

## **FIRST PETER**

### Lesson 20

#### **Suffering for the Name of Jesus**

1 Peter 4:12-19

How much have we been persecuted for Christ? Many Christians throughout the history of the church have been thrown to lions, beheaded, buried alive or burned at the stake, but most of us have never come close to martyrdom. We have, however, felt the sting of social persecution where non-Christians mock, laugh at us, keep us at a distance and think we are a little weird, but that is the extent of any persecution we receive. I dare say that few, if any, of us has lost a job or been jailed for our Christian faith. (However, there are many Christians who are persecuted today, especially in Muslim countries.) Because of this, some of the things mentioned in this sermon about persecution may not be relevant to most of us as we know little or nothing about suffering for the cause of Christ.

The closing section of First Peter begins with 4:12 and Peter will again emphasize the subject of suffering and give exhortations to these Christians in view of special trials they were facing or about to face. In 4:12-19 the emphasis is on persecution which comes from the world because of the Christian's testimony by life and word.

In any godless society Christians become thorns in the flesh because they are assaulting the kingdom of Satan and bringing conviction to the godless lives of non-Christians. We must remember that all true Christians will suffer some persecution in this life. *"And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Tim. 3:12). Our Lord assured us that the world will hate us because it really hates Him and all that He stands for.

*"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (John 15:18-19).

As we go through this section, let us ask ourselves how much persecution we take because we are standing for Christ? How much do we compromise our beliefs to appease people or to make them like us? How often do we really suffer for Christ or is most of the suffering we bear caused by our own obnoxiousness?

#### **SUFFERING IS DESIGNED BY GOD TO TEST THE CHRISTIAN (4:12)**

##### **"Beloved"**

Peter addresses these suffering Christians as "divinely loved ones," reminding them that they are loved with all the love in the heart of God. When undergoing suffering, what a comfort to know that God loves His children with an infinite love.

**"Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you ... as though some strange thing were happening to you."**

Literally this say, “Stop being surprised at the fiery ordeal ... as though it were alien (foreign) to you.” These Christians apparently thought that being Christians and severe persecution were inconsistent. They did not fully realize that suffering is an integral part of Christianity, for it is part of God’s plan for the Christian to suffer for his faith. Peter says that the mental attitude we Christians are to display in the midst of suffering is not to be astonished by it or to think that it is somehow out of God’s control.

Suffering for Christ is an inevitable part of Christian living; it is inescapable. It does not just happen. It is not an accident. As believers in the absolute sovereignty of God, we know that nothing takes God by surprise and everything that happens to us is either directly brought by God or allowed by Him.

While the Bible declares over and over again that suffering is part and parcel in our Christian experience, we somehow still think of it as something strange when it comes to us. It seems foreign or alien to us, for we have wrongly thought of suffering as incompatible with victory in Christ. On the contrary, the really strange thing is peace and prosperity. The normal thing is suffering.

If you are seriously considering becoming a Christian, I want to rid your mind of one wrong thought: Becoming a Christian does not take away all your problems so everything is made perfect. It does bring peace, joy and security because you know your life is right with God, but it also brings suffering—sometimes more than to unbelievers.

It is a falsehood to say Christians have no more problems, but we do have Christ, our divine resource, who removes some problems, improves the situation in others, and teaches us to cope with still others.

As Christians, our lives become more difficult because we are at war with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Without exception, all Christians have to go to the school of suffering, so we should not be surprised, astonished, or upset when trials, testings and temptations come into our lives.

### **“which comes upon you for your testing”**

These “fiery ordeals” are pressure situations brought into the life and used by God to test the Christian. All trials are but tests. They come to help us see that our faith is genuine. Even though we may resist at first, sufferings make us cling to God. They are used to strengthen our faith and purify our lives. Trials are used by God to bring the Christian to maturity. Only as faith is tested does it become greater and stronger.

What is true of the individual Christian is also true of the local church. Just as the individual Christian cannot mature without suffering, so a local church cannot grow spiritually or numerically without suffering. If it never suffers, it never grows. Suffering will make a church stronger and greater if its members respond to suffering biblically and by faith in the living God.

### **SUFFERING BRINGS THE CHRISTIAN INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST (4: 13)**

#### **“but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing”**

Christians who are being persecuted for Christ are sharing His sufferings. The verb translated “share” comes from the same root as the word *koinonia* which means “fellowship.”

