

SUFFERING ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL – 1 Peter 4:12-19 - May 2, 2021

We are going through 1 Peter, and one of its main themes is suffering. It is not the kind of subject we like to talk about, and especially in this country, where you have false teachers talking about a prosperity gospel – that we are not supposed to suffer, that the Christian life is to be one of health, wealth, and prosperity. But suffering is part of God's plan for our lives - and we see that in the NT, and we see that throughout church history. And it's true that the Christians in our country have not suffered as much as some in other countries. But I believe this is changing.

1 Peter 4:12. Peter starts off by telling the believers that they are beloved - which is an affectionate, comforting, and tender term - indeed Peter knew that God loved them greatly, and he loved them too. And as he starts on this subject of suffering, he felt it was important to remind them that they were loved. Peter tells them to not be surprised if they suffered. He didn't want them to think it was unusual or strange that they were suffering.

- John 15:20 – Jesus said, *“If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”*

- 2 Tim. 3:12 – *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*

- 1 John 3:13 – *“Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.”*

But notice that he calls this suffering a fiery ordeal. And there are 2 thoughts here:

- First, suffering can be a fiery ordeal, it can be extremely difficult, it can be most challenging. Being persecuted for being a Christian, being put down, and attacked and criticized and smeared can be one of the hardest things you ever go through.

- Second, this fiery ordeal is coming upon you for your testing. That is, suffering for the Lord is a trial and God gives you trials to test you, to build your faith. James 1:2-3 But trials are also given to make you more holy. You have a super-hot furnace that melts down a metal to get rid of its impurities. And so too trials are to purify you. Mal. 3:1-3

Then this verse says, *“as though something strange were happening to you.”*

This word *“strange”* comes from the same Greek word as surprised, and so Peter is emphasizing this point that you're not to be surprised when you suffer for the Lord. And I think you know that we don't live in a religious country anymore - the majority of people don't go to church. 70-47. We now live in a secular country, where more and more people who are openly non-religious, and openly against Christians.

1 Peter 4:13. This says that we share in the suffering of Christ. Now to clarify, this does not at all mean that you need to suffer to pay for your sins, for Christ suffered and died for you, His payment being sufficient to pay for your sins.

But we learn here that we are to rejoice in our sufferings, and here's why:

1. We know that the church as a whole suffers, that the body of Christ is suffering for Christ during this church age. And as Christians, as part of this universal church, we're blessed and privileged that we can share and partake in these sufferings.

2. We know Christ suffered and now we are suffering, and we should rejoice and be glad that we too can suffer, and that we have this in common with Christ, this communion, this unity with Christ, in that He suffered, and now we too can suffer.

3. We should rejoice because we know that suffering is good for our lives.

It helps us to grow in faith, holiness, hope, and in love for God. Deut. 13:3

4. We should rejoice because we know Christ's glory will be revealed. At this time, we see and experience a little of Christ's glory, but when He comes back and during the millennial kingdom we'll see Christ's glory like never before, and we should be glad and rejoicing because we know this glory is coming. Is. 6:3, Hab. 2:14, Lk. 2:14

5. We should rejoice because we will be greatly rewarded for serving the Lord during our short time on this earth. Matt. 5:12, 19:28; 2 Cor. 4:16-17; Col. 3:24

- In fact, it says we should rejoice in exultation, in exceeding joy, for we know how good, how great, how incredibly wonderful it'll be to be in heaven, and to be reigning with Christ on earth in the coming age.

1 Peter 4:14. *"If you are reviled for the name of Christ."*

1. This word *"if"* means that God is sovereign over all your suffering. Vs 19.

God is the One who determines who suffers, how we suffer, and to what degree.

Always remember that. And never compare your situation with others. Peter – John 21

2. The word reviled means to defame, to denounce, to heap insults, to mistreat verbally, to verbally abuse. This is what Jesus' enemies did to Him during his life. Matt. 26

But why do unbelievers revile us? Why do they mistreat us? We tell them their real problem, that they are sinners, we tell them that their lives are going in the wrong direction, we tell them that if they don't repent and turn to Christ, then they will be judged and go to hell.

And unbelievers don't like hearing this – they are proud and think they are right. John 7:7 – Jesus said, *"The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil."* Stephen – Acts 7:51-53

Vs. 14 goes on to say you are blessed, and why? *"Because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."* As Christians, we have the Holy Spirit, and when we suffer for God, then we'll experience and be blessed with the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, and peace.

In the OT we read about the presence of God being with the Israelites, seen in the Shekinah glory resting over the tabernacle. Indeed, the Lord was with His people.

And so too, as we suffer for God, then we will know and experience the very presence of God, the glory of God, and the fruit of the Spirit. Indeed, God wants you to experience supernatural relief & blessing in the midst of your suffering.

