

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

Holiness

1 Peter 4:12-19 Lesson # 23

Dr. Bruce Bickel

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Bruce: Good morning, men.

Men: Good morning, Bruce.

Bruce: Let’s turn in your Bibles, please, to the book of 1 Peter. We’re in chapter 4, verses 12-19 of the epistle of 1 Peter. I’ll be reading from the English Standard Version. The verses for our consideration today are found in the fourth chapter of the first book, beginning at verse 12 and concluding with verse 19. Let’s listen to the word of the Lord.

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice, in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And “if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

“Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Let’s pray. Father, have mercy upon me, the sinner. Do not hold my sins against me to impact the glory of God. May my sins not be like the sins of Achan, who impacted the body of Christ. Father, we just pray that You would be pleased to honor Yourself by having Your Holy Spirit descend upon us, guide us through these words and fulfill His job description, to guide us into all truth. And Father, I would pray this, that Your Holy Spirit would not vacate our land because of our moral decadence, but that You would revive us again and begin inside the church. May revival start in the church and then influence our society. May it be done for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen!

Bruce: The theme of the books of 1 and 2 Peter is holiness. And we’ve been talking a great deal about holiness over the past year. But basically, what does holiness mean? Simplistically, what is holiness? We’ve been studying a lot of theory about it and a lot of application. But just at the hundred thousand foot level, what does holiness mean?

Participant: Set apart.

Bruce: Holiness means literally to be set apart. When something is sanctified, it is holy. It is set apart for a special use.

Now we find this concept in the Old Testament in the temple, where certain instruments and certain vessels were used for certain specific items for worship. And they would be sanctified. They would be set apart for a special use. What gave them

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

their value was not the intrinsic value of the implement itself, but its purpose. And so when they were purposely set apart for something special, they were made holy and they were used for a very special cause.

We can derive from that, friends, that the basic understanding of holiness is this: that God takes that which is sinful—us—He takes mankind, which is very, very sinful. He sanctifies us through the work of the Holy Spirit. He sets us apart to be a special means by which He is glorified.

So our value is not in who we are as people per se, or what we do as individuals. It is not our position or our power or our personality. It’s basically that we have been set apart to be holy, and God has given us a special purpose to be the means by which His glory is going to be demonstrated wherever we are. So that’s why we say that our definition of ministry is who you are, where you are. That means this. Because you are in Christ, you’ve been sanctified, you’ve been consecrated, you’ve been set apart by the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are holy in the sense that you’re going to be different.

Holiness means this. You’re designed specifically to be different, not like the rest of the world. The implements in the temple in Israel were different not because of what they contained but because they were set apart for a special purpose. Our special purpose is to glorify God in all that we do—to love God and enjoy Him forever and to be the means by which God will demonstrate His glory to a lost world. That is our purpose and that is what it means to be holy. We are to be different.

Now when somebody lives a different style of life, a person who lives a different life is going to have a difficult life. The child who is tall and slender, or the child who is short and overweight is going to be harassed and find opposition from his classmates because he is different. The student who breaks the curve academically is not well received by his or her classmates because he broke the curve, and that is because he is different.

Peter is going to tell us that the person who has a different style of life is going to have a difficult life. And in a world where what happens depends upon mostly lies and pride and greed and pleasure and the desire to get more, when someone comes along and operates at a different level—operates on truth, humility and holiness—when somebody comes along and has a desire that in whatever they do they desire to bring glory to the Lord, they’re going to be different, and Peter says this. That person is going to have a difficult life. When you and I are different from the system of this world, we should expect to have life become more difficult for us.

The world does not persecute religious people. The world has opposition to righteous people. We see the difference in Genesis chapter 4. The Bible illustrates this very clearly on numerous occasions. In Genesis chapter 4, verses 1-8, Cain was described as a very religious man, yet he hated his brother and he killed him. And why did he do that? Look at 1 John 3:12. The answer is this. “Because his own works were evil and his brother’s works were righteous.”