We “share in common or fellowship with” the sufferings of Christ. These are not expiatory sufferings which He experienced on the Cross, but His sufferings for righteousness while enduring the opposition of sinners previous to the Cross.

Colossians 1:24 seems to indicate that all the sufferings of Christ are not over, for they are carried on in the church, His body: *“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”* This is why Christ said to Saul of Tarsus, when he appeared on the road to Damascus, *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”* (Acts 9:4)

Saul was not actually persecuting Christ, who had been crucified and raised from the dead, but he was persecuting Christians. To persecute Christians is to persecute Christ. We are identified with Christ, and we are going to suffer. There is a type of fellowship we can only have as we suffer for Christ. *“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”* (Phil. 3:10).

No matter how much we suffer for Christ, we are to rejoice and keep on rejoicing.

*“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance”* (James 1:2-3).

*“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance”* (Rom 5:3).

The continual exhortation of Scripture is to rejoice, rejoice, rejoice! Why? Because suffering brings us into a special and close fellowship with Christ, giving us a little taste of heaven. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is more important in this world than fellowship with Christ.

**“so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.”**

The reason we can rejoice as Christians in suffering is that we know when Christ’s glory shall be revealed, we will be with Him. Peter’s point is that if the Christian is involved in suffering for Christ on this earth, then this is a guarantee that he will be involved with Christ in eternity. If we share His suffering, we will share His glory.

With total understanding, we will then acknowledge that the sufferings endured for Christ here are nothing compared to the glory we have with Him. *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us”* (Rom. 8:18). But is it not just because we will be glorified that we rejoice in suffering, it is also because we are being sanctified, changed, right now in this life to be more Christ-like. *“But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit”* (2 Cor. 3:18).

God is using all our suffering to conform us to Christ, so we can say that suffering does not work against us but for us. It is accomplishing in us exactly what God wants and what we need to make us spiritual Christians. It drives us to depend on God. It really doesn’t make us stronger; it makes us feel our weakness more keenly so we begin to draw on God’s power and strength. Suffering accomplishes the very thing we all want in our lives—the character of Christ.

Christian, when you are discouraged with the opposition and persecutions that come from believing in Christ, and when you see your own inadequacies and weaknesses, say to

yourself, “God isn’t finished with me yet!” Keep pushing on. At the Second Advent you will be revealed with Christ in His glory being everything you desire to be—like Christ.

A sculptor’s work is conceived in his mind. He then takes a square block and begins to chip away and continues day after day until he gets his finished product. Then comes the unveiling. So also one day all Christians will be unveiled as the finished products of God. This will occur at the revelation of Christ.

## **SUFFERING IS THE EVIDENCE OF A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN LIFE (4:14)**

### **“If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed”**

The “if” assumes a fact to be true and it could be translated “since you are reviled.” Part of the persecution of Christians is to be reviled, reproached, slandered, and lied about because we bear the name of Christ which the world hates. We do not deserve injustices but they are a cross we are called on to bear for Christ, and when we bear them we are blessed, meaning “happy” or “prosperous.”

When the world persecutes the Christian this shows that he is doing something right. He is living a positive life for Christ; he is spiritually healthy, and this causes the world to take its stand against him. A compromising, lukewarm Christian never draws any kind of attack from the unsaved world. The nominal Christian is doing great damage to the cause of Christ, and this is why the Bible says in Revelation 3:17-18, *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.”*

Let’s face it. We Christians will suffer simply because we bear the name of Christ, but for His precious name we gladly suffer.

History records an interesting bit of correspondence between the Emperor Trajan and Pliny, the governor of a province in Asia Minor. Pliny wrote Trajan asking whether he should persecute Christians. He described their worship and behavior saying that they met together on the first day of the week and prayed together and sang hymns to Messiah as God and did other things which were virtually innocuous, yet, he said they were creating a disturbance. “Should we then persecute them for the name?”

Trajan answered, “Yes, merely for the name.” And from then until the time of Constantine a series of great persecutions swept across the church, merely for the name.

