

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expository Journey Through 1Peter

1Peter 4:1-6

40- Arm Yourself Also with the Same Purpose, Part 1

December 16, 2018

1 Peter 4:1-6

1 Therefore, 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,

2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

3 For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

4 In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*;

5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

6 For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*.

To the Glory of God

Now in the Providence of God, right at the time of the year that we are celebrating the greatest Miracle in the history of the Universe, the moment in time when God took on flesh and became Man (The Incarnation), we are also on a verse by verse "journey" through an Epistle that deals, almost exclusively with Suffering. So, in a time when we are rejoicing that God is now "with us" (Immanuel), we are analyzing a very hard and brutal subject that many people don't even want to talk about, much less go into great depth with.

But that is the way that God works. God's Ways are *not* like our ways. And in His unbelievable Mercy, God is *infinitely* more interested that you and I are changed, so that we may share in the very Holiness of God, than He is in us avoiding a subject that, one way or another, will touch our lives in profound ways. Because the Reality is that Suffering is part and parcel to life in this fallen world. And when Suffering comes to our door, we will either be "trained" by it (**Hebrews 12:4-17**), or we will be destroyed by it.

But it is so amazing to learn the Ways of God. We are graciously forgiven and made Righteous, by a sovereign Act of God, and then we enter into a fascinating "Process" that involves our cooperation with God called "Sanctification". And it is during this Process where we are being "made holy" that we learn how *different* God's Ways are from our own. We learn that the way God looks at things is vastly different from the normal way we understand, and what God does is unique and distinct from what we do.

For example, what God *warns* us about, the things that God sees as being *dangers* to our walk with Him and our spiritual development, are the very things that many of us seek after, like "Becoming Satisfied", and "Financial Prosperity", and "Material Possessions". And the very Issues that we *fear* the most, like "Pain", and "Being Uncomfortable", and "Suffering", are the Issues that God uses the most to mold us into the Image and Likeness of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

About 500 years before Jesus was born, God the Holy Spirit "moved along" the son of Berechiah, the Prophet Zechariah, to write this in **Zechariah 13:8**:

It will come about in all the land," Declares the Lord, "That two parts in it will be cut off *and* perish; But the third will be left in it.

Here, the Prophet declares how God saves sinners. He sovereignly chooses a small remnant to be His people. So, the Lord "cuts off" two-thirds, and then He "sets His Love" on or "chooses" the remaining "third". So, He takes the remnant to be His Own people, and He allows the much larger group to perish in their sins. But then, amazingly, what does God do with the people He has chosen to love and to save?

Zechariah 13:9:

And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'

So, God examines the whole land, and He allows two thirds of them to perish. They get wiped out, but God saves a third. And we are in that remaining "third", *symbolically*, because we are a Christian and have been given the Gift of being able to "deny ourselves". Back in **Luke 9:23a-26**, Jesus said:

... If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and *the glory* of the Father and of the holy angels.

... so, here, Jesus said these three things constitute what genuine Salvation looks like:

1. Denying Self
2. Taking up our Cross daily
3. Following Jesus

So, *all* genuine believers have these three attributes working in their lives, *ongoingly*. But for many years, the concept of "denying self" was twisted in the minds of many people to mean "taking a vow of poverty", or "trying as hard as we could to get rid of all of this world's possessions".

But, in reality, the ability and the desire to "deny self" has to do with being able to understand that there is no "Good" in us. It has to do with being gifted to see that we are *completely* fallen and *utterly* sinful, and entirely *deserving* of Eternal Damnation. This is a frame of mind and attitude, a realization that we are "totally depraved" and "spiritually bankrupt" and in "desperate need" for God's Mercy and Grace through a loving Savior.

