

Suffer According To The Will Of God

Anthony Kim

Please go ahead and turn with me to First Peter, Chapter 4, and we'll be starting with verse 12 this morning. 1 Peter chapter 4, beginning at verse 12. This letter nears its conclusion. Peter encourages his readers to remain steadfast in the face of suffering and that they should not be surprised by it. God intends to use trials to purify his church, Christ's church. And so therefore, they as Christians are called to fully entrust their souls to God while they are suffering. Peter addresses both the cause and the believer's reaction to their hardships in verses 12 to 19, and he clarifies the essence of Christian suffering. Specifically, what defines Christian suffering? So I pose this question: What defines Christian suffering?

Persecution should never be viewed as strange or unexpected for those who are following after Christ. Jesus says this in John 16:1-4. These are his very words. He said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that you should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues. Yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them." See, believers should anticipate all kinds of difficulties. For the early Christians, namely the ones that were written to in this letter, this included severe political and social persecution specifically because of their faith in Christ.

And Christians are sometimes misled by false teachers who promise a life of constant ease and prosperity and rewards for the choices you make in life. But Peter, however, sharply contradicts this notion, instructing true believers to prepare for the opposite. He emphasizes that we should not allow the quality of our circumstances to become the standard by which we judge God's trustworthiness or character. See, God's knowledge spans from beginning to end. He is omnipotent and omniscient, and his character is immutable, never changes. And in short, when it comes to Christian suffering, God is fully in control. He is sovereign over every matter and every concern. Nothing gets slipped by God. Amen. As God sets apart people, we should not be shocked when suffering comes our way.

So let us begin in verse 12, shall we? "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Reading on verse 13, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." These two verses, we're going to find, have two instructions. Peter addresses the suffering of the believers once more, initiating this new section with the affectionate term beloved, a term he had previously used in chapter 2 verse 11 as dearly beloved there. Although Peter is about to confront the harsh realities of Christian suffering, he assures them that their hardship is not a sign that they are unloved. On the

contrary, the Lord God and Peter himself deeply loved these saints he was writing to, despite his never having met them—many of them he hasn't met personally.

With the spirit of love, Peter adopts a more intense tone in verses 12 and 13, offering two again specific instructions to those who are actually enduring suffering for Christ. So we see the phrase, "Think it not strange." Meaning, "Do not be surprised when the fiery trial comes," says Peter. The initial shock and the awe that it gives when you are persecuted gives this deeper disillusionment that potentially could lead to bitter resentment if you have this feeling of being unloved. So he says most importantly you are loved by God through the suffering, and also me, Peter, I love you too. I love you too. Never let bitterness get entwined with that love. Never separate your love that God has for you. Amen. And so this term foreshadows the intense persecution ahead, is to prepare them ahead of time, graphically illustrating by the events that Nero would blame the very Christians at the time for burning Rome and using them as human torches. He actually did that. He was an evil man.

But like precious metal placed in a fire, this suffering is meant to reveal, to purify, and strengthen believers. Suffering acts as a divine test for believers, much like teachers test students. This test of faith is essential because it purifies our faith for the Lord Jesus Christ. It strips away elements that might cloud, again, disillusion us in our walk with the Lord. He wants to make clarity in our life. Amen. He wants to bring clarity to whatever is going to happen to us.

Let me just give some of these disillusionments that might creep up when persecution comes. Such clouding elements include, for example, continuing to trust in one's own power or believing that God's favor must be earned through fulfilling certain conditions. The major issue of work salvation plagued the church in Galatia, where teachers known as Judaizers falsely asserted that adherence to the Mosaic law, including practices about circumcision, was necessary for salvation. This explains why those who embrace the foolishness of a false gospel, such as a notion that faith guarantees some sort of wealth and health guarantees—this is not existent in the Bible. Even a reputation is not there. So inevitably when people are surprised, it's because they might be disillusioned by the false gospel that surrounds us even today. So we encounter these things while we're suffering, and we don't want to ever be misguided that where our beliefs are rooted cannot be removed, cannot be removed. A true believer cannot be removed of his beliefs.

