

Standing Fast in the Grace of God

“The Fiery Trial”

Living for Christ When the Fire Comes

1 Peter 4:12-19

A man can float downstream without any effort at all. The current carries him wherever the river flows. But the moment he decides to turn around and swim upstream, he immediately feels the resistance of the water.

In the last message from the first 11 verses of this chapter, Peter told believers to turn away from the old life and live for the will of God. That means turning against the current of the world. And when someone begins swimming upstream against the current of the culture around them, there will be resistance, and significant at that.

That is exactly what Peter prepares us for in the next verses. When believers live for the will of God, they should not be surprised when opposition and suffering follow.

I. THE REALITY OF THE FIRE (VS. 12)

Peter begins by correcting their expectations about suffering. Suffering for Christ is not abnormal Christianity.

A. The surprise to reject regarding suffering

“Think it not strange...”

1. The word for “strange” (ξενίζω), in this context, implies being shocked by something foreign.
2. He’s simply saying that suffering should not shock us.

John 15:18–20

¹⁸ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

2 Timothy 3:12

¹² Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

B. The suffering we can expect

“Fiery trials”

1. The word for “fiery trials” (πύρωσις) refers to a refining fire.

A refining fire is a process used to purify metals, such as gold or silver, by melting them down to remove impurities. In a spiritual context, it symbolizes how challenges and trials can help purify and strengthen a person's character.

2. This connects to Peter's earlier theme in 1:6-7.

C. The purpose of the testing

“Which is to try you”

When we go through the “fiery trials,” it isn't meant to punish us — He is proving and purifying us.

II. THE RESPONSE TO THE FIRE (VS. 13-16)

Instead of being shocked by the suffering, Peter calls for

joy and steadfastness.

A. Rejoice in Christ's sufferings (vs. 13)

"Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings"

1. The conjunction "inasmuch as" (καθό) means in proportion as, and is used that way in 2 Cor. 8:12 (the only other time the word appears in the Greek New Testament).

2 Corinthians 8:12

¹² For if there be first a willing mind, *it is accepted according to that* a man hath, *and not according to that* he hath not.

2. Peter is saying that we are to rejoice in proportion to the degree that we share in Christ's suffering.
3. The words create a direct relationship between suffering and rejoicing.

Not merely: *Rejoice when you suffer*. But: Rejoice to the degree that you share in His suffering.

The greater the participation in Christ's suffering now, the greater the participation in Christ's glory when He is revealed.

Romans 8:17

¹⁷ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

Philippians 3:10

¹⁰ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings,

| being made conformable unto his death;

B. Recognize the Spirit's presence (vs. 14)

1. *"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ..."* — the conditional clause here is critical.
 - a) Some of our suffering may be of our own making and not because of our testimony for Christ.
 - b) The promise of this verse is for those who are "reproached" (ὄνειδίζω) — defamed, railed at, assailed with abusive words — for their testimony in the world around them for Christ.

| Matthew 5:11

¹¹ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

2. *"Happy are ye"* — same word as that of "blessed" in Matt. 5:11. It means that they were to regard their condition in life while enduring these trials as a blessed one; not that they would find personal and positive enjoyment on being reproached or vilified (Barnes).
3. *"For the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you"*
 - a) Although "spirit" in the KJV is a lowercase "s," the context indicates the Holy Spirit is in view here. The "spirit of glory" describes the attribute of the Holy Spirit, and "the spirit...of God" describes the Person of the Spirit — that He is "of God."
 - b) "Resteth upon you" — this is a precious promise for any of God's children when they are going through trials.

- c) The phrase “*the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*” is Old Testament language. In the Old Testament, the glory of God rested upon the tabernacle and temple as the visible sign of God’s presence. Peter takes that same imagery and applies it to suffering believers. When Christians are reproached for Christ, God’s own Spirit rests upon them just as His glory once rested upon the sanctuary.

The term “Shekinah,” although not in the Bible itself, was the Jewish term for the manifest presence of God dwelling among His people. The term comes from the Hebrew word יָשַׁב , which means to dwell or to settle.

