

“Living against the Wind”

1 Peter 4:12-19

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1 Peter 4:12-19 *12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share*

Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:12-19, ESV)



Paul taught in Philippians 1:29: *“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him”*

Peter wrote the whole of this letter to some suffering and persecuted believers. I myself have been repeatedly and keenly made aware that throughout the world being a Christian is often a personally costly endeavor. The practice of “easy Jesus” is a purely western construct. We built it because we wanted Christ, eternal life, AND all the comforts that a first world western nation affords us. But it was never so biblically, historically, or via the teaching of Jesus.

We have a generation of folks today who want church to be like a drive through fast food joint. Tasty, quick, inexpensive, and filling. Never mind that the food isn't any good for you and it will eventually contribute to killing you. We only care about today. There is a grand divide between the half of the church that wants to only GET from Jesus and His church and those who are committed to serving Him and His church. Therefore within every church we find essentially two churches ... and we here are not any different. We seek to minister to all, but do we not have an obligation to provide also for those who seek more than church attendance and the occasional group activity?

Anyone who thinks that Jesus taught unity at all costs does not know his bible. Certainly spiritual unity should be sought after and held up as our great corporate ideal. However unity is achieved through corporate priority and thought, not through compromise and the surrendering of the priorities and directives of God. Godly unity is not achieved through concession of truth and misleading. The truth is, to a vast degree, a scriptural picture of the church and its job is to divide. What we *“bind on earth is bound in heaven”* and what we *“loose on earth is loosed in heaven.”* The wedding feast in Matthew 22 was made up only of those who truly wanted to be there and made the time and priority to be there and the others were left behind. Is that not dividing?

2 Thessalonians 3:6 *“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.”*

1 Timothy 6:3-5 “If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth...”

Amos 3:3 “Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?”

Peter wants his readers to be prepared to suffer. In this directive lies the power to separate the sheep from the goats. To differentiate between the wheat and the tares (weeds). For such times of difficulty will indeed come to us in this life. It is not a matter of “IF” but simply a matter of “WHEN.” And how we deal with such speaks volumes concerning our hearts and passions, and certainly concerning our commitment.

Are we prepared to not only suffer but to endure through that suffering...through that trial and testing? For we all know very well that such times have taken many folks out of the race. Nothing drives us more toward self absorbed thought and self centered priority than such times of testing. We can find ourselves in crisis and quickly go into “self-preservation” mode. And then it all becomes about us and us alone.

Peter reminds us that we shouldn’t be surprised by such intense periods of difficulty in our lives.

The danger today of prosperity doctrine is that under such unbiblical understanding we are presented with “Jesus the lucky rabbit’s foot.” A world where Christianity is a bed of roses... or at least is supposed to be. But Christianity does not provide immunity from suffering; don’t be surprised if the world hates you (1 Jn.3:13) or if sickness or even death comes knocking. Don’t be surprised when hard times visit you. And because of that fact, we need to teach people to count the cost.

How do we battle the tendency to apathy and self? How do we protect ourselves from the danger of melt down in times of crisis? Certainly assurance of love produces security.... this is true in our earthly family; true in the family of God.

The words “fiery trial” speaks of a great intensity -- a fiery ordeal. What the church was going through must have been a very severe time of testing since they already had weathered other opposition; The only other NT usage of those words are found in Rev. 18:9 in the burning of Babylon.

We are called herein to do more than simply “overcome.” We are told to actually rejoice. No...not rejoice in the pain of the moment or the anguish of the situation. But rather rejoice that we are counted worthy of walking the same paths that Christ walked. We also rejoice as we overcome...as we endure through the test. We rejoice because we are “still standing.” We rejoice in the victory on the other side of the trial. We rejoice in the stronger and more intimate relationship with Christ that springs forth from passing through that fire together with Him. God's purpose is to make us like His Son; thus we must go thru same school of obedience (Heb. 5:8, Philip. 3:10-11)

We are...as true and faithful children of God, to have more than a passive surrender to such sufferings, but rather we are to “rejoice” that we have been chosen to share in something so quintessentially Christ. This is why such love is the express qualifier and “litmus test” of our faith standing. It is a love that cannot be “mustered up” or practiced with any kind of faithful continuance without being Spirit -filled by God. Only the true born again believer can know and practice this kind of love. One who has died to the things of this world, and now desires to operate in a realm where “to live is Christ,” with no reservation.

So contrary to the message of the "I-need-to-feel-good-healing-ministries," Peter says we will be actually "reproached" for our stand in Christ and we will "suffer" for our stand on the gospel. It is natural in our flesh to want to feel good and avoid pain, but actually both joy and pain are overt aspects of the walk of a disciple. For many of us, it is an easy thing to walk with Christ when all is going well. Yet, Peter here in this letter and in fact the whole of the Bible, makes it clear that the committed disciple will indeed suffer earthly for his faith. By doing so, we *share in His being, and in His life.*

Please note that God is not herein calling us to some sort of weird ritual masochistic living, where we don the biblical "sack cloth and ashes" and wail and mourn because we are Christians! As Peter began this very letter back in chapter 1 verse 8, God loves His children and brings a "joy inexpressible and full of glory." But with that other-world joy that we experience comes often trials and tribulation and even persecution. And can we find joy even in that, because we are sharing in the experience of Jesus? It's hard to imagine on this side of such an experience to be sure.

