

The Pilgrims' Faith in Suffering

1 Peter 4:12–19

The Nineteenth Sermon on First Peter

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“Even if I am beaten, it is all joy. Those of us who were beaten are the privileged ones. So we live for Christ, and when we die, we die for Christ. We have completely given our lives into the hand of Jesus.”¹

I recently read these words by a pastor in Northern India who sees Christians suffering daily, and experiences it himself at the hands of militant Hinduism. How can he say such things? Well, in our passage tonight we read one last time of Peter's teaching on how faith responds to suffering as a Christian.

1. *A Ready Faith (v. 12)*
2. *A Rejoicing Faith (vv. 13–16)*
3. *A Refined Faith (vv. 17–18)*
4. *A Rooted Faith (v. 19)*

A Ready Faith (v. 12)

The first thing to see here is that in suffering we are to have *a ready faith*. **Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you (v. 12). Do not be surprised**; do not think that **something strange is happening to you** when you suffer the **fiery trial** that he spoke of back in 1:6–7. Be ready to suffer for being a Christian. Remember that in 4:4 Peter said your unbelieving family and friends

¹ <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-privilege-of-persecution-in-northern-india>

are surprised when you won't join them in their sinful activities but here he says you, though, **do not be surprised** when they persecute you in response.

As the saying goes, character counts in adversity. Whether it's a team down by a few points at the end of the game or whether it's how you will respond to a natural disaster, adversity displays who we are. Now, to get character it takes preparation. And so Peter writes to us here how to respond when we suffer, but this takes preparation. Listen to John Calvin:

“In order to be in a prepared state of mind when the floods of persecution roll over us, we ought to get used to such an event in good time by meditating continually on the cross.”²

A Rejoicing Faith (vv. 13–16)

We are also to have *a rejoicing faith* in suffering. Look at verse 13: **But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.** As Jesus said we are to “when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account rejoice and be glad” (Matt. 5:11–12). As James said, “Count it all joy” (Jas. 1:2). As Calvin said, “It is, indeed, a cause of joy when God forces us to show our faith by persecutions.”³

Why? Notice that the joy is rooted in the privilege of participating in Jesus' suffering and glory. We are identified with Jesus now in his sufferings and in the age to come in his glory. This is why he can say, **If you are insulted for the name**

² Calvin, 307.

³ Calvin, 307.

of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you (v. 14). This resting of the Holy Spirit comes from Isaiah 11:1–3. In Isaiah’s prophecy it’s something in the future of the Messiah; but notice the blessing here is that it’s in the present of us! Because you share in Christ sufferings you share in Christ’s blessings. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure and you now are anointed with a measure of that Spirit. And it’s because you are identified with Jesus Christ that he goes on to say, **But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name** (vv. 15–16).

A Refined Faith (vv. 17–18)

In suffering our faith also become *a refined faith*. Verse 17 seems to get us out of focus when he says, **For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?** (v. 17) Then he goes on quote from the Proverb: **If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”** (v. 18)

You see what he’s doing here? We are united to Christ, not to our sinful practices of the past. Yet our faith needs to be refined. So Peter speaks of suffering as Christian’s as a purification. Remember, the imagery of fire can mean

punishment or purification. For us, in this life, God brings the judgment of the fire of persecution as a purification. This language of fire and purification comes right from the Old Testament in Psalm 66:10: “For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.” Again, the prophet Malachi envisioned a day when the Lord would come to his temple to refine with fire (Mal. 3:1-4). Again, this is not for condemnation but for our purification. Thus our sufferings are not a sign that God is absent but that he is present with us in the fire.

A Rooted Faith (v. 19)

Finally, Peter concludes with an exhortation to have *a rooted faith*: **Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good** (v. 19). Again he says that we suffer **according to God’s will** to give us the comfort of knowing that it’s not by chance, that it’s not random, but that it’s totally in the control of God.

And isn’t it interesting that Peter doesn’t call God here “Father?” He’s already done that back in 1:17. Why doesn’t he speak of him as a **faithful Father**? Why, in fact, does he call him a **faith Creator**? Since he’s calling us to root our faith in God in suffering the language of God as **Creator** is meant to emphasize his power over all things, especially our faith that we entrust to him.

How can you say, “Even if I am beaten, it is all joy. Those of us who were beaten are the privileged ones. So we live for Christ, and when we die, we die for

Christ. We have completely given our lives into the hand of Jesus?” You can do so because this is the language of faith. Amen.