The Puritans taught that “denying self” would lead the individual to “self-loath”. He would literally *despise* his sin, and *hate* the fact that he has dishonored God and trampled God’s Glory under foot with disgust. And this “self-loathing” would produce several attributes in us:

- ✓ A healthy “Reverential Respect” (Fear) of God
- ✓ A Desperation for God’s Forgiveness
- ✓ An Appreciation for God’s Grace
- ✓ A Gratitude for God’s Mercy
- ✓ A Humbleness and Thankfulness
- ✓ A Desire to see others saved

These are the Attitudes that prove that our Salvation experience was genuine. And since these Attributes please God and bring great Glory to Him, *whatever* helps us to develop this humble “self-loathing” is Good.

But we must understand that *hating* self, and *despising* our own propensity to sin, and *diminishing* our own importance in our own eyes, are *not* “normal or natural” to fallen human beings. The normal inclination of all humans is to be at peace with themselves, and to take pride in what we do, and to think that we are basically “good people”. And so, God must help us to “put on” these unnatural Qualities. And the way God helps us to put on this humble denying of self is by changing us. And the way that God changes us is through the “Fires of Purification” that is called “Suffering”.

Jesus said that *loving* ourselves will cause us to perish, while *denying* self will cause us to experience the fullness of Joy in Heaven. *Loving* who we are and what we do, and *taking great pride* in our accomplishments will cause us to go to hell; while *hating* self and *despising* our arrogance and self-righteousness, and glorying *only* in what God in Christ has done for us will allow us to worship God in Heaven forever.

So loving self and being unable to deny self is categorized by God as a “Spiritual Weakness”, while denying self and refusing to take any glory in what we have done is categorized by God as a “Spiritual Strength”. So, what is God’s Remedy for “Spiritual Weakness”? What is God’s “School of Prayer”?

And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The Lord is my God.

So, now notice carefully what's happening, because this is so strange. In His great Love, God rescues the remnant from the whole, and He wondrously includes them in His elected people. And God loves these people and He saves them and He provides for them and keeps them and cherishes them. God has determined that, of all the people who have ever lived, these elected sinners will be with Him forever in unspeakable Joy!

So, God *refuses* to let these people perish. But then He takes His loved ones, His cherished remnant, the apple of His Eye, and God immediately puts them into the Fire! So, when God really loves somebody, what does He do with them? He sheds His great Love upon them by "purifying them *by Fire*". He demonstrates His unfathomable Kindness to them by *changing* them so they will not love themselves. He proves that they are His chosen ones by *stopping* them from taking any glory for their accomplishments. He manifests His tender Kindness to them by *burning away* whatever they have that would cause them to miss sharing in His Holiness!

Now this is not really anything unusual. This is "Normal Christianity". But you might be tempted to think that this is just how God worked back in the Old Testament, and that God doesn't do this anymore. And if you think that way, please listen to the Apostle Peter in **1Peter 4:12-17**:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. 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?

... so, unfair Suffering, unjust Suffering, Suffering as a Christian, sharing in the Sufferings of Jesus Christ, is not strange, it is not odd, it is "Normal Christianity". God rescued us from Hell so He could put us into the Fire! God rescues us from the "damning Fires of Hell" so He can put us into the purifying "Fires of Sanctification"!

And so, I would suggest to you that what Sanctification really is is being "trained" by the Fires of holy Discipline so that we will be so radically changed, so that verse 14 will be true in our lives:

1 Peter 4:14

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

... so, Sanctification exists so that we will agree that being "reviled for the Name" or "Suffering for the Reputation" of Jesus Christ will classify us as being "Blessed", and so that the Spirit and the Glory of God rests upon us!

Now, there are a dozen places in both the Old and New Testaments that I could go to prove that what I just said is true, but this morning, I want to find the Answer to this from the Prophet Zechariah. And he was moved along by God the Holy Spirit to say:

And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The Lord is my God.

Now notice that the Prophet wasn't talking about getting his TV viewing purified, or trying harder to not let loose with a whole string of curse words when he got angry, or working on forgiving those who had wronged him. No, very narrowly, the Prophet said that God rescued him from Hell and put him into the Fire of Purification and test him like gold, so that what will happen?

