

*Suffering for Christ*  
1 Peter 4:12-19  
Reading: Malachi 3:1-6

Bethany Baptist Church  
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...pray...

**Christians are suffering in Afghanistan.**

- A. Not because of an *earthquake* or *famine*.
- B. They are suffering *persecution*.
- C. They are suffering because they are *Christians*.
- D. Could Christians *suffer persecution* in America?
- E. How will you *handle* it?

**Peter writes to *arm* you to *face animosity*. Turn w/me to 1 Peter 4:12-19.**

- A. This text introduces the *last major section* 1 Peter (do you see that “*amen*” at the end of v. 11?).
- B. Peter seems certain that the 1<sup>st</sup> century church is about to become the target of *Roman persecution*. *Suffering* is a huge idea in the apostle’s epistle.
- C. Life can be *difficult*, but the apostle wants his friends to *stand firm*. In fact, “*standing firm in the grace of God*” is **the big idea** in the apostle’s letter (note 5:12).
- D. And *standing firm* shapes Peter’s *point* in our text: ***trust God & do right when you suffer for Christ***.

Here’s how Peter makes his point; let’s consider his *directions for suffering pilgrims*:

- A. Make the *right response* (vv.12-14).**
- B. Guard the *right reason* (vv.15-18).**
- C. Keep on the *right road* (v.19).**

## What is the right response to suffering (read 12-14)?

- a. “*Whoa – you should have seen **that** coming!*” That’s kind of what Peter is saying, *isn’t it* (v. **12**)?
  - i. He’s reminding you, you *should’ve known* suffering was a part of the *journey*.
  - ii. And when it comes, it *hurts like fire!*
  - iii. We know that life is full of *difficulty*, but Peter has something *very specific* in mind here: not just *any* kind of ordeal.
    1. He isn’t *bracing us* for *failure*, or *layoffs*, or *cancer*, or *bereavement*. (**Sure!** the Bible has plenty of *guidance & comfort* for hard times...)
    2. But *here* Peter has **one difficult deal** in mind: it’s when everyone around you *turns on you* because *you belong to Christ*. Follow w/ me – v **14.a**.
  - iv. When you follow Jesus, suffering for your faith (*insults, taunting, scorn*) is just a part of the package.

- b. When people *push back* on your Christianity, what are you going to do...?
- i. Peter's paragraph leads-off with a command (12): **don't** be *astonished* when things begin to *heat up*!
    1. You ever *fiddled* with something under the *hood of your car & burned your hand* (said something in *French*)? You should have **known** that was hot!
    2. Peter wants you to *expect* suffering because he **doesn't** want you to *blow it*...
    3. If you **aren't** *prepared* for life to *push back* when you try to *press on*, Peter is afraid you might just *pull away*! That you might not **stand firm**!
    4. Beloved, is it *so strange* that the same people in your world who **refuse to obey Christ** also **refuse to love His followers (you)**. Don't be *so surprised* ... don't be *caught off guard*.
  - ii. "...*but*..." That's how v. 13 begins, and the Bible is painting a *big black line* between the *wrong* response (12) and the *right* one (**read v.13**). Here is the *right response* when you are *taunted* for your faith:
    1. **Theological interpretation.** You need to tie *your suffering to Jesus' suffering*. If you are *suffering* as a Christian, you are *sharing the sufferings of Christ*.

2. **Continual rejoicing.** Here is Peter's **second** command: *keep on rejoicing*, i.e. a ***lifestyle of rejoicing***, even in the face of *heated opposition*.

- a. Peter's vocabulary is *unvanquished!*  
"Rejoice w/exultation." Gr. **αγαλλιαω** – *overflowing, unsuppressable rejoicing!*
- b. *Rejoicing* that *starts* in this life and keeps on *rejoicing* until Christ returns.
- c. Jesus' *return* is the fuel for *rejoicing!*
- d. Because if you can *rejoice* when you suffer for Him ***now***, just think of how good it's going to be when He *returns!*

3. **Functioning eschatology.** Peter is reminding his friends (and us) that in order to *rejoice* despite your *suffering*, you must focus on *Christ's return*.

- a. **Peter pounds this point home time & time again!**
- b. Beloved, don't *rob* yourself of this essential NT encouragement: Christ is coming, *at any moment!* *Live in joy!*

- c. But why does God *allow* people to *persecute* us? Isn't He big enough to *stop* that?
  - i. **Sure**, He's *big enough*...so maybe He's got a *good reason!* In fact, Peter says here that God has **three** purposes when Christians suffer for their faith:
  - ii. **1<sup>st</sup> – Refining** (v. 12) – God allows the *heat of suffering* to *test & refine* (*test*) your faith. Peter painted such a clear picture of this in **1:6-7**: Suffering is like a *smelter's furnace* – your *faith* is the precious metal He's *purifying*.