The believer's true lesson is to learn to trust in God alone. Trust in God's power alone. Trust in his faithfulness alone. I can go on and on in this. But the idea is there's no preconditions. God doesn't ask us to do anything for him in regards to our salvation or having favor with him. In fact, it's the exact opposite, isn't it? That he's the one that favors us. He's the one that gives us grace, the things that we don't deserve. Amen. Proverbs 3:5-7 is just a passage that I often pray for myself, pray for you all as well. It says this. It's a very familiar verse, but let me read it to you, and I'm going to highlight some things. Verse 5, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear the Lord, and depart from evil." See, you are to trust the Lord with your whole heart, and only him. You see that? You are not to trust your whole heart with anybody else. Everything else is of a lesser degree of trust, but you must fully trust

with all your heart unto the Lord. By doing so, God instills a fear in your heart that causes you to distrust your own heart. That's what you see in verses 6 and 7. So that's a really important verse that I often pray for myself and for everyone here.

See, suffering for Christ is a deliberate and purposeful experience rather than an accidental misfortune. No, no accidents appear in the eyes of God. Everything he sees ahead of time. The Lord allows these hardships for the benefit of all of us as brothers and sisters in Christ, our spiritual good, which is for our good. Spiritual growth is good. Just think of a child physically. You want them to grow, right? That's how God wants to see us. He wants us to see in us spiritual growth, which is for our good, and it's also a demonstration of his glory. By the way, let me just namely point you to Romans 8:28. Again, not an unfamiliar verse, but accentuates what I'm saying here. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." And then 1 Peter 1:7, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." So with these two verses, you see for your good and for his glory.

Let's look at verse 13. I'll read it again. "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." I love this verse in that it says rejoice. We went from beloved to rejoice. And what this is is essentially the aim here is be encouraged. Be encouraged. Not only know that you are loved, but be encouraged by God. Instead of letting suffering, which is your expected lot—all of us have our expected lot by God because of your connection with Christ—don't let that discourage you. You are connected with Christ in your suffering. Always remember that, brothers and sisters. You are also not only connected to him in his suffering, but you are also connected to him in his joy, according to this verse. So the joy stems from sharing the sufferings of Christ. This refers specifically to persecution Christ endured for men, but not his atoning suffering for sin. I brought that out in a previous sermon. To experience what Christ also went through is one of the things about sharing in his sufferings brings a profound inner joy.

Look what Paul said, and he deeply desired this for himself. He says this in Philippians 3:10, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and then here it is, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Are you conformed unto his death this morning? Because that is the way that we can resemble Christ as closely as possible. You see how he wants to get closer and closer to Christ. That great participation in Christ's suffering is a deeper also capacity to rejoice. So the more suffering you experience, the more joy you have. This is the paradox of the Christian life that cannot be met by our eyes, but your heart knows. It knows because your spirit is alive when you were born again. And now you can love the things of God and hate the things of sin. That's what God does from the inside out.

And Peter understood this, just like Paul. He experienced it firsthand himself. Acts 5:41 records his experience along with the other apostles when they were beaten for preaching about the Lord Jesus. It said this: "And they departed from the presence of the council. They were teaching about Christ and they were rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." See, Christian joy is again, it's a paradox preparation for trials, which is constant in

all various kinds of trials in our lives that every genuine believer will face, and our assurance is to "count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations," again, various trials. James 1:2. See, the reason for this rejoicing is given in verse 13 where it says, "inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering." Conversely, a lack of preparation for the test time results in anxiety.

Have you ever been anxious because you were not prepared for a test? Anxiety before, which causes anxiety whenever a test comes, can lead to various forms of wrongdoing. Just remember all the times that you were anxious for any type of test. Did it ever go well, or was it when you were confident that you were prepared for examination time that you did well in it? And that's the same idea God wants to test us. That's where he says, "Try you, test you." He's testing you through trials that he has prepared ahead of time and he sends it your way. How are you going to respond? Are you going to respond with anxiety? "Why me, God? How long, God?" Or are you going to say, "Lord, let it be your will. Let it be done." Your response is important to God. He hears your heart. He hears your words.