I'm not saying it is easy. It certainly isn't for me. That is why it is mandatory to be filled with the Spirit of God if we are to endure and moreover thrive as Peter is calling us to do. Church attendance alone will never do that for you. We must be in a walking and talking relationship with the Master. We must be in an active engagement of our faith and service. The reality is, many of us are only one personal crisis away from calling it quits.

While the truth of this passage may grate upon our fleshly tendencies, for the disciple it is a character element of our Savior that we are able to grab hold of and make it our own also. It is not that we are to seek to suffer needlessly. We are not to try to be a self-proclaimed martyr. Christ does not desire that we seek to physically die for Him, but to *live* for Him! And if need be, we should be *ready to die* if it is required of us to remain true to the faith. Yet our desire must be to *live* for Him, which in truth is the more difficult of the two!

A believer who seeks to walk as Jesus walked, must know that to spiritually trace His steps, is to walk a path of great joy and at the same time endure trials, difficulties, and even persecution. Even Peter...as he wrote this letter from Rome, likely was aware that martyrdom was imminently waiting for him, not perfect health, comfort and ease. For it was soon after these letters that Peter was executed for his faith. For history tells us that Peter would be crucified for his witness and his work for Christ.

Peter warns us that we must however remember that the context of the suffering has to be nothing short of commendable conduct! Sometimes there is nothing righteous or blessed about our suffering because in reality such is simply a consequence of our poor decisions and unchristlike behavior. Peter clarifies that we should never let it be said that we are suffering under a righteous persecution, if in truth we have found ourselves in such a state through sin or the flesh! It's a whole lot easier to claim we are being persecuted because of our righteous actions than to acknowledge the truth that we are under fire because we are being stupid, rebellious, nosey, or controlling.

Note the presence of the term and judgement of the individual verse 15 dubs a "meddler." The New American Standard uses the phrase "troublesome meddler." Other versions says "troublemaker" or "busybody." The text lumps together the sins of murder, theft, or evil-doing, with that of a "meddler." Obviously God takes such behavior quite seriously.

It is agape love that causes me to translate my God-given, Spirit anointed gifts into service *to others*. It's about *them*. Peter calls us to serve with anointed gusto...with all that we have and all that we are. And when we do, we likely will experience some "fiery trials." Because Jesus loved in that way, and He paid dearly for doing so! Such love has one overwhelming attribute, and that is it is *sacrificial*. It gives, even if and when it pains us.

In verse 17 Peter directs his word's right at us. We, the body of Christ, are called forth into this path of Christ, this path of discipleship fires, as we in the house of God are being held accountable. The first purpose of judgment (in the form of persecution) is to purify the church. The church will always serve to be a hospital to the lost, but it must never be satisfied with leaving people in the condition in which they came to the church. We must always accept in the sick and broken, but we must serve to heal and restore and make strong those who enter through its doors. If we simply accepted folks as they are, we wouldn't be much of a hospital!

Certainly there is no argument that in order to heal and be restored in any hospital there is often some pain and discomfort involved. Otherwise we aren't a hospital but rather a hospice. Just making people as comfortable as possible while they wait to die. The church must be able to be a holy example and a righteous witness to the lost. This also serves as a warning to the lost! For we in the church know better. We have been showed the path and have seen the light, thus we are "without excuse."

The point is that God's judgment is moving through the earth. The church does not escape. When the fire of judgment burns the church, it is a testing, proving, purifying fire. Scripture tells us that those who remain are truly members of the church and those that endure to the end will be saved (Heb 3:6, 14).

If God sends trials to the church now, this is evidence that He will someday judge the lost. We have our trials now and our glory later; the lost have their glory now and their suffering later. The only heaven the lost sinner will know is on earth today! One day, a fiery judgment will overtake the whole world. Meanwhile, God's judgment begins "at the house of God," the church. This truth ought to motivate us to continually grow and mature...to be as pure and obedient as possible, both individually as well as corporately. Again, the fires of judgement and testing's that occur herein for believers are not for punishment but for refining. For "purification."

All of this passage comes down to verse 19. We know that the Word tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. Do we have such a faith today? Do we trust Him with the whole of our care? Are we willing to "commit the keeping of our souls to Him?" He, the very Creator of our being?

Persecution can either cause you to grow or grumble in the Christian life. It all depends on your response! *Living in close proximity to Jesus Christ for more than three years had provided the apostle Peter the best possible example of what it looked like to live in holiness amid a hostile world. More than any other man who walked the earth, Jesus modeled that lifestyle. Peter therefore pointed his readers in the best possible direction, to Jesus Himself. The apostle called Christians to "sanctify Christ as Lord" in their hearts, that believers might live and act as Jesus desires during their short time here on earth.* (Charles Swindall).

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God." Dietrich Bonhoeffer