The world does not persecute religious people. The world opposes righteous people. The Pharisees and the Jews in Biblical times were very religious people. Yet they persecuted the early church even after they crucified Christ.

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

And so Peter, I think, being in the inner circle of the disciples with Christ, no doubt remembered these words of Jesus as he penned this particular book. Turn with me to John chapter 15. I think Peter may have had this in mind when he was writing this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

John chapter 15 beginning at verse 18. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated Me before it has hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, “A servant is not greater than his master.”

“If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of My name because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin. For whoever hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen and hated both Me and My Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: “They hated Me without a cause.”

Now friends, I think that Peter may have had that in his mind as he was writing these instructions to us because he is basically saying this. When you desire to live a holy life, you’re going to be different. And when you’re different, life is going to become difficult. In light of Christ’s teaching and Christ’s own experience, one would expect Peter to deal with the troubles that he faced and counsel us on how we should manage the troubles that we will face because of the opposition of the world that hates Christ, because we are different because we have been set apart to be holy.

When you look at the flow of the book of 1 Peter, basically it can be summarized like this. The first section deals with our salvation. That’s our living hope, the living hope that we get in our salvation. This is how God makes us holy, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The second section of the book of 1 Peter we discussed is on submission. Salvation leads to submission. That’s the pilgrim life. That’s how we live our lives.

And the third section which we’re now engaged in studying is suffering. So the book of 1 Peter can be designed and divided up into three major themes—salvation, submission and suffering.

Now the more that a person is conformed to the image of Christ, the more the world is going to oppose you, and the more the world is going to try to destroy us. That’s because we are upsetting the curve of society. And the world doesn’t like that and they don’t like you and me for it.

Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12 that “everyone who wants to live a godly life ... will be persecuted.” Peter has a lot to say, friends, about opposition from this world and about suffering. And most of it is very encouraging.

I think he gives us four insights into how we are to manage the opposition that we will find from the system of this world that hates Christ. They don’t hate Christians. They hate Christ.

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: That’s the issue. They hate Him. If they hate Him, they hate His Father. And that’s why we are different when we are called to be holy. Our purpose in life is to be the means by which God demonstrates His glory wherever we are and our ministry is that, wherever we are, we’re giving away what God has given us. And brothers, if we don’t know what God has given us, we have nothing to give this world.

But when you give away what God has given you in the world, you should anticipate life to become more difficult. Peter experienced that. He was in the inner circle with Jesus. He understood John 15, when Jesus said, (paraphrase), “They will hate you because they hated Me. They will oppose you because they will oppose Me.”

Here’s how Peter exhorts us to manage the difficulties of life. First of all, we should expect it. We should expect opposition from the world. Secondly, we should rejoice in it. Expect it, rejoice in it. Thirdly, praise God for it. And lastly, commit yourself to God because of it.

Now Peter is giving us some wonderful instruction about how to live a life that is going to be difficult because of the purpose you’ve been given, which is to be sanctified, to be set apart, to be holy. And the world is going to oppose that because you and I are upsetting the curve of the standard of society. They don’t like anybody who upsets the curve and they don’t like us for doing it. That should be expected in this world, Peter tells us.

But we’re to have a certain response to that expectation of having a difficult life. That is that we are to rejoice in that. And he will give us instructions as to why.

And then we need to talk about how we praise God for the fact that we’re rejoicing in the suffering that we’re going through and in the opposition of this world. We need to praise God for it because it means certain things about us and what God is doing. And lastly, it reminds us to commit ourselves to God in this world. So let’s look at these four insights from Peter—how he teaches us to manage the difficult life of being holy in this world.

First of all, we should *expect* it. Look at verse 12. Back to 1 Peter. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening.” Suffering is not to be regarded as something foreign, Peter tells us, to the Christian experience. But he says, rather, that it’s a refining test. Let me explain why he says that it’s a refining test.