They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'

So, God puts His people into the Fires of Purification to "clean up" or to "purify" our Prayers. Look again what Zechariah said:

... They will call on My name, And I will answer them ...

... so, *when* will these people call on God? *When* will God answer them?

**I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined,
And test them as gold is tested.**

So, the "Fires of Suffering", the "purifying Discipline of the Lord", "sharing the Sufferings of Jesus", and "Suffering as a Christian", those difficult times of burning are given to us as a Gift from a loving God Who cherishes us and loves us, and has taken us out of perishing so that we will be shaped and fashioned and changed, so that when we call on God, He will answer us! So, the main reason why we suffer is so that God can awaken in us earnest and fervent Prayer!

But the tragedy is that the very Gift that God gives to change us, so that we may call on God and He will answer us, is the very thing that *eliminates* Prayer in far too many lives. People say, *"If that is the way God is going to treat me, I'll just stop praying. I'll stop worshipping. I'll withhold my love from God. God could have kept me out of this, and I even asked God to get me out of this, and He didn't. So, why should I worship Him?"* And I have heard statements like this repeated over and over again from many people for almost 50 years.

So, the "Divine School" that exists to awaken earnest and fervent Prayer in God's people is what causes many to abandon Prayer altogether.

But this verse is in the Bible so that this will not happen to us. So, as you look around and you see the Fires of Purification about to consume you and you're tempted to say, "Okay God, what's up with this?" Don't. Don't try to teach God how to teach you. What does Peter tell us in the first two verses of Chapter 4?

Therefore, 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, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Peter says:

“... Arm Yourselves ...”

... and arming ourselves so that we may suffer “as a Christian” and be “blessed”, so that the Spirit and Glory of God “may rest upon us”, is the main point of the Passage that Brother Vern just read to us.

Now *historically*, this Greek phrase was used by the Military, and it had to do with an army “preparing themselves against an attack with the knowledge that provisions were on the way”. So, it has to do with “getting ready” *so they won’t be taken by surprise*. But it also meant that as we are to prepare for battle, we do so with the knowledge that *Provisions are already on their way!* So, we are going to win, in fact, the Victory is guaranteed! The devil has already been defeated! God has already taken us out from the group who are perishing. And so, we aren’t simply “preparing for battle”. We are preparing for battle with the knowledge that what we need to win with is already on the way!

Now about 500 years ago, the great Reformer, John Calvin, said:

“It is therefore necessary that we should be subject, from first to last, to the scourges of God, in order that we may from the heart call on him; for our hearts are enfeebled by prosperity, so that we cannot make the effort to pray.”¹

... and if that’s not the modern “church” in America, I don’t know what it is. We are spiritually *enfeebled* by our amazing safety and prosperity so that we can scarcely make the effort to pray because so many other “*good things*”, “*nice things*”, “*prosperous things*”, “*right things*”, fill our powerless lives. But Calvin went on to say:

“... when God casts his faithful people into the fire, he does this according to his paternal purpose in order to burn out their dross, and thus they become gold and silver who were before filthy and abominable, and in whom much dross abounded. We see then that the elect of God, even those who may be rightly counted his children, are here distinguished from the reprobate...”²

¹ John Calvin; *Commentary on Zechariah and Malachi*; 2005-2006 Bible-Soft, Inc.

² Ibid

So, would you “arm yourselves” with me that this simply will not happen to us? May we “prepare for battle” *with the knowledge that what we need to win has already been sent*, so that our hearts will *not* be “enfeebled by prosperity”, so that we cannot make the effort to pray. Let us *not* be so hardened by our Trials and Sufferings that we forget what this is all about. God has cherished us, above the two thirds, to remove us from eternally perishing, so that we may be purified to share in His Holiness! Now look again at the first part of **1 Peter 4:1**:

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose,

... so, Peter is saying, *“Since it is true that Jesus has suffered unmercifully and unjustly in His Flesh, now those who have been sovereignly removed from the larger group who will perish eternally...*

... arm yourselves also with the same purpose...

