



1 Peter

Part 14 – Standing for Christ in the Fiery Trial

1 Peter 4:12-19

Suffering was not part of God's design for creation. Every time suffering is encountered we are reminded that things are not the way they are supposed to be. Sin has made a terrible mess of God's good world. Yet the Apostle Peter makes the jarring claim that Christians

should not be surprised at their sufferings, particularly those suffered for standing with Christ. Indeed, when Christians suffer for standing with Christ it is a cause for blessing and joy (vs. 13).

Peter was writing to men and women who, because they were Christians, had found themselves in a position of conflict with the surrounding culture. Christian beliefs and ethics were in marked contrast to those of the Greco-Roman world. Because of this conflict of beliefs and lifestyle Christians were routinely marked out as trouble-makers, haters of humanity, atheists, insurrectionists, and worse. There was no way for a Christ-loving people to avoid being hated, marginalized, and persecuted by a Christ-hating world.

"Because evil and sin targeted the perfect human being, Jesus Christ, those who follow in his footsteps should not be surprised to find themselves also targets of the forces of evil and sin that came against Jesus" (Jobes, 286). And even though we do not live in a society which persecutes Christians with the same violence and openness as that which was experienced by Peter's original readers, we nevertheless are living in a time when Christian beliefs and ethics and those who hold them are increasingly mocked, marginalized, and accused of all sorts of evil.

Certainly, people suffer for doing wrong. And when Christians suffer because of sinful or foolish choices they ought not think that such suffering is a cause for joy. But to suffer for standing with Christ is to suffer according to God's will (vs. 19). In fact, Peter's claim is that those who choose to suffer by standing with Christ are undergoing a kind of end-times judgment which will in the end separate God's people from those who reject him (vs. 17).

Suffering for the sake of Christ is a blessing. Not only does such suffering refine our faith and fix our hope on Christ but it confirms that we belong to God's household; those upon whom the Holy Spirit rests (vs. 14).

Maid Idea: God is at work refining his people and preparing them for life in the age to come when they suffer for standing for Christ.

1. Don't be surprised by the fiery trial.

Vs. 12

- "Fiery trial" echoes Peter's reference to the refining fire of 1:7. The theme of rejoicing in trials in anticipation of the age to come (4:13) repeats the same theme in 1:6-7. Here, Peter concludes his extended instructions concerning suffering and trials. The term "fiery trials" may well be meant to indicate both the intensity of Christian suffering as well as the nature of those sufferings as God's means to refine his people as precious metal through the fire.
- Unjust suffering is not to come as a surprise to Christians. All suffering is a reminder that sin has had a profound ongoing impact upon the whole creation. The suffering Peter references here is that sort which Christians encounter for standing for Christ in a world which hates God.
- The longing to be free of suffering is a "lingering echo of life in Eden as God created it before the fall. It is also a longing for the time when there will be no more tears, suffering, pain, and death (Rev. 21:4)"

(Jobes, 286). So the Christian's fiery trial reminds us that 1) Things are not the way they are supposed to be in this fallen world and 2) Christians should expect such trials by virtue of their commitment to Christ.

2. Rejoice in the fiery trial because you share in Christ's suffering.

Vv. 13-14

- Peter reframes suffering from a cause for bitterness to an occasion for rejoicing. Specifically, the Christian who suffers for standing for Christ should rejoice because...
 - A) They are joining Christ in his sufferings.
 - B) They will have greater joy at the return of Christ.
 - C) Their union with Christ is confirmed by the Holy Spirit who rests upon them.

3. There is no shame in suffering fiery trials for Christ's sake.

Vv. 15-16

- Peter is clear that he is referring to suffering for the sake of Christ not suffering in general and certainly not suffering for doing wrong. The sort of suffering that comes from sinful behavior is an occasion for shame. In the first century it was not uncommon (depending on the mood of the Roman Emperor) for Christians to be accused of a variety of crimes. Indeed, Christians were often seen as enemies of the people and the government. Society heaped shame on these "criminals." So Peter is reminding those Christians who are vilified by the powers that be that they need not be ashamed for their suffering gives glory to God through Jesus Christ.

4. Through the fiery trial God is fitting you for eternity.

Vv. 17-18

- It may seem odd or even wrong to you to consider that God's people will be judged. And yet it is the repeated testimony of Scripture that God's people will face the end times judgement. But Christians have an entirely different relationship with God's judgment than do unbelievers.
- I think we can speak of Christians facing God's judgment in at least two ways. First, Jesus is returning to judge the living and the dead. No one will escape the judgment of God through Jesus Christ. The question is, upon what basis will we be judged? Will we be judged on the basis of our own deeds or on the meritorious obedience and atoning death of Jesus? Christians will be judged upon the later.
- But we can also understand our relationship to God's judgement – and I think this is the point Peter is making – as a means by which God refines our faith in this life. While God is preparing his people for eternal life through the fiery trials they experience he is preparing for judgment those who reject the gospel and persecute his people (Vs. 18).

5. While suffering the fiery trial, entrust yourself to God and keep doing good.

Vs. 19

- What then is the proper response of those who are suffering for the sake of Christ? The Christian sufferer must continue to trust God. Since God is both the Creator and the Faithful One he can be trusted to bring about cosmic justice and make all things right.
- How is such trust in God expressed? By continuing to do good.
- "...while doing good." – I want to us to note two important features of this imperative to do good: 1) Behavior matters. In our zeal to avoid legalism let us not forget that Scripture calls us to do good; to be holy. 2) Do not take this instruction for granted for it provides us with a window into the miracle of the new birth. Those who are in Christ have gone through a radical transformation such that we are no longer slaves to sin unable and unwilling to do what pleases God (Rom 8:7). Rather, in Christ we are new creations both willing and able to do good (1 John 3:9).