

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Suffering As A Christian

by Dan Trygg

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial coming upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ Rather, according as you share Christ's sufferings, keep on rejoicing, that in the revelation of His glory you may rejoice exceedingly. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as one intruding in other people's business. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin from the household of God; and if it is first with us, what will be the outcome for those who stubbornly resist the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And ‘If the righteous with difficulty is saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’ ¹⁹ So the ones suffering according to the will of God, let them entrust their souls to a faithful Creator by doing-good.” 1 Peter 4:12-19

“For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰ experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” Philippians 1:29-30

This passage encapsulates so much of the message of 1 Peter. The word for “suffer” occurs 16 times in this brief letter. It is in the noun form four times (1 Pet. 1:11; 4:13; 5:1,9), and as a verbal form another dozen times (2:19,20,21,23; 3:14,17,18; 4:1[2x],15,19; 5:10). When you consider that this letter is only five chapters long, ***you cannot escape the obvious emphasis that Peter places on this theme.*** Note, too, the distribution of these occurrences. The word, “suffering”, occurs in every chapter, and is spaced out pretty evenly.

Furthermore, the language of verse 12 here clearly harks back to what Peter had written in 1:6,7: “In this [salvation] you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof (*dokimion*) of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested (*dokimazō*) by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” **Clearly, we can expect that there will be circumstances and situations that will challenge and test our faith. What God is looking for is for the genuineness of our faith to be sharpened, purified and demonstrated through these challenging circumstances.**

Both passages refer to “trials”. The Greek word there is *peirasmos*, which can refer to a “trial, test, or temptation”. When you work your way through the letter, you see that **sometimes it is temptation that is the challenge that must be put aside. We must choose holiness**, ...dedication and commitment to live for Christ..., instead of giving in to fleshly temptation. **At other times, it is rejection by other people that is the challenge we must face.** As we choose to follow Christ, and live for Him, others will notice that we do *not* choose to drink, party and carouse as *they* do, and often they will harass us, ridicule us, or call us mocking names, simply because we choose to be different. **We must choose to follow Christ, even when others disapprove, or actively speak or act against us.**

Both passages use the image of fire in conjunction with these challenges. Fire can have different connotations. It can refer to something that is very unpleasant, ...something that *burns*. Sometimes, the way people may treat us may make our flesh *burn* with anger or embarrassment. The other connotation is that **fire can be both a destructive and purifying force.** It is destructive to what is corruptible, but it purifies and refines what is incorruptible. **Fire was a key part of the refining process of metals.** The heat would cause the impurities to surface, where they could be “skimmed off” or “pushed to the side” and removed. The remaining metal would become more and more pure, as this process continued, until all that was left was the desired, refined, precious metal.

Peter used a different word for “test” or “trial” to describe this process. The root word is *dokimazō*, which refers to a process of testing by trial to discover what is really there. In the refining process, the metalworker or assayer would be looking for what is genuine and valuable in the testing. The purpose is to discover and approve what is of good quality and precious, and to make it visible. **Here, it is the demonstrated proof of genuine faith, ...made evident through the choices we make in the face of difficulty, temptation, and suffering..., that God is looking for**, purifying and making visible, as we continue to follow Him in obedience. This is precious to Him, and should be to us, as well.

With this in mind, Peter says that we should not be surprised, ...or, literally, “think it strange”..., in the fiery ordeal that comes upon us to “test” (*peirasmos*) us, ...as though something strange or unexpected would be happening to us. What an important statement! What a significant insight! **We should not be surprised or shocked when stuff comes into our lives to challenge us. We should expect it!** We should even not be surprised at tests, challenges and difficulties that *burn*, or are emotionally painful at times. It is part of the deal. It is part of the reality we are going to be living in, if we are going to follow Jesus. **It is so important to clearly understand and expect this. I don't know how often I have had to comfort someone who had unrealistic expectations in this regard. They expected**

that there would be no more temptations, or hardships, I guess, ...or at least they wouldn't be painful or difficult. They were shocked and surprised. Some of them, like the seed sown on the rocky ground in Jesus' parable of the soils (Mk. 4:16,17), stumble over the difficulty, and abandon Jesus. ***Their lack of faith, ...or "not quite faith"..., was made evident by the trial.*** It is disheartening to lose people, ...but it is important to see that whatever "faith" they professed was *not* genuine enough to stand the fiery trial. They may have had some emotional experience, but they did not make a true faith commitment, ...or they would have endured. The genuineness of their faith would have been made visible through the trial. ***Others, though temporarily set back by their unrealistic expectations, do come back. Their faith becomes more evident and solidified as they persevere through such painful experiences and continue on with Jesus.***

What are the fiery tests that we must endure? What are the temptations that can pull us off track?