### **“because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”**

If the Christian is persecuted by the world, this is a clear indication that the Holy Spirit is alive and at work in his life. Only godly lives invoke the opposition of the enemy. All who suffer unjustly for the name of Christ should rejoice in this positive proof that God is at work in them. The other truth here is that when persecution comes, the Holy Spirit “rests upon” or refreshes the Christian, teaching him that the battle is the Lord’s and he does not need to retaliate.

Christian, do you receive some opposition from the world? Do you experience some social persecution because of your Christian stance? If not, you may be in a very weak spiritual state and compromising your faith to please men. May God help you to see this issue and your great need for revival in your own life.

## **SUFFERING FOR ACTS OF SIN IS NOT SUFFERING FOR THE GLORY OF GOD (4:15)**

### **“By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer”**

Peter says that suffering for evil we have done is not unjust suffering. We know what a murderer is and what a thief is, but what is an “evil doer?” This is a person who is guilty of injustice or any wrong to others. If a Christian breaks the law of God or the law of the state, he must be punished. If he does evil and suffers for it, that is exactly what he deserves. He is not suffering for Christ’s sake.

Peter implies that Christians are capable of the most gross sins and that is why he exhorts them. Before conversion they were guilty of all kinds of sins. Even after they had received new life in Christ they still had sin natures and were capable of the same kinds of sin when not under the control of the Holy Spirit.

If we Christians think we are beyond certain sins, even what we think of as the gross ones, we are in real trouble. We must never let our guards down or we could suffer as murderers, thieves or evil doers.

### **“or as a troublesome meddler”**

This is an interesting word meaning “a self-appointed overseer or regulator in other men’s matters.” The KJV translates this “busybody,” that is, someone who always has his nose in someone else’s business. This is sin, and if we suffer for it, we are not suffering for Christ.

Notice that “troublesome meddler” is placed in the same list with “murderer.” We Christians are capable of murdering others, if not with a gun or knife, with our tongue. Sometimes Christians talk maliciously, get into trouble for it, and then claim to be suffering for the name of Christ. Not so, they are suffering as disobedient Christians.

Another lesson should be learned from this verse. It is never the directive will of God that a Christian should sin. If we sin, we cannot say, “God made me do it!” We did it. We could have, and should have, avoided that sin, and we will be disciplined for it. Surely all sin is somehow in the secret plan of God, but He is never responsible for man’s sin; man is always responsible for it.

There was once an epitaph which read: Erected by her sorrowing brothers In memory of Martha Clay. Here lies one who lived for others. Now she has peace And so have they.

## **SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN BRINGS SHAMELESSNESS AND GLORY TO GOD (4:16)**

### **“but if anyone suffers as a Christian”**

If a person suffers unjustly as a Christian, he has real reason to rejoice. The kind of suffering that pleases God is not that which comes from breaking the law, but the unjust things a Christian bears for the name of Christ. The name “Christian” had great significance in New Testament times.

*“The Cult of the Caesar was the state religion of the Roman Empire, in which the emperor was worshipped as a god. It served two purposes. The subjects of Rome*

*gave obedience to the laws of the empire, not only as a political, but also as a religious duty. It also constituted the unifying factor which bound the many different peoples of the empire into one and made the military task of holding together its far-flung domain an easier one.*

*The Greek word for Caesar is Kaisar. Those who worshipped the Kaisar were called Kaisarianos. Christianity appeared as a rival claimant to world worship and dominion. The Lord Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, was looked upon in the Christian Church as the One who would someday come back and take the government of the world upon His shoulders. Those who worshipped Him as God were called Christianos, worshipers of Christ as against the Kaisarianos, worshipers of the Caesar. Rome saw the imperialism of Christianity was challenging the imperialism of the Caesars, and that is was by its propagation, striking at the very vitals of the empire. It answered this by the ten bloody persecutions. It cost something to be a Christianos in those days.” (Kenneth Wuest, First Peter)*

### **“let him not feel ashamed”**

In suffering for sins, there is no honor. In suffering for Christ, there is no shame. It is suffering as a Christian that really glorifies God, and we should never be ashamed to follow Christ.

