

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." 1 Peter 4:12-19, NAS95.

On July 19, A.D. 64 during the reign of Emperor Nero the city of Rome was consumed in a holocaust of fire. It was a city of narrow streets and high, wooden tenements that were built close together. The fire spread rapidly and lasted three days and nights. The Roman populace believed that Nero was responsible for burning their great city because he had a strange fixation for building a new city. As the city burned to the ground, he watched gleefully from the Tower of Maecenas. His soldiers not only hindered people who tried to extinguish the fire but also started new fires. The destruction devastated the Roman people because they lost everything: their religious temples, their household gods, their homes, and more. Obviously their resentment was great. Needing to divert the attention away from him, Nero chose the Christians as his scapegoat. Publicly he blamed them for burning Rome.

It was a slick choice because Christians were already the innocent victims of hatred and slander. False rumors spread that they ate human flesh and drank blood during Communion and that the holy kiss was in fact unbridled lust. Furthermore, the Romans associated them with the Jewish people. Since hatred for the Jewish people was growing at the time, it was easy to have an anti-Christian attitude as well. The Christian faith was also unpopular because there was tension in the family structure when one spouse became a believer but the other did not.

That initial hatred against the Christians eventually turned into sanctioned policy of persecution under various Roman emperors. Honest judges who were prepared to

acquitt believers of the unfounded charges were overpowered and ignored. Instead, the false charge of anarchy against a civilized society stood against them. As a result, Christians were used as human torches to light Nero's garden parties, sewn inside wild animal skins for hunting dogs to devour, nailed to crosses, and were the objects of other atrocious acts.

Many believers perished in that delirium of savagery. H.B. Workman in his book *Persecution in the Early Church* says, "For two hundred years [from Nero on] the leaders among the Christians were branded as 'anarchists' and 'atheists,' and hated accordingly.... To become a Christian meant the great renunciation, the joining of a despised and persecuted sect, the swimming against the tide of popular prejudice, the coming under the ban of the Empire, the possibility at any moment of imprisonment and death under its most fearful forms.... He that would follow Christ must count the cost, and be prepared to pay the same with his liberty and life.... The mere profession of Christianity was itself a crime. *Christianus sum* [I am a Christian] was almost the one plea for which there was no forgiveness, in itself all that was necessary as a 'title' on the back of the condemned.... For [many] the Name itself ... meant the rack, the blazing shirt of pitch, the lion, the panther, or in the case of maidens an infamy worse than death" ([Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, n.d.], pp. 103-04).

First Peter was probably written just after that persecution began, toward the end of A.D 64. The believers were experiencing a "fiery ordeal" indeed (1 Pet. 4:12). So the apostle Peter told them how to respond to suffering. In a way it sums up all his previous instruction about that subject.

As we approach 1 Peter 4:12-13 it is of some interest and importance I think to realize that in these two verses we hear echoes of at least a half dozen themes from 1:6-7

1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Rejoice in 1:6 is echoed by rejoicing and rejoice in 4:13. Distress in 1:6 is echoed by surprised in 4:12. Various trials in 1:6 is echoed by fiery ordeal in 4:12 and share the sufferings of Christ in 4:13. . Tested in 1:7 is echoed by testing in 4:12. Praise, glory and honor in 1:7 are echoed by exultation in 4:13. Finally, the revelation of Jesus Christ in 1:7 is echoed by the revelation of His glory in 4:13.

This is no mere curiosity. The Spirit of God, the divine Author, apparently considers these themes of such significance that they merit repetition. My conclusion is that

what the Spirit of God says here must be vitally important to our lives as the

children of God. What is said here must be vital to our continuance in the faith.

What is said here must be vital to our righteous endurance of hardship.

I am quoting John Piper at this point. He says ...

“The most significant difference between sickness and persecution is that persecution is an intentional hostility from someone because we are known to be Christians, but sickness is not. Therefore, in some situations, to choose to be public Christians is to choose a way of life that accepts suffering if God wills (1 Peter 4:19). But suffering may result from living as a Christian even when there is no intentional hostility from unbelievers. For example, a Christian may go to a disease ridden village to minister and contract the disease. This is suffering as a Christian, but it is not ‘persecution.’ It is a choice to suffer, if God wills, but not from the hostility of others.

