

1 Peter 4:12-19

Suffering For Christ's Sake And An Encouraging Admonition

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS

The apostle speaks once again of the suffering, the revilement and the persecution which the believers must endure for Christ's sake. He aims to encourage them. They should bear in mind that the present suffering, even though caused by the authorities (see note on v. 15), is not to be compared with the glory which will be revealed to them. As well, they should hear in their suffering the thunder of God's final judgment, and therefore examine themselves carefully in the knowledge that they can enter the full glory of the Kingdom only by way of much oppression. Therefore, with fear and trembling, they should become active in the struggle to sanctify their lives.

MAIN THOUGHTS

Suffering for faith's sake is not a reason for surprise, but for joy. The tie of believers to Christ not only means sharing in his suffering, but also sharing in his glory. If they indeed suffer for Christ's sake, for no legitimate reason, there is no reason for shame, but rather, reason for praising God. They should also see that God's judgment is being revealed in that oppression — God's judgment, which begins with his Church and which produces self-examination and self-revelation. In this way believers will be motivated to live godly lives.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Verse 12

For an explanation of "dear friends", see the note on Chapter 2:11.

"Do not be surprised" means "stop acting like strangers", "stop looking up strangely" — see question 1. All things are done "for your testing" [NASB]; people try to tempt the believers to sin, but God tests and examines their faith by this temptation.

Verse 13

The Greek word for "to the degree" [NASB] connotes "in proportion to". There is, therefore, a certain correlation between their present suffering and their joy later. To "participate" or "share" [NASB] is to be a "partner in" (cf. Matthew 25:34-45; Colossians 1:24). The phrases "you may be overjoyed" is literally "you may rejoice with exulting joy". The original uses a different verb for "exulting joy" than it does for "rejoice" in this verse. The verb for "exulting joy" makes us think of the revelation of joy's activity (cf. Revelation 19:7). Therefore, it serves to strengthen the concept of "being glad" both in heart and in deed.

Verse 14

"Blessed" (cf. Matthew 5:3 ff.) actually means "to be congratulated". That "the Spirit of glory and of God" rests on them is apparent from their patient and joyful endurance of fiery persecutions. "The Spirit of glory and of God" means "the Spirit of glory; that is, the Spirit of God". In

Stephen's life (Acts 6:15) this glory was visibly revealed, but that is an exception. What is meant here is that this glory of the Spirit is revealed in the calm, modest, and joyful mental attitude of the believer on account of which their revilers and persecutors are amazed.

Verse 15

"By no means let any of you" [NASB] translates as "not one of you". That phrase strongly emphasises individual responsibility. The sins mentioned in this verse could lead to difficulties with the authorities. Presumably, heathens who were hostile towards Christians, who hated them merely because they were Christians, accused them of misdeeds just to harass them, causing the authorities to launch an investigation. These enemies must never be given a legitimate reason for their accusations.

A "meddler" or a "busy-body" is someone who interferes with someone else's business.

Verse 16

The use of the name "Christian" had become common — [see question 2](#). They were not to be "ashamed" as if they had done something dishonourable, but they were to glorify God because he particularly manifested his grace.

"In that name" [NASB] or "under that name" [RSV] is also translated in other manuscripts as "in this respect". Greijdanus says that if "in this respect" is the original rendition, it means in this case "privilege", "special favour" (see note on next verse).

Verse 17

"For" indicates why it is a privilege for the believers to suffer as Christians. The reason lies in what Peter says further on: "it is time for..." (That is why I personally consider the rendition "in this respect" - verse 16 - to be the original one.) The Greek word for "time" is used here which indicates "the opportunity" or "the occasion". God deems now to be the time.

"Judgment" refers to the final judgment (as appears from the questions in vv. 17b and 18b). Peter sees these oppressions as a glimpse of the final judgment.

The "family of God" is the church, Christ's family (cf. Ezekiel 9:1-6). "To begin with the family of God" is a biblical concept (found in Ezekiel 9, Jeremiah 25:29 and 49:12), a firm law of the covenant — [see question 3](#). If God, in his judgment, will not even pass by his own people, for whom Jesus bore God's wrath, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Verse 18

Pay attention to the two groups: the "family of God", "us", the church people are contrasted with "those who do not obey". Here they are compared as "the righteous" with "the ungodly and the sinner". "It is hard" does not mean "just barely", but "with difficulty". Only by way of much strife, oppression, anguish, testing and chastisement can they be saved — [see question 4](#). In the church, judgment is temporal. He who is "righteous" can appear before God, for his Saviour took the curse upon himself.

Verse 19

"So then" indicates that a conclusion is going to be drawn. "Suffer according to God's will", not as evil-doers, but in accordance with his will (here the Greek word which indicates his revealed will, his commandment is again used). "Their souls" [NASB] means their persons, "themselves".

The "Creator" (this is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used) means in this context the "God of the Covenant", our Father in Christ, and was chosen on account of his omnipotence (cf. Apostles' Creed, Art. 1; and Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 10).

The verb in the original text for "commit" is borrowed from banking, and means "to deposit", "to put in safekeeping".

"Continue to do good" shows that obedience to God's commandments is the condition for salvation — see question 5 — and it averts God's wrath.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. For what reason would the believers' suffering have surprised them (cf. Isaiah 3:10; Matthew 28:18)?
2. Where is the name "Christian" used for the first time (cf. Acts 11:26)? Was it used as a name of honour or of revilement? Does it appear from Scripture that this name quickly came into common use (cf. Acts 26:28)?
3. Is God's judgment over the Church merely a mock judgment and his wrath over his children only pretence? What does the story of David teach us in this respect (cf. 2 Samuel 12:7-12; Psalm 51)?
4. Many weak believers think that verse 18 means that the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven are only slightly open. Is this Scriptural (cf. 2 Peter 1:11; Ephesians 1:8; Ephesians 2:4-7)?
5. Does "condition" in the explanation of verse 19 mean "meritorious condition"? If not, what does it mean?

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12, Q&A 32

What does the name "Christian" mean?

Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus a partaker of his anointing, that I may confess his Name, present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to him, and with a free and good conscience fight against sin and the devil in this life, and hereafter reign with him eternally over all creatures.

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