He speaks of these sufferings and the opposition of the world directed to us because we love Christ as a fiery or painful trial. And the word there in the Greek is a word that is used to describe a smelting furnace where gold is refined. Look at 1 Peter 1:7. It’s referred to as a refining process. Life is a refining process for us.

Certainly one who knew about that refining process would be our friend Job.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Look at Job chapter 23 verse 10. Job says this about the fiery trials of being tested and refined and purified. “But He knows the way that I take. When He has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

Job understood this: that all the difficulties he went through were a test for him and they were refining him. So Peter says, (*paraphrase*), “Don’t be surprised when the world opposes you because you love Christ.” You’re going through a test that is refining you, refining your faith.

He uses the phrase here “as if something strange were happening to you.” The word *strange* means alien or foreign in nature. He’s basically saying that if you love Christ, don’t think it strange when the world opposes you because you’re upsetting the curve. You’re exposing their sin.

Remember what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5 in the preamble to the Sermon On the Mount? He says this, that when you possess these eight character qualities of the Beatitudes, and He teaches us how to enter the kingdom of God and how to live like a kingdom citizen, He says the consequence of that is going to be present tense reality. “You are the salt of the earth,” and “You are the light of the world.”

Notice the verb tense. He doesn’t say, “You should become the salt. You might become light.” The verb tense is present tense reality. You are, as a result of these eight character qualities of the Beatitudes, when you are redeemed and set apart to be holy and you are being more and more conformed to the image of Christ, you are going to be salt. And what is salt. And what does salt do? Salt slows down corruption. That’s what we do in this world, friends. And that’s why the world does not like us. It’s because you are slowing down the corruption of this world.

Now the greatest thing I did in my 28 years at PNC as an employee, as a senior vice president, was to show up!

Participant: There you go.

Bruce: Because by showing up, what did I do? As a kingdom of God citizen, I slowed down the corruption of PNC. They don’t know that. (*Laughter.*) But I do, because that’s who God says I am.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: You see, that’s who we are. That’s what it means to be holy in the marketplace. Your mere presence is the best thing you can do for your employer. That’s the very best thing you can do for the person for whom you work. You show up because, as a kingdom citizen, you are slowing down the corruption of society by your mere presence.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Because you are holy. You’re different.

Jesus also says, “You are the light of the world.” What does light do? Light exposes things. The second thing that we do in this world is not only to slow down the corruption of society. We expose the sin of the world. Now that’s not necessarily comfortable. They’re not going to come and pat you on the back and say, “Oh, thank you for exposing my sin.” They’re going to hate you for it. They’re going to oppose you for it. They’re going to persecute you for it. They’re going to subject you to all sorts of harassment for it, perhaps, because you’re upsetting the curve., because you’re exposing who they are.

You see, that’s what Peter is saying. Life is going to be difficult and you should expect it. Don’t act as if something strange is going on. This isn’t foreign. This is

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

normal, Peter says. You’ve got to expect this. So don’t act as if something strange is happening to you when the world opposes you because of your faith in Christ.

Let me give you an illustration. Now I can talk about this since I’m not an employer there anymore. (*Laughter.*) I think I’ve given you this illustration before.

After I’d been there a couple of years, one of my responsibilities was to make some decisions relating to some charitable giving. And there was one particular situation where the committee that I was the chair of said, “You know, if we say no to this grant request, we won’t get this business from this company.”

And I said, “Well, what does that have to do with our decision?”

“Well, we won’t get this business if we don’t give them the grant.”

I said, “That’s a conflict of interest. We can’t do that because the language of this document doesn’t say anything about using the grants from this foundation to get business for PNC. We have to honor the intent of the donor.”

And the people of the committee said, “Well, we won’t get the business.”

And I said, “And that changes things how?” So we didn’t do it.

We voted. And so they voted to give them the grant.

I said, “I’m going to create a new system today, folks, called “chairman’s prerogative. I’m vetoing it.” (*Laughter.*)

They said, “You’re going to get your rosy red rectum in trouble.” (*Laughter.*)

I said, “That may happen.”