- iii. **2<sup>nd</sup> – Sharing (v. 13)** – Beloved when someone *scorns* you because you live for Christ, you’ve just been given a *wonderful privilege*. Christ suffered – now *you* are *sharing* His suffering. (Nathaniel M. Williams, in Hiebert)
- “*Their enemies would persecute Christ if He were among them, for it is really He who is the object of their hatred; and therefore, in being persecuted themselves, [Christians share in] Christ’s sufferings.*”
- iv. **3<sup>rd</sup> – Blessing (read v. 14)** – The main idea of v. 14 is right in the *middle*: “*you are blessed!*” **Peter** is saying something he once heard **Jesus** teach in the **Sermon on the Mt.** “*Blessed are you when people insult you & persecute you, & falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice & be glad, for...*” (Matt 5:11)
1. And Peter is very specific about what that *blessing* looks like: *the presence of God’s Spirit*.
  2. *...you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*
  3. The Spirit of God, who is *completely glorious*,...
  4. ...He *rests* (and *remains*) on you! Does *that* sound good!?!

***Beloved, if you’re going live for Jesus, He’s going to let you share His suffering. Don’t be astonished when the fire gets hot; just keep on rejoicing...and keep on looking up!***

## 2. Guard the *right reason* for the suffering (read 15-18).

a. You *can* suffer for all the *wrong* reasons, you know!

i. Peter's already pointed that out:

1. In **2:20** – There is **no** *credit* for a *servant* who sins on the job, even if he *submits* & takes his *lumps*.

2. In **3:17** – There is **no** *persuasive testimony* in suffering for *doing wrong*.

ii. And now, in vv. **15 & 16**, the apostle issues his **third command**: “*Make sure none of you...*” then follows with a list of reasons for being *reviled*. The list has **three** parts, two *negative* (15) and the third *positive* (16).

1. *Make sure that none of you suffer as a:*

a. *Murderer!*

b. *Thief!* → kleptomaniac

c. *Evil-doer!*

d. When people attack you as a **criminal**, you **clearly aren't sharing Christ's suffering**.

2. That **first** group were *bad hombres*, maybe you think you'll *never be there*, but then there's a **second** group; look again at the end of **v.14**: *make sure that none of you suffer as: a troublesome meddler...!*
  - a. This is an *interesting* & very **uncommon** Gr. word - *αλ.λο.τρι.πισ.κο.πος!* In fact, Peter might have *coined* it himself!
  - b. Lit. "*watching over someone else's affairs.*" *Meddling* is getting into someone's business.
  - c. You know, a *busy body!* Beloved, the Bible is so clear, these *dull & daily sins* have **no** more place in your life than *murder* or *theft*.
  - d. When people *revile* you as a *busy-body* (*gossip, complainer, grumbler*); **don't** *kid* yourself; *you aren't* *sharing Christ's suffering*.
- b. But Peter knows that sometimes you suffer for the *right reason*.
  - i. **V. 16** (third group) – *but if anyone suffers as a "Christian," he is not to be ashamed.*
    1. 1<sup>st</sup> Century Saints did not generally call themselves "*Christians.*" (It only appears **3x** in the **NT**). *Pagans* in the city of Antioch gave us that label.
    2. Some say it means "*little Christ,*" but a more accurate understanding is, *a member of Christ's party, or ...sect, or Christ-follower.*
    3. Perhaps the name "*Christian*" wasn't always hurled as an *insult*, but it wasn't meant as a *complement*. It was a way to label you as someone on the **outside (the wrong side of culture)**. A member of a *sect* or a *cult*. Early believers **didn't** silk-screen "*Christian*" on their t-shirts.

ii. It's no fun to be an *outsider*; to be *mocked* or *labeled*, but Peter has *good news*!

1. It's **not** okay to be *tagged* a *murderer*, or even an irritating *meddler*...
2. But when your pagan neighbors see your *holy life* and hear your *gospel testimony*...
3. And if they *sneer* & they call you **Jesus Freak**, **don't** *hang* your head, **don't** *deny* your Master, *it's* okay!

c. In fact, that's simply the *times* we live in! In v. **17** Peter makes a point about Christian suffering, then he *reinforces* in v. **18** w/ an **OT** Proverb (11:31). Follow w/ me while I **re-read** vv. **17-18**.

