

## I Peter 4:12-19

### Stand Up Under the Fiery Trial of Persecution

Why would God ever allow a person who believes in God, who really loves and follows God, to suffer persecution? This is the point of this passage, to discuss the question of persecution, of the fiery trial that the believer sometimes has to suffer.

The reality is that trials are inevitable for the believer. “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Believers often do not understand why they have to suffer. When they suffer, they are surprised and astonished, and they wonder why God does not protect them from suffering and from persecution. This is especially true when persecution is fiery, and so long as the believer is upon earth, he is going to be called upon to face fiery trials. Being a genuine believer in a corrupt world is difficult. People often oppose the believer’s stand for Christ.

Trials are painful. It may be next door, in the office, in school, in the government, or a hundred other places, but the genuine Christian is often neglected, slandered, avoided, ridiculed, mocked, isolated, questioned, abused, and mistreated. The sufferings of the early Christians were just what Peter says, “fiery.” Most of us have seen pictures of believers being fed to wild lions and burned at the stake. But these were mild deaths compared to what some believers suffered. (See [Foxes Book of Martyrs](#) for a complete discussion of the persecution of believers down through the centuries.)

Everyone has trials, so no pity parties are allowed! Why does God allow the believer to suffer persecution? This verse says that God allows it for one very basic reason: to test and try and prove us. This means at least four things.

1. Persecution measures how strong our faith is. Any person’s faith can be measured by how much he is willing to sacrifice and bear for it. Suffering persecution for Christ shows how strong or weak our faith really is.
2. Persecution proves our trust in God and teaches us to depend upon God more and more. The more we suffer for Christ, the more we draw near God and plead for His help and strength. This, of course, teaches us to trust and depend upon Him more and more.
3. Persecution proves and strengthens our patience and endurance. The more we are tried and persecuted, the more we endure; and the more we endure, the more we are taught to endure. Persecution strengthens our patience, endurance, perseverance, and steadfastness in Christ.
4. Persecution proves our faith and attracts others to Christ. When we suffer and are persecuted, others can see the strength of Christ in us. They see that our faith in Christ is a living reality and they are drawn to Christ, to His salvation and love and care and strength. When others see us suffer for the hope of salvation and eternal life, the Holy Spirit uses our suffering to speak to the hearts of the persecutors and observers. He convicts them, and

some eventually turn to Christ. Our faith is proven to be true, and it bears fruit.

**(John 15:19, John 15:18, 22, Philippians 1:29, 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 John 3:13).**

Our response to trials is to reflect the truths of this passage. We are to rejoice in persecution. The greater the suffering, the greater the joy, IF we respond properly. This is difficult to do, for no person likes to suffer abuse or pain of any sort, but especially when it is inflicted by neighbors, friends, or co-workers. No person likes to be isolated, ridiculed, bypassed, scorned, imprisoned, or called upon to face death. Therefore, it is difficult to rejoice in persecution. Nevertheless this is the exhortation of Scripture.

When we suffer, we are sharing in Christ's sufferings. Christ was rejected by men because He lived and proclaimed the righteousness and salvation of God. Therefore, when we suffer for following Christ—for living and proclaiming the righteousness and salvation of God—we are suffering for the very same reason that Christ suffered. We are sharing in the very sufferings of Christ Himself. We are denying ourselves and suffering for God and His righteousness just as Christ did. We become identified with Christ, associated with Him in the deepest devotion possible, the very sacrifice of ourselves for the cause of God and His glorious salvation. To be so identified with Christ, who is the very Son of God Himself, is the height of privileges, a great reason for joy and rejoicing. Also, we must remember that when we suffer, we shall be greatly rewarded when Christ returns in glory. This is exactly what Scripture declares time and again.

**(Matthew 5:11-12, Acts 5:41, Acts 16:23-25, Romans 8:16-17, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Timothy 2:10, 2 Timothy 3:11, Hebrews 10:34, Hebrews 11:26, 1 Peter 4:11-12).**

The words **“reproached for...Christ”** mean **suffering for righteousness; being persecuted or abused or ridiculed for Christ**. When a believer suffers for Christ, “the spirit of glory and of God rests upon [him].” He is given a very special closeness, a oneness with Christ that is beyond imagination and unexplainable (Acts 7:54-60). The Holy Spirit infuses him with a deep, intense consciousness of the Lord's presence. This is apparently the Shekinah glory of God's presence. It is the same glory that shone upon Stephen's face when he was martyred. It is an anointing, a consciousness so deep that it cannot be experienced apart from some severe experience of suffering.

In suffering for Christ the believer also experiences a very special identification with Christ, an identification that stirs a sense of happiness and joy within him. The Lord suffered on behalf of the believer, so now the believer suffers on behalf of the Lord. Christ is glorified by the believer's sufferings. The believer honors Christ and proves that Christ is the Savior of the world by standing up for Him.

