

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Dr. Bruce Bickel

1 Peter 4:12-19

July 24, 2015

Bruce: Good morning, men!

Men: Good morning, Bruce!

Bruce: Good to be with you again. Don, do you want to set the tone for us? Just go into the presence of the Lord and know that He is God and be grateful and be thankful.

(Music.)

Our gracious Lord, we love to tell the story of the Person and work of Christ. But first of all, Lord, that from You, and have it be the one of Biblical revelation and not the one of human imagination. May the truth that we proclaim to a lost world be that, the truth that you give us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whose mission is to exalt the Person and work of Christ and guide us into all truth. May that be accomplished today for Your glory. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen.

Bruce: The passage that we’re looking at for our consideration is found in 1 Peter chapter 4, beginning at verse 12 to the end of the chapter. And may you follow along as I read from the English Standard Version. The book of 1 Peter chapter 4, beginning at verse 12.

“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 suffering, 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 the Spirit of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or even 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 of 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.” May God be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold Him for His glory. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: In our examination of this passage last week we began to realize that Peter was making some very personal and practical applications of the Christina life and a principle of society that basically says this. A person who is different may have a difficult life. People who are different may have a difficult life. The person who upsets the curve academically in the school system who makes the exam and blows the curve is not necessarily going to be well received by his classmates. The person who chooses to dress differently, or radical different, may not be well received in society. The person who is too tall or too thin or too heavy or too short with their classmates in school may be made fun of.

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Well, Peter is basically saying this. If you're different in society, you should anticipate some degree of a difficult life. Being different means that we may have a difficult life.

Peter made application to us in our Christian faith. He gave us four insights in how we are to manage the fact that we are different. When Peter refers to us as being different, he's not saying that it's something you go out and choose to do. You don't go out and choose to be different from society. He's basically saying that the consequence of your being in Christ, of being regenerate, of having the Holy Spirit in your life and giving you a new heart, removing that heart of stone that is now a heart of flesh that is sensitive to spiritual things—the consequence of that is you are going to be different because you're going to be more Christlike than society.

This is not something you and I choose. I don't choose to say, “I'm going to wake up and be different today.” The difference that Peter is referring to is the consequence of our regeneration by the work of the Holy Spirit that manifests itself in our Christlike conduct which he refers to as *righteousness*.

Participant: That's right.

Bruce: So he says that if you're persecuted for righteousness' sake, you should expect it because you are different. Now that design of being different is something that's a consequence. It's not something that you and I purpose to do. We certainly are different because of our obedience. But it's something that God works in us. It's the result of our regeneration.

So Peter gives us four insights as to how we should manage this issue of being different in society and expecting some sort of a difficult life. We might be opposed, we might be persecuted, Peter says. But you need to understand four things.

First of all, you should expect it. A person who is different, a person who chooses to live righteously, may be opposed by society. Remember this. The world does not persecute religious people. It opposes righteous people. It doesn't persecute religious people, but opposes and persecutes righteous people.

Now when you make application to our country today, ask yourself the question. Are we, the church, really being opposed, persecuted? To some degree. I use the word *opposed*. I think we're being more opposed than we are being persecuted.

One of the reasons we may not be persecuted enough is because we are not very—

Men: Righteous.

Bruce: Righteous. We're not very different from society. The church is very much like the American way of life.

Now I'm not saying that we go out and purposely change to be different. I'm saying that there is a consequence. You need to understand this, men. When the Holy Spirit works in your life, you are going to be different by consequence. It's the result of your regeneration.

And Peter says this. As a result of your righteousness, you should expect it. It is not something that's foreign to you. It's not something that's alien. Don't be surprised when the opposition of this world system comes at you because you are different because of your increased righteousness and Christlikeness. It's a consequence of your regeneration.

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

It’s not something that you and I choose to do. It’s something that is part of who we are because we are in Christ.

The second thing he told us last week is this. Rejoice in it! When opposition comes to you because of your righteousness, because of your Christlikeness, rejoice in it because it reveals two things.