So, “arm yourselves”. Don’t be caught flat-footed”, don’t be spiritual naïve, don’t be childish, realize what is going on here, what is at stake here, and get ready for battle...

... with the same purpose...

... with *what* “same Purpose”?

... and two-fold Purpose:

1. We are to be conformed to Jesus’s Likeness in our Sufferings.
2. Our “old man” being dead and extinct in us, we are to be renewed to a new, powerful “spiritual life”.

...and the Apostle Paul agreed with Peter. And God “moved him along” to say:

Philippians 3:10&11

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

... and ...

Romans 6:1-14

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

So, Peter is encouraging these "scattered aliens", and us, that when the purifying Fires of Suffering come, we will have already armed ourselves with the very same Purpose that Jesus had, and so, when we are being sanctified, we will *not* become weary of the journey, and we will not get slack in our prayer-life, because we know that the Fires of Sanctification will *not* ultimately destroy us, but change us so that what Peter said next will become true in our lives:

... because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

Now does this mean that the Fire of Sanctification will make it to where we will never sin again, in any capacity? No. But it *does* mean that what he said in verse 2:

So as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

... *will* become true in our lives.

And so, the various sins that allow “**living to the lusts of men**” to be attractive to us will get *weaker and weaker* as the Fire of Sanctification burns away all the remaining Hay, Wood, and Stubble that is in us. And as living to the lusts of men” gets *weaker*, living our lives for the Will of God will get *stronger*. That *will* happen.

Will we still sin? Yes, but not as much. And so, “Suffering in the Fires of Sanctification” will not produce “Sinless Perfection”, but it *will* produce people who sin less.

Suffering stops the *pervasiveness* of sinning. That is a biblical Truth, a Scriptural Teaching. Suffering in the flesh changes you so that you will not be so attracted to sin. The most godly people in the history of the world have been those who have suffered the most. Avoiding hardship doesn't make you a more spiritual person. Getting *what* you want, *when* you want it, and *how* you want it, only makes you proud and arrogant and demanding. Peace and safety doesn't make you more spiritual either. It hardens you, and it makes you cold and uncaring. It is just the way it is.

We must understand, dear friends, that God didn't separate us from the “two-thirds”, who are perishing, so we could be safe and secure, and so we could escape hardship. No, God rescued us from perishing so that when we call on Him, He will answer us, and so that we would be faithful and fruitful and busy in the Work of the Lord. If you have ever one time in your life begged God to help you overcome a particular fault, then realize that the fire you find yourself in is the Answer to that Prayer. Now look again at **1 Peter 4:3**:

For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

Now many people have told me over the years that the reason they refuse to repent, and the reason they stay away from Church is because they enjoy their sin, and they have a whole lot more sin they want to do. To these people, the Bible is boring and hopelessly outdated. So, concepts like "pursuing biblical Holiness on purpose" is about the *last* thing on their list. What attracts them are the exact things that the Apostle Peter mentions here:

- ✓ **Sensuality**
- ✓ **Lusts**
- ✓ **Drunkenness**
- ✓ **Carousing**
- ✓ **Drinking Parties**
- ✓ **Abominable Idolatries**

... and yet, even the most hardened sinner realizes that there is a "built-in" *obsolescence* to all these things. And as God begins to deal with these "chosen sinners" (Zechariah called them the "one-third"), they begin to be like the Prodigal Son and they "come to their senses" (**Luke 15:17**). God sovereignly graces them to realize that sin has made them *less* happy, *less* satisfied, and *less* fulfilled.

And this is what I call "Divine Dis-Satisfaction". It is the phenomenon whereby lost people, who are chosen by God for Salvation, try as hard as they can to find joy in their sin, but it never seems to work. As a lost person, I tried as hard as I could to find happiness in my sin. Everybody around me seemed to be so happy, and so, I put forth every ounce of strength I had to follow them. But the more I sinned, the worse I became. And so, the abundance of sin made me more and more miserable.