Christ's full glory is yes, currently hidden on earth, but will be revealed at his second coming, and we are promised a share in this glory. Romans 8:17 states, "We are heirs of God, and fellow-heirs with Christ; provided we suffer with him, in order that we may also be glorified with him." You see, we rejoice with the knowledge that a future for us is going to be triumphant. It's going to be full with exceeding joy and it waits for all of us as true believers. Do you keep the end in mind? I preached this last Sunday. Do you keep the end in mind? What's going to appear for you? Because it's important to God. So our godly joy now is a precursor to even greater joy later. So you're experiencing joy now in the suffering, but you will experience even greater joy later on in glory. So glory is coming. Be ready. Be ready for that.

Let's look at verse 14 and 15 with me. Verse 14 and 15. "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters." Verse 14, Christian suffering is sometimes met with reproach, which means by definition insults, defamation, disrespect, and dishonor—all under the umbrella of reproach. And this is an attack on one's character. But the central focus is on the believer's relationship with God. These insults are directed at the individual simply for the fact that they are Christian. The discussion begins by setting up a specific scenario of this kind of suffering with the conditional statement "if." Jesus reminds us of the blessing that comes with suffering for his sake. This is again the words of Jesus. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Matthew 5:11-12.

See, insults and persecution for Christ's name are not a curse, but a promise of future reward in heaven. Peter echoes this truth, assuring believers that we are insulted, but we are also blessed. So people see it through their lens. I'm going to insult them, but God sees it as you are blessed. So again, whose perspective is more important? God's perspective of course is most important to that question. And so enduring suffering is one of the evidences of being a child of God. God says blessed to you as a child of God. And when suffering unjustly, we saw this in first

Peter 2:19 to 20. God provides the strength. God gives us the comfort. God gives us the assurance needed to endure with patience. With patience. It is vital to have the wisdom to understand this very truth and to avoid letting insults received for Christ's sake provoke a response that would damage your Christian witness.

That's verse 14. Verse 15. Verse 15 repeating again. "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters." So after presenting in verse 14 the honor of suffering for Christ or in Christ, Peter issues a strong warning here against suffering for sinful reasons. And the sinful suffering is the opposite of godly endurance and happens when sin takes control without God's presence. So we saw in verse 14, it's God. It's God. It's God. He gives you the patience. He gives you the strength. He gives you the ability to be able to stay in control over sin. But here we see again that sin takes control without having God's presence.

And Peter makes a notable contrast by grouping the sin of being a busy body. Did you notice that you see here murderer, thief, evildoer? Those look like pretty good groupings. But then we have here a busybody. Interesting. So we know I'm not going to accentuate those three in that grouping, but I'm going to provide some insight to the busybodied person. This is a very serious sin, according to this, attaching to these other serious sins. A busybody is someone who interferes uninvited in the affairs of others, meaning nobody asked for you to get into my business. You're just going around and just going around and picking people and just targeting them and saying all sorts of things that you think you have the power to do, and you have all the wisdom and all of this. Again, this is a person that just is not prepared. This is a person that does not have God's presence. Remember that. It's someone that is going out and just sinning. And this is an interfering with other people's affairs. Another way of putting it, moving ahead of God's timing, moving ahead of God's timing. That should be a fearful thing when you get involved in what God is trying to do in that person's life and you just get into the affairs and you short-circuit that process. It limits the freedom of the Lord guiding that person because he must always be first. He must be the one that is ultimately leading this person that you are trying to help out, which you are not helping out by trying to get ahead of the Lord. And so it's destructive. It has destructive effects, and it often becomes apparent over time. Just allow time to go and you'll see the fruits of that kind of heart attitude and posture. It is shameful for a professing Christian to suffer as a consequence of such sin. Amen.

Verse 16 and 17. "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" A genuine believer, verse 16, may suffer precisely because they embody what it means to be a Christian, that is, they display the characteristics of Christ to whom the name refers. See that on behalf. The term Christian is presented three times in the Bible, appearing in first Peter here and in Acts 11:26 and Acts 26:28. Interestingly, in both passages in Acts, the name was coined and used by unbelievers to describe those who bore witness to their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, the name originated by the world. However, here in first Peter, we see that the Holy Spirit formally validates and acknowledges this designation Christian. So, whatever man has meant for evil, God has meant it for good. Amen.

