

1Peter 4:12-16

Suffering for the Sake of Christ is Normal

What time in history do you think that persecution of Christians was at its worst?

In the last 120 years of history there have been more Christians persecuted for their faith and more Christians put to death for their faith than in all the combined 1,900 years of church history before.

Today in 53 countries of the world, the Bible is illegal, and many western countries, including Canada, are seriously considering also banning the Bible as hate literature. (*search "Bible banned as hate speech"*)

The persecutions of the 20th century were the most severe in the history of the Church and it is only growing worse now in the 21st century as persecution moves into the most Christianized countries of the west, including Canada. (*Gospel Defence League, <http://gospeldefenceleague.org/index.php/articles/67-a-century-of-persecution>)*

Count on Suffering for Christ

1Peter 4:12, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you..."

Peter warns the church of a coming time of persecution, referred to as a *fiery trial*, that was coming upon the entire church (cf. ESV).

The following verses are written to prepare the hearts and minds of the believers so that we would come through this trial victoriously.

Peter is informing believers that suffering for our faith should never surprise the Christian. The Bible teaches us that we should expect to suffer for our faith, especially as we approach the end of church history before the return of Christ.

2Timothy 3:1, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come..."

2Timothy 3:12, "...all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

Remember that recently we saw that in **Revelation 3:10**, Jesus prophesied that in the final stages of church history there would come upon the whole world a time trial which will put us to the test.

And in **Revelation 3:18**, Jesus counsels the end-time church to buy from Him gold refined in the fire, a symbol of high-quality faith—faith that has been produced by going fiery trials. (*Robert Thomas, Revelation 1-7, p. 313-14*)

And then in **Revelation 3:19** Jesus promised a time of rebuke and chastening of the church, “*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*”

This is not speaking of the Tribulation, that doesn’t begin until Revelation chapter six. This chastening of the church takes place before the Tribulation.

This biblical concept, that Christians should accept persecution and hard times as the normal experience, runs contrary to our western culture that views all kinds of suffering and hardship as an abnormal condition that should be avoided as much as possible.

And if it can’t be avoided, then it should be confronted and resolved quickly with medicine, or with petitions to our government representatives, or by dialing 911, so that “normal” life can resume as soon as possible.

The longing that we all have for a peaceful life, free from suffering, and filled with pleasure, is a lingering built-in yearning for that which we were originally created for—the perfect, painless life of pleasure in the Garden of Eden, which is what we were originally created to experience all the time.

Sin and the corruption that it caused to our lives, destroyed all perfection, but there is still a frustrated, built-in desire for that state of perfection remaining in our genetic make-up.

For the believer, this longing for a peaceful, comfortable, pleasure-filled life, will be satisfied after the rapture of the church, when there will be no more tears, nor suffering, nor pain, nor death, but fullness of joy and pleasure forever more in the presence of Christ.

But until Christ comes, we live in this fallen world as pilgrims and foreigners, living on mission in a kingdom of darkness and evil.

We long to go home where there will be no more suffering, but that joy must be postponed until our rescue mission here is done.

There are still many lost souls with no hope of experiencing freedom from the pain and frustration of sin, unless we reach them and show them the way.

When we look at verse 13, we read that, not only are we to consider suffering for Christ as normal, but we are to...

Rejoice in Suffering for Christ

1Peter 4:12-13, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ **but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.**”

We are told to “rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings...” NASB says, “to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing...”

This implies that the greater the suffering, the greater the reason to rejoice.

In the natural world, blessing and suffering are viewed as opposites, but for the pilgrim who is on mission in this foreign land, suffering for the sake of Christ is a great blessing, and when its significance and purpose is understood, it is a reason for great rejoicing.

Because the forces of evil, and the wicked, opposed and attacked Jesus, those who follow in His footsteps should not be surprised to find themselves also targets of the same forces of darkness that opposed Jesus.

John 15:18-20, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...”

It is an honor and a privilege to suffer with Christ and to be treated by the world the way it treated Jesus.

To suffer because of your faithful obedience to Christ, is a blessing because the persecution identifies you as belonging to Jesus and not belonging to this world.

As our society moves further away from our Judeo-Christian foundation, and sinks deeper and deeper under the totalitarian control of the anti-God, one-world system that is driving the response to Covid, increasingly we will find ourselves hated and opposed by those loyal to this world system, because of our biblical beliefs, values and lifestyle.

But, as Jesus said in **Luke 6:26**, “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you...”

Because such approval from the world is often a sign that either you have in some way compromised God’s truth in order to please the world, or you actually belong to the world.

I think that these passages should give pause to those AHS approved Christians who find themselves critical of Pastor James Coates and the GraceLife Church.

Suffering persecution is not the sole factor in determining if we are in the will of God, as verse 15 makes clear, but I suspect that Pastor James and the GraceLife Church is the canary in the mine.

Through the extreme reaction their stance has generated, are exposing the true nature of what is taking over our government, and is giving us a glimpse of what is to come for all who don't fully comply with the totalitarian demands of the government.

Verse 13, makes an important statement when it says, that we “partake of Christ’s sufferings” (meaning we participate in, or share in His sufferings). When someone sins against us, we need to remember that all sin is ultimately against God, not us.

David recognized this fact when he repented of his sins of adultery and murder, confessing in ***Psalm 51:4***, “*Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil...*”

We belong to the Lord. He is the true owner of all that we are, and any attack against us is an attack against Him.

When Saul was seeking to destroy the Christians, Jesus knocked him off his donkey and said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4).

When others persecute you, they are persecuting Jesus through you.

We are members of the body of Christ. Each of us makes up a specific part in that body, but we are only a part of the whole. The whole is Jesus, and Jesus is our life.

