

Ministry of Grace Church

1 Peter 4:12-19 - Speaker Notes



Introduction

Before we continue in our study from 1 Peter, let's review who this is written to. The opening verse of this book is:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as exiles, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen (1 Peter 1:1)

The word translated as “who reside as exiles” is *parepidemos*. This specifically refers to “an alien living alongside,” or “a foreign resident.” In other words, a person who is not a citizen of a country but is living there (not simply visiting). Does that apply to Christians? Of course it does! We are living in a world that is not our own. We are foreigners living alongside the local residents. Peter also says that this is written to those “who are chosen.”

Yes, it's true that he said it was to those who were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. But, as with all the New Testament epistles, there was a primary audience and there was an extended audience. Since these letters were copied and sent to churches all over the world, we need to look at the secondary audience. We, who are foreign residents on this earth and who have been chosen by God are the people to whom this letter was written.

Part of Peter's reason for writing to the Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia is because they were undergoing significant persecution both from the Jews and from Rome. The Jews saw Christians as traitors to the Jewish religion and the Romans saw them as

traitors to the rule of Rome. That's why Peter said in verse 12, "do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you."

The reason that this letter is so relevant for us is because Christians have suffered for their faith throughout history. Therefore, do not be surprised if it happens to you. In fact, we should be happy when we suffer as followers of Christ, because our obedient, righteous suffering glorifies God. Keep in mind that your suffering for righteousness is pleasing to God, but suffering for wrongdoing is not pleasing to anyone.

If you do suffer for the cause of Christ, place yourself in His hands and serve Him faithfully. Focus on the big picture and on the God you are serving. Let Him take care of the details - and the outcome.

Here's how Peter said it:

1 Peter 4:12-13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you. But to the degree you are sharing the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

Well, what does Peter mean by "trial?" This word is translated from the Greek *peirasmos*. It refers to "a time of testing." This trial, or testing, is sometimes translated "temptation." When used of Satan tempting us, it always indicates a solicitation to evil. When used of God testing man however, it is never used with a sense of tempting to make man sin.

Peter here continues with the theme that he has been focusing on throughout this letter, suffering for righteousness' sake. The Christians in the early church suffered persecution repeatedly at the hands of jealous Jews and tyrannical Roman rulers. But members of the Church have suffered persecution throughout history. In fact, there have been few times in history when the church has not suffered persecution. That's one of the things which makes our own country so unique. We have been virtually persecution free since our founding. Not so for other countries ever since the time of Christ. That's why Peter's message is relevant for all generations of believers.

Consider, after all, the spiritual warfare that is going on, and has been going on in the heavenlies since time began. Satan and his demons have been opposed to God's plan and his faithful servants from the beginning. We sometimes think it a strange thing that we are coming under heavier and heavier attack from the humanists and secularist who want to get God out of our school systems and out of our government. Wasn't this country founded on Christian ideals and values? Of course it was. However, that doesn't mean that our enemy won't do everything in his power to neutralize God's influence. Actually, in this country we have had such religious freedom for the past 250 years that we think all of history has been like that. Not so, I'm afraid.

And consider this, there are places in the world right now where Christians are being persecuted and murdered simply because they believe that Jesus Christ died for their sins.

The time is coming when, even in this country, Christians will be persecuted and caused to suffer simply for believing in the Creator-God and the sacrificial atonement of His Son. So, Peter's message is just as relevant to us today as it has been throughout history. Therefore, don't think it strange if it happens to you. Don't be surprised at the adversity that is currently happening to us.

He tells us not to think that such adversities are strange. In support of Peter's position, here's what Paul said:

... all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will** be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

And, remember what Jesus told His disciples:

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Therefore, we shouldn't think it unusual if we are being persecuted for trying to live godly lives. Instead of thinking it strange, we should rejoice in the midst of our persecution and suffering. We should rejoice because we are sharing in Christ's suffering, as Paul said to the Philippians:

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (Philippians 3:10)

We should be willing, yes even desirous of being identified as one of His, even in our suffering. James also said:

Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, (James 1:2)

James even taught us that we will grow from these trials. And keep in mind what our Lord, Himself, told us:

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; ... (Matthew 5:11-12a)

Any personal relationship is strengthened when both parties in the relationship share common experiences, especially if they are difficult or painful experiences. God wants us to develop a closer relationship with Him, and one of the ways we can do this is by sharing in the suffering of Christ.