As a true follower of Christ, a Christian should not be ashamed when suffering, like it says in this text. As a Christian, that is because of their known allegiance—one God, one Savior, one Holy Spirit, the triune God—and the actions that flow as a follower of Christ, that these sufferings are great privileges. Always remember that it is a great privilege to allow ourselves to be suffering so that we can give glory to God, to give glory to God. You see, in the previous passage, they were not giving glory to God. They were giving glory to themselves. They want to do all the things according to their will. But here we see a true Christian, a true genuine believer glorifies God. Glorifies God. And that is consistent. That is consistent with a genuine believer, more consistent as we follow in the steps of Christ.

Now look at verse 17 again. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" You see, God permits the suffering of persecution for his followers for another significant reason. There's just layers upon layers. Here we see another one. While the ultimate judgment upon the world is yet to come, as we see in this passage, and we're going to see this in second Peter as he addresses it there in his second letter. But this letter just again, big picture is focusing on God's governance over his people, the house of God, his rules. Amen. His rules under his house. So consequently, Peter discusses here God's judgment beginning with his own household. The church starts with us. And this perspective views the church as a collective body of followers of the Lord Jesus, each of whom—all of us—remains accountable for our own personal conduct. Our own personal conduct. And God's defining attribute is, by the way, holiness, as a reminder. And because he is holy, God cannot ignore sin. He cannot dismiss sin even among his own children. And so consequently, there are times when judgment must begin with the household of God.

Romans 8:1 says this, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Here the judgment of God's house is both corrective and of discipline, corrective discipline and of purifying, but not of condemnation. You will never be condemned for our sin. But when we are walking after the spirit—I'm sorry, let me back that up. When we're not when we're walking after the flesh, in that text where it says "who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit," if you are walking in the flesh, he's going to purify you. He is going to correct you. That is what a good father does. Amen. So God begins judgment with what is closest and most responsible to him. We see this all the way back in Leviticus 10:3, where it says this. Approaching God requires utmost reverence, obedience, and purity, and a failure to do so can have severe consequences, even death. Amos 3:2, just again paraphrasing like I did with Leviticus 10:3—just some comments here, not the whole scripture in its relation. We have a special relationship with God, and by being associated with God we are met with a higher standard, and injustice and sin have severe consequences even for chosen people, like back in Amos. And so we see here that is consistent with the Old Testament as it is here in the New. We have a higher standard with the household of God because God is overruling us and he is overruling the lost, but he's going to judge them later. He's going to show a preview of it, which is actually a lighter preview than what it ultimately will look like for the world. So the idea is if you think the afflictions and the judgment is severe, it's nothing in comparison to what the lost will experience. So, a way to show an example to those that are

lost. "Look, hey, we're going through it, but it's going to be a lot worse for you. You better make correction here. You better make correction." That's a way we can witness to the lost.

You see, God's desire is for wrong to be confessed and put away with. "Not in my home. Not in my home." And that's another way of saying God doesn't want this in our home. And so Peter includes himself. You see, and notice the word "us." I'm included in this with every preacher and teacher. It's not just I'm speaking to you. I'm speaking to. It's all of us. We are all under the household of God. And as we are subject to God's judgment, it is as you see here, "for the time is come," is come now. And for this judgment while the church is still on earth. Unbelievers, however, face a again future judgment. And I'm going to bring the text here that is consistent with the Old Testament. Proverbs 11:31 says, "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth." The righteous shall be recompensed in the earth. But here it is: "much more the wicked and the sinner." The severity of the coming judgment on the world serves as a stark warning to believers not to align themselves with the world. That future judgment will be absolute, will be terrible, and inescapable. Peter uses a logical argument here. From the lesser to the greater, if Christians suffer judgment now, the fate awaiting the unsaved will be far, far worse.

Let's look at verse 18 and 19. Verse 18. "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 19. "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator." The word scarcely means through difficulty. Acts 14:22 affirms this. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." And you are righteous if you are a true believer here this morning. But consider the immense effort that God, this is God, expends to secure your salvation and lead you to final glory. Through all trials, he continues his work within you, guarding you from falling away or sliding back into the world. He purifies your faith so that you can constantly respond to his will.