An offense against one part is an offense against the entire body.

If a man named Joe gets stabbed in the back, the news doesn't report, “A back was stabbed yesterday.” The news reports that, “Joe was stabbed yesterday.”

When you get persecuted, the offense is against Jesus, although the offense came into the part of His body that happens to be you. Thus, we partake of Christ’s sufferings, for our life is truly His life, and His life is ours. (*Bill Ewing, Rest Assured, p. 186-87*)

We rejoice when we suffer for our faith in Christ because of the honor of being treated as Jesus was treated;

Because it affirms that we belong to Christ and not to the world; “*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*” (*John 15:20*)

And we rejoice when we are persecuted because when we share in His suffering, we are assured of sharing in His glory one day.

1Peter 4:13, “***but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.***”

That means suffering persecution for our faith is an indicator that when Christ returns, we will join Him and share with Him in His glory.

Sharing in His glory means we will have perfect, glorified bodies, like His, that will experience no pain, no sickness, no aging and no death.

We will live with Jesus in His Father's home in heaven, we will rule with Jesus in His Kingdom here on earth, we will be sinless like Jesus, and the life we will live is described as being filled with exceeding joy.

And the more we have suffered while as pilgrims on mission here in these bodies, the greater will be our glory when the Lord returns and our assignment is done.

The best in life is never behind us, but it is always yet to come.

His glory will be revealed in stages: First at the rapture of the church—that will be our first, face to face encounter with Jesus, and that is when we will receive our glorified bodies and fully sanctified minds.

Then more glory when we will accompany Christ when He returns to the earth as a mighty conquering warrior to exact vengeance against the wicked and against the demons of hell, and to seize the victory that was gained at the cross.

The next stage of glory we will experience is when we reign with Him in the glory of His Kingdom here on the earth, when it will be beautiful, like never before since the Garden of Eden. This will last for 1,000 years.

Then when He creates a perfect, new heaven and new earth, we will live with Him in the unimaginable glory of that place forever, with no risk of the joy and adventure ever ending or growing dull.

Now here is one more reason why we can rejoice when we share in Christ's sufferings:

We are Empowered by Suffering for Christ

1Peter 4:14, "If you are reproached [insulted] for the name of Christ, blessed are you, [AMP - happy, fortunate, to be envied, with life-joy, and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation regardless of your outward condition] for the Spirit of glory and of God [this refers to the awesome Shekinah glory of the presence of God that was in the pillar of fire that accompanied Israel in the wilderness (Warren Wiersbe, p. 116)] rests upon you..."

This is assurance that when you are persecuted for the sake of Christ, you will never go through the experience alone, but the grace of God's presence will, in a special way, in that exact moment of need, strengthen and empower you to thrive in that experience.

This explains how Paul and Silas could sing songs of praise after being severely beaten and thrown into prison (Acts 16:23-25).

This promise of the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon the persecuted explains how martyrs could sing praises to God while their bodies were being burned at the stake.

In 1555, while in prison waiting till he be taken to be burned at the stake for refusing to renounce his faith, Thomas Hawkes was allowed to see his friends.

Several of them asked him if it would be possible for him to give them some signal to show that a man could suffer the fire without despairing.

Hawkes promised, that if God's presence was sustaining him and comforting him in the fire, he would lift up a hands toward heaven before he died as a signal to his friends, to show that the grace of God was present to make the most terrible torments bearable in the glorious cause of Christ.

When Thomas was led to the place of execution, he was fastened to the stake with a strong chain about his middle.

The flames were kindled around him, and soon blazed with such fierceness that his skin began to shrivel and curl, but Thomas didn't move.

The people thought he was dead, but suddenly, mindful of the promise he had made to his friends, Thomas raised his hands burning with flames high above his head, and, as if in an ecstasy of joy, clapped them together three times.

Then his body collapsed as he triumphantly gave up his spirit. (<https://deeperchristian.com/thomas-hawke/>)

Isaiah 43:2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you."

This promise of the Spirit of glory and of God resting upon the persecuted is what Jesus promised which would enable persecuted followers to boldly speak to the glory of God.

Matthew 10:16-20, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.¹⁷ But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.¹⁸ You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.¹⁹ But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."

There is No Shame in Suffering for Christ

1Peter 4:15-16, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”

None of these promises of glory and grace are given to those who suffer because of their own foolishness or because of their sin.

But if you are unjustly treated because you are living as God wants you to live, then there is no shame in that, no matter how much the world may try to shame you.

There are some social practices that the world today is trying to shame people for doing, but they are practices that our Lord has directed us to not neglect as part of living out our calling as Christians. Therefore, we must follow Christ and be prepared to suffer from the world.

Our Lord calls us to regularly assemble together with other believers for fellowship, and when we do to worship the one true God, praying together and singing songs of praise to the Lord.

We are to teach the full counsel of God’s word, to remember Christ’s death in communion and prayer, to practice hospitality, opening up our homes to one another.

We are to share meals together, to relate to one another as family members, and to make disciples of all people, boldly proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We glorify God when we are persecuted for practicing any of these things in obedience to our Lord.

To summarize, suffering for the sake of Christ is normal and to be expected while on mission in this world.

We are to rejoice in suffering, because it identifies us as belonging to Christ, rather than to this world, and because temporary suffering here increases our eternal glory in the future.

And we never go through suffering alone, but are empowered by God to triumph in suffering.

If you were of the world the world would love its own. Does the world love you, or does the world recognize that you belong not to them but to Christ?

Come to Jesus, put your faith in Him and enter into His Kingdom and into eternal life.

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