First of all, it reveals your spiritual prosperity. He talks about our being spiritually prosperous because of the work of the Holy Spirit. When the world opposes you and me, it’s telling us essentially this: that you have some degree of spiritual prosperity that the world does not have, and you’re different and they’re going to oppose that.

So he says, first of all, to be grateful that it’s an indication of your spiritual prosperity, that the world sees something different about you because you’re living a righteous life. So he says that’s a cause for rejoicing. You don’t gripe about it. You don’t complain about it. You’re not frustrated about it. You’re not angry about it. You’re not irritated about it. He says to rejoice in it, because it’s an affirmation of your spiritual prosperity.

Now we are a nation of consumers marketing about prosperity. Everything we want to do talks about being prosperous. Think about that in terms of your spiritual growth. Peter says this. When you’re different because of your regeneration, because of your righteous living, expect it. It’s not foreign. It’s not strange. It’s not out of this world. It’s normal because you’re different from society.

The second thing is this. Realize this. It’s an indication of your spiritual prosperity, because not everybody can handle it. Who are the ones that suffer for the cause of Christ? Those who are spiritually prosperous in their internal souls, in their beings, in their spirits. God has regenerated them, given them His Holy Spirit. They are spiritually prosperous.

Now the world has an opportunity and it likes to reject those things that are based upon Biblical truth. It’s fashionable in our society, in some quarters, to deny that there is any such thing as certainty about Biblical truth. Society likes to reject that. “That’s just your opinion.”

But when you are different, friends, the world takes notice of it because of your righteous living.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Let me give you an example. Four hundred and thirty some years ago there were two hundred and twenty-nine men, fifty-five women and four children who were very certain that they had found out truth and were content to die for their opinions of Biblical truth. I’m referring to the Marianist martyrs, burned alive between 1555 and 1558 by the Roman Catholic Church, under the authority and direction of Queen Mary of England, daughter of Henry VIII, known as Bloody Mary.

One such man was John Rogers, whom I referred to last week. We have the modern-day John Rodgers in our presence, for which I’m very, very grateful. (*Laughter and applause.*)

We have much to be thankful for in our country, people—our heritage, our nation and our forefathers. We have a great deal of gratitude for our democracy and for our freedoms.

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

As I was thinking about that this past week, I think that the possession by people of the Bible in their own language is perhaps the greatest national blessing we could have.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Do you understand that? The freedom that we have to have the Scripture in our own language may be one of the greatest blessings we have nationally in our culture.

At a church I was pastoring in Chicago I had a man, a historian, rather wealthy, and he had purchased a copy of the Matthews Bible. It was the Matthews Bible and we had it in our physical presence and he let me have it in my office. And I didn't even touch it. I mean it was so old and so precious. It was published in 1537. And we had a copy of that in my pastor's office in my church. And every time a person would join my church, I would have him come over and I would give him the history of the Matthews Bible because I wanted him to be so grateful for the benefit of living in a country where we have the Scripture translated into our own language so we can read and understand the character and nature of God. We have the privilege of being exposed to the God of Biblical revelation, not the God of human imagination.

Let me give you the history of how we ought to be grateful for the fact that we have the Scripture in our own language. The Matthews Bible was a major inspiration in most of all the translations which led up to the King James translation of 1611. There was the Wycliffe Bible in 1380, the Tyndale Bible in 1525, the Coverdale Bible in 1535, the Matthews Bible in 1537, the Great Bible in 1539, the Geneva Bible in 1560, the Bishop's Bible in 1568, and the King James Bible in 1611.

I wanted these people to come in and just see that, to see the history of people who gave their lives. They suffered because they were different in society, to maintain the freedoms that we have to worship God correctly because of Biblical revelation.

So why would these people be burned and suffer so? It's because, in verse 16, they were not ashamed to bear the name of Christ, exactly what Peter says in verse 16. "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

"Let him glorify God in that name." These brothers took seriously what Peter says about suffering. We should expect it. Yes, Dick?

Dick: Bruce, you might expand upon this. I read the William Tyndale story. These individuals spent fifty, sixty years under cover. I mean, they wouldn't allow that Bible to come into England. I mean, I don't think most of us are familiar with the fact that there was just such a strong opposition to having the Bible printed in their language in their countries.