“But then, when you stop to think about it, all of life, if it is lived earnestly by faith in pursuit of God’s glory and the salvation of others, is like the Christian who goes to the disease-ridden village. The suffering that comes is part of the price of living where you are in obedience to the call of God. In choosing to follow Christ in the way he directs, we choose all that this path includes under his sovereign providence. Thus all suffering that comes in the path of obedience

is suffering with Christ and for Christ – whether it is cancer or conflict. And it is chosen – that is, we willingly take the path of obedience where the suffering befalls us, and we do not murmur against God. We may pray – as Paul did – that the suffering be removed (2 Corinthians 12:8); but if God wills, we embrace it in the end, as part of the cost of discipleship in the path of obedience on the way to heaven” (Desiring God, pp. 215-216).

So we could say that our hardship and suffering identifies with that suffering with and for Christ envisioned in 1 Peter as we (1) desire and choose obedience, (2) as we search out and earnestly pursue God’ will and (3) as we give our lives for the salvation of others. This one statement should be a great encouragement to some.

Throughout his letter Peter says that persecution is inevitable. In fact, the surprise would be if it didn't come: the apostle John said, "Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13), Jesus said to His disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18), and the apostle Paul said, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Persecution is the cost of discipleship. To the lost, proclaiming Christ's name is like the unwelcome prick of the conscience because it confronts them with their sin. That confrontation often results in suffering, which is the price of discipleship. Therefore it's necessary to consider the cost of discipleship before deciding to follow Christ. Certainly Jesus had that in mind when He observed that no one builds a tower or goes into battle without first calculating the cost (Luke 14:28-32). Taking up the cross to follow Christ speaks of pain and even death (v. 27).

Disciples need the assurance of God's love

"Beloved" (1 Pet. 4:12) is a pastoral term that conveys tenderness, compassion, affection, and care. Both the "sincere love of the brethren" (1:22) and the fervent love covering a multitude of sins (4:8) are expressed in that single word. Such love is a

Suffering can tempt us to doubt God's love. If someone like Nero rolled our children in pitch and used them as human torches, we might wonder about God's love. In the midst of such persecution the enemy might echo in our ears these vile words once uttered by Job's wife: "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). So Peter wrote to assure the believers of his day --and ours--of God's unfailing love.

True disciples face many difficulties in life.

It shouldn't shock us that life is difficult. When someone takes issue with our testimony, when employees at work are hostile toward us, or when our neighbors have a vendetta against us, it's no surprise since suffering is corollary to the Christian faith. That's because following Christ promises suffering, not immunity from it. Instead of saying Jesus wants us all to be happy, healthy, and wealthy, and will solve all our worldly problems, we need to say truthfully to the ungodly, "You're in desperate need of Jesus Christ because you're on your way to an eternal hell. You have the choice of suffering in hell forever or suffering here for a while as a Christian."

Yet some want to live under the illusion that being a Christian and serving the church eliminates every difficulty. Rather, when God effectively uses us as we're faithful to His Word, we will arouse animosity. In the words of the apostle Paul, "We are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life" (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

These difficulties are a test genuine faith.

We should not be amazed about the "fiery ordeal." That Greek term speaks of burning and pictures a furnace that melts down metal to purge it of foreign elements. For example Psalm 66:10 says, "[God] has tried us with fire as silver is tried" (LXX). It's symbolic of affliction, which the Lord designs for our spiritual purity. First Peter 1:6-7 says, "In [the eternal salvation yet to come] you greatly rejoice, even though now for

a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Believers are willing to endure adversity because they know it proves the genuineness of their faith, which will be rewarded at Christ's appearing. So the fiery trial doesn't refer to just any trouble but to persecution for living the Christian faith.

Suffering for righteousness' sake reveals who is really a true believer. Christ illustrated that point in the parable of the soils: A sower scattered some seed on stony ground, and a plant grew quickly but its roots didn't grow deeply since the soil was shallow. Consequently, under the punishing rays of the sun, the plant died without ever bearing fruit (Matt. 13:5-6).

Jesus was describing a false conversion. Persecution revealed it to be nothing but a superficial profession (vv. 20-21). That's why the persecuted church is the purest church. Through tribulation we are purged and cleansed. 1 Peter 4:12 indicates that this fiery affliction is by God' design, not because of chance. His design is to remove our pride and self reliance that we might truly have our all sufficiency in Christ.

John J. Murray makes the point that "there is a providence". He says, "Providence is an old fashioned word and has a strange ring to modern ears. Yet when we break it down into its parts the meaning becomes clear. It comes from the Latin video 'to see' and pro 'before', meaning 'to see beforehand'. In our lives we plan beforehand but we do not see what is going to happen. God has planned everything for His creation and because He is the sovereign God everything will come to pass as He purposed. Providence is that marvelous working of God by which all the events and happenings in His universe accomplish the purpose He has in mind ... The plan of God extends to every detail of my life. This plan is perfect, exhaustive, secret, and for my ultimate good" (Behind a Frowning Providence, pp. 9-10).