When undergoing persecution we tend to be ashamed and seek to squirm out of a situation rather than have to take our stand for Christ. We are never to be ashamed of Christ, our Lord, or of His doctrines, or of other Christians, even though they are poor, uneducated or despised. We have a godly pride in the fact that we serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Peter wrote with great compassion and understanding because he knew from personal experience how easy it is to be ashamed of Christ. He had been ashamed of Christ. He had been badgered by a little girl and had refused to identify himself with the despised Christ. When asked if he knew Jesus, he had said that he did not and cursed to make his point. Later he became convicted and Christ forgave him, but Peter knew how easy it is to slip out of giving a clear testimony for Christ.

### **“but in that name let him glorify God.”**

It is in the precious name of Jesus that we are to glorify God. It is in this wonderful name we are saved. *“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).* Through this marvelous name we receive power and authority to live the Christian life. In the name of Jesus we find salvation, strength, power, love and courage. His name is Jesus, Christ, Lord Messiah, God, Master, and King. He is everything and we fall down and worship Him, the Mighty God!

### **SUFFERING ASSURES THE CHRISTIAN THAT GOD’S PROGRAM OF JUDGMENT FOR SIN HAS BEGUN AND WILL BE COMPLETED (4:17-18)**

**“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?”**

The "for" points back to verses 15 and 16. God apparently begins judgment with His people and then moves out to the world. He uses suffering, divine discipline and general circumstances to refine His people from their remaining sin. If He so judges the church, which He purchased with the blood of His Son, what terrible judgment will He bring on those who reject Jesus Christ! He deals with His own in love, but He will deal with unbelievers in holy wrath.

**“AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?”**

The truly saved man will experience trials, testings, hardships, stresses, pressures and difficulties, but these are all designed to make us more godly and to cause us to mature in Christ. The truth that whatever a man sows he will also reap is just as true for Christians as for non-Christians.

In this life, even though forgiven, Christians have to pay the consequences of sin. If this be true, what can the unsaved expect? While it may appear that non-Christians prosper in their rejection of Christ, we must remember that God does not settle His accounts until the final judgment. There the righteous shall be demonstrated to be saved and the godless will be demonstrated to be lost and under God's eternal wrath.

**SUFFERING CAUSES THE CHRISTIAN TO TRUST GOD (4:19)**

**“Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God.”**

Suffering unjustly for the name of Christ is part of the plan of God for Christians. *“For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29)*. It is the directive will of God that Christians are misunderstood, persecuted and ostracized. God has control over evil, and whatever persecution is brought on the church or against Christians by the world, the flesh, or the devil will be used to purify the church.

**“entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”**

Under persecution, we must entrust ourselves to God. The word “entrust” is a banking term meaning “to give in charge as a deposit.” The Christian deposits his life in the hands of a sovereign God who is faithful, reliable. He is also Creator and has all power to deliver us, comfort us and assure us in the midst of persecution of any kind. He has created the universe; surely he can take care of His child who is suffering.

Notice the words “in doing what is right.” Christians must always seek to do right even if that means persecution. The hardest thing in the world is to do right to one who is doing you wrong. When people mock, laugh, ridicule or whatever, do right. God will bless this attitude.

**CONCLUSION**

God wants us Christians to learn that suffering is no accident. It is part of His plan for us to test our faith. Suffering draws us close to Christ in fellowship. It guarantees we will

reign with Him in glory. It indicates that we are healthy spiritually. Suffering for the name of Christ should never surprise us, and in the midst of it we should rejoice in our Lord.

One of the early church fathers gives an account of the martyrdom of Peter's wife. He says,

*“The blessed Peter, seeing his own wife led away to execution, was delighted on account of her calling and return to her country. And so he cried out to her, in a consoling and encouraging voice, addressing her by name, ‘O thou, remember the Lord.’”*

This is rejoicing in suffering. This is rejoicing in persecution. Could we do this if our husbands or wives or children were being led off to martyrdom?

If you are without Christ, this passage clearly says you will be judged by a wrathful, holy God for all eternity. Why? Because you reject Christ, God's only remedy for the sin problem. The Bible tells us that a person is saved totally by God's grace, but every person must make a choice, a decision, to receive Christ as personal Lord and Savior. You can become a Christian and experience only the mild but firm discipline of a loving Heavenly Father, or you can remain a rejector and face the holy wrath of God for all eternity in hell. Will Christ be your Savior or your Judge? Remember, the only name that can save you is the name of Christ (Acts 4:12).