

## **STUDIES IN 1 PETER**

### **Excelling In Our Attitude Toward God in Suffering**

#### **1 Pet. 4:12-19**

Intro: Foxe's Book of Martyrs: "The first persecution of the Church took place in the year 67, under Nero, the sixth emperor of Rome. This monarch reigned for the space of five years, with tolerable credit to himself, but then gave way to the greatest extravagancy of temper, and to the most atrocious barbarities. Among other diabolical whims, he ordered that the city of Rome should be set on fire, which order was executed by his officers, guards, and servants. While the imperial city was in flames, he went up to the tower of Macaenas, played upon his harp, sung the song of the burning of Troy, and openly declared that 'he wished the ruin of all things before his death.' Besides the noble pile, called the Circus, many other palaces and houses were consumed; several thousands perished in the flames, were smothered in the smoke, or buried beneath the ruins. This dreadful conflagration continued nine days. when Nero, finding that his conduct was greatly blamed, and a severe odium cast upon him, determined to lay the whole upon the Christians, at once to excuse himself and have an opportunity of glutting his sight with new cruelties. This was the occasion of the first persecution; and the barbarities exercised on the Christians were such as even excited the commiseration of the Romans themselves. Nero even refined upon cruelty, and contrived all manner of punishments for the Christians that the most infernal imagination could design. In particular he had some sewed up in skins of wild beasts, and then worried by dogs until they expired; and others dressed in shirts made stiff with wax, fixed to axletrees, and set on fire in his gardens, in order to illuminate them. This persecution was general throughout the whole Roman Empire, but it rather increased than diminished the spirit of Christianity. In the course of it, St. Paul and St. Peter were martyred."

It was either during or in anticipation of these atrocities that Peter wrote his first letter to the Christians in the provinces of the Roman empire. If his work were given a title, it might have been called "The Christian's behavior in a hostile world". In this book, we more references to suffering than in any other NT book. (15 times in 5 chapters).

What Peter seeks to show us is that suffering is the inevitable lot of those who serve the Lord. Not only will we suffer the many problems common to humanity, we will also suffer unique problems because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

What is your attitude when you have to suffer for Christ's sake? If you were to be ridiculed for being a Christian, or left out of someone's plans, or lost association, or perhaps even were discriminated against on the job how would you view this? What if we had to face governmental persecution for our faith? How would we handle it?

In this book Peter tells disciples everything they need to know to live in a hostile world. In 1 Pet. 3:13-4:6 Peter tells the Christian what his attitude and response should be to his persecutors. In 1 Peter 4:7-11 he tells us what our attitude and response should be toward each other in suffering. And now in our text today, Peter tells us what our attitude and response should be toward God when we suffer (4:12-19.) When you suffer...

**Don't be surprised by the fact that you suffer.**

*Surprised--Don't think it to be alien or foreign to the Christian life. Suffering then should not be seen as a strange thing but a normal thing. God does not choose to protect us from the conflict of good and evil. Instead He uses suffering to test us.*

**Peter calls suffering for Christ's sake a fiery ordeal--"purosis", a process used in the refining of metals; a smelting furnace. Suffering is allowed by God to determine the genuiness and quality of our faith. Just like fire purifies gold, so suffering purifies faith and indicates that it is real. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:7 "the "proof of your faith"**

**But rather keep on rejoicing!**

*The measure of our joy should be comparable to the measure of our sufferings for Christ's sake. It astounds us to hear Peter say, "The more you suffer the more you should rejoice!" That is because suffering for Christ sake affirms two things about us.*

**Persecution is an indication that we are "blessed" (not merely happy but possessing a happiness that grows out of divine favor, a state of spiritual prosperity.)**

*Peter alludes, no doubt, to the beatitude of Jesus which he had heard on the Galilean hillside, Mt. 5:10-12.*

**Persecution is the indication of the presence of God's Spirit working in our lives. So Peter says rejoice "because the Spirit of glory and grace rests upon us!"**

**Don't be ashamed...**

*There are some things for which people may suffer that ought to cause them to be ashamed. v. 15*

*To suffer as a Christian is to suffer because of your faith in Jesus and in the teachings he has given us.*

*If anyone suffers as a Christia, don't be ashamed.*

**To be ashamed is to be reluctant to acknowledge our faith in Jesus before others. It is to be embarrassed by his teaching and remain silent rather than let others know that we agree with it.**

**Remember Jesus' words:**

**"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him**

when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”  
(Mark 8:38)

*How could we be ashamed of the Lord knowing this? And Peter promises that if we are not ashamed now, we will reason to boast in a godly way in the end (with exultation).*

**But glorify God in it!**

*Rather than allow hostility to back us down and shut us up, it can become the occasion to cause us to speak out for God and speak up for what is right. And in doing that we are “glorifying God”. We are helping others to see His character, the brilliance of His thoughts and the perfections of His nature.*

*Cf. the story of Polycarp as an example of the kind of suffering possible and the faith to glorify God in it. Ignatius was an elder of the church at Smyrna who was martyred under the reign of the Roman Emperor Trajan. Foxe recounts his story:*

Accordingly having come to Smyrna, he wrote to, the Church at Rome, exhorting them not to use means for his deliverance from martyrdom, lest they deprive him of that which he most longed and hoped for. “Now I begin to be a disciple. I care for nothing, of visible or invisible things, so that I may but win Christ. Let fire and the cross, let the companies of wild beasts, let breaking of bones and tearing of limbs, let the grinding of the whole body, and all the malice of the devil, come upon me; be it so, only may I win Christ Jesus!” And even when he was sentenced to be thrown to the beast such was the burning desire that he had to suffer, that he spake, what time he heard the lions roaring, saying. “I am the wheat of Christ: I am going to be ground with the teeth of wild beasts, that I may be found pure bread.” What a powerful testimony he gives. He would give up everything to “win Christ”.

**Put your trust in God in doing what is right!**

*Peter reveals that a time of great persecution was on the horizon. Such persecutions could be considered a time of judgment on God’s people to purify and discipline them. They should be seen in that light as the attempts of a loving God to perfect and prepare them for their eternal life with Him. At the same time, these persecutions and difficulties would declare the greater severity and difficulty with which God would punish those who were not in His house and who did not obey the gospel.*

*So Peter urges all who suffer to entrust their souls to a faithful God.*

“Commit” or “trust” conveys the idea of making a deposit. It means that we put our souls in His hands believing that He knows what is best.

“Faithful” reminds us that God, even when we are suffering, is a trustworthy God. He will always do what is right and what is best for His people.

**“in doing what is right” remind us that it is only when we stay committed to truth that we can receive the blessings God offers us.**

**Conclusion: Sometimes when we read those horrifying stories of persecution we may not see in them the love or care of God. But even they were the manifestation of a loving God who allows all things to work for the good and the salvation of His people.**

**At the same time they became the evidence of God’s justice in punishing eternally those who did not know and obey Him.**