

Letters From A Fisherman
Week 18
1 Peter 4:12-19
“Why Must I Suffer?”

Introduction

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared ahead of time for us to do. **Ephesians 2:10**

The false prophets that are so prevalent on television and the internet these days will tell you that when you become a Believer everything in your life will be perfect. You'll always have good health, enough money to do whatever you wish, with no stress or difficulties at all. It sounds wonderful doesn't it? But it's a lie. And the reason these people can perpetuate such falsehoods is because there is always a multitude of people who will gladly pay someone to tell them what they want to hear (**2 Timothy 4:1-4**).

These charlatans are counting upon the support of those who do not really know The Word. For there is no possibility of diligently studying The Scripture's and coming to any such foolish notion that living the Christian life is a walk in the park. We are called to take up our cross, not the rocking chair. This life is meant to be hard. And God intends to use trials and difficulties in order to mold us into the image of Christ. Period. If we are truly *His workmanship*, as Paul has said in Ephesians, then it stands to reason that some work has to be done in us in order for God to accomplish His purposes.

The problem with so-called modern day *Christianity* (and I use the term loosely) is that people are being taught that they are ok, just as they are, and that God simply wants them to have all they ever wanted. In other words, they are searching for a *god* (small “g”) who will appeal to their fleshly lusts as opposed to having any desire to be remade in the image of Christ Jesus. To be like Christ is to share in His sufferings. He was despised, and therefore, we will be as well. That is, if we are to be anything like Him.

“If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of My name, because they don't know the One who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin. The one who hates Me also hates My Father. **John 15:18-23**

So, why exactly do so many churchgoers today seem to struggle with this concept? It is because many of them have no real desire to be fully surrendered to God, allowing Him to do with them as He wills. For you see, in order to *be* His workmanship, we have to be willing to allow Him to do a work in us! And many times, that work is painful. For it requires The Potter to take away all the things in these jars of clay that keep us from bearing Christ's image. And our flesh doesn't exactly like being denied.

God intends to mold us into the image of His Son, and His Spirit uses The Word, and yes, quite often fiery trials, in order to do just that. We need to learn to trust that His way is best and to joyfully accept His plan as He continues to do His work in us. Simon Peter understood this process all too well. And in his letter to the persecuted church in Rome, he reminded his frightened readers that God was using even Nero's bloody persecution to do His work within the body of Christ. So not only should the church *not* be surprised by the trials that they would face, but to also embrace the opportunity to suffer for God's glory! What a shock this would be to the modern day televangelist!

So let us look together at what The Word of God has to say about suffering. For God uses suffering to chisel us into the very image of Christ. So why must we suffer? We suffer, because it is meant for our *Purification*, *Purging*, and ultimately for our *Prize*, when we stand before the throne as God's completed workmanship! Please allow me to explain.

Our Purification (vs. 12 & 14)

Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. **1 Peter 4:12**

If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. **1 Peter 4:14**

Peter starts this section by telling the church not to be *surprised* when the fiery trials come their way. But rather, they were to expect them and be prepared for them. The word used here for “fiery trials” (*pyrosis*) speaks of the way that precious metals are purified in a furnace. *The Bible* is filled with references of how God will refine His people with trials, so that they can be conformed into His image.

Look, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. **Isaiah 48:10**

Make no mistake. God will test His people in order to refine them. Sometimes God uses the fiery furnace in order to burn the sin right out of us. Remember what Peter said earlier:

...because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin... **1 Peter 4:1b**

I am convinced that this verse simply means that those who are willing to endure suffering for the sake of Christ, are the true followers of Christ. Therefore, they are willing to forsake the desires of their own flesh in order to follow Him. They are through with sin and are deadly serious about walking in holiness. This doesn't mean that they are sinlessly perfect, but it certainly means that they are serious about their faith.

When we are tested, we have a choice to make. We can either forsake the faith or decide to double down and get real. If you go around saying that you love Jesus, then sooner or later, you will be given the opportunity to prove it! And we prove it, by staying faithful even in the midst of suffering. I am reminded here of the story of Abraham and Isaac. God made Abraham patiently wait for a promised son, and then commanded him to sacrifice him on Mount Moriah.

Of course, God had no intention of Isaac actually being sacrificed, but rather, He commanded it to test Abraham's loyalty and faith. Now God already knew of Abraham's love and obedience, but Abraham, when he was tested, learned a great deal about his own love and obedience. God wanted to demonstrate to him, as well as to all of us, the sacrifices that are required in order to serve God. When Abraham passed the test, listen to the accommodation he received from God:

Then He said, “Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from Me.”