What was wrong was *not* that I was sinning *incorrectly* or too *infrequently*, but that God had chosen me for Salvation. And that's why I didn't "fit in" with the others. So, it was the "Hand of God" that was on my life that allowed me to find no joy in my sin. That "Sovereign Interruption", that "Divine Dis-Satisfaction", that "Sovereign Imposition" into my life was God the Holy Spirit drawing me to Jesus for Salvation.

And that was God *rescuing* me from the "two-thirds", who will perish. But thanks be to God, that even though He saved me, He wasn't

finished with me. God loves me so much, He's not about to allow me to remain the way I am. So, God, mercifully, lovingly, and relentlessly allows the Fires of Sanctification to periodically come upon me, so that by this "holy burning", I will change and God will be glorified and I will find the fullness of Joy.

And part of that radical process of making me Holy was that several years ago, by God's Grace, I began to realize that my passion to be happy and God's Passion to be glorified were not at odds with one another. And it changed my life. You see, for most of my Christian experience, I was told to "put aside" or "kill" my desire to be happy, and to "sacrifice" that passion to the *greater* "Good" of God's Will and Glory. And so, my devotion to God and my service to Him was carried out from my "Duty" and "Obligation" to "do the right thing". So, I obeyed Jesus, because I was "supposed to". It was the "right thing to do". And my motivation became "my own will-power" and "human discipline".

But God began to deal with me that He is not really being honored, He is not being glorified as much as He should be unless my devotion to Him is truly a Joy, a Delight. That unless and until I *enjoyed* my walk with God, I was not really obeying Him. And I began to understand that my desire to be happy meets together with God's Desire to be glorified, at the Cross of Jesus.

And so my motivation to struggle against my flesh was no longer my own strength or humanly engineered discipline, but the Promise, from a God, Who cannot lie, that doing this would afford me the "Fullness of Joy".

And that means that becoming a Christian is not about me *artificially* stifling my own inherent desire to be fulfilled, it is about me, by God's Grace, not buying into the lie that sin makes anybody happy.

The other day, I was speaking with a friend of mine, who I used to work with, and he asked me, *"What do you tell your child, when they say they have fallen in love with someone of their same sex? What do I tell him?"* I said, *"Tell him that he's setting his sights too low. Tell him that God wants him to be happier than he does. But he will never be happy in sin. Sin will rob your son of the joy that he says he wants.* But then my friend said, *"But my child has told me that he has genuine internal desires for another man. What do I do?"*

And I got up to embrace my friend and I told him, *"He's telling you the truth. He does have those internal desires. And they are real. But*

they are also wrong. Your son may not want to hear you say this, but you will never help him by confirming him in his sin. You must tell him the Truth, that sin will always make him miserable, and then he will die and go to hell forever. But then you must demonstrate that you believe that Truth as well."

We have to understand, dear friends, that every human born after Adam has "internal desires". And one word for those internal desires is "lust". Another word is "passions". Another word is "affections". But every human born of woman has them. And we are internally "driven", we are "motivated", we are "inclined" toward certain things by those internal desires. And those "inclinations are very real, but they are also very wrong.

So, *some* people are *inclined* to tell lies. Others have an *internal drive* to steal. *Some* have a *passion* to commit violence. *Some lust* for sex or money or for power. But however different these lusts may be, they are real. And they are all about the one thing, Human beings want to be happy.

And these desires, these internal lusts, are very powerful. Sometimes they seem to be overpowering, even invincible. But that simply isn't true. What makes these lusts so powerful is that they are "fed", they are "encouraged" and "made stronger" by the external stimulation of what we look at, what we listen to, what we read, what we say, and the company we keep.

But yielding to the lust for sexual perversion is no different than yielding to the lust to tell lies or to steal or to engage in violence. Yet we don't tell a liar that we understand his internal desire to lie, and therefore it is okay for him to tell lies. We tell him to *resist* that inclination and tell the truth. We don't encourage people, who have an inclination to steal, that since it is *innate* within them, that their thievery is okay. We tell them to *overcome* that real and powerful urge and to give, rather than take something that doesn't belong to them.

