Jesus had to die an innocent death so you could have God’s gift of eternal life in heaven. So, when it comes to your salvation it’s not, “no pain, no gain.” Rather, it is **HIS PAIN – YOUR GAIN.**

In our text Jesus insists that the only way for him to save you from your sin, death, and Satan is for him to suffer, die, and rise again. Jesus says, **the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.**

Now, you and I know this so well, it's sounds natural. But it did not sound natural, good, or even sensible to Peter. Our text says, **Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.**

But Jesus did not allow Peter's rebuke. Our text continues, **Jesus...rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** Peter's ideas about no suffering for Jesus did not come from God. Those wrong ideas came from Satan and from sinful human thinking.

Unfortunately, Satan and sinful human thinking have not gone away. False ideas about how we gain forgiveness and salvation still infiltrate our hearts and minds. And it comes from that logical expression, "no pain, no gain." So, we think, "If I am to gain favor and kindness from God, I have to put effort into my salvation. I have to make sacrifices. If I sacrifice my time and go to church, then I will gain some forgiveness. If I sacrifice my money and give some offerings, then God will bless me with more money and financial security. If I give up some hobbies and spend that time volunteering for a good cause, then God will give me more happiness in heaven." Well, if you ever think that way, Jesus would say to you, **"Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."**

Now, don't take Jesus the wrong way. Going to church, giving your offerings, and volunteering are good. You should do them. You must do them. But they do not earn God's love. Your good works do not earn God's blessings. When you make painful sacrifices of time, money, or effort, it does not gain forgiveness or your place in heaven.

No, instead, God's blessings, God's love, his forgiveness of your sins, and his bringing you to heaven only happen because of Jesus Christ and his

sacrifice. Only Christ's pain on the cross is your gain for eternal salvation. Saint Paul says in our epistle lesson: **At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

So, no, you do not have to suffer pain to get God's love and forgiveness. Jesus already suffered on the cross to give you that love and forgiveness. You do not have to suffer pain to earn your place in heaven. Jesus already died and rose again to give you eternal life in the paradise of God's home.

But yet, even though you do not have to put yourself through pain in order to get these blessings, you still have to suffer pain. Just because Jesus suffered the pain of God's anger for your sin, does not mean that being a Christian is living on easy street. Jesus says, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it... If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."**

In other words, Jesus is telling you, "Yes, I suffered for your salvation. And only my suffering earns your salvation—nothing else. But that salvation comes through faith in me. And faith does more than save you. Faith also compels you to imitate me. Faith compels you to experience pain and suffering for my sake."

And so, by Christ's pain you have another kind of gain. Through faith in Jesus you gain a new perspective on suffering. You now understand that suffering for the sake of Christ identifies you as a Christian. So, you will suffer the pain of persecution, the pain of ridicule, and the pain of rejection from friends and family. But your suffering for the sake of Christ is your way to tell the world, "Jesus is my only Savior. He suffered for me. So, I am not ashamed to suffer for him. I am not afraid to experience pain or loss or unpopularity or even death for the sake of Jesus Christ."

And again, in our epistle lesson, Saint Paul tells us how Christians have a new, positive perspective on experiencing pain and suffering for the sake of

Jesus. Paul tells us, **since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**

This new, positive, and willing perspective on suffering does not come from human thinking. Joyfully suffering for Christ comes when God pours **out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**

Now, unfortunately, there's also another kind of pain. This pain comes when we realize what spiritual sissies we have all been. This pain of guilt and shame comes when we look in the mirror and tell ourselves, "How dare you call yourself a Christian? You haven't taken a bold stand for the sake of Christ. You haven't given sacrificial, painful offerings. No, you have spent your money foolishly and selfishly. And you haven't disciplined yourself to worship God faithfully. You've convinced yourself that your flimsy excuses for skipping church are acceptable to God. And you haven't corrected a fellow believer for their sin because you are afraid of the blowback you might get. No, you have not embraced Christ and his pain. You have not imitated Christ and the suffering of his cross."

That guilt and that shame should cause you pain. But, thanks and praise be to Christ, your only Savior. He provides relief to your pain-filled soul. His relief for your pain is his pain. Jesus tells you, "By my pain on the cross, I have gained forgiveness for you. So, you are free from blame. You are free from guilt. You are forever free from suffering the pain of God's anger and the agony of hell. My life, my death, and my resurrection have given you a place in heaven, **where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.**" Yes, Christ's pain is your gain—your eternal gain in the everlasting joy of heaven. To Christ alone be all glory, honor, and praise forever and ever. AMEN.