

1 Peter 4:12-19

SUFFERING FOR GOD'S GLORY

When you hear the word “*suffering*,” what comes to mind? Certainly nothing pleasant, and certainly nothing you would deliberately look for. People down through the ages have asked the question, “*Why do we suffer?*” And philosophers and theologians alike have given their thoughtful answers, usually agreeing in some way or another that there is benefit to be found in suffering. Tim Hansel has written the following observation:

“Most of the Psalms were born in difficulty. Most of the Epistles were written in prisons. Most of the greatest thoughts of the greatest thinkers of all time had to pass through the fire. Bunyan wrote Pilgrim's Progress from jail. Florence Nightingale, too ill to move from her bed, reorganized the hospitals of England. Semiparalyzed and under the constant menace of apoplexy, Pasteur was tireless in his attack on disease. During the greater part of his life, American historian Francis Parkman suffered so acutely that he could not work for

more than five minutes at a time. His eyesight was so wretched that he could scrawl only a few gigantic words on a manuscript, yet he contrived to write twenty magnificent volumes of history. Sometimes it seems that when God is about to make preeminent use of a man, he puts him through the fire.¹ [Emphasis added.]

As we continue our study in 1 Peter today we find that anticipating hardships the believers in Asia Minor were about to undergo, Peter encouraged his readers to endure suffering with Christ-like faith so that they might be further identified with Christ, receive a blessing, and trust God completely.²

The emphasis of this passage in 1 Peter 4:12-19 was to explain the judgment of God. The Old Testament Scripture quoted here in verse 18 is from Proverbs 11:31. Verse 18 says: “*If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?*” Some people thought that judgment, including suffering and trials, could only mean punishment for sin even though Christ had taught otherwise (John 9:1-3). To them, the “*fiery trials*” of persecution in verse 12 seemed strange and out of keeping with God’s salvation. Other people understood that judgment can be both punishment for unbelievers

¹ Tim Hansel, *You Gotta Keep Dancin'*, David C. Cook, 1985, p. 87.

and purifying, or cleansing for believers. This perspective on judgment enables believers to submit with a sense of peace to God's ways of judgment, starting with the church first and then the world (1 Peter 5:10). Peter wanted his readers to understand that there was judgment for the family of God that followed the pattern of Christ's own sufferings. In that light, continued rejoicing is the proper response to suffering as a Christian as we see in verse 13. In verse 17 Peter referred to Ezekiel 9:4–6. Persecution is something that God allows in order to purge believers of their disobedience while serving as a warning of judgment on the ungodly. The implication of the use of Proverbs 11:31 is that the ungodly face terrifying final judgment. Those who suffer according to God's will must place their confidence in God who is faithful and can be counted on to do what is right.³

1 Peter 4:12-19, NAS

12 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;

13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on

² Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:854

³ Hughes, Robert B. ; Laney, J. Carl ; Hughes, Robert B.: Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 692

rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.

14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

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

16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.

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?

18 And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?

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

Now let's walk through this verse by verse.

1 Peter 4:12 NLT:

12 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.

We shouldn't be surprised that living according to God's will involves suffering (verse 12). In fact we should expect to participate in and rejoice in the same kind of suffering that Jesus experienced. There is no shame in suffering as a Christian. When we suffer, we are simply to continue to commit our lives to God, and keep on doing good as verses 13–19 tell us to do⁴

Persecution is part of the Christian life. Throughout history the people of God have suffered at the hands of the unbelieving world. Christians are different from unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14–18). They have different values, different goals, and different behaviors. This different kind of life produces a different kind of lifestyle. Much of what goes on in the world depends on lies, pride, pleasure, and the desire to *get more*. I've heard this referred to as the disease of *Moropia*. The main symptom of this disease is the idea that if some is good, more is better. A dedicated Christian builds his life on truth, humility, holiness, and the desire to glorify God.

⁴ Richards, Larry: *The Bible Reader's Companion*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S.

God declared war on Satan after the Fall of man (Genesis 3:15), and Satan has been attacking God by attacking God's people ever since. Christians are "*strangers and pilgrims*" in an alien world where Satan is the god and prince.⁵ Whatever glorifies God will anger the enemy, and he will attack. For believers, persecution is not an unusual occurrence. The absence of opposition by Satan is what would be considered unusual. If you are a Christian and are not experiencing attacks by Satan, or trials of some sort, maybe you need to examine yourself as whether you are fully committed to Christ or whether you are still trying to keep one foot in the world.

Jesus explained to His disciples that they should expect opposition and persecution from the world.⁶ But He also gave them an encouraging promise: "*In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33 NAS). It was through His death on the cross, plus His resurrection, that He overcame sin and the world.⁷

The image of "*fire*" is often applied to testing or persecution even in modern

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⁵ John 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:3-4.

