

1Peter 4:17-19

If Judgment Begins at the House of God

This announcement just came out this weekend from the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedom: “The trial of Pastor James Coates, of grace Life Church, will proceed on May 3, 2021 at Provincial Court in Stony Plain, however the Court granted the Government’s request that Pastor Coates not be permitted to challenge the constitutional validity of Dr. Deena Hinshaw’s orders at the trial. The government will not be required to produce scientific evidence in support of Dr. Hinshaw’s orders. Government lawyers told the Court that the Alberta Government could not produce any scientific evidence in support of Dr. Hinshaw’s orders in time for the May 3 trial.”

This is very disappointing for many to read that the courts are enabling the government to dodge accountability for their actions against James Coates and against society in general.

How should believers respond to these kinds of developments and injustices?

I believe that our passage today in First Peter gives us insights into what is going on and how Christians should interpret these things.

1Peter 4:16-17, “Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

17 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?”

Verses 12 to 16 have portrayed suffering for our faith in Jesus Christ in a very positive light, telling us it is sharing in the suffering of Christ, which is a great honor, there is no shame in it, but instead there is much reason to rejoice and glorify God in our suffering, which we looked at in our last study.

Therefore, when verse 17, points to the growing signs of coming persecution, and calls it judgment, this is not referring to a judgment of wrath or punishment...at least not for the church, though it begins at the house of God

Verse 17 begins by identifying the coming persecution of the believers as the beginning of God’s end-time judgment—I will explain that in a minute.

I believe that in these verses we will find a helpful explanation of the stage of history that we are entering into in the world today.

In Peter’s day, the events he was describing were about to take place in an isolated local context.

But in our day, the events he is describing are taking place in a global context, which indicates that we are beginning the time of God’s final judgment.

17 “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God;”

The Greek word that is translated into English as, “judgment”, in this context does not necessarily refer only to the condemnation that a judge passes, but it refers to the all of the actions of a judge in determining who is innocent and who is guilty. (*Jobes, p. 293*)

When a judge makes a judgment, he/she makes a distinction between the innocent and the guilty. The judge has the responsibility of making sure that no innocent are punished, and that no guilty escape unpunished.

What this verse is saying is that in the last days, God will begin His process of judging humanity by starting with His own people, He will begin sifting them to determine and to reveal which are truly Christ’s and which are imposters—fakes. (*Jobes p. 293*)

As this whole section, beginning with 1Peter 4:12 teaches, the fiery trials of persecution are the sifting process of God, who is the judge.

Look at verse 12 which informs us that these fiery trials are *to test you*. The judge is beginning a process that will ultimately result in an accurate separation of those who are righteous from those who are guilty, and the righteous will be rewarded and the guilty will be punished.

Jesus spoke many times of this sifting, or separating the believer from the unbeliever, which would take place in the last days shortly before the wicked will be destroyed and cast into hell.

For example, **Matthew 3:12**, speaking of Jesus, *“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

Matthew 25:31-46, in the parable of the sheep and the goats, part of the final judgment involved a period of time in which the judge, like a shepherd, separated the wicked (represented by goats) from the righteous (represented by sheep).

Then after the separation was completed, the sheep were rewarded, but the goats were punished.

Also, in **Matthew 13:24-30**, Jesus told the parable about the wheat and the tares, the wheat being the believers, and the tares being imposters.

Matthew 13:30, *“Let both [wheat—genuine believers, and tares—nominal Christians] grow together until the harvest [the last days], and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles [this is the separating, the removal of the imposters them from the genuine believers] to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”*

The imposters are separated so that they can face judgment, first the Tribulation and then hell, while the believers are gathered up and taken away—a picture of going to heaven, either by death or the rapture.

Some Bible teachers believe that this principle of separation of the imposters from the true believers before the final judgment is what Paul was referring to in 2Thessalonians as “*the falling away*” which comes first before the wrath of the Tribulation.

1Peter 4:17a, “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God;”

The house of God is the church—it is the people of God. (1Peter 2:5)

The idea of God’s judgment beginning first with the people of God is a principle that was seen often in the Old Testament, where God would begin by purifying the house of God, then afterwards He would bring wrath against those who were not part of the people of God.

Satan’s strategy has always been to weaken the church by bringing in imposters—hypocritical, fake Christians. They call themselves Christians but often they are not.

And this strategy is particularly effective when Satan can get a fake Christian into the role of leadership—the Bible calls these, wolves in sheep’s clothing.

So when God begins to bring judgment on a land, He begins by strengthening His Church; removing these false leaders and nominal believers, and chastening compromising Christians, waking up the sleeping Christians, causing us all to take our faith more seriously, and bringing home the wayward and backsliding Christians.

This judgment in the house of God ***begins*** with God allowing persecution to come against the church.

This principle is found in the Old Testament book of Malachi.

Malachi 3:1-3, “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts. 2 “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? [The answer to that question is only the true, blood-washed child of God can endure and stand.] For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.”

Peter seems to have this prophecy of Malachi in view, for it combines the thought of God’s coming to His temple with the double purpose of His judgment: to purify His followers by removing from their midst the wicked and the compromise.

When professing Christians and fake pastors start facing the threat of opposition and persecution from the world, pretty quickly a separation begins to take place as those who are unwilling to suffer for being identified as a believer, choose the easy out, and abandon the faith.

This is one of the reasons there are so many churches that are no longer functioning at the slightest threat of danger. And persecution has hardly even begun. This shows how diluted and weak the church has become.

Persecution is very effective at sorting out those who are truly Christ's from those who are only nominal Christians.