- Acts 7 – Stephen; Acts 16 – Paul and Silas; John 14:21, 23

1 Peter 4:15. We are reminded that we are to suffer for doing what is right – we are to be living holy lives, and if we do something wrong, and then suffer, then are punished, then we deserve it. 1 Peter 2:20

- Four words are given to us here – the words “murderer” and “thief” are big sins, and were actually capital offenses in the 1st century. The word “evildoer” is a general word which obviously means we’re not to do evil, we’re not do anything sinful at all. The phrase, “troublesome meddler”, a word used only here in the NT, refers to a person who is a busy body, who is involved in things that are none of his business. Prov. 26:17, 2 Thess. 3:11-12. The whole point is that if you suffer, you’re not to suffer for doing sinful things, whether they’re big or small - you’re to suffer for doing what is right.

1 Peter 4:16. But if you suffer, then suffer for being a Christian, suffer because you are living for God, not because you are sinning. It’s interesting that it uses the word Christian – a word that was rarely used in the NT. Now believers were first called Christians in Antioch – but back then it was used in a derogatory, derisive way. Now in our culture, in our country, it has, in general, been used in a positive way, but I don’t think we’re that far away from it being used as a derogatory term against us. I really believe we are at a turning point in our country, and that unbelievers are more and more openly against us. That is, many of them hate us because we love God.

But Peter is telling us that we’re not to be ashamed for suffering as a Christian. We’re not to feel bad or feel dishonored for loving God and living for Him. But rather, we’re to glorify God, we’re to honor Him, we’re to praise Him that we can suffer for Him. Again, we’re to see that it’s a privilege, an exalted position when we are slandered and reviled for standing up for God. Acts 5:40-42

1 Peter 4:17. Let me define this word judgment. I like what JMacArthur says: “the word judgment refers to a judicial process that renders a decision on someone’s sin.” With respect to a Christian, it refers to the decision God makes with regard to their sin, which would include disciplining and spiritual cleansing. Heb. 12:5-7
- Now God is always concerned about His people first, the Christians on this earth. God wants a holy people, a people dedicated to Him. And that’s why judgment needs to begin with the church, the household of God. Hab. 1:12-13, Acts 5:1-11
Sometimes you see the lives of unbelievers and it seems like they have it so good, so easy in life, and you’re going through all these trials. Psalm 73. Don’t look at them – just know that God wants you to be holy, and that He will do what He needs to do to make you holy. And in the end, it will all be worth it. 2 Cor. 4:17, Rom. 8:18

But now look at the second part of this verse: what is the outcome, the final end of those who aren’t saved, those who don’t obey the gospel of God, who reject His offer of mercy and forgiveness? They will be punished forever in hell.

You need to see that what you go through is very small compared to what an unbeliever will go through. It's better to suffer now than go through eternal, painful torment later. Yes, you may suffer a little bit on earth, but unbelievers will suffer forever in the lake of fire, the most painful and punishing place there is. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Luke 16:19-26

1 Peter 4:18. This vs. relates to the previous vs. Now you have to understand that the word saved isn't referring to being born again, to being initially saved - it's referring to getting thru life as a Christian, to surviving the suffering, temptations and persecution you'll go through, to making it all the way to the end of your life on earth.

- Acts 14:22 – *“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”*

2 Tim. 4:7 – *“I have fought the good fight.”* 2 Tim. 4:18 – *“The Lord stood with me and strengthened me... and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom.”* John 16:33

But what will become of the godless man, the sinner, the unbeliever? He may have a relatively easy life on earth – he may not even suffer much, but that will surely not be the case when he is forever in hell. Matt. 25:46 – *“These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”* 2 Thess. 1:5-9

1 Peter 4:19. This word *“therefore”* means vs. 19 is the conclusion to what we just read on suffering from vs. 12-18. It says those who suffer, suffer according to the will of God. And again, this means that God is sovereign over your suffering, and if you do suffer, you know God has planned it, that He's purposeful, that He'll use this suffering, He'll work it out for your good. The Person who suffered the most was our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And remember what He said to His Father, *“Yet not my will, but Yours be done.”*

- And you know the outcome, the result, that Jesus died, but God raised Him up again, His death and resurrection resulting in Him receiving great glory, and of course, this being the means for our salvation, our eternal life, our being with Jesus forever in glory.

And when we suffer, what are we to do? We are to entrust our soul to God, our Creator, the One who made us, the One who is faithful, always with us, always doing what is good and right. And entrust means we're to commit ourselves to God, we are to be humble, we are to trust Him. Jer. 17:5-7

- And we are to keep doing what is good, what is right. When we suffer, we may be tempted to get off track, to get off the wall, to stop doing what God wants us to do, but we must keep doing what we know to do. Deut. 6:18, Rom. 12:21, 1 Peter 5:10