1 Peter 4:14

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

If you think God has deserted you whenever you encounter hardships in this life, then today's verse should pop into your head whenever you are insulted or discriminated against. If you are being obedient to God, speaking and acting in the way He wants you to, and you are verbally treated with contempt for it, either to your face or behind your back, you are supremely fortunate. This verse, like several of the preceding verses, seems to imply that there is pleasure in pain. However, you will notice that in all of Peter's writings on suffering for righteousness, he never once says that it is pleasurable. It is painful physically and emotionally, just as it was physically and emotionally painful to Christ when He suffered for us. What Peter is trying to get across is that in spite of the pain, we can feel a sense of peace and contentment knowing what the spiritual result will be.

We are told that the reason we are supremely fortunate when we are verbally buffeted in the name of Christ is because the Spirit of God, the spirit of glory, rests on us. There is something very beautiful about this that I don't want any of us to miss. When we are suffering for righteousness' sake as a result of our being obedient to the Spirit of God, He comes upon us imparting a sense of inner peace in spite of the physical or emotional pain. That's how martyrs of the faith in days gone by have been able to sing and give praise to God even while they were being consumed by flames.

In the last part of today's verse, Peter tells us that even though those who are reviling us are intentionally blaspheming God, in reality He is being glorified by our obedience and faithfulness. We all tend to think that we will give God much glory when we do some great spiritual work in His name and to this end we work hard. What Peter is telling us is that simply by being humbly obedient, especially if we suffer for it, we are glorifying God.

1 Peter 4:15-16

Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be put to shame, but is to glorify God in this name.

We often take the moniker "Christian" for granted. The word is translated from the Greek *christianos*, which is actually of Latin formulation, not Greek. It is a word that was not used by Christians to refer to themselves until the end of the first century. This word was coined by Romans as a term of derision to distinguish followers of Christ from Jews and Gentiles. It occurs only three times in the New Testament.

There may be a time, even in this country, when the term Christian will be used as a derogatory word. In fact, it has already begun. Have you heard the term "Christian Nationalist?" It is a term that is used as a derogatory title by people claiming that this country should divorce itself from the Bible and its teachings.

After a number of verses intended to comfort us in our times of trial and suffering, Peter now interjects a solemn warning lest we think that any type of suffering is glorifying to God.

Peter mentions four types of actions for which suffering does not bring glory to God. Two of them are specific crimes and the other two are more general in nature. The first two things he identifies are murder and theft. Certainly, none of us would seriously consider murder as a reasonable action because it is so horrific and final. Stealing, on the other hand, is a different matter. We tend to categorize stealing two ways: intentionally taking something that doesn't rightfully belong to us and "borrowing" or using something that isn't ours but that the rightful owner will never miss or doesn't need if we don't return it. If the matter were truth telling we would call this latter one a "little white lie," so I'll refer to it here as a "little white theft." Unfortunately for us, in God's book there is no difference between a little white theft and any other kind. If we get caught in the act and suffer for it, we do not bring glory to God.

The other two things that Peter mentions for which we should never suffer are being an evildoer and being a meddler. Evildoer is pretty broad in scope and includes all those things that we do which aren't pleasing to God. Lest we try to split hairs here, Peter is not saying that we shouldn't get caught, but that we shouldn't do these types of things. If we don't do these things, we won't have to suffer for them.

The fourth thing that Peter tells us not to suffer for is "a busybody in other people's matters." I'm sure we all know or have known someone like that. This should never be the case with a Christian. After all, we have enough to do just to keep our own sin nature in check without looking into or trying to fix, or even "sharing" with others anyone else's problems. Have you ever noticed that when we gossip about others, we are actually implying that we are better than they are. Yet, the very act of gossiping indicates that we are less than others.

So, to put this verse in perspective, let me summarize what Peter is telling us. If we suffer for righteousness' sake, we are blessed and we bring glory to God, but it does not glorify God when we suffer for our sins.

1 Peter 4:17-18

For it is time for judgment to begin with the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?

Much has been written from varying viewpoints on the meaning of these verses. Some have said that this refers to God's method of dealing with His people (the Jews) in times past. Though His judgment was on the entire body of people, He seems to have always started by judging the more righteous first before proceeding to the less righteous and then the wicked. Others have argued that the term "house of God" refers specifically to the Temple in Jerusalem and that Peter was predicting the destruction of the temple which was soon to come.

But Peter says that judgment begins "with us," which is a reference to Christians, not Jews. Therefore, it is more reasonable that Peter is telling us that Christians, as God's children, will be judged first. That is, we will receive chastisement from the Him when we get off track and stray from His way.

"But" you may say, "I thought that our sins were already judged and paid for at the cross." It is true that all of our sins have been paid for, past, present, and future. In fact, it is only because of this that God can now deal with us as children rather than sinners. When we sin, we do not lose our salvation, but we do break our fellowship with Him. Confession is what restores that fellowship. Sometimes, though, we lie to ourselves regarding our sinfulness and, as a result, don't confess our sins. At times like this God often steps in and judges (chastens) us like a loving father. We need to learn to recognize God's chastening and respond to it with humility, submission, and confession.