And sure enough, I got called in by one of the senior officers who’s no longer there. (*Laughter.*) And he asked me, “I understand that you vetoed that grant decision. Do you realize that you cost us the business?”

I said, “I didn’t cost you any business, sir. What I did is protect the reputation of my company.”

He said, “Why did you do that?”

I said, “Because this would have been a conflict of interest and if the society would have heard that we made the decision to give this grant in order just to get business, how could we be a company of integrity?”

And he said, “Well, who would know?” (*Laughter.*)

And I said, “I would.”

Participant: Very good.

And he said, “What the f--- does that make any difference?”

And I said, “It’s the matter of a clear conscience, sir.”

And he got up out of his chair, he went over to me and said, “Would you rather keep your job or have a clear conscience?” Thank You for exposing that to me. I feel so good about that! (*Laughter.*) That’s not comfortable.

My response was this. “Honestly, sir, I’ll take my clear conscience to my next job.”

And he said, “Get the h--- out of here.”

You’re going to expose things, men, because you are light, you are salt. You by design are holy. You’ve been sanctified for a purpose. And that purpose, wherever you are, is to glorify God in whatever you do, in all things—eating or drinking--to glorify God. Yes, Don?

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

Don: Yes, Bruce. I think we Americans, American evangelicals, really need to take these words of Peter seriously because it is a surprise to us when these things happen. I mean, we grew up and many of us think that the ‘50s and ‘60s were so idyllic. They really weren’t, but we think they were. And with everything that is happening in our culture, evil is glorified. You know, the other night Bruce Jenner received an award for courage? Give me a break! (*Laughter.*) I know, that’s not politically correct to say, but give me a break! And that’s celebrated. But people that stand up for righteousness, you know, more and more that’s being vilified.

Bruce: Remember this. The world is not going to oppose religious people.

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: The world is going to oppose righteous people.

Participant: Yeah.

Bruce: And that’s what Peter is teaching us. You should expect this to be difficult. We should not expect this to be something that’s unusual. It isn’t strange. It isn’t alien. It’s a consequence of who we are in Christ. It’s a consequence of our being salt and of being light. So don’t consider this as something strange or alien or foreign to you.

The kind of persecution that Peter is talking about, the opposition, comes about because God is behind it. These are not mere accidents, Peter is saying. They are part of God’s plan for us, and He is in complete control of that because He is sovereign. Notice verse 19. “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will.”

Remember the six things we talked about being in God’s revealed will? One of them is this—that you suffer. Do you realize that God’s will may be suffering? Now that’s not politically correct in the church today, to say something like that. “I thought Jesus came so I would have abundant life.” That’s true. Part of the abundant life may be suffering.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Peter says that you should expect that because you’re holy. You’re different.

Now those incidents that we’re going to go through where we are opposed are as much a part of Romans 8:28—“God works all things for good to those who love Him”—as anything else. Yes, sir?

Participant: The context here deals with suffering in terms of suffering as a Christian, suffering as a follower of Christ and persecution goes with that. What do you do with other types and forms of suffering such as health or economic suffering?

Bruce: Same thing. Give it to a holy God who is sovereign. Trust Him with it. That’s all we can do.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s the same thing. It’s all we can do. We’ll get into that in our fourth insight when Peter says to commit yourself to it. Whatever the suffering is, be it physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, social, cultural, nationalistic—whatever it is—it’s the same response. Commit to God because of it. That’s the best we can do. And we’ll get to that in subsequent weeks.

Peter tells us that the persecution or the opposition that is going to happen as a result of our being faithful to God and standing up for what is right is really a test. And a

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

person’s devotion to anything can be measured by his or her willingness to suffer and sacrifice for it. Any persecution or opposition that we get is therefore a test.