Do not bring suffering and persecution upon yourself (v.15) by breaking some law or doing some evil thing. If a person violates the laws of the land and harms others, then he deserves to suffer. This is not suffering for Christ's name. Suffering for Christ

means that a person is persecuted because he is living for and proclaiming Christ. Therefore, a believer is not to bring suffering upon himself. If he is ever to suffer or be persecuted, it is to be because he is living for Christ and not because he is a lawbreaker.

Do not be ashamed to suffer for being a Christian (v.16). The name Christian was given to the early believers by unbelievers. It was a name of derision and ridicule and mockery. Early believers called themselves *brothers, believers, disciples, and saints*. Apparently they did not call themselves Christians until much later. The point is this: if a believer is being ridiculed, mocked, cursed, abused, or persecuted because he is a Christian, he is not to be ashamed. No believer should ever be ashamed of the fact that he is a Christian. He is to take a stand for Christ and stand firm. He is to glorify God by standing up for and honoring the name of Christ. The world will usually ridicule and mock or withdraw from and isolate us if we do not join them in their worldly parties and ways.

**(Romans 1:16, Philippians 1:20, 1 Peter 4:16, 1 John 2:28, Psalm 29:2, Psalm 34:3, Psalm 57:5, Psalm 107:32, Isaiah 25:1).**

Accept persecution as the purifying judgment of God (v.17-18). Scripture clearly says that persecution is used by God as a judgment upon believers. What does this mean? When things are going well for the believer, he tends to feel more and more secure in himself and tends to partake of the world more and more. Perhaps he partakes of only little tidbits of the pleasure and possessions of the world, but nevertheless, he is still partaking of some worldliness. The result is that the believer does not concentrate and focus upon Christ like he should. When things are going well, he does not pray and worship nor fellowship and commune with God like he should. He becomes somewhat contaminated and polluted with a sense of self-sufficiency and worldliness. When this happens, God has to do something to awaken the believer, which He may do by using persecution. God can use persecution as a means of judgment, as a means to stir the believer to clean up his life and to draw closer to God. Think about it: When a believer is persecuted, to whom can he turn? There is only one sure deliverer and that is God. Therefore, persecution causes the believer to flee to God for deliverance and protection; it causes the believer to turn his attention from self and the world and to focus and concentrate upon God. Two things happen: The believer forgets self and self-sufficiency and he acknowledges that he is totally dependent upon God, and the believer cleans up his life. He turns away from the tidbits of worldliness and focuses upon God, fellowshiping and communing with Him as God wills. The point is this: persecution is used by God as a purifying judgment, as a means of chastening and cleaning up the life of the believer. Therefore, the believer is to stand fast against persecution knowing that God wants to use it to draw him closer and closer to Christ.

**(2 Peter 2:9)**

Keep on doing good and commit your souls to the keeping of God (v.19). Note that the believer's suffering is in *the will of God*. ***God is either glorifying the name of Christ or purifying the life of the believer by the suffering. Therefore, the believer must***

*do two things:* He must keep on doing good, and he must *commit* the keeping of his soul to God. The word “**commit**” (**paratithesthosan**) means to deposit; to entrust into the hands of a trusted banker or friend. God can be trusted; He will not fail the believer. He will either deliver the believer through the suffering or else on home to be with Christ forever. God will save the believer’s soul. The believer can trust God, trust Him far more than any friend on earth, for God never fails. God is a faithful Creator. He has created us to be with Him eternally, and His plan will not be defeated. If we commit our souls to Him, no matter what men may do to us, God will save us. He will fulfill His plan and purpose in our lives.

(John 17:11, 2 Timothy 1:12, 2 Timothy 4:18, Genesis 28:15, Isaiah 41:10).

### REFINER OF SILVER

Some time ago, a few ladies met in a certain city to read the scriptures, and make them the subject of conversation. While reading the third chapter of Malachi they came upon a remarkable expression in the third verse. "And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."

One lady's opinion was that it was intended to convey the view of the sanctifying influence of the grace of God. Then she proposed to visit a silversmith and report to them what he said on the subject. She went accordingly and without telling the object of her errand, begged to know the process of refining silver, which he fully described to her.

"But Sir" she said, "do you sit while the work of refining is going on?"

"Oh, yes," replied the silversmith; "I must sit with my eye steadily fixed on the furnace, for if the time necessary for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver will be injured."

The lady at once saw the beauty, and comfort too, of the expression, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." God sees it needful to put His children into a furnace; His eye is steadily intent on the work of purifying, and His wisdom and love are both engaged in the best manner for them. Their trials do not come at random; "the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

As the lady was leaving the shop, the silversmith called her back, and said he had still further to mention - that he only knows when the process of purifying was complete by seeing his own image reflected in The silver.

“And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver...” (Malachi 3:3).