Peter goes on to say that if the judgment begins with those who have obeyed the gospel message, and we receive chastening as from a father, what will it be like for those who have rejected the gospel message?

Let's talk about judgment for a few minutes. If you are not a Christian, you will be judged for what you did or didn't do while on this earth. And - if you are a Christian, you will be judged for what you did or didn't do while on this earth. What?! That's right. So what's the purpose of getting saved? The state of your salvation will determine which tribunal you will appear before.

All who have rejected Christ as Savior will appear before the Great White Throne Judgment. This is where their works will be judged to determine if they are righteous or not. Remember what Paul said in Romans:

as it is written, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." (Romans 3:10-12)

Everyone who has committed a single sin in their entire life is unrighteous in the eyes of God the Father. So, everyone who rejects Christ as Savior has rejected the blood payment that Christ offered for their sins. Therefore, they are dead in their sins and have already been declared unrighteous. But Paul also said:

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; ... (Romans 3:21-22)

And:

... a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (Romans 3:28)

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have been declared righteous. Therefore, in God's eyes you never sinned. Every one of your sins throughout your entire life has been paid for and has been wiped from your record. You will not appear before the Great White Throne judgment. Instead, you will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema Seat), where the works of all believers will be judged in order to determine which rewards we will receive.

You see, the primary difference between the Great White Throne and the Bema Seat judgments is one of purpose. The purpose of the Great White Throne is to determine the level of punishment for the unbelievers. The purpose of the Bema Seat is to determine the level of blessing and reward for believers.

So - to answer Peter's rhetorical question in the current verse, "where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" the answer is "The Great White Throne Judgment."

Before we leave this section, however, let's look carefully at what Peter said.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the house of God; and if it begins with us first

...

What does he mean, "if it begins with us first ..."? There is lots of discussion about this, however ... When do these two judgments take place? The Judgment Seat of Christ will occur as part of the Rapture of the church before the tribulation and before the millennial reign of Christ. The Great White Throne Judgment occurs after the millennial reign of Christ. So we see that judgment does, indeed, begin for us first.

Finally, Peter asks: *What will become of the godless man and the sinner?* The answer is, they will all be cast into the lake of fire as will everyone who appears before the Great White Throne.

1 Peter 4:19

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God must entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing good.

We, who are doing all we can to please God and to glorify Him may very well suffer, while the wicked ones and the irreverent ones may appear to prosper. But we have a future hope that the unsaved don't have. Therefore, ...

those also who suffer according to the will of God must entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing good.

What is Peter telling Christians to do if they are suffering according to God's determined plan? He says they should "... *entrust their souls ... in doing good*. The word translated "in" could also be interpreted as "by." So the way we commit our souls to His care is by doing good works. And why should we do this? We should do good works because He is the Creator, the Mighty God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And because He is faithful, He will not let us down. We are to place our souls into His care believing:

... He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

So ... if you should suffer because of your faith, don't despair, don't panic, don't worry, and don't shake your fist at God. Simply commit your soul into His care by continuing to do good things as He has instructed us and **He will take care of you!**

So What?

Throughout the book of 1 Peter we have been told that when we suffer for righteousness' sake, we should consider it a blessing. I know that's hard to do when we are in the middle of the pain. However, if we take our focus off the present and put it onto the future (our heavenly future) we know that we will receive blessings there for the suffering we have here. James tells us what we will receive for persevering under trial:

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

And even if we suffer the ultimate result of persecution (that is, death) we are told that this will result in this same very special blessing in heaven:

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

I don't know if everyone in heaven will be wearing a crown. These crowns will be given as rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the Bema Seat) where believers will receive them for the things done in the body.

Our Bema Seat Judgment will occur as part of the rapture of the church. There our works will be judged, not to find bad things to be condemned, but to find good things to give rewards for. Some will receive a lot of rewards and some will receive very few.

Any rewards that we receive on this earth will cease when the rapture comes. Now, here's the best part, any rewards that we get at the Bema Seat Judgment will last for eternity! Paul's letter to the church at Colossae seems to indicate how our works will be judged at the Bema Seat:

each man's work will become evident, for the day will indicate it because it is revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:13-15)

Remember, this is not our real life. The real life comes after we die. We are just auditioning for the real life. What we do for ourselves in this audition will be burned up, but what we do for God will result in rewards.

Which would you rather have, peace and prosperity in this life, or guaranteed future rewards that will last eternally?

The choice is truly up to you!

Let's pray.