The hostile reaction of unbelievers against Christians who won't compromise their faith, is one of God's means of separating the wheat from the tares, and separating the sheep from the goats.

And persecution of the church is also very effective in causing the people of the world, who in good times were very tolerant of Christians, to begin putting some distance between themselves and Christians when we begin to be despised.

They no longer want to risk hurting their own reputation with the world by associating with believers.

Thus, we the church, will find ourselves increasingly isolated and rejected from the rest of society.

When we see this separation begin taking place in churches on a large scale, with many leaving the church in reaction to pressure from the world, this will be a clear sign that God is preparing to bring His wrath upon the rest of the world.

Notice how God's sifting and separating works: God doesn't drive people out of the church, but as the risks increase, and as the world increasingly begins rejecting the people of God, many choose for themselves that they would rather be accepted by the world and risk rejection from God, than be accepted by God and risk rejection from the world.

Those who leave the church, do so by their own choice. They choose for themselves which side they feel more at home with—they demonstrate by their own action where they belong.

Because these fiery trials of persecution are a test, to expose our true identity, true Christians should embrace this testing as a good thing, and we will trust God's grace to enable us to unashamedly stand firm and bear the name of Christ, gladly showing that we are not of this world, but our allegiance is to Jesus, our King.

1Peter 4:18, "Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

This is a quote of Proverbs 11:31

NASB20, “And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?”

Jesus warned His followers about this difficult choice that must be made, but urged us to choose to walk the path of suffering now, because it would soon lead to a glorious life without end. But to try to avoid suffering for Christ now would soon end in everlasting destruction.

Matthew 7:13-14, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴ Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

When Peter says in verse 18, “*it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved,*” he doesn’t mean that salvation is difficult to obtain—it is a free gift of grace. But rather, he means that the world’s rejection makes it difficult to choose to follow Christ, instead most choose to walk down the popular path of public acceptance, which is easier.

But, contrary to what the crowd believes, the popular path does not lead to salvation, it leads to judgment.

And the implication of this verse is, if the time of trial and persecution that those who are part of the house of God experience is so difficult, how much more severe must be the following judgment that comes upon those who don’t follow Christ?

It is far better to suffer a little now as a Christian than to reject Christ and suffer so much more for ever after.

1Peter 4:19, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

So, verse 19 addresses how we should respond to persecution.

Let’s apply this to our local situation.

As our government begins stripping away more and more of the freedoms we have enjoyed in our land, including the freedom to gather publicly in large groups, including the privilege of having our Christian beliefs enshrined and protected by our laws, how should we be responding to this?

Should we be fighting this out in the courts? Should we mobilize politically? Should we be going public and taking a strong stand for our rights?

I think that day has past, we missed it. I think we have entered into the beginning of judgment, and our response needs to be repentance from our compromise, and make sure you are solidly on the Lord’s side as this separation begins to widen.

As God's judgment of separating those who are His from those who are not, progresses, we should **not** expect the people of the kingdom of this world to be on our side of the divide—they do not belong to us, and God is exposing that fact.

If God is testing all of us to expose whose side we are on—if God is creating a separation to see which kingdom we will cling to, how should we respond when He allows us to experience persecution from the pagan world?

When we see this happening, I am not sure that we are right to be going to the courts to demand that the systems of this world accept us Christians and protect us. We are foreigners to them and God is separating us from one another. We should be prioritizing rescuing souls from their side and bringing them onto ours, rather than seeking to gain acceptance on their side.

This includes the legal system of this world, the governments of this world, and the education system of this world. When God's judgment begins, we pilgrims should expect that they are going to turn against us and reject us as they rejected Christ.

God is exposing each of our loyalties, and they belong to a different kingdom than we do. This rejection from the world is God's will to display who are truly His, and who are being set apart for judgment.

For many decades we have thought of our country as a Christian nation, and its laws and governments have been friendly toward Christianity.

However, I believe the world has, by its friendship, weakened and destroyed more Christians than it ever did by its persecutions.

Now God is removing the world's approval and God will see who will still profess to follow Him when it is unpopular, and who will go with the world.

As the divide between the church and the world grows wider, those trying to keep one foot in each will soon be forced to choose to abandon one or the other.

Our focus should not be on trying to maintain the favor and acceptance of the world—but, as verse 19 exhorts us, let us commit our souls to the Lord and do good—go about fulfilling the mission that we have been given.

“Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

We are encouraged to do exactly what Jesus did when He was being persecuted.

1Peter 2:22-23, “*Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth*”; ²³ *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*”

To commit our souls to God means to give our lives to God for His safe-keeping, trusting in Him to take care of us.

When we can't trust our constitution and laws to protect us. When we can't trust our courts or our police to protect us, we can trust our God to take good care of us.

And this is not a one-time action, but it is to be a constant, daily, entrusting our lives to God.

And we are reminded here in final word of verse 19, that God is a faithful Creator. The one who created the world, and everything in it, is the one in control of His world, and He has the right to judge this world.

What better one could we possibly run to than the one who owns it all, and the only one who has the right to judge it all. Give your life to Him.

God will sort out all people, separating those who are His from those who reject His gospel.

As Christians we have no need to fear this process, but trust God with our lives in all circumstances.

How do we demonstrate our faith in God when we face opposition?

By continuing to walk in the way that He has called you to walk, even when the world says you must not.

Continue to live as a Christian when to do so becomes illegal.

Continue to stand upon the word of God when it becomes banned.

Continue to meet with other Christians for fellowship and worship, continue to spread the word of God to others.

Do not let the threat of persecution deflect you from your calling as a follower of Christ on a rescue mission in this world that is marked to be brought down to its knees by God's judgment.

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