

An Exposition of the 1st Epistle of Peter

“THE DEGREES OF GLORY”

1 Peter 4:12-19



Theme: The saint who perseveres through suffering for Christ is not a victim, but a victor.

I. The Strategy Behind Suffering – 4:12-13

A. The Process of Refinement – v. 12

1. Peter begins by bringing comfort to believers who are facing persecution, assuring believers that their suffering does not cast doubt upon God's affection and compassion for them – *“Beloved ...”*
2. Just as the sinners are surprised at our separation (cp. v. 4), we ought not be surprised at facing hardship – *“... do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing ...”*
3. *“surprised”* [ξενίζω]¹ – conveys the reaction to the introduction of something new or strange; “astonish” or “surprise”
4. God refers to it as a *“fiery ordeal,”* [πύρωσις] an allusion to the intense heat of the furnace of the refiner by which He tests the genuineness and simultaneously increases the purity of metals.
5. God's strategy behind such refinement is to test the genuineness of profession – cp. 1:6-7
6. *“... as though some strange thing were happening to you;”* – [ξένος] - It ought not surprise us that such great “heat” comes from the world – cp. **John 15:18-19.**

B. The Product of Our Rejoicing – v. 13

1. Here Peter clarifies the issue – *“but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing ...”* – when we suffer for Christ, we are made partakers of His suffering – cp. **Colossians 1:24**
2. This teaches us that *“to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ”* we will also know proportionate eternal reward.
3. We do not supplement Christ's sufferings, but complete our share of the suffering that we will face as His people.
4. Because of our union with Christ, the suffering we do is accurately designated as the sufferings of Christ – cp. **Acts 9:4-5**

¹ This term also has the connotation of “showing hospitality,” or “receive as a guest” someone who was not expected – cp. **Hebrews 13:2**

5. Since our fellowship with Christ in His suffering is by Divine appointment, it is connected with fellowship with Him in the glory of our inheritance.
6. God's strategy is to allow our suffering to result in great blessing and reward – *“... so that at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.”*

II. The Sufficiency in Suffering – 4:14-16

A. The Steadiness of God's Spirit – v. 14

1. God indicates that we are not left desolate in the midst of suffering regardless of how lonely it seems – *“If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”*
2. *“reviled”* [ὄνειδίζω] – “to heap insult upon insult” or “to mock” – this is contrasted with the Holy Spirit who *“rests on you”* – [ἀναπαύω] “to settle on an object” for the purpose of providing relief.
3. When we are suffering consistently with the will of God, He then nourishes and refreshes us by His Holy Spirit who enables endurance and perseverance through the trial – cp. **Matthew 11:28**.

B. The Success of the Saints – vv. 15-16

1. He then recalls for them what sins used to characterize them and indicated that suffering for sin is always something that ought to bring shame – *“Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler.”*
2. However, when we suffer as “Christians” we are able to hold our heads high and know that glory is awaiting us – regardless of what revilement we may encounter – *“... but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”*
3. You know when you are persecuted for Christ that you are being a success as a believer – cp. 4:1.

III. The Safety through Suffering – 4:17-19

A. The Contrasted Purposes of God – vv. 17-18

1. God here indicates His awareness of the extremity of the situation – but He does have a purpose of purifying and proving the Church – *“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God ...”*
2. *“judgment”* [κρίμα] here is a term that focuses on passing verdict on the sins of believers for the purposes of chastening and cleansing; not condemnation.
3. But, if believers are purged through such extreme experiences, *“... what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”* – cp. 2:8; 3:12; 3:17

4. Peter then quotes from the Old Testament – *“AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?”* – cp. **Proverbs 11:31**²
5. *“DIFFICULTY”* [μόλις] – an adverb that refers to something hard to accomplish or something that is rare and conveys the typical career of the believer who must endure hostility and persecution from the world and purging and purifying from the Lord.

B. The Commitment to the Provision of God – v. 19

1. In the face of the suffering that is designed to produce our eternal rejoicing, and bring reward despite the temporal trauma – entrust yourself to allowing God to perform His will – *“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”*
2. We realize – as believers – that God has a purpose beyond our own temporal well-being and our suffering does not negate His love and compassion for us.
3. We are thus able to *“entrust [παρατίθημι] our souls”* to God – who is *“a faithful Creator”* whose purpose in creation has not been thwarted.
4. The way this is demonstrated is through the unwavering obedience to the will of God – *“doing what is right.”*

² This is a quote from the Septuagint (LXX) and therefore does not correspond directly with the English translation from the Hebrew.