

The Fiery Trial, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:15–19

Code: 60-45

INTRODUCTION

A. Hostility Against the Early Church

The apostle Peter knew his readers would be experiencing the fury of people who were anti-Christian. So throughout his letter, he expresses his concern about their suffering for righteousness.

1. 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, 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." Trials purify our faith.
2. 1 Peter 2:11-12 -- Peter said, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." As foreigners and pilgrims, our holy conduct is a witness to the lost and a defense against false accusations.
3. 1 Peter 2:19-20 -- "This finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God."
4. 1 Peter 3:8-9 -- "Let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."
5. 1 Peter 3:14, 17 -- "Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled.... For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong."
6. 1 Peter 4:1 -- "Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." We are to expect suffering since Christ experienced it.
7. 1 Peter 5:10 -- "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you."

B. Hostility Against Today's Church

The church in eastern Europe has endured harsh suffering for many years but presently it's experiencing greater freedom. In some ways their freedom might be greater than ours. That's because over there the church is growing stronger as it emerges out of an atheistic society, but here the church faces increasing aggression from our amoral and humanistic society. Hostility against the church for speaking against the sins of our culture already is on the fringe of being frightful and threatening. To endure what we're already experiencing, as well as what we might face in the future, we need to heed the teaching of 1 Peter 4:15-19, which tells us the proper way to deal with suffering for righteousness.

REVIEW

I. EXPECT SUFFERING (v. 12)

II. REJOICE IN SUFFERING (vv. 13-14)

LESSON

III. EVALUATE YOUR SUFFERING (vv. 15-18)

"By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. 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?"

A. Suffering for the Wrong Reasons (v. 15)

1. For being a lawbreaker (v. 15a)

"By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer."

If you murder someone or steal, you have no right to complain about being punished. The same is true for an "evildoer," a term that covers all the crimes not included in the first two words. All those terms refer to lawbreakers.

2. For being a troublemaker (v. 15b)

"Or a troublesome meddler."a) The term explainedThe Greek term translated "troublesome meddler" (allotriopiskopos) occurs only here in the New Testament. Some other verses help us to understand its meaning. In 1 Thessalonians 4:11 the apostle Paul says, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you." We're to occupy ourselves with a trade and not be troublemakers who stir up society. Paul also said, "We hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:11-12). Those verses refer to the believer's conduct in society, not an intrusion into the personal matters of other people. The meaning of "troublesome meddler" (1 Pet. 4:13) is to be understood in the same sense. Specifically, it's a reference to political agitation--disruptive activity that interferes with the function and flow of government. That kind of conduct would compel the government to take action. It would be wrong for the meddler to view that response as persecution for his faith.b) The term appliedA believer could become a troublemaker at his or her place of employment. If he or she works for a secular company and tries to force Christian standards on company policy, that might disrupt the harmony of working conditions. We need to be certain our testimony exhibits grace to the lost. So we each need to ask ourselves, Why am I suffering? We are to live virtuously by telling others about Jesus Christ, being faithful at our workplace, and being good citizens in our communities. If we try to force our thinking on a non-Christian culture--whether it's a corporation, a workshop, or in the sphere of government--we've stepped beyond biblical boundaries. Peter emphasized we're to be models of submission "to every human institution" (1 Pet. 2:13).

B. Suffering for the Right Reasons (vv. 16-18)

1. For righteous living (v. 16)

"But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God." The early Christians spoke of themselves as the brethren, the saints, and those of the Way. But their adversaries stigmatized them with the names "Nazarenes" and "Christians." Ironically, believers began to use "Christians" as a beloved name to identify themselves.

To "glorify God" speaks about praising God for the privilege of suffering for righteousness. It's a privilege because we're sharing in Christ's sufferings, adding to the weight of our eternal reward, and being strengthened by the Spirit (1 Pet. 4:12-14).

2. For spiritual cleansing (vv. 17-18)

"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?"

a) What it is The Greek term translated "time" refers to a decisive, crucial moment--in this case, the beginning of judgment. That occurred on the cross, when all our sins were judged in Christ. In relation to Christians that judgment also includes a chastening, testing, purifying, or cleansing, but not eternal condemnation. That "household" refers to the church is evident from other Scriptures. First Peter 2:5 refers to the godly "as a spiritual house." And in 1 Timothy 3:15 the church is called "the household of God." While judgment begins with His purification of the church, it ends with His final condemnation of the ungodly at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). If God has an important and serious judgment for His children now, what will be the result of judgment on the lost in the future? b) Why it is necessary Ezekiel 9:6 serves as an analogy to help us understand the necessity of judgment. When God looked on the sinful people of the earth to judge them, He said, "Start [the judgment] from My sanctuary," and consequently it began "with the elders who were before the temple." His judgment separated the godly from the ungodly. Similarly, His purging is necessary to purify and separate true believers from the false and carnal. Only a pure church will make disciples of all nations effectively. c) Why it is preferable It is better to endure suffering with joy now than to endure the "outcome" of eternal torment with those "who do not obey the gospel of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). Verse 18 affirms the same truth. It's a quotation from Proverbs 11:31 that's better interpreted, "If the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner?" Although believers suffer hardships now, the agony of the lost will be greater in the eternal state: they will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). The apostle Paul stated the matter this way: "[Persecution] is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction" (2 Thess. 1:5-9).

