

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

Facing the Holiness of God 1 Peter 4:14-19 (706)

God is our most profound problem.

War between nations is not our biggest problem. The state of the national economy at any given time is not our biggest problem. Our biggest problem is neither health care nor childcare. It is neither national security nor Social Security. Whether or not the Cowboys play football in Arlington or Irving or Dallas or Venus, Texas is not our biggest problem. The issues raised in the current political campaign are important for our time but they do not constitute our biggest problem by any stretch. Indeed, all of these matters are temporal. They have to do with time and with this earth. The one living and true God - infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth - is our biggest problem - "that He is, what He is like; and what we as moral beings must do about Him" (Tozer, *Knowledge*, p. 2). No man shall be able to escape God ... to dodge Him or to avoid Him, to neglect Him or to dismiss Him. Indeed, we shall all face His holiness to either be conformed to it in this life or consumed by it in the next. And that determination will be made according to our response to the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. This is the point Peter presses home in **1 Peter 4:14-19**.

¹⁴ *If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.* ¹⁵ *By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;* ¹⁶ *but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.* ¹⁷ *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?* ¹⁸ *And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?* ¹⁹ *Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.*

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed (4:14a). No one likes to be the object of verbal abuse. The term *reviled* is one of several in I Peter that suggests that the Christians to whom Peter wrote were objects of such social ostracism. Peter also points out that they were *slandered (2:12, 3:16)*, that they were *intimidated (3:14)*, and that they were *maligned (4:4)*. All of this harsh treatment was theirs not because they had done anything wrong. This seems unjust and unfair. But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus Himself said that such would be the case: *“Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me” (Matt. 5:11)*. Indeed, these dear people were suffering on account of or ***for the name of Christ***.

For the name of Christ is the first of three phrases in this passage that describe suffering that is distinctly Christian. The other two phrases are *suffers as a Christian* in verse 16 and *suffer according to the will of God* in verse 19. Although these three refer to the same experience they emphasize different aspects of it. ***For the name of Christ*** emphasizes the sufferer’s allegiance to Christ. “Christian” was a pejorative name used by outsiders but which the church

eventually adopted as its own self-designation. **Acts 11:26** says, *and it came about that for an entire year [Paul and Barnabas] met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called **Christians** in Antioch.* So as a *Christian* in verse 16 emphasizes our association with Jesus of Nazareth and with others who follow Him. *Suffer according to the will of God* emphasizes the divine purpose and design behind the hardships and trials we experience as believers.

So, like the blind man kicked out of the synagogue after being healed by Jesus (**John 9:25, 27, 30, 34**), we experience hardship due to our clear profession of Christ. Like the apostles who were flogged because of their public preaching of the gospel (**Acts 5:28-29, 40**), we go through trials due to our unwavering obedience to Christ. Like the saints in Hebrews 10 (**10:32-34**) who visited their fellow believers who had been thrown into prison, we may know persecution due to our courageous and observable identification with Christ and His people. That's what it means to suffer *for the Name*.

And Peter says we are *blessed* if we suffer for such reasons as these. Suffering and being blessed are not easy to reconcile. For example, one might say, "Blessed was not the first word to cross my mind after the doctor told me I had cancer." It has been said of friends who treat us badly or turn on us, "With friends like this who needs enemies." Well, one who is going through painful trials might say, "With blessings like this who needs misfortune?" Admittedly it is just hard sometimes to see the good in our pain. The blessing, however, is perceived by spiritual eyes because it consists of the sweet presence and sanctifying work of the Spirit of God in the inner man.

You are blessed, Peter says, *because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*. You are blessed because you will know the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit in your suffering. But you are also blessed because suffering for the name of Christ is assuring evidence of the reality of the Spirit's transforming and strengthening grace in your life. Indeed, were that not the case you would have already folded under trial. You would have buckled under the weight of hardships. You would have compromised your profession. You would have abandoned the people of God. You would have slipped out of the difficult and dangerous path of obedience in a vain search for an easier and safer way to heaven. Beloved, when you experience suffering and, at the same time, continue on in the faith with a measure of joy in the Lord, take courage! That continuance in itself is confirmation that the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Indeed, the sweetness of the Spirit's presence and ministry is for those who suffer in the way of righteousness. Peter has taken care to make this point in **2:20**. He reinforces it here in **verse 15**. *By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler*. Four categories of lawbreakers are named in verse 15. The first two – *murderers* and *thieves* – are easy enough to understand. The other two – *evildoers* and *troublesome meddlers* – require a little explanation. *Evildoer* is a broad term embracing anyone engaged in wrongdoing. Peter may have in mind the guy who is always in some sort of trouble or up to some kind of mischief. The fourth term, *troublesome meddler*, is an extremely rare word. It is probably best understood in contrast to **I Peter 3:15** where Peter instructs us to bear our Christian witness *with gentleness and reverence*. This *troublesome meddler* is that man or woman who knows nothing of such moderation, discretion, gentleness, or propriety. He sticks his nose into situations in which he has no business. He bears his witness obnoxiously and

intrusively. He thinks it proper to “get in the face” of non-Christians. His behavior brings reproach upon Christ, the gospel, and other believers. All suffering encountered as a result of such sinfulness ought to be a source of genuine shame.

On the other hand, *if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God (4:16)*. If in fact you are suffering in the path of obedience. If you are suffering on account of your identification with Jesus Christ this is no occasion for shame. There is a contrast in this verse. *Be ashamed* is set in contrast to *glorify God*. Peter is saying, “Don’t be ashamed but glorify God.” Verses 17-19 suggest that to be *ashamed* means to deny one’s faith in the face of suffering; to reject the Savior, to despise the work of God, to wilt, like an uprooted flower, under the social disgrace. To *glorify God* means to maintain an appropriate confession of faith in word and deed in the face of hardship. Why is it so important that we maintain such a consistent testimony?

