

STAND UP UNDER THE FIERY TRIAL OF PERSECUTION 1 PETER 04:12–19

Introduction

Persecution is a strange thing. 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 believer is to stand up under the fiery trials of persecution.

- I. First, do not be surprised that you suffer persecution (v. 12).
- II. Second, rejoice in persecution (v. 13).
- III. Third, know God's Spirit, that a glow of God's glory rests upon you (v. 14).
- IV. Fourth, do not bring suffering and persecution upon yourself (v. 15).
- V. Fifth, do not be ashamed to suffer for being a Christian (v. 16).
- VI. Sixth, accept persecution as the purifying judgment of God (v. 17-18).
- VII. Seventh, keep on doing good and commit yourself to God (v. 19).

I. *1 Peter 04:12 Persecution and Suffering*

First, do not be surprised that you are persecuted and have to suffer. (See 1 Pet. 1:12.)

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 painful, and so long as the believer is upon earth, he is going to be called upon to face painful trials.

Being a genuine believer in a corrupt world is difficult. People often oppose the believer's stand for Christ. The world just cannot understand the demands of Christ for self-denial and discipline, for purity and righteousness and in particular His insistence that they give all they are and have to His cause. Therefore, when a person really begins to live for Christ, the world often wants little to do with him. It may be next door, in the office, in school, in the government or a hundred other places, but the genuine Christian is often...

- avoided
- cursed
- ridiculed
- questioned
- mocked
- abused
- isolated
- mistreated
- slandered
- neglected
- persecuted
- overlooked
- imprisoned
- by-passed
- martyred

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.

- => 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.
- => 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.
- => 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.
- => 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 *"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."*

John 15:18, 22 *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin."*

Phil 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.*

2 Tim 3:12 *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

1 John 3:13 *Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.*

1 PETER 04: 12 PERSECUTION AND SUFFERING

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

1 Peter 04:12

The sufferings of the early Christians were just what Peter says, "painful." 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. Some had boiling lead poured over their scorching bodies; others had fiery red branding irons put to the private parts of their bodies; others were wrapped in the bloody skins of wild game and chased in a hunt by man and dogs; others were soaked with flammable oil and set aflame; others had their limbs torn apart from their bodies one by one, both by machine and animals; others were subjected to the most devilish imaginations in torture chambers; and so the list goes on and on.

William Barclay points out that there were essentially five slanders made against the church in the early days of its history (*The Gospel of Mathew*, Mt. 5:10, p. 108-109. Cp. his commentary on Revelation 2:8-11, Vol . 1, p. 98.)

1. Christian believers were thought to be cannibals. There were two reasons for this slander. (1) The teaching that one had to eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood in order to have life (Jn. 6:51f). (2) The practice of the Lord's Supper and its words, "This is my body and this is my blood" (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24).
2. The church was also charged with breaking up homes and tampering with family relationships. This was because some members of families became believers and others did not (Mt. 10:34-39).
3. The church was charged with heresy.
 - => Judaism, the religion of the Jews, charged the Christians with heresy because the believers refused to put tradition before God and people, and they refused to obey the rules and regulations as prescribed by the traditional beliefs.
 - => Other people charged believers with heresy because they refused to pay homage to Caesar and to worship the gods and goddesses of society.
4. The church was charged with lust and immorality. This was because they practiced the Agape or The Love Feast. This was simply a fellowship meal in which Christian brotherhood was shared and experienced. But because it was called "The Love Feast" and such a close bond was seen between Christians, their behaviour was twisted to be immoral.
5. The church and its believers were charged with being revolutionary and with insurrection. They were thought to be traitors for three primary reasons.
 - a. Christians preached Jesus Christ the Lord who is to return and establish His kingdom right here upon earth.
 - b. Christians also preached the destruction of the world by fire.
 - c. Christians refused to worship Caesar, the symbol of Roman government. This was the major reason for the official persecution of Christians by the government.

Rome had conquered the world with its vast number of peoples and their different cultures, politics, beliefs, philosophies and languages. How could one government pull and hold all the diverse people of the world together as one nation and one people?

Rome needed a symbol, an object, something that could be held up before the people that would naturally demand their loyalty. As Rome began to conquer the world, the leaders began to notice something. The conquered people eventually became settled and thankful for the peace, prosperity and civilization that Rome brought to the world. They were glad for a one-world government. And in the eyes of the people that government was centred on the emperor. The emperor was therefore set up as the one unifying principle around which the vast empire was built and held together. A law was passed which demanded that every citizen go once a year and burn a dab of incense to the idol of Caesar and say, “Caesar is Lord.” The worshipper was then given a certificate showing that he was loyal to the empire. He was free to worship as he wished for the rest of the year.

Christians were just unable to bow and worship and say “Caesar is Lord.” Therefore, in the eyes of the government they were lawbreakers and disloyal to Rome. They were hunted down and charged with being revolutionaries and insurrectionists. The result was, of course, just what Peter says, “painful persecution.” □

II. *1 Peter 04:13 Rejoicing in Persecution*

Second, rejoice in persecution. This is difficult to do, for no person likes to suffer abuse or pain of any sort, but especially when it is inflicted by neighbours, 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. But note: there is a way to rejoice in persecution. How? By keeping our eyes and minds upon two things.