Genesis 22:12

Wow! What an endorsement of Abraham's faith! He fully trusted God, even in the inexplicable trial of giving up his son. *The Bible* tells us in the book of *Hebrews* that Abraham was actually convinced that if he sacrificed Isaac, that God would bring him back from the dead (**Hebrews 11:19**). Talk about faith. So you see, in the midst of a fiery trail, Abraham's faith was sorely tested, and he passed the test with flying colors. Now listen to Peter's words once again: “*For the one who has suffered in his flesh is finished with sin.*”

In Peter's day, Nero was doing all that he could to destroy the church of Christ. But he would not succeed, because Christ has established His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (**Matthew 16:18**). The testing of the church has simply purified it. For those who are willing to suffer for the sake of Christ cannot be overcome. For three hundred years, Rome would do its best to extinguish Christianity, but the fiery trials only served to make the church stronger. Because faith is purified in the fiery furnace. And when we are persecuted for the sake of Christ, this is living proof that Christ lives *within us* (**vs. 14**). And those with true saving faith can only be purified by the fire!

Our Purging (vs. 15-18)

Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name. For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?

And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? **1 Peter 4:15-18**

To suffer for the cause of Christ is to suffer nobly. But to suffer for our own misdeeds is simply to get what we deserve. Peter lists murderers, thieves, and general all purpose miscreants as those who have earned their suffering. For these malefactors, no further elaboration is really necessary, for we know that these types of people shall not inherit the kingdom (**1 Corinthians 6:9-10**). These are in no way to be compared to law abiding Christians, who are persecuted simply for their identification with Christ.

Peter adds a final candidate who has earned his own suffering, namely the “meddler” (*allotriepiskopos* in the Greek). I, for one, am glad that he included this particular category, for it speaks of one who is a protester that goes about trying to change the culture by means of civil disturbance. And do we not have a ton of those in the church today?! Peter warns that such as these will be despised by society. Why? Because you cannot bring about salvation by legal means. In short, you can't change the culture by legislation, it can only be changed by regeneration!

The Bible is clear. We do not use the weapons of this world to fight our battles (**2 Corinthians 10:3-5**). We are to fight this battle in the power of The Spirit. We are not going to save America by electing the right politicians, but we can save America by wining souls to Christ! Now don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that the church shouldn't vote or any ridiculous notion of that sort. What I am saying is that if we truly want to see our culture change, then we need to stop meddling and start witnessing! Just imagine, if every professing Christian went out and led one person to Christ? How exactly would this effect the culture? I hear people praying for America all the time these days. How about we start praying for *revival* instead, and then see how fast America changes for the better? What we need are less meddlers... and a lot more witnesses.

Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to The LORD of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”
Matthew 9:37-38

After this, Peter makes a statement that is often used out of context, when he says:

“For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household...” (vs. 17)

It is important to remember that he is still speaking of persecution in this passage. So what type of judgment is to begin within God's household, the Church? Simply put, persecution has a way of purging out from among the faithful, those whose faith is false. In short, fiery trials tend to weed out the fakers! Christ called these folks, “seeds that fell upon rocky ground.”

And the one sown on rocky ground — this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away.
Matthew 13:20-21

So just as the fiery trial purifies the true Believer, it purges out the false ones. Folks, I cannot tell you how many times I have witnessed this with my own eyes. People come into the church, and you

would think that they are on fire for Christ, but then at the first sign of difficulty, they are nowhere to be found. The National Guard couldn't even find them! As the Apostle John would describe these people:

They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. **1 John 2:19**

The fiery trial purifies the true, but purges the false. And if God will not spare his own church from the fiery trial, then just imagine what he will do to those who reject His gospel? Or as Peter quotes here from Proverbs 11:31: ***And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly sinner?*** (Septuagint - LXX - Greek New Testament).

Our Prize (vs. 13,19)

Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. **1 Peter 4:13**

So then, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good. **1 Peter 4:19**

If you were being observant, you noticed that I skipped over verse thirteen earlier in this discussion. There is a reason for this. I believe that the last verse of this passage and verse thirteen go together. For they speak of the reward that shall be given to us because of the suffering that we have endured for the sake of Christ.

In Peter's time, to be called "Christian" was intended as an insult. Believers were first called Christians in the city of Antioch (**Acts 11:26**). The word actually means "little christ's" and has over the centuries come to be a badge of honor for those who would identify as belonging to Jesus. To be persecuted for being a "Christian" is to share in the very glory of The One Who died to save us. And what is more, there is a prize, a reward, coming to those who endure suffering in order to bring Him glory. Listen to the words of Jesus:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you. **Matthew 5:10-12**

So, because we know that God is faithful; because we believe that all things truly do work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose (**Romans 8:28**); because we know that this world is not our home; and our LORD is coming soon for His bride the church; then: we can trust Him in all things, even amidst the fiery trials, for we know that these trials will *purify* the faithful, *purge* out the non-believers from among us, and bring us our great *prize* in heaven when Christ comes in His glory. So we rejoice and say in all things... "Even so, come LORD Jesus!"

TRUTH!!!