Because *it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God (4:17)*. The Old Testament clearly teaches that judgment begins with God’s people. Indeed, that judgment begins in the temple (*Is. 10:11-12; Jer. 25:29; Ezek. 9:6; Zech. 13:7-9; Mal. 3:1-6*). Now in *2:5* Peter refers to the church as a spiritual temple - the place where God’s makes His dwelling. In what sense has God’s judgment begun among us? In this sense does His judgment begin with His own household?

Judgment is God’s determination regarding sin and sinners. God is too holy to look upon sin. God hates sin. He has judged it in the person of His Son. All who trust Christ are freed from the penalty of sin. All who reject Christ must

bear the penalty themselves eternally. But even those who bear the name of Christ still know the presence and destructive power of sin. But God in His zeal for holiness deals with sin even in His own people. Suffering weans us from sin. Through suffering God disciplines us regarding sin. Through suffering God purifies His church.

Our own suffering reveals the zeal of God for His own holiness, glory, and honor. If God's zeal for His own glory is displayed so clearly in the lives of His own people how much more will His zeal in dealing with sin be displayed in those who spurn and dishonor Him? All of this happens to the people God has chosen for His own possession. If the way is this hard for Christians; if God so deals with the sin of those upon whom He has set His saving affections; *if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

Of course, a lost man can see the struggles and sufferings of committed Christians. But due to his spiritual blindness and ignorance he cannot accurately interpret what he sees. He simply cannot make the connection between the present suffering of believers and that which awaits him in the future. He never looks at their troubles and asks, "What shall become of me if God deals with them so severely?"

In the end the issue upon which the destiny hinges is your response in this life to the gospel. You will be blessed not because of the relative goodness of your life. God does not bestow eternal blessing because you were a faithful husband and/or a good father; because you were kind and gentle in your demeanor; because you were a law-abiding citizen; because you were a man of integrity in

your dealings with other men; because you engaged in activities that benefited and served the needs of those less fortunate than yourself. These are all commendable but, by no means, do they in and of themselves merit the eternal favor of God. My friend, you are eternally blessed on account of your obedience to the gospel.

Likewise you will not be condemned because you are relatively worse than others; because you have sinned and others have not; because of any particular sin of which you are guilty. Men are condemned because they fail to obey the gospel. In other words, they fail to repent of their sins and embrace Jesus Christ as God's only provision for escape from His burning wrath, His unflinching justice, and His blinding holiness.

Man at his very best is but a mass of sin. In his sin, he has brought reproach upon the God who created him. He has denigrated the holiness of God and violated the law of God. His nature is corrupted. Every faculty of his being is touched by sin. Guilt has attached itself to him. He is liable to the punishment of God for his violation of God's law. Jesus Christ is God's gracious provision for the sinner. Christ took our sins upon Himself receiving in His body the wrath of God and suffering in the stead of guilty sinners. And when a man receives Christ as He is offered to him in the gospel he receives that righteousness which is from God to the salvation of his soul.

If God is willing to ordain and govern suffering in the lives of His own people in order to maintain and promote His holiness, how much more will He be zealous for His holiness in the case of those who have spurned His overtures of grace and His provision for their rescue and escape from His wrath against sin? O my

friends make no mistake your eternal destiny hangs upon your obedience or disobedience to the gospel. Eternal blessedness awaits those who embrace the Savior. Eternal misery awaits those who disobey the gospel; those who close their ears to the message of salvation.

Peter continues to press the point in **verse 18**: *And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?* In what sense *are the righteous saved with difficulty?* Does this mean that God will have a hard time saving His elect? Does it mean that God is strict and reluctant to save sinners? Does it mean that we must work hard, like so many soldiers in boot camp, to earn our way into heaven? It means that even “God’s elect have to pass through hazards and trials” (Kelly, p. 194; see **Acts 14:22**). It means that “the fire of God’s holiness is so intense that even the righteous feel pain in its discipline” (Grudem, p. 184).

What’s the point of all this? Perseverance and endurance in suffering proves one’s faith. Suffering exposes the genuineness or superficiality of one’s faith. And true saving faith alone is the key that opens the door to heaven.

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right (4:19). According to the will of God may be interpreted in one of two ways. First, it could refer to the *way* Christians act while we are suffering. Second, it could refer to the *reason* for our suffering. The second interpretation is preferable. “The teaching of the entire letter is summarized in this one verse. Beloved, we do not suffer accidentally or because of the irresistible forces of blind fate; rather, we suffer *according to God’s*

will. This at first seems harsh doesn't it? It implies that it is God's will that we suffer at times.

But upon reflection no better comfort in suffering can be found than this: it is God's good and perfect will. Because this is true we can know that there is a limit to the hardship, both in its intensity and in its duration - a limit set and governed by the God who is our Creator, our Savior, our Sustainer, and our Father. Because this is true we can also know that our suffering is only for our good: it is purifying us, drawing us closer to our Lord, and making us more like Him in our lives" (adapted from Grudem, pp. 184-85). And so we trust and obey. *We entrust our souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.*

We demonstrate our trust in God by continuing in the path of obedience regardless of the hardships that we are encountering or will encounter in that way. Such obedience is our confession that God is sovereign, that He knows best, that His purposes are beyond question, that His designs are gracious, and that our own hardships will issue forth in the praise and honor of Him to whom belongs the glory forever and ever, world without end. Amen.

Benediction (Numbers 6:24-26)

²⁴ The LORD bless you, and keep you;

²⁵ The LORD make His face shine on you,

And be gracious to you;

²⁶ The LORD lift up His countenance on you,

And give you peace.'

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