

# Suffering & Grace

1 Peter 4:12-19

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## 1 Peter 4:12-19 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup> If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. <sup>17</sup> For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup> And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" <sup>19</sup> So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

### v12 – Why shouldn't we be surprised at fiery ordeals that test us?

Instead of thinking of trials (even **fiery** trials) as **strange** occurrences, we see them as ways to **partake of Christ's sufferings**. And if we partake of His sufferings, we will also partake of His **glory and joy**.

### Why does God allow us to experience fiery ordeals that test us?

They help us depend on Him more and thereby grow in our faith.

### v13 – How may our suffering be like Christ's suffering?

We can only **partake** of Jesus' sufferings because He partook of our humanity and sufferings. He became a man and suffered so that our suffering wouldn't be meaningless. It is good to share *anything* with Jesus, even His suffering.

- Christ's sufferings were not just His dying on the cross but His coming into our fallen world as one of us.

### What helps us deal with suffering?

Our tendency is to embrace the glory and the joy and to avoid any sharing of Jesus' suffering. Or we morbidly fixate on the suffering and forget that it is but a necessary prelude to the **glory and joy**.

### What is the role of suffering in making us more like Jesus?

Though there is much needless pain we bear through lack of knowledge or faith, there is also necessary suffering.

Hebrews 5:8 – *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*

If suffering was a suitable tool to teach Jesus, it is a suitable tool to teach His servants.

- Jesus can identify with those He saved because He experienced the same suffering that is common to man.

### v14 – How should we respond to suffering because we are Christians?

We need to recognize that suffering for **the name of Christ** is a blessing, because it shows that we really are following Jesus, and that we suffer because we are identified with Him.

### v15 – How should we react to suffering that is not due to following Jesus?

We should recognize it for what it is... the normal consequences for wrongdoing. Suffering as **an evildoer** is deserved and brings shame to the name of Jesus.

- Not all suffering that Christians experience is suffering in **the name of Jesus**.

### Why is a meddler lumped in with the more obvious evil doing of murder and thievery?

There is a full spectrum of evil doing and things done not for the sake of Jesus that lead to suffering.

### v16 – Why shouldn't we be ashamed by our suffering for Jesus?

Suffering as a Christian is nothing to be ashamed about, even though the world may despise the suffering Christian.

- It provides us with an opportunity to glorify God.

### How may we glorify God in our suffering?

We don't glorify God for suffering. But we do glorify Him in suffering, and we glorify Him for what He will accomplish in us and through us with the suffering.

Matthew 5:16 – *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

When people see our godly reaction to suffering and know we are reacting this way due to our relationship to Christ, it attracts them to Jesus.

### What does the name “Christian” mean?

The name ‘Christian’ (*Christianos*), built on the name *Christ* with the suffix *-ianos*, a Latin formation (*-ianus*), denotes a partisan follower... *Christian* categorized the followers of Christ as ‘members of the Christ-party,’ not ‘little Christ’ as some popular explanations would have it.

### When did followers of Jesus begin referring to themselves as Christians?

Acts 11:26 – *the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*

Following the persecution of Stephen in Jerusalem, many followers of Jesus scattered (Acts 11:19)... Antioch was one of those places.

- Christians were first known as “disciples,” “believers,” “the Lord’s disciples,” or “those who belonged to the Way” before they were known as Christians.
- In Acts 26:28 Agrippa told Paul, *You almost persuade me to become a Christian.* This shows that between Acts 11:26 and 26:28 Christian had become a popularized name for the followers of Jesus.

### What does it tell us that in 1 Peter 4:16 some are suffering due to being Christians?

This shows that the name had become very widely used, so much so that one could be persecuted for being numbered as a Christian.

### v17 – What does it mean that it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household?

In the context of suffering, Peter tells us that judgment begins at the **house of God**. Right now, God uses suffering as a **judgment** (in a positive, purifying sense) for Christians (**the house of God**).

### Why is it right for judgment to begin at the house of God?

There is equity in it; for Christians profess to be forgiven of our sins, we ought to act like sin has no part of us.

- We are to be a holy people, separated unto Christ; so we should act holy, separate from sinners, as was Jesus.

- Now is our time of *fiery trial* (1 Peter 4:12); the ungodly will have their fire later.
- The fire we endure now purifies us; the fire the ungodly will endure will punish them.

For the Christian, the issue of *punishment* was settled once and for all at the cross, where Jesus endured all the punishment the Christian could ever face from God.