And also notice this, that only the holy are going to be opposed. The one who compromises and accommodates the world system won’t be tested because there’s no difference to test. Do you realize that? There’s no difference to test when somebody compromises or accommodates the system of this world. They will not be opposed because there’s nothing to test because they are not different, because they are not holy.

Not all of these difficulties that we go through in life are refining tests. Not all of them are difficulties. Some of them are brought about by our disobedience and our sin. We need to realize that. We need to take responsibility for our own sinfulness. So not all the difficulties we go through are the result of the opposition of the world because of our holiness. It may just be because I’ve been disobedient. It may be because of my sin. I’d encourage you to cross reference 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 18-20 and also 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 13-17.

Transcriber’s Note: 1 Peter 2:18-20. “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if, when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”

1 Peter 3:13-17. “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”

I want to quote the Puritan John Rogers. We’re very, very honored to have in our presence Bishop John Rodgers. (*Laughter.*) John Rogers was one of the great Puritans that we studied. And so we’re greatly blessed that we can study the Puritan John Rogers and also study under the present-day theologian Bishop John Rodgers. We’re glad to have him with us.

But let me quote the Puritan John Rogers. He makes these statements about the fiery tests that are brought on as a result of the opposition of the world. “The fiery trial which is given to you is to try whether we have any truth of grace in us, whether we be sound or hollow. The trials that we go through are designed to try what measure of grace we have, whether we have as much or more or less than we thought we had. The fiery trials we go through are to purify and refine that measure of true grace that is within us.”

Not all of these things that we go through in the opposition of the world are brought about because of the world system. Some of them are just because of our own disobedience. And you have to know the difference. You’ve got to know yourselves well enough, men, to know the difference. I can’t blame God for this. Remember, we’re not victims. We’re just vessels. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us.” We are never the victims. But

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

you’ve got to know yourself well enough to know the consequences of what you’re suffering. Is it the opposition of the world because of my faithfulness to Christ, or is it because of my disobedience and my sinfulness? I can’t answer that for you. But you have to look yourself in the mirror and know the difference.

Let me give you some insights from history. They’re always such an encouragement to us. If you ever want to read an interesting book, read *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*.

Participant: Oh, yes.

Bruce: It’s a wonderful book that talks about the English reformers. Let me give you some history on them.

The first English reformers were burned alive at the stake on Monday, February the 4th, 1555, known as Black Monday. The translator of the Matthews Bible said this. “God is in my burning as much as He is in my preaching. That which I have preached I will seal with my blood.”

Five days later John Hooper was burned alive at the stake. The man who had made the fire and was given the task of lighting the fire to burn John Hooper alive asked forgiveness of John Hooper before he lit the matches.

And Hooper said this. “Why? Why are you asking me for forgiveness? I know of no offense you have committed against me.”

The man said, “I am appointed to light the fire.”

Hooper said this. “You do nothing to offend me, only what God permits you. God forgive you your sins, and do your duty, I pray.”

Participant: Wow!

Bruce: Men, that is absolutely not possible in your human nature.

Participant: That’s right. Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Why do we go through the tests? Peter says that it’s to see the amount of grace that you have in you. Do you have as much as you think you have? Do you have all that you think you need to have? Are you shallow in your grace? Are you fulfilled in your grace? How much grace do you really have?

You see, Peter is saying this. These are the normal things of life that are testing us to see the amount of grace that we have, so that if God would be pleased to have us burned alive, we could have a response that would be supernatural to this world, you see, because we are designed to be different.

It is in our understanding that we are not victims of society’s cruelties, but subjected to the pains of refinement that permit us to rejoice in it. Yes, please?

Participant: That supernatural aspect, I think we have to know when that comes in. That kicks into gear when we realize that we don’t war against flesh and blood. That guy lighting that match—in our own flesh we would have feared, we would have been human beings. But when the Spirit kicks in, and you realize that this is principalities against God Himself and that the battle is the Lord’s, that’s when that happens.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: When do you get grace?

Men: When you need it.