So, we should never confirm a person, who is yielding to the inclination to love someone of the same sex. Because that will doom him to Everlasting Damnation. But it will also doom him to miss the Joy that God has promised to those who love God and who are called according to His Purpose.

We must understand that the politically conservative heterosexual, who refuses to believe in Jesus, will spend Eternity in the

very same Hell as the politically liberal homosexual, who refuses to believe in Jesus. And so, the Goal of God for sexual perversion is *not* for everybody to become "heterosexual". The Goal is for both the heterosexual and the homosexual to repent and be saved, and then to become holy through repentance, and trust in Jesus and in His finished Work.

Yielding to whatever sinful impulse, whether we judge it to be internal or external, will guarantee that you will miss the unimaginable privilege of glorifying God down here, and the fullness of unspeakable Joy over there.

But, the cure for sin is not in us becoming stoics. It is *not* in us artificially *killing* the desire we have to be happy. Victory over sin is not found in us sitting in straight backed chair in a white room with no pictures on the wall, quoting Scripture all day long.

No, we are delivered from "*sinful* desires" by *replacing* them with "*holy* desires". We trade the base, ugly, and fleshly loves that we received from our father Adam with lofty, beautiful, and infinitely *superior* loves that we get from our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. So, it isn't wrong to want to be happy, it is wrong *not* to. It is right to crave and to seek after Joy. But we will never achieve that Happiness and we will never possess that Joy until we begin to love what God loves and hate what God hates.

And God through Peter gives us a sure remedy whereby we may have the power to not yield to whatever sinful impulse we may be warring against:

... he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Peter says that Suffering in our flesh helps us to replace our wicked, internal inclinations with new desires and inclinations that are not of this world. The word "**ceased**" here doesn't refer to a complete end of all sin, but rather a "*ceasing*" of the *domination* of sin over us. And so, the Purpose behind the Fire of Sanctification is to so radically transform us that we honestly and genuinely experience the fullness of Joy by becoming bought-and-paid-for "bond-slaves" of the Lord Christ. Suffering changes us to where we no longer seek to find happiness in sin, but where we truly delight ourselves in the Lord!

And then, in verse 3, Peter tells us that *whatever* amount of sin we have already committed in our lives, before we were rescued, is enough!

... the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles...

... Peter said, "*It's enough! It is sufficient!*" Now notice what he called these sins:

... the desire of the Gentiles ...

Now back under the Old Covenant, "Gentiles" were anyone who wasn't a naturally-born Jew. So, to the Jew of the first and weak Covenant, "Salvation" was simply being born Jewish. "Heaven" was the nation of Israel, and the very "Throne of God" was Jerusalem. But under the infinitely superior New Covenant, a "Gentile" is an unbeliever. So, *all* unsaved people, regardless of their ethnicity or naturality or blood-line, are "Gentiles", and all genuinely born-again souls are "True Jews". In **Romans 2:28&29**, the Apostle Paul taught:

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

So, Peter teaches us that these various sins are what unbelievers engage in. These are actions that typify people who have never experienced the Miracle of the New Birth and are not saved. So, these things should never be included in the testimony of our daily lives. But then look again at what Peter said in verses 4&5:

In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Now we have to understand that nobody persecutes Christians because we build hospitals, or because we treat sick people, or because we develop homes for the blind and the cripple or the deaf, or because

we speak up for the widows and the orphans. Even militant atheists agree that Christianity has done enormous Good for the weakest people in society.

What they have against us is *why* we do all these things and in what we say. And many people get angry when we are around, and they will mock us, or even persecute us not because we are better than they are, but precisely because our desire to be holy makes them feel guilty. The writer of **Hebrews** said:

Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

... so, the entire world was condemned by God simply by Noah reverently obeying God and preparing the Ark by faith.

