

**Subject: *Facing the Fire***  
**Scripture: *1 Peter 4:12-19***

The Book of First Peter deals with three main themes: salvation, submission, and suffering. This powerful letter was written to encourage believers and show them how to respond to suffering. Persecution and suffering can make us bitter or better. It all depends on how we deal with it. We need to remember that God has a sovereign purpose for everything in our Christian lives. In verse 12, “the fiery trial” refers to the reality of persecution to test their faith. He calls these believers “beloved.” They were loved by Peter and by Christ, but they were not exempt from persecution. Puritan Thomas Watson said: “No vessel can be made of gold without fire, so it is impossible that we should be made vessels of honor unless we are melted and refined in the furnace of affliction.”

### **Different Kinds of Suffering:**

- Common suffering – All people suffer to some degree because we live in a fallen world. *Job 14:1 Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.*
- Catastrophic suffering – Natural disasters like tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes and other things like shootings and terrorist attacks.
- Consequential suffering – Suffering as the consequence of wrong choices (ex., drug and alcohol abuse).
- Christ’s suffering – He suffered for our sins on the cross and died in our place.
- Constant suffering – There is eternal punishment in hell for all unsaved sinners. In Luke 16, the rich man died and in hell said, “I am tormented in this flame.” Jesus said hell is a place where there is “weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.”
- Christian suffering – This is suffering for Christ’s sake. Peter spoke of “the fiery trial” that believers faced at that time. They were about to enter a time of intense persecution under the Roman Emperor Nero.

At the time Peter first wrote this letter, believers were just beginning to suffer severe persecution under Emperor Nero. As history records it, Nero wanted to rebuild Rome. He was obsessed with building, but some opposed it. So he had Rome burned, and then used Christians as a scapegoat to blame it on them. Up until this point Christians were regarded as a branch of Judaism, and had protection under the Roman government. But when persecution broke out, it was the fiery trial Peter wrote about.

### **1. Face persecution as a normal thing (vs. 12)**

The word “happened” means to take place by chance. Believers must not think that persecution is accidental or a thing of chance. God allows it and even designs it as a part of His purpose. So we should not be surprised whenever we suffer for Christ’s sake. We ought to be surprised if we don’t suffer.

Martin Luther: “You ought to beware thinking that Christ will achieve things in the earth quietly and softly when you see that He fought with His own blood, and afterward with all the martyrs.”

In 2023 the statistics on worldwide persecution reveal that:

- Around 365 million Christians, or 1 in 7, face high levels of persecution or discrimination for their faith.
- About 5,000 Christians were killed, which averages to about 13 per day.
- 4,125 Christians were detained, arrested, sentenced, or imprisoned.
- 3,900 Christians were abducted.
- 43,000 Christians were physically or mentally abused.
- Nearly 300,000 were forced to leave their homes or their country
- About 18,000 churches or Christian properties were attacked.

Jesus suffered and He said all who follow Him can expect to suffer. **John 15:20** *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*

That's the bad news, but here's the good news: **John 16:33** *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

## **2. Face persecution as a special blessing (vs. 13-14)**

When we suffer for Christ's name and for His sake, we actually partake in His sufferings because we are identified with Him and connected to Him by faith. Paul spoke of "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). The Apostles understood this. **Acts 5:41** *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.* Jesus said that we should rejoice when we suffer for His sake: **Matthew 5:10-12** <sup>10</sup> *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* <sup>11</sup> *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.* <sup>12</sup> *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.* **Philippians 1:29** *For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.*

We share in Christ's suffering now and we will share in His glory later. There is blessing now, and blessing later. Even now when we suffer (vs. 14, "reproach" means revile or insult) we are blessed by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of glory refers to the glory of God's presence, once represented in the Old Testament by the Shekinah glory in the tabernacle and the temple. There will be even greater blessing when Christ returns to take us home and to reward our faithfulness (vs. 13, "when His glory is revealed)."

**Romans 8:16-18** *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.*

## **3. Face persecution as a way to glorify Christ (vs. 14-16)**

Believers are united with Christ spiritually. We show that unity with Christ in baptism. Verses 14-16 describe two kinds of suffering: 1) suffering for our sins, and 2) suffering for our Savior

and our service for Him. Remember this: when we are persecuted, we are so identified with Christ, it is the same as persecuting Christ Himself (vs. 14, “on their part He is blasphemed”). When Paul met Christ on the Damascus Road in Acts 9, Jesus said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” If we suffer for Christ, there is no need to be ashamed (vs. 16) because we are bringing honor and glory to our Lord in it. The name “Christian” is found only three times in the Bible (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and here in vs. 16). The very name “Christian” was first used as an insult, but God used it for His glory.

#### **4. Face persecution as God’s way to refine us (vs. 17)**

The hymn, *How Firm a Foundation*, was written as if God is speaking to the suffering believer, “When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my strength all-sufficient shall be thy supply; the flames shall not hurt thee, I only design, thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.” When Job went through his trials he said, **Job 23:10** *But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.* God allows persecution not to punish us, but to refine us and mature us. Our suffering is not accidental. It is an important part of His purpose.

**Romans 8:28** *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

#### **5. Face persecution as a reminder of God’s judgment (vs. 17-18)**

These verses speak of two kinds of judgment. There is a judgment that begins at the house (household) of God and there is a judgment of those who do not obey the gospel of God. In other words, there is a judgment of the saved and a judgment of the lost. The judgment of the saved (the house of God) is a judgment to purify. The judgment of the lost is a judgment to punish. The judgment that begins at the house of God is a corrective judgment, a chastening judgment, a judgment that purges and purifies. The judgment of the lost (vs. 18, the ungodly and the sinner) is a condemning judgment. It is far better to suffer the fiery trial of persecution as a child of God than to suffer God’s wrath in the eternal lake of fire. Here’s the point: if God firmly and thoroughly judges His own people whom He loves, what will be the awful judgment on people who are not saved? Why are they lost? They do not obey the Gospel. The Gospel is good news to be preached and believed, but it is also a command to be obeyed. Isn’t it worth any persecution we may face to share the Gospel so lost people can hear it, believe it, and obey it?

#### **6. Face persecution as a reason to trust God (vs. 19)**

If our suffering is in the will of God (for Christ’s sake), then we have nothing to fear and everything to gain. We can commit our souls to God as our faithful Creator. The word “commit” is a banking term that means “to deposit for safe keeping.” People often use a vault or a safe deposit box to store important papers, coins, or other valuables. Nothing is more valuable than your soul. Jesus asked, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?” God is our faithful Creator. He gave us physical life and He gave us spiritual life through the new birth, and He knows what is best for us. And if we can trust Him with my soul, it should be easy to trust Him for all the other things in our life. We should face persecution... 1) as a normal thing; 2) as a special blessing; 3) as a way to glorify Christ; 4) as God’s way to refine us; 5) as a reminder of God’s judgment; and 6) as a reason to trust God.