Bruce: Bishop Rodgers, would you help me with that, please, historically?

Bishop Rodgers: The church was afraid that if we interpreted the Bible,--they didn't believe in the clarity of Scripture, that it's so clear that even a lay person can get the main message. So they banned the public owning and reading of the Bible. They wanted the exclusive rights at that point to interpret the Scripture. That was the reason. And they actually killed Tyndale.

Participant: Yes, they did.

Bishop Rodgers: Because he published the Scriptures. It was forbidden.

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Bruce: That’s right. You know, we should never take for granted, men, when we come together on a Friday, that we have the Scripture to open up the heart of God to us.

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: You know, don’t ever take that for granted. You know, we just flippantly take a look at the Scripture and say, “How many Bibles do you have in your house that you don’t use. I bet you probably have two or three that are just sitting around in your living room somewhere that you don’t use. There are people in the world who do not have the Scripture in their own language. And one of the things we need to be involved in, men, is praying for those ministries such as the Wycliffe Bible Translators and others who are giving their lives to translate the Scripture into the language of the people so they will have the same benefits that you and I have. And yet we take it so for granted.

Men, when you study the Scripture, never take it for granted because it is wrapped in the blood of martyrs.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You know, there’s no such thing as black blood or white blood. It’s only red blood.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: We’re wrapped in the robes of righteousness, in the red blood of the cross of Jesus Christ. And people gave their lives because they believed the Scripture to be true. They believed it to be true.

And so when you and I live righteously, we need to understand this—that we should expect opposition and persecution. We should rejoice in it. The reason we rejoice in it is because it reveals our spiritual prosperity. And secondly, as Peter taught us last week, it reveals the location of where God resides. I want you to notice. Take a look at verse—

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: Are you saying that Christians were stopping other Christians from having access to the Bible?

Bruce: The church was, yes. The Roman Church was doing that because they were saying that the only ones who could interpret the Bible were the church clergy, the clergymen of the church. They were the only ones who could interpret it. The common man could not do that. So the church was saying, “No, that comes from us. This is what we do and we’ll forbid that from getting into the hands of the common people.” That’s what they were doing.

I want to give you a little bit of the history of that in a moment because the context of what Peter is writing is helpful for us to understand. So first of all, expect it. Rejoice in it. It reveals the location of where God is.

Take a look at this. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you, as though something strange were happening. Expect it. “rejoice as in so far you share in Christ’s suffering, 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.”

That word *blessed* there means spiritual prosperity, being happy in spite of circumstances. When you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are actually being

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

blessed because it's identifying you as more spiritually prosperous than somebody else who is not in Christ. So recognize and rejoice in that, “because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

The second thing that we rejoice in is that when you are persecuted for the name of Christ, you are revealing where God is. Do you realize that? In the midst of your persecution, you're revealing that this is where God is. He's in me right now through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who rests upon me. The Spirit of God is upon me. And you are giving a visible demonstration of the location where God resides, and He resides where?

Men: In me.

Bruce: In me! Christ in us, the hope of glory.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: So rejoice when you suffer for Christ's sake. And he gives us two more insights today. One is to praise God for it. And secondly, commit yourselves to it because God is in it. Let's take a look at these.

First of all, verse 18. Praise God for it. “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.”

We saw last week that not all of our suffering is a result of the fiery trial. Sometimes it's because we are disobedient. If a follower of Christ breaks the law in disobedience, that's not suffering for righteousness' sake. That's the natural consequence of our spiritual disobedience. In that case the person should suffer because of the consequence.

One of the great blessings we have in our culture today, men, is this. We live in a culture of choice. You get to choose the car you want. You get to choose the house you want. You get to choose the job you want. You get to choose where you want to live. But what comes with those choices is the absolute responsibility to accept the consequences of your choices. We need to help people to understand that yes, you've got the freedom of choice. But you've also got to understand that with that freedom comes the responsibility to accept the consequences of the choices that you make. If you don't want those consequences, don't make that choice.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Because when you get the consequences of your choice, you have no right to gripe. You need to know the consequences of your choices before you make them. You need to understand those things before you make them, because when you get those consequences of the choices you have the freedom to make, you have no right to gripe about it because you got what you wanted!