- i. *Now* is the time for *judgment*! Christians *now*; the ungodly *later*.
  1. That little word "**for**" ties the *judgment* of vv. **17 & 18** back to the *suffering* of v. **16**.
  2. The *judgment* that Peter sees for *Christians* is the *refining & purifying* judgment of *suffering* (e.g. of being *reviled* for being a Christian).
  3. Which serves as a warning: because our path will be beset by *fiery, faith-refining ordeals*, our way **will** be difficult.
  4. Not *doubtful*, (not *joyless* (13)), just ... *difficult*.
- ii. Peter wants to help us *stand firm* by drawing our attention to the **lesser**, then the **greater**. From a temporal judgment that *purifies the Christian*, to eternal judgment that *condemns the ungodly & the sinner*. From our *difficulty* to our enemies' *damnation*.

***You can suffer for a lot of reasons, some better than others. When testing comes, make sure your life is difficult for all the right reasons.***

### 3. So *navigate* your suffering by staying on the *right road* (19).

- a. We've come to the *final command* (instruction) in this morning's text: *sufferers must **entrust their souls** to their faithful Creator.*
  - i. The Greek verb that we translate *entrust* is a directive to *place* your soul in God's *safe-keeping*.
  - ii. This was Jesus' final word on the Cross (Lk 23:46): "*Father, into Your hands I **entrust** My spirit.*"
- b. When we suffer, you can place your *trust* in God's *care* for these *three reasons* (19):
  - i. *God is in **control***. He is *sovereign* over our *circumstances*. Even the *bad ones*.
    1. Do you see it there in v. **19a**? When you suffer, you suffer *according to **will** of God* (under His *control* & for His *purposes*).
      - a. God's *will* (*purpose*) is a big deal to Peter; here's how he said it **3:17** – *For it is better, **if God should will it so**, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.*
    2. Trusting that God is *in control*, and *determining* to place yourself in His care, is the Bible's key for *handling suffering* of all kinds.
  - ii. *God is **faithful***. V.19 – *faithful Creator*
    1. Men **aren't** faithful, but God is.
    2. Beloved, God will *fulfill* all His promises to you.
    3. Including those promises to *protect & guide & bring you safely* to your heavenly inheritance.

iii. *God is mighty.*

1. The **NT** is full of reminders that God made *us* and *everything else*. But this is the only place the **NT** actually uses the term *Creator!*
2. Peter's point that God is your *Creator* (the Creator of *everything!*) which means He is *incomparably powerful!*

iv. He is in *control* of everything; He is always *faithful*; He is *powerful*. Add them up: you can *trust* Him.

c. *How you gonna know that you're really trusting God? Do you see the answer there at the end of v. 19?*

- i. By the way you *live*; ...*in doing what is right*.
- ii. When you *trust* Him, you'll **keep** *right on* doing the *right thing*.
- iii. *And that includes whatever it was that brought on the heat.*

4. Beloved, what brings on this kind of *suffering*? **Christian** suffering?
- a. **A *changed life***. We might say a *changed life* is evidenced by “*doing what is right*” – *holy living* and a *gospel testimony*:
- i. **Holy living** (*holy = separate, distinct; conspicuous*). In 1 Peter *holiness* is often *seen* in how you *relate to people* and how *pure* you are.
  - ii. **Gospel testimony**. If you share your faith, people are going to respond. But not always *favorably*.
  - iii. **Beloved** are you living a conspicuously holy life, and are you sharing your faith?
- b. But **not** everyone here is a **Christian**. I know that...
- i. Will you stare at v. **17** with me as I **read it** for you again?
    1. Do you see the *clear threat of judgment* for men & woman who *reject the gospel*?
    2. Don't you want to *escape* God's holy wrath...?
  - ii. Here is the *only way*; let's *revisit* v.19: *entrust your soul to a faithful Creator*. Have you *entrusted your soul to Jesus*?
    1. *Trust* His death to **pay for all your sins**.
    2. *Believe* God raised Him from the dead to **live as your King**.
    3. *Repent* of your sins, *count* all things loss, and *turn* to follow Jesus. God will *forgive* you and *give* you *new life*!
    4. *Will it be difficult?* Count the costs: **yes**, it will be difficult!
    5. ? But see v. **13 (read)**: *life will be filled with joy*!