

## Suffering for Righteousness

1 Peter 4: 12-16

Peter had spent considerable time in the preceding verses dealing with Christian character and conduct in the midst of a fallen world. He was well aware of the struggles and persecution many within the church faced. Although they were forced to deal with adversity, they were also expected to maintain their integrity before men, presenting a positive witness for Christ.

Our text today continues that thought, but Peter takes their responsibilities in a different direction. Most believers in that day dealt with opposition from the world, knowing all too well the difficulties of being a committed Christian in the midst of a pagan culture. Peter does not shy away from the truth, nor does he try to minimize the reality of their lives. He is very straightforward with the church. In fact, instead of trying to alter their focus, Peter dealt candidly with the sufferings they faced. He knew their suffering would likely continue, and he wanted to prepare them to endure even though they faced great opposition.

As with previous passages, it is difficult for us to genuinely relate to the plight of the early believers, but these principles remain true. Our world is rapidly changing, and we too must prepare for the difficulties that are sure to come. While we hate to admit it, the Lord often uses difficulties to strengthen our faith and reliance upon Him. The suffering we endure from time to time is actually beneficial in our Christian lives. As we consider the [expectations](#) for our lives, I want to discuss: [Suffering for Righteousness](#).

**I. Our Attitude in Suffering** (12-14) – As Peter began to deal with the suffering believers faced, he addressed their attitude in the midst of suffering. Developing and maintaining a proper attitude in suffering would enable them to better navigate the difficulties they encountered. Consider:

**A. The Reality** (12) – [Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.](#) Peter challenged the church in regard to their perception of trials and adversity. He urged them not to consider such difficulties as strange or unusual. No doubt, some would have felt as if they were being forced to deal with struggles that others had been able to avoid. Human nature tends to generate feelings of pity for ourselves in the midst of adversity, causing us to feel as if we have been treated unfairly, and even thinking we are forced to deal with issues no one else has had to endure. Peter assured them that these trials were not unusual, and they were not the first to encounter such difficulty. This was simply the reality of striving to live for the Lord in the midst of a wicked and perverted culture.

- Peter revealed another reality regarding these trials. Not only were they not the first to face such adversity, there was actually purpose in these trials. God had allowed them to come into their lives in order to try their faith and strengthen their resolve. While our nature resists and despises trials, the Lord knows they are beneficial in our lives. Through them we realize our weakness and learn dependence upon the Lord. As we endure faithful, and the Lord sustains us in the midst of trials, our faith in Him grows. While trials are never enjoyable at the moment, once they are over, they almost always produce stronger Christians who are more mature in the faith. Trials will come into our lives; this is just a reality of our Christian journey.

**B. The Rejoicing** (13) – *But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.* The challenge for believers continues as Peter calls on them to not only embrace the reality of suffering, but also rejoice in the midst of their suffering. (I think you will agree that is often difficult to accomplish. I know that trials are beneficial, but I find it difficult to rejoice in the midst of them. However, that is expected of us. This is easier when we realize that God has not only allowed the trial, but is planning to use it in order to make us stronger in the faith.)

- Peter also revealed an important aspect of our sufferings. As we suffer for our faith in Christ, we are partaking in His sufferings. Consider all that Christ suffered on our behalf. He was falsely accused, condemned to death, scourged, mocked, rejected, and crucified. All of this was done in submission to the Father's will to provide redemption. As we embrace the suffering we encounter for the Christ, we are following His example, submitting to the will of God for our lives in an effort to serve and honor Him. While suffering is not enjoyable, it is a great honor and privilege to identify with the sufferings of our Lord.
- Our rejoicing in trials provides great benefit as we walk with the Lord in this life, and it will produce great joy as we meet the Lord when He returns. The suffering we endure in this life will not compare to the glory that will be revealed when the Lord comes again. *2 Cor.4:17 – For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

**C. The Reproach** (14a) – *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye;* Again, contrary to human nature, Peter declared that suffering reproach for the Lord will result in great joy and even happiness. Those to whom Peter had written would certainly be able to relate to suffering reproach for Christ. These had been forced to flee their homes because of their faith in Christ. They lived a life of uncertainty and great difficulty, being rejected by the majority of society. They were pushed to the fringes of society, often impoverished and ridiculed simply because they had believed in Christ as Lord and Savior.