### But will not Christians also face the fire of Judgment at the Bema Seat?

1 Corinthians 11-15 – *no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* <sup>12</sup> *Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,* <sup>13</sup> *each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.* <sup>14</sup> *If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.* <sup>15</sup> *If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

The bema was never a place to reprimand the athletes or to punish them in any way. It was a place of testing and reward.

- The same fire that consumes straw will purify gold.
- The fire is the same, but its *purpose* in application is different, and its *effect* is different upon the straw and the gold.
- Even so, Christians do suffer some of the same things the ungodly do, yet the *purpose* of God is different and the *effect* is different.

### What is the difference between the suffering of Christians versus that of those alienated from God?

Christians can rejoice that the sufferings they face in this life are the worst they will ever face throughout all eternity. We have seen the worst; those who reject Jesus Christ have seen the *best* of life their eternal existence will ever see.

- This mortal life is the closest Christians will come to hell & the closest unbelievers will come to heaven.

### v18 – What does it mean that it is hard for the righteous to be saved?

Peter is quoting here from the Septuagint translation of Proverbs 11:31, *“If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”*

The salvation of the righteous does not come without difficulty — God Himself had to pay the penalty as demanded by the Law.

- And we must also accept that provision despite our natural inclination to prideful self-salvation.
- It isn't that our salvation is difficult in the sense of earning it or finding a way to deserve it; it is all the free gift of Jesus Christ.

- Our salvation *is* also hard in that being a disciple challenges us to cast away our idols and our sins.

### Why isn't salvation as easy as just believing in Jesus Christ?

Believing is how our relationship begins but if we are genuinely born-again, we will grow in our relationship by getting to know Him...

Matthew 22:37 – *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*

We are not loving the Lord if we don't know Him and apply that knowledge to our lives.

- We get to know Him mostly through being immersed in His Word.
- The idea that simply making a profession of faith will get you to heaven has been called cheap grace.

### What is cheap grace?

The term “cheap grace” was originated by German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in a book called *The Cost of Discipleship*, published in 1937.

- “cheap grace” is defined as “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”
- The emphasis is on the benefits of Christianity without the costs involved; hence, the adjective cheap to describe it.
- Cheap grace has also been referred to “gospel light” in more recent times.
- Cheap grace seeks to hide the cost of discipleship from people...

### What did Jesus have to say about what was involved in following Him?

Luke 14:27 – *whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*

We must be willing to die, both literally and metaphorically (“die to self”) in order to follow Jesus.

Jesus then gives two examples of “counting the cost...”

- a man who desires to build a tower without first counting its cost. After realizing he cannot complete it, he gives up in shame and embarrassment.
- a king preparing to go to battle and making sure he can defend against the superior foe.

The point Jesus is making is that discipleship has a cost.

- Furthermore, discipleship requires repentance and obedience (see Matthew 4:17, Acts 2:38, Luke 6:46).

### What did Paul have to say about cheap grace?

Romans 6:1-2 – *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*

Salvation by grace alone through faith alone is so much more than simply mouthing the words “Jesus is Lord.”

- We are not saved by a profession of faith.
  - We are not saved by praying the Sinner's Prayer.
  - We are not saved by signing a card or walking an aisle.
- We are saved by a living and active faith (James 2:14-26), a faith that manifests itself in repentance, obedience and love of God and our neighbor.
- Salvation is not a transaction; it's a transformation; we are “*new creations*” in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).
  - There is nothing “cheap” about grace!

### v18 – What is the distinction between suffering according to God's will and not according to His will?

Not all suffering is the will of God... we can suffer due to our own bad decisions as a natural consequence of acting outside of the will of God.

### What suffering according to God's will lead to?

Committing to Him... The ancient Greek word translated “**commit**” is a technical one, used for leaving money on deposit with a trusted friend.

- Such a trust was regarded as sacred, and the friend was bound by honor to return the money intact.
- It is the very word Jesus used when He said, “*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit*” (Luke 23:46).

### What does it mean to commit ourselves to God?

When Christians **commit their souls to Him**, they leave their souls in a safe place. God is a **faithful Creator**, and we can give ourselves to Him as pliable clay in His hands.

### What does it mean that God is the Faithful Creator?

Much of the agony we put ourselves through in times of trial and suffering has to do with our disregard of God's faithfulness or of His place as Creator.

- He *is* our sovereign **Creator**, with the right to do with us as He pleases. Yet He *is* **faithful**, and will only do what is ultimately best for us.

### What applications come to mind from this passage?

- God uses our suffering to make us more like Christ
- Not all suffering is the will of God but we are better off when it is.
- Grace is not cheap; salvation is a relationship, not a simple profession of faith.