⁶ John 15:17-16:4.

⁷ John 12:23-33; see Gal. 6:14.

conversation. “*He is really going through the fire,*” is a typical statement to describe someone experiencing personal difficulties. In the Old Testament, fire was a symbol of the holiness of God and the presence of God. The fire on the altar consumed the sacrifice (Hebrews 12:28–29). But Peter saw in the image of fire *a purifying process* rather than a divine judgment.⁸

Peter warned his readers about the coming of a more intense period of persecution. He again stressed mental readiness: “*don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through.*” The NAS translates this last phrase “*the fiery ordeal among you.*” Literally it could be translated “*the among you burning.*” This verse could be applied to the suffering Christians experienced under the Roman emperor, Nero. Christians were blamed for the burning of Rome. Some were actually covered with pitch and used as living torches to light the imperial gardens at night. Peter may have believed that the provincial officials were likely to follow their emperor’s example and burn Christians at the stake in Asia Minor. Such persecution should not take the Christians by surprise as verse 12 states: “*as if something strange were happening to you.*”⁹

⁸ Job 23:10; 1 Peter 1:7.

⁹ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An

It is important to note that not all of the difficulties of life are necessarily fiery trials. There are some difficulties that are simply a part of human life and almost everybody experiences them. Unfortunately, there are some difficulties that we bring on ourselves because of disobedience and sin. Peter mentioned these in 1 Peter 2:18–20 and 3:13–17. However, the fiery trial he mentioned in 1 Peter 4:12 comes because we are faithful to God and stand up for that which is right. It is because we bear the name of Christ that the lost world attacks us. Christ told His disciples that people would persecute them, as they had Him, because their persecutors did not know God (John 15:20–21).

Note, too, the phrase in verse 12, “*for your testing.*” As we saw in chapter one, God allows trials and persecution to come into our lives to test us for various reasons, often to strengthen and purify our faith. When persecution comes along it is also often a test of our commitment. Are we going to continue to take a stand for our Lord in spite of being mistreated and slandered? Or will we slink off and turn our backs on our faith?

Persecution and trials do not just “*happen,*” in the sense of being accidents.

They are a part of God's plan, and He is in control. They are a part of Romans 8:28 and will work out for good if we let God have His way.¹⁰

1 Peter 4:13 NLT:

13 Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

Literally, Peter wrote, “*Be constantly rejoicing!*” In fact, he mentioned joy in one form or another *four times* in verses 13 and 14. The world cannot understand how difficult circumstances can produce constant joy, because the world has never experienced the grace of God (2 Corinthians 8:1–5). Peter named several privileges that we share that encourage us to rejoice in the midst of a fiery trial.

Our suffering because of persecution means fellowship with Christ. It is an honor and a privilege to suffer with Christ and be treated by the world the way it treated Him. “*The fellowship of His sufferings*” is a gift from God according to Philippians 1:29; 3:10. Not every believer grows to the point

¹⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 4:12

where God can trust him with this kind of experience, so we ought to rejoice when the privilege is given to us just as the apostles did in Acts 5:41: “*And they [the Apostles] departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.*”

Christ is with us in the furnace of persecution (Isaiah 41:10; 43:2). When Daniel’s three friends were cast into the fiery furnace because they wouldn’t worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image, they discovered they were not alone (Daniel 3:23–25). The Lord was with Paul in all of his trials,¹¹ and He promises to be with us “*to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). In fact, when sinners persecute us, they are really persecuting Jesus Christ according to Acts 9:4. The trial of our faith today is the assurance of glory when Jesus returns (1 Peter 1:7–8). This was the experience of Christ (1 Peter 5:1) and it will also be our experience.

Mature people know that life includes some postponed pleasures. We pay a price *today* in order to have enjoyments in the future. The piano student may not enjoy practicing scales by the hour, but he/she looks forward to the pleasure of playing beautiful music one day. The athlete may not enjoy

¹¹ Acts 23:11; 27:21–25; 2 Tim. 4:9–18.

exercising and developing his/her skills, but they look forward to winning the game by doing their best. Christians have something even better: our very sufferings will one day be transformed into glory, and we will be “*glad also with exceeding joy*” (Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 3:11).¹²

Suffering for Christ’s sake should cause rejoicing because through suffering Christians further identify with Christ. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ results in (a) joy with Christ; (b) fellowship with Him (Philippians 3:10); (c) being glorified with Him (Romans 8:17), and (d) reigning with Him (2 Timothy 2:12). The New Testament is clear that those who take part in the suffering of Christ also will take part in His glory, when it is revealed (1 Peter 1:7; 5:1). Peter presented this truth as a cause for future hope and present rejoicing while enduring persecution.¹³

Jesus suffered for doing the will of God. When we suffer for likewise doing the will of God, we share in Jesus’ suffering. In Romans 8:16,17 Paul writes

*16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are
God’s children.*

¹² Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 4:13

¹³ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An

17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

Then in 2 Corinthians 1:5-7, Paul again writes:

5 For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ.

6 Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer.

