



Is an Abused Spouse Called to Suffer for Jesus?

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Does scripture encourage a spouse to patiently and quietly endure harsh and abusive treatment within her or his marriage?

The passage that we usually turn to support this thinking is found in 1 Peter 2:13–3:22, where Peter writes to believers who face mistreatment for their faith.

The entire book of 1 Peter has to do with suffering, but let's see what Peter teaches us about **how** we suffer in a godly way, as well as **when** we should patiently endure suffering.

First, let's look at **how** Peter tells us to handle ourselves in the presence of abusive people. Peter is clear that believers should be respectful of others, regardless of how we are treated. Often, in destructive marriages, a spouse who is verbally battered or emotionally neglected or abused starts to lob some verbal bombs of her own. Instead of responding to mistreatment in a way that honors God, she dishonors herself, her husband, and God by her building resentment, as well as her explosive or sinful reactions to his abuse.

We must help her choose a different path. Peter encourages us not to pay back evil for evil, by reminding us of Jesus, who, "when he was reviled, did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:22,23).

Second, Peter explains **when** we should endure abusive treatment. He writes, "For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you **do good** and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."

The **good** Peter is talking about here is a moral good—a doing-the-right-thing kind of good. Although in this passage Peter specifically advises us to submit to authority, Peter himself was flogged after he refused to stop preaching about Christ, even though

he'd been ordered by those in authority to stop. Peter refused to submit, because in doing so, he would have to stop doing good (Acts 4:19; 5:17-42).

In the same way, **when a wife refuses to submit to her husband's sinful behavior, or stands up for her children who are being mistreated, or refuses to sign a dishonest income tax report, or calls 911 when her husband is threatening to harm her or himself, she is doing good—even if it doesn't feel good to her spouse.**

Her behavior honors God, protects her children, and does what is in the best interest of her spouse. It is never in someone's best interest to enable sin to flourish.

When a woman takes these brave steps, she will suffer. She may suffer financially, as her husband sits in jail because she called the police when he hit her. She may suffer the censure from her church, when she separates from him because of his unrepentant use of pornography and verbal abuse. She may suffer with loneliness, retaliation from her spouse, and disapproval from her friends and family for the stance she's taken. That's exactly the kind of suffering Peter is talking about. He's speaking about suffering for doing good, instead of being passive or fearful—doing the wrong thing or nothing at all. **Peter is saying that when we do what is right and we get mistreated for it, God sees it and commends us.**

When we counsel a wife that God calls her to provide all the benefits of a good marriage, regardless of how her husband treats her, provides for her, or violates their marital vows, we're asking her to lie and pretend. This is not good for her or her marriage. This counsel also reinforces the abusive person's delusions that he can do as he please with no consequences. **It would enable him to stay blind to his sin, and colludes with his destructive ways, which is not good for him, for her, or for their family.** That kind of passivity does not honor God.

Peter concludes his teaching with these words: "Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator *while doing good.*" (1 Peter 4:19 ESV).

If we encourage a woman to suffer for Jesus, let's make sure we're encouraging her suffer for doing good, rather than suffer for staying passive or pretending.