Exodus 40:34–35

³⁴ Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

4. “*On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified*”
- a) The pronoun “he” is pointing back to “the name of Christ.”
- b) The phrase “*is evil spoken of*” (βλασφημέω) is literally transliterated in the English word “blaspheme.” They don’t merely speak against the believer, they blasphemously mock Christ and Christianity itself (J-F-B).
- c) “*On your part he is glorified*” — because of their testimony, even if the enemy blasphemed everything they believed, their very life glorified God.

C. Reject deserved suffering (vs. 15)

This is fairly self-explanatory. Not all suffering is Christian suffering. The suffering described here that isn't from a testimony for Christ brings no spiritual glory.

D. Refuse shame for Christ (vs. 16)

1. This is only the third use of the word "Christian" in the New Testament.

Acts 11:26

²⁶ And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

Acts 26:28

²⁸ Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

2. Instead of being ashamed of Christ because of suffering, the suffering should lead us to glorify God because of it ("on this behalf").

We glorify God when we show to those around us His greatness and by making Him known to others, as we live in accordance with His word and demonstrate His love and grace.

III. THE REASON FOR THE FIRE (vs. 17-18)

Peter now explains why suffering comes to believers.

A. Judgment begins with God's house (vs. 17)

1. "*Judgment*" (κρίμα) can mean condemnation, judicial decision, or disciplinary judgment,

depending on context.

- a) Here, it cannot mean condemnation, because Peter is speaking to believers.

Romans 8:1

¹ *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

- b) The sense is purifying or disciplinary judgment — God dealing with His people in order to refine them (vs. 12).

2. “*Must begin*” (ἀρχασθαι) — implies divine necessity. God deals with His own house first.

Malachi 3:1–3

¹ Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. ² But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he *is* like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: ³ And he shall sit *as* a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

3. “*The house of God*” — this is the church. It’s not speaking of the building we assemble in, but is speaking of God’s people that make up the “church.”
4. “*If it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*” — Peter uses a lesser-to-greater argument here. If God refines

His own people, what will happen to those who reject Him?

In other words, if believers experience refining discipline, unbelievers will experience final judgment. The contrast is between temporary refining and eternal judgment.

B. The difficulty of the righteous path (vs. 18)

1. *"And if the righteous scarcely be saved..."*

- a) The word "scarcely" (μόλις) comes from a word for labor pains. It carries the idea of "with difficulty or hardly."
- b) This does not mean that salvation is uncertain, nor that suffering earns salvation. The Bible is clear that we are saved by grace through faith, not by works. What Peter means is that the path of salvation in this life is not an easy one. The righteous are saved, but they are saved through many hardships and trials on their way to final glory.

Acts 14:22

²² Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

- c) The point Peter is making is that if the path of the righteous already includes suffering and refining, what hope does the ungodly have when final judgment comes?

IV. THE REST IN THE FIRE (vs. 19)

This verse answers the question, "How should believers respond to suffering?"

A. Conformity to the will of God (vs. 19a; 3:17)

"Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God..."

Peter begins by reminding suffering believers that their hardship is not outside of God's control. They are suffering according to the will of God. Their suffering is not accidental, and it is not evidence that God has abandoned them.

B. Commit your soul to God (vs. 19a)

"Commit the keeping of their souls to him..."

1. The word for "*commit the keeping*" is a banking term — to entrust something valuable for safekeeping.
2. Jesus used the same term while on the cross.

Luke 23:46

⁴⁶ And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*; and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

C. Continue doing good (vs. 19c)

"In well doing"

Trials and persecution should not change our conduct. We should keep obeying God.

D. Confidence in God's character (vs. 19d)

"As unto a faithful Creator"

This title for God is unusual in the New Testament and that is intentional. The logic Peter uses is: "The God who created the universe is faithful to keep you." So the believer can entrust his soul to Him with complete confidence.

Conclusion:

Peter reminds us that suffering for Christ should not surprise the believer. The fiery trial is not strange, and it is not outside the will of God. When the fire comes, the believer's response is simple: commit the keeping of your soul to a faithful Creator and continue doing what is right.

And Peter's words also raise a sobering question: if even the righteous pass through trials on the path to glory, what will become of those who reject the gospel?

The good news is that Christ suffered for sinners so that those who trust Him might be saved. So the call of this passage is simple — entrust your soul to Him.