



Old Testament: Psalm 66:1-20
New Testament: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

A Living Hope – Preparing for Persecution ***“Rejoicing In Your Suffering”*** **1 Peter 4:12-19**

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One of the most neglected principles of the Christian life is how God uses “suffering” to conform our lives to the image of Jesus Christ.

- Since we are taught to avoid any kind of suffering at all, most Christians cannot accept the slightest inconvenience to their schedule, much less comprehend the idea of being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.
- However, the “refiner’s fire” for Christians is persecution. Just as silver is refined through smelting, God refines His people through the fires of suffering.
- Those who avoid the fires of persecution by denying the name of Jesus Christ will face the eternal judgment of God.

Peter wrote this epistle to those Christians in the 1st century who were the first to suffer persecution for their expressed faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah.

- According to Dr. H.B. Workman, there were ten waves of the massive persecution of Christians that lasted more than 200 years.

“The mere profession of Christianity was a crime. Those who believed Jesus Christ was the Messiah were branded as anarchists and atheists. To become a Christian in that day not only meant renunciation and persecution, but the possibility at any moment of imprisonment and death by the rack, the blazing shirt of pitch, the lion, of the panther.”

- Modern historians estimate that during this period, as many as 3,000–3,500 Christians were executed under the authority of Imperial edicts, but rather than suppress the numerical growth of Christianity, the Church grew by the hundreds of thousands, as those who were being persecuted spread the gospel as they fled from city to city.

Peter identified four qualities that should describe a Christians' attitude and actions when faced with persecution.

1. We Must Expect It – Vs. 12 – *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you!”*

The general theme of Peter's 1st Epistle is that Christians are called to suffer persecution.

- Therefore, rather than focus on the persecution we may be called to endure, Christians should expect to be persecuted, and be prepared to respond to it in faith, for therein lies our witness to other believers and unbelievers.
- Godly lives are not welcome in an ungodly world, because God uses the lives of the godly to confront the lives of the ungodly with their ungodliness, and they don't like that.
- If we proclaim Jesus Christ strongly enough, we will confront the ungodly with the truth about their lives, as well as the truth about Jesus Christ, and they will find that offensive, judgmental, hateful, and derogatory.
- Therefore, as the Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, ***“All who live godly, in Christ Jesus, will be persecuted.”***
- The more the Savior is revealed in and through our lives, even in non-verbal ways, the more sin is exposed in the lives of unbelievers, as well as compromised Christians, and the more persecution we can expect.

2. We Must Exult in It – Vs. 13-14 – *“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part, he is glorified!”*

Regardless of what the world brings against us, Christians must keep rejoicing, because persecution is the evidence that God is at work in us and through us. (See Matthew 5:10-12)

- To the degree that we are willing to share in the sufferings of Christ, to that same degree, we will share in the glory of Christ at His appearing.
- The Apostle Paul said he ***“bore on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus!”***
- The word “marks” means “scars” where he had been whipped, beaten, and stoned.
- Paul said he received those “marks” because they couldn't get to Jesus – so they hit him.
- Paul said his JOY was to bear these marks for Jesus, for in so doing, he was sharing in the “fellowship of His sufferings!”
- If we keep to ourselves and hide our faith so as not to be persecuted, we will be ashamed on the day Jesus comes for us.
- If we are bold in our witness, we will suffer in this life, but we will be glorified for eternity.
- If we endure suffering for righteousness's sake, the ***“Spirit of the glory and of God rests upon us,”*** and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is peace.

3. We Must Evaluate it – Vs. 15 -18 – *“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as*

a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

When suffering comes, we are to discern its source to see if it is of our doing, as a result of our sin or if it is of God's "doing", to prepare us to meet the Savior.

- Rather than "burr up" at those who are persecuting us, we need to allow the persecution to motivate us to "clean up" the household of God.
- God is using the persecution of the world today to purge the Church of sin and to prepare the Church for the Rapture.
- If God is purifying His Church today, how close are we then to His judgment of the ungodly?
- It is far better to endure this temporal judgment today, than to endure God's wrath for all eternity!

An American pastor said to a Russian pastor, "It must be difficult to pastor a church in Russia!" The Russian pastor said, "Not as difficult as it is in America, for we know who the true Christians are."

4. We Must Endure it – Vs. 19 – "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator."

Now that we know that the persecution we are called to endure is not just the evil intentions and hatred of man but according to the will of God for our lives, our only response should be to "endure it by faith" by entrusting our souls unto God.

- If the persecution is for our testing, it is an essential feature of God's working in our lives to purge us from anything that would hinder our witness.