And So, most of the people, who say they admire Jesus, only admire certain things about Him. Many of these “admirers” will categorically reject most, if not all, of what Jesus said. And as we have discovered, if you don’t love what Jesus said, then you really don’t love what Jesus did or Who He is. Because what Jesus taught is part and parcel to Who He is.

As we will find out next month, when we get into the Issue of what the Biblical Gospel really is, what is termed today as the “Social Gospel” is really *not* the Gospel at all. Feeding the hungry and treating the sick and housing the homeless and clothing the naked are things that we are to engage in as believers, absolutely. But those things are carried out because we are *already* saved, *not* so that by doing them we can “earn” God’s Favor. Jesus said:

Matthew 5:16

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

So, “Yes!”, we give people a cup of water. But we give people a cup of water... “in the Name of the Lord”. In other words, any and all efforts at conducting Acts of Mercy in our Community are done as an extension of the overall Mandate of the Church:

Mark 16:15b

... Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

... and then we are to:

Matthew 28:19b&20a

... make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;

So, we give and help and lift up and build and plant and show Kindness in a number of ways. But we do so only as a “means to an end”. We want lost people to hear the Gospel so they can be saved. And that is the *primary* reason for *everything* else we do. So, we exalt Jesus Christ so that He will draw all manner of men to Himself. And that means that every effort at feeding and clothing and helping is an effort at Evangelization.

But Peter says that the people, to whom this Epistle was originally written, were being persecuted precisely because they had *stopped* sinning with the others. He said:

In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*...

... but then the Apostle went on to give these believers great Hope by reminding them,

... but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Now I’ve said this before, but it needs to be repeated here. There are many verses that seem to say that God’s people are to make the mistake of the Amish and the Mennonites and the ancient Anabaptists, and assume a position of being “non-violent Conscientious Objectors”. But that is *not* what Peter and the other Apostles were teaching. Peter *promises* here that those who persecute these saints will stand before God and be judged. So, it isn’t sinful for Christians to defend themselves or to resist Evil. Now look again at verse 6:

For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*.

Here we see that Death does not hinder Jesus from always being our Defender. And that means that Death itself cannot diminish our Salvation. So, even though Jesus may appear to some to not be very strong by allowing His Own people to suffer, yet Peter tells us here that our King is so mighty that our Redemption is certain.

Now the phrase “**judged in the flesh as men**” that Peter uses here has given people some trouble down through the Centuries, and all sorts of unbiblical Teachings have come from that confusion. But Peter was *not* teaching what many say that he was. Peter is *not* saying that the only way the Judgment of God will be against us is in our flesh. So, there is a real Hell, and Hell is eternal, and in Hell those who refused to repent and trust in Jesus will suffer forever.

We need to see the word “judged” here as “Condemned”. So, all Peter is saying here is the very *same* thing that every other New Testament writer taught. You see, back in the 1st Century it was common for those who were lost to believe that the dead suffer annihilation in their flesh, and are deemed to be “condemned by God” by virtue of dying. But Peter said that belief was wrong. Peter is teaching here that even Death itself doesn't end the Life of the believer. So, even though genuine saints may die, they only die in the natural bodies. But all truly redeemed souls will live forever, in their spirit, and that this “Eternal Life” is the Will of God!

So, there is great reason for us to be encouraged! God has chosen us from the majority of people who will perish. And in, by, and through that same Love whereby God chose us in the first place to rescue from everlasting perishing, He puts us into the Fires of Sanctification, not to destroy us and not because He is mad at us, but because God wants to share with us His very Own Holiness, and there are still remaining attributes and attitudes in us that would prevent that from happening.

And so, the Gift of God's Love sustains us in our Suffering, and as we burn, the domination that Sin had over us is broken, and even though we still periodically fall short, we sin less and less.

And the many sins we used to enjoy are a thing of the past, and even the cause of some of our suffering by those we used to sin with. And finally, even if we die, only our bodies die. And our spirits go to be with God forever, which is God's Will. I tell you, it's something to rejoice about!

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.