1. 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. No greater privilege could be given to a person than to become so devoted to God that he would join Christ in the sacrifice of himself to God. 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.

Acts 5:41 *The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.*

Acts 16:23-25 *After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.*

2 Cor 6:10 *Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*

Heb 10:34 *You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.*

1 Pet 4:11-12 *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.*

2. When we suffer, we shall be greatly rewarded when Christ returns in glory. This is exactly what Scripture declares time and again. (See note, *Reward*, 1 Pet. 1:4.)

Mat 5:11-12 *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

Rom 8:16-17 *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

2 Cor 4:17 *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

2 Tim 2:10 *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

2 Tim 3:11 *Persecutions, sufferings — what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.*

Heb 11:26 *He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.*

III. 1 Peter 04:14 Persecution and Closeness with Christ

Third, know God's Spirit, that a glow of God's glory rests upon you. The words "insulted because of...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 on [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. The Holy Spirit actually causes a glow of God's glory to shine in and through the believer's body. 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. There is a sense in which the believer's sufferings *fill up the sufferings of Christ* and complete the sufferings of Christ for the church (see Col. 1:24).

These two experiences — gaining a deeper consciousness of the Lord's presence and being used to complete the sufferings for the church — are gained only through suffering. They make suffering a privilege and a joy for the believer, for the believer suffers even as his Lord suffered. Note: Christ is glorified by the believer's sufferings. The believer honours Christ and proves that Christ is the Saviour of the world by standing up for Him.

IV. 1 Peter 04:15 Bringing Persecution upon Self

Fourth, do not bring suffering and persecution upon yourself 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.

- => The believer is not to suffer as a murderer: he is not to take the life of another person. In fact, he is never to become unjustly angry or to demean another person.
- => The believer is not to suffer as a thief: he is not to steal, no matter how small the item is nor how much he may need or desire it.
- => The believer is not to suffer as an evil doer, as any kind of lawbreaker or evil person.
- => The believer is not to suffer as a busybody or meddler or troublemaker in other people's affairs. No believer is to interfere in the life or affairs of anyone else — never in matters that do not concern him.

1 Tim 1:9-10 *We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.*

Eph 5:6 *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

Heb 2:2-3 *For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.*

V. 1 Peter 04:16 Persecution for Being a Christian

Fifth, do not be ashamed to suffer for being a Christian. 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. It is used only three times in the New Testament:

=> in Acts 11:26 where the world called the believers at Antioch *Christians*.

=> in Acts 26:28 where King Agrippa uses the name in scorn.

=> here in 1 Peter 4:16.

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 honouring the name of Christ.

Thought 1. 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. But Scripture is clear:

Rom 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

Phil 1:20 *I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*

1 Pet 4:16 *However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*

1 John 2:28 *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

Psa 29:2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.

Psa 34:3 Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.

Psa 57:5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.

Psa 107:32 Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders.

Psa 25:1 O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvellous things, things planned long ago.

VI. 1 Peter 04:17–18 Persecution, a Purifying Judgment

Sixth, accept persecution as the purifying judgment of God. Note: Scripture clearly says that persecution is used by God as a judgment upon believers. Judgment, in fact, must begin at the house or church of God. 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. One thing that He often does is use persecution to arouse the believer. 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.

=> 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.

Note one other significant truth: if believers have to suffer the judgment of God while on earth — if the righteous are scarcely saved — where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?

What shall be the end of the person who lives an impure and unrighteous life? Who disobeys God and rebels and rejects Him and curses His name? What kind of judgment shall they bear? The point is this: they will never be allowed to appear in God's presence; they will never be acceptable to God. Their judgment shall be terrible; they shall be eternally doomed from the presence of the Lord — forever and ever separated from Him.

Mat 25:46 *“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

Mark 3:29 *“But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”*

Luke 3:17 *“His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

Rom 2:8 *But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*

Rom 6:21 *What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!*

Phil 3:18-19 *For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.*

2 Th 1:9 *They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.*

Heb 6:8 *But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.*

Heb 10:29 *How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

1 Pet 4:18 *And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

Rev 20:15 *If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Rev 21:8 *“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”*

VII. *1 Peter 04:19 Do Good and Commit Yourself to God*

Seventh, keep on doing good and commit yourself to God. 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.

=> He must *commit* himself 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 bring him 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 fulfil His plan and purpose in our lives.

John 17:11 "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name — the name you gave me — so that they may be one as we are one."

2 Tim 1:12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

2 Tim 4:18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Gen 28:15 "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Deu 6:24 The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.

Psa 31:23 Love the LORD, all his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful, but the proud he pays back in full.

Psa 37:28 For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. They will be protected forever, but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off.

Psa 121:4 Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Prov 2:8 For he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

Isa 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. ■