

Everyday Christian Fellowship

DO NOT BE SURPRISED!

1 Peter 4:12-19

“¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you. ¹³But to the degree you are sharing the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be put to shame but is to glorify God in this name. ¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin with the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸And 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 must entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing good.

On the job, in school, in the community, and even in the family, Christians who live out their faith will be confronted by unbelievers who resist the truth and oppose the gospel. No matter what believers say or do, such folks will find fault, criticize, and confront faithful believers.

In this portion of Peter’s letter, he addresses a special kind of persecution—a “*fiery trial*”—that was in the church’s future. It would not be an occasional personal or public opposition, but official persecution from authorities. To this point, Christianity had been tolerated by Rome because it was considered a sect of Judaism, and the Jews were still permitted to worship openly. However, beginning with Nero, such toleration changed, and the fires of persecution were ignited.

1. Expect Suffering (4:12). Persecution is certainly not unusual to the Christian life. Throughout history, the people of God have suffered at the hands of an unbelieving world. However, through the miracle of salvation, the indwelling Holy Spirit produces an attitude and lifestyle that is obviously different from that of unbelievers (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Worldly lifestyles focus upon pride, pleasure, prosperity, and whatever it takes to “get ahead,” whereas *committed* Christians build their lives upon truth, humility, honesty, and the commitment to glorify the living God! These contrasting lifestyles create such hostility that the world, including religious people, reacts in resentment, opposition, and even hatred—the seeds of persecution.

The Pharisees and Jewish leaders were very religious, yet, they crucified Jesus and persecuted His followers, the church! Jesus warned, “*Beware of men for they will deliver you up to councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues*” (Matthew 10:17).

This cosmic war has been going on since the beginning of God’s creation. God declared war on Satan after his deception of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and Satan has been attacking God through His people ever since.

The Bible indicates that Christians are “*strangers and pilgrims*” in an alien world of unbelievers where Satan is their god and prince (John 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4). Whatever glorifies God so angers our supernatural enemy that he attacks. Therefore, for believers, persecution is not strange—in fact,

the very absence of satanic opposition is what would be strange!

Jesus told His disciples that they should expect opposition and persecution in this world (John 15:17-16:4). However, He also gave them an encouraging promise: *“In the world you will have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). Of course, it was through His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension that Jesus overcame the world and provided our forgiveness (John 12:23-33; Galatians 6:14).

The image of “fire” is often used when referring to testing or persecution (e.g., *“He is really going through the fire.”* In the Old Testament, fire was a symbol of God’s holiness and presence (cf. Hebrews 12:28-29). In his letter, Peter used the image of fire as a *refining process* rather than a divine judgment (cf. Job 23:10; 1 Peter 1:7).

Of course, not all of life’s difficulties are *fiery trials*. Difficulties are simply a part of human life that everyone experiences, but which may be the direct consequence of sinful disobedience (e.g., 1 Peter 2:18-20; 3:13-17).

However, the *fiery trial* Peter mentions in 4:12 occurs when we are faithful to God and doing what is right. The lost world attacks us because they do not know God, yet we bear the name of Christ (John 15:20-21).

Persecution and trials are NOT accidents—they do not just “happen.” They are part of God’s plan, and He is in control. This is the methodology of Romans 8:28 whereby God causes *“all things to work together for good,”* if we are obedient to the Lord.

2. Rejoice in suffering (4:13-14). Literally, Peter wrote, *“Be constantly rejoicing, you must!”* In these two verses, Peter mentioned *joy*, in one form or another, four times!

Because the world has not experienced God’s amazing grace, people without Christ cannot understand how difficult situations and painful circumstances can produce exceeding joy (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). In that regard, Peter names several privileges that encourage us to rejoice during fiery trials:

- Our suffering means fellowship with Christ (v. 13). *“The fellowship of His sufferings”* is a gift from God (Philippians 1:29; 3:10). It is an honor and privilege to suffer with Christ and be treated the way Jesus was treated.

Not every believer reaches the spiritual maturity where God can trust them with this kind of experience: *“And they (the apostles) departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (Acts 5:41).

The Hebrew children were cast into the fiery furnace but were not alone (Daniel 3:23-25). The Lord was with Paul in all his trials (Acts 23:11; 27:21-25; 2 Timothy 4:9-18). The Lord has promised to be with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5).

- Our suffering means glory in the future (v. 13). In his letter, Peter combines *“suffering”* and *“glory”* as corresponding truths. The world believes that the absence of suffering is necessary to experience glory, but the biblical outlook is different. The trial of faith today is the assurance of future glory when Jesus returns (1 Peter 1:7-8); cf. 1 Peter 5:1).

Of course, God is not going to replace suffering with glory—rather, He will transform suffering into glory. In John 16:20-22, Jesus explains how the same baby that gives a mother her pain in childbirth is also the baby that gives her joy in the delivery. Similarly, Paul’s thorn in the flesh gave him power and glory (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). The cross that gave shame and pain

to Jesus also brought Him power and glory (cf. 2 Timothy 3:11)!