Bruce: At the moment of application, not contemplation.

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: When do you need the grace? You need it when you’re under the fire of the world. You don’t need it when you’re sitting back here wondering what you’re going to do. How often do we create anxiety and frustration for ourselves by saying, “Well, what if she says this? What if he does this?” You don’t need grace at that moment of contemplation. You don’t need it when she says something to you and you have a response that basically says this. It’s the second statement that’s going to start the argument. When she says something to you, you need the grace at that moment to keep your mouth shut. (*Laughter.*) You need the grace at that moment to apply Exodus 14:14. “I will fight for you while you remain silent,” my life’s verse. It’s gotten me out of more trouble than anything I know, (*laughter*), because at the moment when somebody stimulates something within you, you want to give them back what they stimulate within you.

You don’t do that! And that’s because at that moment God gives you the grace when you need it. That’s when grace is applicable. Grace is available at the point of application, not contemplation. You’ll get it when you need it, when you commit yourselves to Christ and trust Him for it. Now that’s when the Holy Spirit descends upon us and gives us the supernatural ingredients of Christ known as grace.

Participant: Hey, Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: How much of that is out of practice, out of discipline, messing up here and there and just getting more and more grace? Would you say that it’s more of a practice, or more that it’s truly supernatural at that point and you just get it?

Bruce: Well, what I would have to say, Brian, is that my greatest teacher has been my failure. It has not been my theological knowledge. It has been my failure. It’s when I fail, Brian, that I go back and say, “Lord, I have a problem with this. I need your help. Will You help me?”

Now in the failures of my life that’s the little mantra I go through. “Lord, I have a problem here. It’s obvious that I blew it. I need help. Will You help me?” That’s the way I go back and submit myself and commit myself back to Him so that I don’t repeat the same thing.

That’s the moment when God’s grace infuses us through the work of the Holy Spirit because we recognize the reality of who we are and our need for Him. Any time we can recognize our need for Christ is when God gives us His grace. Remember this. Grace is defined as God’s resources at Christ’s expense.

So we learn by our failures, men. But we also need to learn by our obedience to the Word. Two ways in which we learn—by our obedience to the Lord when we do it and by our failures, to come back to repentance and faith.

Repentance is not a single thing in life. It’s a style of living. We constantly come back and repent of our sin and trust God to forgive us of all unrighteousness and to cleanse us from that. It’s a process, Brian. It’s something that happens supernaturally. And you may not even know when it happens until it happens. You know it when you get it. You’ll get it, but you may not know when it’s going to come. But you can know this.

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

He will not give you more than you can be tested with because it's a refinement of our grace.

So, in effect, Peter says, “Look! Expect it.” Expect the opposition of the world. It's not foreign. It's not strange. Therefore when it happens, rejoice in it.

Notice verses 13-15 of 1 Peter chapter 4. “But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's suffering, that you also may rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler.”

You see, even there Peter draws a contrast between that which God is superintending supernaturally because of His grace and that which you do because of your own sin and disobedience. There's a distinction. You and I have to know the difference.

So what does he mean when he says to rejoice in it? Instead of thinking of the opposition that I'm getting from the system of the world as something that is strange or foreign, we're exhorted by Peter to be constantly rejoicing.

Now practically, is Peter asking us to do something that's too much? No, I don't think so, because we know that God will use suffering to refine us, as we've already learned. And God will use it to glorify Himself. And when you know this, that what I'm going through is refining me and glorifying Him, when you understand those two things, you can rejoice. But you've got to understand those two things. That's why Peter is telling us this.

When you understand that the test you're going through, that the opposition of this world is refining you, that it's also glorifying God, that's the reason for our rejoicing. We don't rejoice in the pain we go through per se. We rejoice in the environment of what's going on, that I'm being refined as pure as gold and God is being glorified. That's what gives us the freedom to rejoice in it. We don't rejoice in the pain per se. Nor do we rejoice in the anguish that we go through. But we rejoice in the fact that the persecution and the opposition of this world is brought about by our well doing, not our misdoing. It's brought about by our well doing--our doing good, not our doing poorly.