And therefore, it says the difficulty mentioned refers to all of God's efforts. Not our efforts, his efforts, to safely navigate you through every danger. He's doing this. He sees the danger. He says, "Nope. Turn this way," and ultimately granting you the reserved inheritance. His aim is this. 1 Peter 1:4: "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." 1 Peter 1:4. This truth should again encourage you as a believer. But to the world it is a warning, and is a great warning because in this is embedded in the question, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Where is their direction going if God is not directing them? And if they're directing their own lives? Another way of putting it. You see, those without God are only living for themselves. They're directing their own lives. And so, the answer to that question is they will appear before the great white throne judgment to be judged there according to their works. Revelation 20:11 says, "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." Those are very convicting words, aren't they?

Verse 19, verse 19 says, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God." That's the title of my sermon: Suffer According to the Will of God. "Commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator." Here is a summary of first Peter and all of his teaching

on Christian suffering. And we suffer according to the will of God. This realization assures you that your suffering is never a random occurrence. Never. Nothing happens outside of God's deliberate plan and purpose. Own that. Trust in him in that. Genesis 15:20, similar to Romans 8:28. The world thought it was meant for evil against Joseph, but God meant it unto good. See, at the end is going to be always good. It's always going to be good.

And if it's God's will for you to suffer, entrust yourself to him. Look at that word "keep" in this verse. "Keep." It's actually a banking term. It's a banking term and it's to give your valuables, namely money, jewels of sorts, for safekeeping. If you ever go to a bank, I've never seen this ever happen, but what is a bank? You're it's a place to entrust something. I never seen anyone step up to the bank teller and hand a deposit and want to take it back. The idea is, "I trust you with my money." It's a small picture of this idea that you are entrusting yourself to God. I give the most valuable thing, not money, not jewels, not material things. It says here, your soul. You see, your soul is the most important thing. We know that from Jesus. He said it first. And so he safekeeps, he safeguards your soul. And it says here, he's a faithful creator. I love that. In fact, nowhere else in the New Testament calls God creator. This is the only place. And creation emphasizes the sovereignty, the omnipotence, and the transcendence of God. Psalm 24:1-2 says this, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods." The faithful creator here is our maker and he fully comprehends you and your suffering, and he's guiding you in all things toward his intended purpose. And those who suffer in accordance to his will, namely entrusting your soul to him as a faithful creator.

What happens is this. Let me just showcase God here at this, towards the end. I want everyone to remember the certainty of God's character because I want you to see that word "faithful" and see the certainty in it.

I want to close with some passages. Lamentations 3:22-23 describes his faithfulness and mercy. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." And then reading from Galatians 6:9, the reward of perseverance says this, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." And then 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." And then Hebrews 6:10, God will not forget your service. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." These are precious promises. It is based and founded on his faithfulness. Amen.

Now, I want to take this moment for you to consider as I close this message. Which path are you on this morning? Are you a follower of Christ or are you a follower of your own self? Put your name there. Choice is before you today. If you are walking according to your name, you have an opportunity to repent. You have an opportunity that today is the day of salvation. If God is speaking to you, don't continue in this downward trajectory because that is where sin ultimately leads us to death. But thanks be to God for the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Amen.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for all the promises. We thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you, God, that you are a God that never changes. That once you say something, like we have just heard from your word, it is timeless. It is repeatable. And through the ages, until the Lord Jesus Christ returns, we can trust that you will fulfill every part of this verse of these verses for genuine believers. So bless our hearts to that end that we would know that we are loved by you, that we can rejoice in you, and that we can go through all sorts of suffering because of you. And so I pray this for all of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And then I pray for those that are not on this path. Again, Lord, I pray that you would awaken them by your spirit. Convict them of their sin of disobeying you and going their own way. And I pray, Father, that this morning that they will turn as you say, as you turn, you will be turned. As your word says, you are faithful. You are good. Help them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who paid for their sin. All of it finished on the cross. Help them to trust in him and him alone. I ask it in Jesus name. Amen.