7 We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

And here is Paul Again in Philippians 3:10 NLT:

10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death,

This could be considered a very high form of flattery. Just imagine that God has a purpose to accomplish His will in our suffering, just as He did in His Son's suffering, and as a result we will be given eternal life for eternity in Heaven with Christ.

1 Peter 4:14 NLT:

14 So be happy when you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you.

Suffering Christians do not have to wait for Heaven in order to experience His glory. Through the Holy Spirit, they can have the glory now. This explains how martyrs could sing praises to God while bound in the midst of blazing fires. It also explains how persecuted Christians (and there are many in today's world) can go to prison and to death without complaining or resisting their captors.¹⁴

If a Christian was insulted (1 Peter 3:9) because of the name of Christ, he/she should be considered blessed (3:14). Anything that we suffer for the

¹⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 4:13

sake of Christ is a privilege, not a penalty. The Spirit of glory and of God¹⁵ refers to the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence within all who are identified by "*the name of Christ*" and thus suffer persecution (1 Peter 4:16).¹⁶ Anything that we suffer for the sake of Christ is a privilege, not a penalty.¹⁷ Jesus expressed this same truth in the Beatitudes.

Matthew 5:11–12 NLT:

11 "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.

12 Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.

In Matthew the source of happiness is the reward such earthly suffering will provide for us in Heaven. Here the source of happiness for us is to realize that if our suffering is for Christ it confirms that the Holy Spirit of God lives within us providing us all of God's power in order to withstand that

¹⁵ Isa. 11:2; Matt. 3:16.

¹⁶ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:854.

¹⁷ Ibid.

suffering.

Polycarp was the Bishop of Smyrna about the middle of the second century.

He was arrested for his faith and threatened with death if he did not recant.

“Eighty and six years have I served Him,” the saintly Bishop replied, *“and*

He never did me any injury. How can I blaspheme my King and my

Saviour?” *“I have respect for your age,”* said the Roman officer. *“Simply*

say, ‘Away with the atheists!’ and be set free.” By “the atheists” he meant the

Christians who would not acknowledge that Caesar was “*lord.*” The old

man pointed to the crowd of Roman pagans surrounding him, and cried,

“Away with the atheists!” He was burned at the stake and in his martyrdom

brought glory to the name of Jesus Christ. ¹⁸

1 Peter 4:15 NLT:

15 If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing,

making trouble, or prying into other people’s affairs.

Peter stressed that suffering was not an excuse for breaking the law.

Christians were not to retaliate. Back in chapter 3, verses 8 and 9, Peter said:

8 Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.

9 Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it.

It didn't matter how they suffered, Christians were not to react in any way that would allow for them to be punished as criminals. Peter had already told them back in 1 Peter 2:18,19 and 3:15-17 NLT:

18 You who are slaves must accept the authority of your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel.

19 For God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right and patiently endure unfair treatment.

15 Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to

¹⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 4:13

explain it.

*16 But do this in a gentle and respectful way. **Keep your conscience clear.** Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.*

17 Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!

We noted before that not all suffering is a “fiery trial” from the Lord. If a professed Christian breaks the law and gets into trouble, or becomes a meddler into other people’s lives, then he ought to suffer. The fact that we are Christians is not a guarantee that we escape the normal consequences of our misdeeds. We may not be guilty of murder (though rage can be the same as murder in the heart, Matthew 5:21–26), but what about stealing, or meddling? When Abraham, David, Peter, and other Bible “greats” disobeyed God, they suffered for it; so, who are we that we should escape? Let’s be sure we are suffering because we are Christians and not because we are criminals or because we have disobeyed God.¹⁹

¹⁹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 4:15

1 Peter 4:16 NLT

*16 But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God
for the privilege of being called by his name!*

When others persecute and ridicule us for bearing the name “*Christian*” we shouldn’t put our tail between our legs and look for the nearest hiding place. We should stand tall and show them that we are proud to identify ourselves with Jesus.