(1.) fleshly temptations (1:14; 2:1,8,11; 3:9-12; 4:1-4,15); **(2.) resistance and defiance toward authorities and leaders** (2:13-18; 3:1-7; 5:5,6; cf. Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1,2; 1 Tim 2:1,2); and **(3.) suffering** (1:6,7; 2:19-24; 3:13-18; 4:1-2,12-19; 5:6-10; cf. Phil. 1:19,20). **We should not be surprised, or think it strange, to experience difficulties coming from any of these areas.**

We should have an entirely different perspective and response toward "the sufferings of Christ". Instead of being shocked, or surprised, we should *rejoice*. ***Why? Because to the extent that we authentically participate in the sufferings of Christ, we experience His Presence, His Spirit, and His glory,*** ...and when He returns, we will have that much more to celebrate over.

We need to clarify, a bit, here. Peter is *not* talking about the suffering people experience because they are foolishly offensive to others in the name of Christ. No. That is not *Christ's* sufferings. That is the suffering that follows fleshly religiosity. That is as distasteful to Christ as it is to the world.

If, however, we are representing Jesus well, and we are partners in His work and are authentically revealing Him at work in us, and then we are mistreated, we are blessed. ***Why? Because we are faithfully expressing and embodying Him. The Spirit of grace and glory is resting upon us.*** (Remember, that is what Jesus was, the embodiment of the grace-and-truth-glory [radiance, outshining] of God – Jn. 1:14; Heb. 1:3.) ***That is the summum bonum, the highest good, the supreme goal we are to be aiming for in our spiritual walk, ...to abide in Christ, and He in us, so that people encounter Him in us.*** If *that* is what we are participating in, and we are rejected or insulted, we have nothing to be ashamed of.

But Peter warns, don't be suffering for evil things, ...for being a murderer, a thief, an evil doer of any kind, ...not even as a busybody, someone who is inappropriately poking their nose into other people's affairs. ***If we suffer as a Christian, ...a legitimate expression and example of a follower of Jesus Christ..., then we can glorify God in that name.*** (Note that the name "Christian" occurs in this passage in an honorable way. The term meant "one under Christ" or a "follower of Christ. The term occurs in Acts 11:26 and 26:28.)

It is time for judgment to begin from the household of God. We become the test or trial to the world around us. They reveal their own hearts by virtue of how they treat us who are faithfully demonstrating Jesus. The negative treatment they express toward us adds to their own liability for judgment. But **God cleanses His own house first.** Those who are not serious or committed will abandon Christ. Only those whose hearts are firm and steady will remain, those who have learned to trust in the Spirit of grace and glory. ***But, if God is cleansing and refining His own people through trial and difficulty, what will happen to those who are stubbornly-resistant to the gospel?*** What will they depend on? What will be their hope? **The language here harks back to Ezekiel 9, where God prepares to judge His people.** He first sent a scribe to place a mark on those who were the faithful, ...those who groaned and sighed over the sin of the people. Then, He sent executioners throughout the city to kill everyone who did not have His mark on their forehead. (The "mark" was the Hebrew letter, "tav". At the time of Ezekiel, the writing of that letter would have looked like a cross.) The executioners were to start at the temple, ...the "house" of God..., and spread out from there. So, **while everyone would experience the suffering that came upon the city, God protected those who were righteous.** It would appear that they were the ones who survived, and the unrighteous did not. **Verse 18 is a quotation from Proverbs 11:31,** "If the righteous are scarcely saved, ...or saved with difficulty..., what will become of the undevoted person and the sinner?" The implication is that it will not go well for them. So, **if we are experiencing suffering for Christ, what will happen to those who are not for Christ?** The sorting, the sifting, the refining fires are beginning with the people of God, so that what is genuine and eternal might be purified, become more visible, and bring greater glory to God. Those who have no such inner eternal treasure to bring to the surface will be destroyed in the spreading judgment.

Peter's conclusion is that if we encounter suffering, ...if it is God's will that we must face such hardships, difficulties and even mistreatment or persecution..., **our response should be to entrust our "selves" (souls, natural-lives) to God, the faithful Creator.** The last phrase, "in doing-good", is capable of being understood in either of two ways. Maybe it is *meant* to be ambiguous, so we would have to think of *both* aspects. It could mean that we are to trust ourselves to God as our faithful Creator in doing what is good for us, ...or, 'doing good' is the way in which we commit ourselves to Him. In Luke 23:46, Jesus used the same word to say, "Father, into Your hands I entrust My Spirit."