And the reason we can rejoice is because we share in common with Christ's sufferings for righteousness' sake. Now we're talking here about being opposed because of righteousness, not because of our stupidity. There's a difference. You have to know the difference between being opposed and being persecuted because of righteousness. Righteousness means right wiseness. It means making the right decisions based upon our commitment to Christ.

Now we can view it as an honor and a privilege to suffer with Christ. And we can view it as an honor and a privilege to be treated by the world the same way that we treated Christ. That's what Peter is saying in verses 13-15.

Now notice. We're not talking about the sufferings that Christ suffered on the cross. We can never experience that. That is not what he's talking about. He says that you will join in the sufferings of Christ, the sufferings that He experienced, *before* He went to the cross. He suffered because of His righteousness, because He upset the curve. You and I will share in those sufferings. We will not share in the sufferings of the cross. Know the

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

distinction. We will share in the sufferings that He suffered before He went to the cross because of His righteousness. That’s what we will share in—not the sufferings of the cross, but the sufferings for being righteous before He went to the cross. That’s what Paul writes in Philippians 1:29 and Philippians 3:10, referring to “the fellowship of His sufferings.”

One other insight, men, as we draw this to some closure this morning. We’ve got to be honest. Not everyone can be trusted with this type of opposition. Not everyone can be trusted with this type of persecution. So when it does happen, rejoice.

I give you an illustration in Acts chapter 5 verse 41. “And the apostles departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” In other words, they were disgraced because of the name of Christ.

So for believers, the followers of Christ, persecution and opposition from the world is not strange. The absence of the opposition would be strange. The world thinks that the absence of opposition means glory and peace and satisfaction and security. And they react with sorrow, shock and retaliation when they are subjected to it.

But the person who is in Christ sees it differently. We see two important consequences of the trials that we go through, Peter tells us.

First of all, it’s this. The trials and refinements of our faith today assure us of His glory tomorrow. The trials that we go through today assure us of His glory tomorrow. In fact, in verse 14, if you look at that, Peter says that if insulted for the sake of Christ, you are actually blessed. Notice verse 14. You are actually blessed when that occurs.

Now what does that word *blessed* mean? Literally, it means happy in spite of circumstances. But it has a deeper meaning. It carries the idea of being prosperous.

What is it when somebody is prosperous? What do they have? Their wallets are full; they’re full of something. Peter is saying this: that when you’re insulted for the sake of Christ, you are indulging in prosperity because you’re happy in spite of circumstances. It includes the idea of this. A prosperous person, spiritually, is one who is found in a spiritually prosperous state.

When you are tested for the sake of Christ and insulted for His name, you are blessed because you are demonstrating the fact that you are spiritually prosperous in your faith in Christ. You receive that blessing. Spiritual prosperity is the state in which you are found. And so if the world persecutes you and opposes you for your righteousness, it’s an indication of spiritual prosperity in your life. What an honor!

When God says, “Bruce, you’re spiritually prosperous enough that I can give you this,” how can I not say, “Thank You, Lord,” when He’s really saying, “You’re one of the ones who is spiritually prosperous enough that can handle it. And in My grace you’re going to do it because you’ll be refined in this and I’m going to be glorified.”

Peter says that this isn’t strange. He’s affirming your spiritual prosperity. In that moment when you’re insulted because of your love for Christ, you are blessed. You are blessed.

Our response? “In all things give thanks.” We’ll rejoice in it.

The world won’t persecute worldly believers. They will only persecute spiritually prosperous believers. It’s your maturity that rubs the world the wrong way. Not your

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

religiosity, but your spiritual prosperity—that God views you worthy enough to suffer for the name of Christ. Rejoice when that happens to you.