1 Peter 4:17,18 NLT:

17 For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News?

18 And also, “If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?”

These verses do not suggest condemnation of the Church but the purging and purifying of the Church by a God who loves them. Just like a loving earthly father needs to discipline his children for their own good, so God must discipline the Church out of love. If God deals with His Church, those

who believe and trust Him, through such suffering, what could possibly await those who don't believe and trust Him? In Proverbs 11:31 NLT, Solomon writes: *"If the righteous are rewarded here on earth, what will happen to wicked sinners?"*

In 1 Peter 1:6-7 Peter had referred to persecution and suffering as trials that refine and prove one's faith if we react to them in a manner that is in accordance with the will of God (3:17). Now he added that God allows persecution and suffering as disciplinary judgment to purify the lives of those in the family of God. If believers need disciplinary earthly judgments, how much more will those who do not obey the gospel (2:7), the ungodly and the sinner, deserve everlasting judgment? Peter quoted the Septuagint rendering of Proverbs 11:31, *"If the righteous are barely saved,"* to emphasize God's disciplinary demands on His children. The variety of occurrences in life is a part of God's constant care, yet from a human perspective discipline is always hard. Peter is not teaching that salvation is earned through personal trials or works, but simply that those who are saved are not exempt from disciplinary judgments, which are the natural consequences of sin, while they are still here on earth. The writer of Hebrews also supports Peter: *"Endure hardship as discipline; God is*

*treating you as sons” (Hebrews 12:7).*²⁰

When a believer suffers, he/she experiences glory and knows that there will be greater glory in the future. But a sinner who causes that suffering is only filling up the measure of God’s wrath more and more (Matthew 23:29–33). Instead of being concerned only about ourselves, we need to be concerned about the lost sinners around us. Our present “*fiery trial*” is nothing compared with the “*flaming fire*” that will punish the lost when Jesus returns in judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:7–10). The idea is expressed in Proverbs 11:31: “*If the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!*”²¹

Times of persecution are times of opportunity for a loving witness to those who persecute us (Mathew. 5:10–12, 43–48). It was not the earthquake that brought that Philippian jailer to Christ, because that frightened him into almost committing suicide. No, it was Paul’s loving concern for him that brought the jailer to faith in Christ. As Christians, we do not seek for vengeance on those who have hurt us. Rather, we pray for them and seek to

²⁰ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:855

²¹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 4:15

lead them to Jesus Christ.²²

1 Peter 1:19 NAS:

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

Believers could be sure that they were being called on to suffer according to God's will (2:15; 3:17; 4:2) if, having committed no crimes, they were suffering solely because they bore Christ's name. Peter encouraged suffering saints to endure through the exercise of Christ-like faith. Just as Christ trusted Himself to His Father who judges justly (2:23), so should believers commit themselves to Jesus and continue to do good (2:15, 20).²³ Trusting ourselves to Him completely, we are free to "*keep on doing what is right.*"²⁴ While this section of the chapter is focused primarily on the suffering that comes from persecution associated with taking a stand for Christ, we can also recognize that our personal sufferings as well are because God's will has allowed them into our lives. As the old saying goes, "*The will of God*

²² Ibid.

²³ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:855

²⁴ Richards, Larry: The Bible Reader's Companion. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S. 882

will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.” Whenever God allows something into our lives it is our place to trust Him completely. We can trust our lives, our hearts, and our souls to our faithful Creator who will do only what is best for us.

When we are suffering in the will of God, we can commit ourselves into the care of God. Everything else that we do as Christians depends on this. The word is a banking term; it means, *“to deposit for safekeeping”* (2 Timothy 1:12). Of course, when you deposit your life in God’s bank, you always receive eternal dividends on your investment. This picture reminds us that we are valuable to God. He made us, redeemed us, lives in us, guards, and protects us. There was a savings and loan association advertisement in the newspaper, reaffirming the financial stability of the firm and the backing of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. In days of financial unsteadiness, such assurances are necessary to depositors. But when you *deposit* your life with God, you have nothing to fear; for He is able to keep you safe.²⁵

This commitment is not a single action but an ongoing attitude. As we return good for evil and do good even though we suffer for it, we are committing

²⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 4:19

ourselves to God so that He can care for us. This commitment involves every area of our lives and every minute of our lives. If we really have hope, and believe that Jesus is coming again, then we will obey His Word and start laying up treasures and glory in Heaven. Unsaved people have a present that is controlled by their past, but Christians have a present that is controlled by the future (Philippians 3:12–21). In our very serving, we are committing ourselves to God and making investments for the future.

Our Heavenly Father is “*the Lord of heaven and earth*” (Matthew 11:25). With that kind of a Father, we have no need to worry. His faithfulness will not fail.

Before God pours out His wrath on this evil world, a “*fiery trial*” will come to God’s Church, to unite and purify it, that it might be a strong witness to the lost. There is nothing for us to fear if we are suffering according to the will of God. Our faithful Father-Creator will victoriously see us through.²⁶ We can take heart from that no matter what may come.

²⁶ Ibid.