

Embracing Fiery Trials - 1 Peter 4:12-19

Introduction – “*I thought it had been an easy thing to be a Christian, and that to seek God had been at the next door; but, oh, the windings, the turnings, the ups and downs He hath led me through*” – Samuel Rutherford. Sometimes, as you read through a letter, in the same way as watching a play with all kinds of scenes, you lose the sense of which is the main plot and which are the surrounding subplots. Be certain, this section is the core; the heart of the matter for which Peter’s epistle has been written.

It Is Not Strange (vv12-13) – The public ridicule and persecution that can come upon a Christian for a faith and manner of life that seems so ‘out of step’ to the pagan culture was current in Peter’s day as in ours. Peter commands us to rejoice in such reactions.

Beloved – Remember again, Peter is speaking on behalf of Jesus Christ, who loved you and gave Himself for you. As we will see in this context, He called you in love to share in His sufferings (Phil 1:29, Luke 9:23).

Fiery Trials – This is the testing by fire that precious metals go through in order to be purified. The persecutions under Nero brought literal ‘fiery’ trials as well.

Rejoice To the Extent – The more the sufferings, the more you are to rejoice. Notice two important observations. This is not a call to stoicism; it is a sin to simply ‘gut it out’ through the trial. Secondly, this obviously will not occur outside of the gracious work of God in your heart, which is the point – it reveals and proves the work of God in you.

Peter – This author earlier thought Jesus should not suffer (Mark 8:32). Peter thought that Christ and anyone who followed Christ would never suffer. Christ explained that the Scriptures taught quite the opposite (Luke 24:26).

Partaking of Christ’s Sufferings - Sufferings do not *go away* when you become a Christian. Sufferings *make sense* when you become a Christian. Brothers and sisters, when you suffer, your sufferings are deemed to be Christ’s sufferings. You were buried with Him in baptism (Col 2:12). You have been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20). Therefore, all the sufferings of Christians will be revealed “*when His glory is revealed*” in such a way that you will “*be glad with exceeding joy.*”

The Blessing No One Wants (*Except with eyes of faith*) (vv 14-16) – Receive the reproach with the same thankfulness as any other blessing. This cannot be done without a firm grasp on the sovereignty of God. Otherwise, you will be tempted to think that something got out of His hands, or that God does not love you. For instance, when someone sins against you, you must understand that God has a ‘prescriptive will’ which can be broken, and a ‘decretive will’ which cannot.

The Spirit of the Glory of God – In Stephen’s great trial, his face shone like an angel (Acts 6:15). What is this glory that rests? It must be His presence, it must be His peace that passes understanding, it must be His gift of faith that perseveres to the end. God brings glory to Himself in everything; in the sins of men and His judgment or mercy extended, in His gift of repentance and in the patient obedience of His children. You have been united with Christ in His sufferings, and you have been united with Him in His glory.

But Not As A... - Never let this truth cause you to justify your own sins. In those cases, your chastisement is for another reason.

Judgment Upon Our House (v17-18) – In 64AD the Beast persecuted the church for 42 months. Then, Rome turned her sights full upon unbelieving Jerusalem. “*When we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world*” (1 Cor 11:20). But to the unbelieving world, the same judgment brings eternal wrath, weeping and gnashing of teeth. Therefore, to the extent that it is happening to Christians, the suffering is a blessing. But only because it is from God (His sovereignty).

Think About That Again (v18) – If you embrace a truly sovereign Christ, then ask yourself this question: Who would you rather be, the Christian burning on the pole, or Nero bringing the suffering to one Christ loves?

“Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (v19). Here is What You Must Do – Commit yourself to God. Look to Christ (Luke 23:44-46). He committed Himself and then He died. He committed Himself in doing good.

In Doing Good – Committing your soul to Christ is not simply a matter of making a mental attitude adjustment. This is not something that just takes place deep down in your heart (that’s stoicism). Your commitment is displayed by good works. By faith, when a Christian suffers, he looks away from the suffering to Christ, and then imitates His Master, and does good to others.

Application – God does not change and God is good. Therefore, God is faithful. Your faith must have an object – God’s faithfulness.

Glorious Hard Words – Like Rom 8:28, these verses grant us glorious promises, but to rest in them takes away all grounds for complaining. Receive these words with faith and they will bring unspeakable comfort.

Learning Calculus – Christians fool themselves if they think they can moan and complain now in the little things and expect to stand faithfully in the harder trials. You must learn the easy lessons, those little inconveniences and trials, as from the hand of a loving Father.

“But you don’t know what I’m going through” – You’re right. But God does. Jesus knows what it is like to suffer and to suffer unjustly. He knows more about you than you know about yourself. And He has proclaimed His love for you, beloved, in the cross. You must rest upon Him – where else can you honestly rest?