God does not replace suffering with glory, but He transforms suffering into glory. You need to understand that. He does not replace suffering with glory. It just doesn't happen. What He does is that He transforms that suffering into glory. He does that by refining us and glorifying Himself. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from Him and not from us.”

John 16:20-22 gives us the illustration of a woman giving birth. There's pain in birth, but there's great joy in new life.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: There's pain in our suffering. There's great joy in realizing that God has just valued me worthy enough for my spiritual prosperity to be insulted for the name of Christ. Yes, there's pain in that, but there's rejoicing in it because I understand what's going on behind the scenes.

There's a second consequence and I believe this is also important. In verse 14 also, he says that the Holy Spirit is upon you. Not only are you blessed when you're insulted for the name of Christ, but you give evidence of the Holy Spirit resting upon you. This is a reference to the Old Testament *shekinah* glory, which was the luminous glow of the very presence of God to identify where He was. The *shekinah* glory identified where He was. You can read about that in Exodus chapter 40 and 1 Kings chapter 8. There is something of that glow that rests upon the person who suffers in the righteousness of Christ.

In Acts chapter 6 verse 15 it was said of Stephen that he had the face like an angel. Now notice this. When you suffer and are insulted for Christ, there is the glow of Christ because the Holy Spirit is on you, giving evidence that this is where God resides. This is where God is. Do you understand that? That's what it means when he says that the Holy Spirit rests upon you.

Notice verse 14. “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed.” God is identifying your spiritual prosperity. “Because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

He's identifying where He is. And where is He? He's in us. We're in Christ. God is revealing His location in this world. That's what holiness does! Holiness reveals where God is!

And he says that when you're insulted for the name of Christ, and when you and I respond and we don't expect it to be normal and we rejoice in it, God is identifying the fact that this is where He is. And what is that? Ministry! It's giving away what God has given you! You're identifying to the world where God is! He's right here in me, in you, in this issue of me being opposed by the world! He has personally identified my spiritual prosperity because I'm blessed!

And secondly, for the world, He's identifying where He is! People are always looking for God.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: God is saying that you're going to find Him right in My son, right in My daughter who has just gone through suffering and the insult of being associated with the

“Suffering According To The Will Of God” Part 1

Person and work of Christ. “That’s where I am,” because the person to whom it happens the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, rests upon him, identifying where He is. How can you and I do anything but rejoice--

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: When you understand that? Now the world is going to say, “Bruce, you’ve got your head up your rear end. This is totally illogical.”

And I’d say, “Yes, it is.” This is supernatural. This is God’s grace. These are supernatural things. This is why Peter is saying that we should not expect things to be rosey all the time, because God is identifying where He is by our persecution.

That’s why the martyrs suffer so powerfully. Let me give you one more illustration.

In 150 A.D., the bishop of Smyrna was Polycarp. And he said this. “Eighty and six years I have served Him and He never did me any injury. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior now?”

The Roman official said to Polycarp, “I have respect for your age. Simply say, “Away with the atheists,” and you will be set free.”

Now the Romans referred to the Christians as atheists because they would not worship Caesar as Lord. Now the Roman official said to Polycarp, “Just say, “Away with the atheists! Away with the Christians!”, and you will be set free.”

And Polycarp pointed to the Roman people and the Roman pagans and said this. “Away with the atheists!” (*Laughter.*) And he was burned alive.

What do you do? We’re talking about that now because he brought glory to the Lord.

Brothers, when you and I are opposed by the world, expect it. And when you see it happening, remember this. God is affirming your spiritual prosperity because you’re mature enough to handle it for His glory. And secondly, He’s identifying where He is through the presence of the Holy Spirit resting upon you. You are now demonstrating to a lost world that God is right here in the midst of this opposition.

May God be pleased to bind our hearts in humble allegiance to the cross and render us more radiant to the benefit of a dark and perishing world, to the praise of the glory of His grace. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen.

Bruce: And Amen. Thank you very much.

Participant: Thank you, brother. (*Applause.*)