Participant: Come on! Right!

Bruce: We need to help people understand the consequences of their choices before they make them.

One of the great things I'm very appreciative of is that we live in a nation of choice. But at the same time we need to be responsible in accepting the consequences of the choices that we make.

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Not all of our fiery trials come because of our righteous living. It’s because we are disobedient. We need to recognize when that occurs.

But being a follower of Christ is not a guarantee that you’ll escape the normal consequences of bad choices and misdeeds. Just because you’re a follower of Christ does not mean that when you are disobedient that you’re not going to suffer the consequences. Yes, I’m covered by the blood of the Lamb, but I’m still going to suffer the consequences of that. We need to understand what those are in advance. Yes, sir?

Participant: I want to thank you for remembering this instance with Bloody Mary and John Rogers, because in my haste to get here today and my unwillingness to dress appropriately—I’m sorry!—but I forgot to say this prayer that we pray twice a day in the church to our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. “Preserve our church unconquerable by the gates of hell forever. Heal the schisms of the churches. Quench the rages of the heathen. Speedily undo and root out the growth of heresies and bring them to nothing by the power of the Holy Spirit.” And the fact that throughout history, people have tried to put the bible down and elevate others and their ideas about the bible without letting us read the bible is indeed the worst heresy.

Bruce: Thank you for that reminder.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Amen. Peter is describing in this passage the difference between conduct that is Christlike and conduct that is like a criminal. Notice verses 15 and 16. “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 even as a meddler.” Just suffer as a Christian.

He’s showing us a contrast. You’ve got to be reminded of this, men. Not all of the opposition that we get is because of our righteousness. It may be because of our disobedience.

Participant: Come on, sir.

Bruce: And you need to be careful to understand the consequences of your choices before you make them. His contrast here is criminal conduct, meaning conduct like the system of this world, versus Christlike conduct. So being a Christian is not a guarantee that life is going to be rosy when you and I are disobedient to the Scripture.

Look at the contrast in verse 15. Criminal conduct versus Christlike conduct in verse 16. One word I pick out there is when he says, (*paraphrase*), “Don’t be like a meddler.” Do you know what a meddler is? It’s a self-appointed overseer of somebody else’s matters. (*Laughter.*) Don’t be like that! That’s the contrast of criminal conduct versus Christlike conduct. Be sure that you’re suffering for the right reason—for our righteousness and not because of our ridiculousness.

If you suffer because you are Christlike, praise God for that because you bear His name. Now that phrase “bear His name” had great interest and great impact upon Peter’s culture. Let me give you historically the background of why Peter may have been moved by the Holy Spirit to write this to the people to whom he is writing in this epistle.

It had real significance in Peter’s time in the new church. The cult of Caesar was the state religion of the Roman Empire. The worship of Caesar was a cult. The emperor was

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

worshiped as a god. And obedience to Roman law as not only politically correct, but a religious duty. The unifying factor of many different peoples was brought together because of this cult of Roman worship. And it made the military task easier to draft people into the army because they had one common religion and one common worship style and that was that they worshiped Caesar as God.

The Greek word for Caesar is the word *Kaisar*. And this cult was known as *Kaisaronias*, the worship of *Kaisar*, the worship of Caesar.

Now Christianity, then, was viewed as a threat. The Lord/Messiah of Israel was seen as One who would come some day and take the government of the world upon His shoulders and defeat the imperialistic Roman Empire. Worshipers were known as *Christianos*.

So you had two major issues going on, *Kaiseronias* and *Christianos*, which is the worship of Christ versus the worship of Caesar. That was the contrast—the worship of Christ versus the worship of Caesar. That’s the context in which Peter is writing this epistle.

Rome saw that the imperialization of Christ, as they viewed it, was a threat to the imperialization of the Roman and of all the Caesars.

So Peter was warning his friends that it’s going to cost you something if you worship Christ in this culture. It’s going to cost you something. Expect it. Rejoice in it. Praise God for it and commit yourself to God because of it.