IV. ENTRUST YOURSELF TO GOD (v. 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."

A. An Explanation About Commitment

"Therefore" indicates Peter is saying something based on his previous teaching about suffering. The Greek term translated "entrust" is a banking term that speaks of a deposit for safekeeping. It's the same word Christ used on the cross in entrusting Himself to the Father (Luke 23:46). Entrusting your soul speaks of your life or being. So we're to give our lives "to a faithful Creator." That phrase occurs only here in the New Testament. "Creator" remind us we're simply giving back to God what He created, which means He is most capable of caring for our lives.

"Faithful" indicates we can trust Him because He knows what's best for us. He knows our needs and will meet them according to His promise (Phil. 4:19). While we're "doing what is right" in the midst of hostility, we are to commit ourselves to God rather than defect from Him.

B. An Example of Commitment

At age thirty Geoffrey Bull was imprisoned by Chinese communists and held for over three years. He was subjected to solitary confinement, starvation, threats, and brainwashing. During that time he composed this poem to serve as his prayer in the midst of his suffering (cited by Paul S. Rees, *Triumphant in Trouble* [Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1962], pp. 119-20):

Let not Thy face grow dim, dear God,
Nor sense of Thee depart,
Let not the memory of Thy Word
Burn low within my heart.
Let not my spirit, Lord, grow numb,

Through loneliness or fears,
 Let not my heart to doubt succumb
 And keep my eyes from tears.
 Let not the distance come between
 As months and years increase,
 Let not the darkness close me in,
 Let me not lose Thy peace.
 Let not the pressure of the foe
 Crush out my love for Thee,
 Let not the tiredness and the woe
 Eclipse Thy victory.
 For Thy joy is my joy
 And my hope, Thy day,
 And Thy kingdom Gracious God,
 Shall never pass away.
 Let us all seek to have that kind of commitment!

Focusing on the Facts

1. What concern did the apostle Peter express throughout his letter? Support your answer with Scripture.
2. Like a murderer and thief, an "evildoer" is a (1 Pet. 4:15).
3. Explain what "a troublesome meddler" (1 Pet. 4:15) is and how that could apply to a believer (see pp. 3-4).
4. What are ways for a believer to live virtuously?
5. Believers are to be models of "to every human institution" (1 Pet. 2:13).
6. Why is it a privilege to suffer for righteousness (1 Pet. 4:12-14)?
7. When did the beginning of judgment for believers occur (1 Pet. 4:17)? What does that judgment also include?
8. How does God's judgment end?
9. Why is His judgment necessary?
10. Spiritual cleansing is preferable to what? Support your answer with Scripture.
11. What does it mean to entrust your soul?
12. Why is the phrase "a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4:19) an encouragement for believers?

Pondering the Principles

1. We are to commit our lives to God in the midst of hostility (1 Pet. 4:19). The Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs spoke of that truth this way: "A gracious heart is contented by the melting of his will and desires into God's will and desires That is the excellence of grace: grace does not only subject the will to God, but it melts the will into God's will, so that they are now but one will. What a sweet satisfaction the soul must have in this condition, when all is made over to God" (The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987], pp. 53-54). Ask the Lord for His help in melting your will into His.
2. God's judgment of believers is for their spiritual purification (1 Pet. 4:17). Jerry Bridges wrote, "God uses adversity to loosen our grip on those things that are not true fruit. A severe illness or the death of someone dear to us, the loss of material substance or the tarnishing of our reputation, the turning aside of friends or the dashing of our cherished dreams on the rocks of failure, cause us to think about what is really important in life. Position or possessions or even reputation no longer seem so important. We begin to relinquish our desires and expectations--even good ones--to the sovereign will of God. We come more and more to depend on God and to desire only that which will count for

eternity. God is pruning us so that we will be more fruitful" (Trusting God [Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988], pp. 180-81). Be encouraged to "know that God causes all [your trials] to work together for good" (Rom. 8:28).

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