The evidence of maturity is the personal ability to postpone pleasure to achieve a worthy goal. In other words, we pay a price today to have joy in the future. Our sufferings will one day be transformed into glory, with “*joy inexpressible*” (1 Peter 1:8, cf. Romans 8:17).

- Our suffering brings to us the ministry of the Holy Spirit (v. 14). The Holy Spirit has a special ministry to those who suffer for the glory of Jesus Christ. The reference is to the Shekinah glory of God that dwelt in the temple (cf. Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11).

When Stephen was stoned, he saw Jesus in heaven and experienced God’s glory (Acts 6:15; 7:54-60)—“*joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (1 Peter 1:7-8).

As we suffer in Jesus’ name, we do not wait for heaven to experience His glory. Through the Holy Spirit, such glory can be experienced in the moment. This explains how martyrs can sing praises to God while bound in the blazing fire. It also explains how persecuted Christians can go to prison and death rejoicing in the Lord and without resisting their captors.

- Our suffering enables us to glorify the name of Jesus (v. 14). We suffer because of His name. We can identify ourselves denominationally, and there might be mocking but no major opposition. However, introduce the name of Jesus and things tend to change. Our authority and power are in Jesus’ name, and Satan hates His name! Anytime we are reproached for the name of Jesus, we have the divine opportunity to bring glory to His name.

The word “*Christian*” is found only three times in the entire New Testament (1 Peter 4:16; Acts 11:26; 26:28). Originally, the name was given by the enemies of the Antioch Church as a term of derision, but in time, it became an honored identity. The word carries the idea of “*a Christ one, belonging to Christ.*” It is certainly a privilege to bear the name and to suffer for His sake (Acts 5:41).

3. Examine Your Life (4:15-18). In the furnace of persecution and suffering, we often have more light through which we can examine our lives. The *fiery trial* is a refining process by which God removes the dross of sin to purify us. Of course, one day a *fiery judgment* will overtake the world (2 Peter 3:7-16). In the meantime, God’s judgment begins with the house of God, His church (1 Peter 2:5).

There are several questions that confront us as we examine our lives:

1) Why am I suffering (v. 15)? Not ALL suffering is a “*fiery trial.*” If a Christian gets into trouble through personal sin, *he ought to suffer.* Being a Christian does not entitle believers to escape the normal consequences of their misdeeds. We must be certain that our suffering is because we are Christians and not because we are sinful!

2) Am I ashamed, or glorifying Jesus (v. 16)? Jesus is not ashamed of us (Hebrews 2:11)—though there are many times He could be! God the Father is not ashamed to be called our God (Hebrews 2:11). On the cross, Jesus despised shame for us (Hebrews 12:2). Therefore, we can bear reproach for Him and not be ashamed (cf. Mark 8:38).

Of course, “*not be ashamed*” is negative—“*glorify God*” is positive. It takes both attitudes for a balanced witness. If we seek to glorify God, we will not be ashamed of the name of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul was determined not to be ashamed when he went to Rome (Romans 1:16), suffered in Rome (Philippians 1:20-21), and faced Martyrdom in Rome (2 Timothy 1:12).

3) Am I seeking to win the lost (vv. 17-18)? Note the word that Peter used

to describe the lost: “*Them that obey not the gospel...the ungodly and the sinner.*” The argument of this verse is clear: if God sends a *fiery trial* to His own children, and they are saved “*with difficulty*,” what will happen to the lost sinners when God’s fiery judgment falls?

When a believer suffers, he experiences glory in his suffering and knows that there will be greater glory in the future. But a sinner who causes such suffering is increasingly filling up the measure of God’s wrath (Matthew 23:29-33).

Of course, we need to be concerned about the unsaved because our present “*fiery trial*” is nothing compared with the “*flaming fire*” that shall punish the lost when Jesus returns in judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). The phrase, “*scarcely be saved*,” means “*saved with difficulty*,” but it does not suggest that God is too weak to save us.

Times of persecution are times of opportunity to present a loving witness to those who persecute us. Consider what happened to the Philippian jailor—it was not the earthquake that brought the Jailer to Jesus—it was Paul’s loving concern that brought the jailor (and his household) to faith in Christ. As Christians, we should not seek vengeance on those who hurt us. Rather, we must pray that our witness, our words and deeds, will lead them to Jesus.

4) Commit yourself to God (4:19). When suffering in the will of God, we should commit ourselves to the care of God. The Greek word, παρατίθημι (paratithēmi), translated “*commit*” or “*entrust*,” is a banking term that means “*to deposit for safekeeping*” (cf. 2 Timothy 1:12).

This commitment is not a single action—it is a constant and continuing attitude and decision! The “*dividend*” for such commitment is that God enables us to “*do good!*”

This picture reminds us that we are valuable to God—He made us, redeemed us, lives in us, guards us, and protects us. When we deposit our lives in God, we have nothing to fear for He is both faithful and able! He meets the needs of His people (cf. Matthew 6:24-34).

Remember: before God pours out His wrath on this evil world, a “*fiery trial*” will come upon the church to unite and purify us that we might become a strong witness to the lost—don’t be surprised!