And so, no doubt, he remembered this as he was penning this. When he cowered before the Romans and denied his Lord, he remembered his own shame as he wrote this passage to the believing church. You read about that in Mark chapter 14.

And oh, how it costs us so little in America to bear the name of Christ because, in America, Christianity is tolerated. We tolerate it because we are not making a difference.

Now I’m not a prophet by any means, so this is just my personal observation. Take it for what it’s worth. When I look at the role of the Holy Spirit, it tells us in John 14 and John 15 that the role of the Holy Spirit is to exalt the Person and work of Christ and to guide us into all truth. I don’t see a lot of that going on in America. Now I’m not saying that I’m a prophet by any means. But one of my daily prayers is this. Lord, don’t vacate our nation from the Holy Spirit’s power. Revive us again. Begin in the church.

Where does revival need to occur?

Participant: In the church.

Bruce: In the church. The word *revive* means that it assumes something is alive. Revival means to rekindle that which is alive. The world is not alive. A revival is not going to start in the world.

Participant: No, sir.

Bruce: Because there is no what?

Participant: Life.

Bruce: No life. Revival means that you start with something that has life in it. Revive! “Revive us again!” My prayer is that the Holy Spirit would not vacate America but would revive us again by starting in the church. It’s going to cost us. Yes, Don?

Don: Isn’t that the point of verse 17?

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the household of God.”

Bruce: It’s going to start right there.

Don: And if we don’t stand firm for what is right—and I can give examples, but I won’t—but if we don’t stand firm for what God teaches and what the Bible says in our culture, then we may be, as a church, like some of the churches in the book of Revelation that God abandoned.

Bruce: That’s correct.

Don: So we need to take that seriously.

Bruce: Remember, it starts with us.

Participant: Yes, sir.

Bruce: And the reason it starts with us is because we are the ones who by regeneration should make a—

Men: Difference.

Bruce: Difference. Regeneration means there’s going to be a difference in our style of life, that we live a Christlike life, not a meddling life. So it’s all going to begin with us.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: One part of that, too, as Don was saying, is that it’s really easy for us to point out how disappointed we are in “gay marriage,” and disappointed in all these other externals. But I believe that, especially us as men, are we truly washing our lives in the Word? Are we raising our children and our grandchildren up and teaching them the way and doing what we should be doing? I mean, Peter puts down meddling. And we can meddle all the time and do all of these bits and pieces. But if we don’t look inwardly and see how we can be more Christlike, it’s a lot easier, at least for me, to say, “Oh well, at least I’m not doing this or that or all the obvious sins. In reality, to be righteous and Christlike, we have to look inwardly and change ourselves, and then we can start with the rest.

Bruce: Amen. That’s how we make a difference. It all begins within us. An ancient philosopher once said this. “Show me your redeemed life and I may be more inclined to believe in your Redeemer.”

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s what Brian is saying. Do we demonstrate a redeemed life as a result of our regeneration?

You see, when we do make a difference, we should expect the opposition of the world. And when it comes, we rejoice in it because it shows us our spiritual prosperity. It shows us where God resides. And so now we praise God for it because we bear His name. Yes, Don?

Don: Yes, Bruce. I’m sorry. I have a question. Maybe you were going to get to this. But verse 18,—

Bruce: Which is,—

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Don: “Now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

Bruce: I’ll get to that.

Don: Okay, okay. (*Laughter.*) I have a question in regard to that and—

Bruce: I’m sure you do. (*Laughter.*) I’ll get to it. Give me a chance. (*Laughter.*) You can correct me after I’m done. (*Laughter.*)

Now let me give you some cross references. What’s so important about our not being ashamed of Christ? Well, first of all, go to Hebrews chapter 2 verse 11.

Transcriber’s Note: Hebrews 2:11. “For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Source. That is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers.”

Bruce: Jesus is not ashamed of us!

Participant: That’s right. Yes.

Bruce: Do you realize that? He’s not ashamed to call us—

Men: Brothers.