- This begs the question – how is one happy when suffering reproach? This all depends on one's perspective and attitude. Peter wanted them to view their struggles through the lens of faith, not through what their eyes could see. While they suffered greatly in this life for their faith, their suffering and commitment to Christ were not in vain. They endured difficulty here, but their eternal destiny was secure in Christ. These had to come to the realization that temporary suffering was actually a small price to pay in light of eternal life in Christ. When they viewed their reproach through the perspective of faith, it was easier to endure, and they were even able to rejoice.

**D. The Reward (14b)** – *for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.* Here Peter described the gracious provision of the Lord for those who suffer for Him. Many scholars agree this is the heart of the passage. Those who suffer for Christ never suffer alone. Peter assured them, as they faced trials and suffering for Christ, they would receive the Spirit of God and His glory resting upon them. Peter did not promise the Lord would prevent suffering, but he did reveal the Lord had promised to meet them in their suffering, and provide the provision of His Spirit to guide, guard, comfort, and enable them to endure.

- I certainly don't pray for trials and suffering in my life, but there is a presence and provision from the Lord that is only experienced in the midst of those difficulties. In fact, I am convinced we experience the Lord more intimately in those moments than at any other time in our lives. Trials are not enjoyable, but if we can experience His presence in the midst of them, growing in our faith, being conformed to His image, then we must agree they are beneficial.

- This is tough to consider, but I wonder how many trials we have wasted? That's an odd question, but think about the principle – how often do we merely endure trials, never really seeking the Lord or drawing strength from Him, struggling through until the trial has ended. God may have desired to teach us a great lesson that would have a significant impact on our lives and faith, and yet we squandered such a gracious opportunity. Rather than begging God to remove the trials we face, we should learn to embrace them, drawing nigh to the Lord, in order to receive that which He intended for us through that particular trial.

**II. Our Fortitude in Suffering (15-16)** – After discussing the attitude believers are to possess in the midst of suffering, Peter then addressed how we are to endure in the midst of suffering. He referred to:

**A. Our Purity (15)** – *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.* Peter revealed our suffering should never be caused by ungodly actions. Those who engaged in willful sin could expect to reap the consequences of their

behavior, but that should never be the case for believers. If the believer is to suffer, it should be in relation to their commitment to the faith, seeking to honor Christ rather than indulging the desires of the flesh. When suffering comes, we should be able to take solace knowing it is for our faith in the Lord instead of rebellion against His plan and will for our lives.

**B. Our Integrity** (16a) – *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.* Unlike those whose behavior brought about suffering, Peter declared the Christian has no reason to be ashamed for their suffering for the faith. This is one of only three times the word Christian is found within the New Testament. In that day, it was a name that often brought reproach and disdain. Those among the world used it as a slang term to identify those who believed Jesus was the Christ. Peter wanted the believers to embrace their faith, while standing boldly for the Lord, being willing to identify with His suffering.

- Many today are ridiculed for their faith. Believers in positions of prominence are often urged to keep their faith to themselves, lest others within their circle of influence discover their faith. There is no shame in identifying with Christ our Lord. We all have been in situations when we were uncomfortable, feeling as if we were the only believer within the group. While those encounters are uncomfortable, they do not provide justification for us to hide our faith. As believers in Christ, we should never be ashamed to identify with our Lord.

**C. Our Testimony** (16b) – *but let him glorify God on this behalf.* When faced with opposition or ridicule for their faith, Peter encouraged them to use that as an opportunity to bear witness of the grace of our Lord rather than allowing fear to silence their voice. Their faithfulness to the Lord, especially in difficult situations, would provide a tremendous witness for their faith and Christ. These difficult moments should be viewed as opportunities rather than inconveniences.

- Light shines brightest in the darkest places. These situations are never easy, but we must continually seek opportunities to let our light shine for the Lord. Being a faithful witness when we are forced to stand alone often bears great influence. Those with whom we interact may never admit it publicly, but I am confident they will notice our commitment and it will make an impact in their lives. We must commit to being a consistent witness, regardless of the situation or company we are among.

**Conclusion:** I think you will agree this has been a difficult passage to consider. It is easy enough to understand, but difficult to put in practice. As believers we must view our trials in light of God's plan and purpose for our lives, while striving to present a positive witness among unbelievers. If you are struggling, come to the Lord for guidance and strength to endure!