Now, Murray goes on to say that there are "different kinds of providences.

There are favorable or smiling providences and there are what appear to be dark or frowning providences ... The Bible leaves us in no doubt that suffering [including hardship, adversity, affliction, sorrow, and disappointment] is a normal part of the true Christian life” (Behind a Frowning Providence, p.11-12).

What Peter is saying is this: Do not be surprised by the fact that hardship, pain, loss, and persecution come to you as a Christian. There is nothing at all strange about this. Hardship is not an occasion for bewilderment or perplexity. Indeed, we are called to this very thing. Remember when we studied earlier in the letter in

1 Peter 2:21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.

Beloved, we are called that we might follow Christ, particularly that we might follow Him in His suffering; that we, like our Savior, might patiently endure unfair suffering, unjust suffering, harsh treatment for doing what is right. So, Christian suffering is nothing foreign.

Peter’s second point is this: Christian suffering is ours for a reason (4:12b).

Which comes upon you for your testing. Sufferings are the means God has ordained to accomplish His good and perfect will in our lives. In this respect our lives mirror that of our Lord. The sufferings of Jesus Himself were viewed as a divine necessity (Mark 8:31; Lu. 24:26). God has more to do with our lives than just effective management of unexpected situations. Our trials come by design. There is purpose behind them. God is ever ordaining. God is ever governing our trials. He determines the timing, the duration, the intensity, and the kind of difficulties through which we must go. God is ever accomplishing His will through our hardships. So, Christian suffering is ours for a reason. And the reason given here is to prove or show that one’s faith is genuine; to demonstrate that one’s faith is not merely intellectual. It is to show that one is in fact

trusting in Christ alone; that one's faith is truly a reliance and a trust upon the promises of God in Christ as we have discussed many times in our study of 1 Peter.

Peter's third point is that Christian suffering brings joy now

(4:13a). But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing. We should not be bewildered, disheartened, or upset but expectant of sharing to some degree in Christ's suffering. Peter argues that we should rejoice in when this is the case.

Peter says to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ. To the degree suggests that first, we may rejoice when our suffering is for the same reason as Christ's. Jesus suffered for the sake of righteousness. He did not suffer on account of His own wrongdoing. Second, we may rejoice when our sufferings for the sake of Christ increase.

Peter's fourth point is this: Christian suffering brings joy in the future

(4:13b). So that at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. Again we see the value of simple perseverance in the faith.

The day of His appearing as we learned last week is near. We are not expectant of a great escape but of seeing Christ in the fullness of His glory and then entering into the fullness of His glory for eternity.

In v 14 Peter not only reminds his readers of what he has said before but again he is really just echoing Jesus own words from the Sermon on the Mount Mt. 5:5 and it is fitting in light of what he has been writing about Christ , his sufferings and our identifying with them.

This kind of ill treatment by others is blessed

V 14 because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Because he rests on us we can rest in Christ and have our rest in Christ now and forever. The idea behind

v 15 By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief or murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler

is that if we as believers we ever rightly charged with these kinds of offences, then

we have nothing to complain about. We get what we deserve which leads to the point of vs 16

16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

There is no shame in suffering for Christ.

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Peter is not talking about a condemnation kind of judgement.

The judgement of the church, God's household according to 1Peter 2:5 and 1 Tim. 3:15 is for the purpose of purifying, cleansing and maturing. The idea is that if God will ordain some of these great difficulties on those who are His for His purpose and for His glory and the result is a people who are made the better for it, then woe to those who do not know Christ when judgement, for them, can only be for final condemnation for sin.

Whatever we suffer as believers temporarily is nothing compared to the eternal suffering of those without Christ.

18 AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?

19Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

There are many who believe that can earn or maintain their salvation by doing something. This is not what Peter means. If Christians are saved with difficulty in other words in the midst of difficulty for being Christians and suffering which is all part of God's purpose for His glory, then what can the ungodly sinner look forward to when it comes to judgement from God. They cannot trust all of what they will suffer to the God who only does that which is right. The ungodly does not trust His soul to Christ and therefore in judgment has no hope. We have deposited by grace our faith in the safety deposit box of Christ Himself. In modern terms that is what entrusted could mean. Our Creator is absolutely capable of caring for us, regardless of what He brings to our live for His glory.