Bruce: And yet, are we ashamed to take a stand for Him, to be different? Hebrews 2:11. He has all kinds of reasons to be ashamed of us, but He’s not.

How about Hebrews 11 verse 16?

Transcriber’s Note: Hebrews 11:16. “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city.”

The Father is not ashamed to be called our God.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: He’s not ashamed to have us refer to Him as God our Father. On the cross the Lord scorned its shame because of us. Read Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2.

Transcriber’s Note: Hebrews 12:2. “looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Bruce: I want you to see the warning in Mark chapter 8 verse 38. Would somebody go to Mark chapter 8 verse 38.

Participant: Do you want it read, Bruce?

Bruce: Please.

Participant: “For if anyone is ashamed of Me and My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of Him when He comes in the glory of His Father and of the holy angels.”

Bruce: Now men, we need to take that seriously. Are we ashamed to take a stand for Christ? He’s not ashamed of us.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: The Father is not ashamed to have us refer to Him as God. When we take a stand for Christ, men, that should be expected. Expect opposition. That’s showing your spiritual prosperity, where the presence of the Lord is, and we’re to rejoice in it because it’s a refining test of our character. It’s an affirmation of our salvation when you and I are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Yes, Tom?

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Tom: A few years ago I was designing a church and doing a long range plan for them. And when we got to talking about a school, I said, “Well, do you want a K-8 or a K-12?”

And they said, “Well, we have a different plan for education. All of our schooling will be after school. Our children will be in the public school system, and after school is to teach them how to be Christians in the public school system.”

I said, “Wow, that’s different!” Instead of pulling out of society, they want to educate the children to go back into society. And so often we just want to take the more comfortable route.

Bruce: Amen.

Tom: I was very impressed with that.

Bruce: That’s interesting. Whenever you and I suffer because of our Christlike conduct, it ought to make us grateful for our salvation. Do you understand that? Whenever you and I suffer for the name of Christ, it ought to make us grateful for our salvation because Christlike conduct is evidence of true saving faith. And that realization ought to cause you and I to weep with joy, not complain with anger.

When you and I suffer for the name of Christ, we ought to weep with joy because it’s an affirmation of our regeneration and our salvation, not to react with anger or to complain. It’s an affirmation of our salvation.

It’s also a disciplinary judgment. Look at verse 17. Let’s begin with the household of God. It’s designed to purify our conduct. It’s designed to purify our lives, to make it even more obvious that we are one in Christ. It’s designed to make you more noticeable as a follower of Christ. It’s getting us ready for the Lord’s return. Judgment is not a judgment for believers’ sins because those sins were laid upon Christ.

Now look at verse 18. If God uses Christian suffering as a preliminary judgment of refinement, what is it going to be like for people who are disobedient? If God uses suffering as a means of refining our spiritual prosperity in our spiritual lives, what is His judgment going to be like for those who are disobedient?

Let me talk about disobedience for a moment. Did you know that the greatest sin is the sin of disobedience, the sin of unbelief? Look at 1 Peter 2:7. Let me give you some verses to understand this.

We should not leave people thinking that the gospel is an option, that it’s something you choose. Far be it for us to make optional what God says is a commandment.

Look at these verses. Romans chapter 2 verse 8 refers to disobedience as unbelief. Unbelief and disobedience are synonyms. The same thing in Acts chapter 19 verse 9.

Transcriber’s Note: Acts 19:9: But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.”

Bruce: The same thing in John chapter 3 verse 36.

Transcriber’s Note: John 3:36: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

Bruce: Disobedience is the same as unbelief. And yet we have the audacity to say , “Would you like to receive Christ as your Savior? It’s your choice. You’re an

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

American.” (*Laughter.*) “We’re in the land of choice. You’ve got free will. You can decide if you want to or not.”

The Scripture says this. Disobeying the gospel is an act of unbelief. And unbelief is an act of disobedience. That’s why the gospel is to be preached with power and conviction. That doesn’t mean that we beat people over the head with the Scripture. But we have to realize the seriousness of this, that when they reject the gospel, they’re being disobedient. It’s not a matter of choice. It’s a matter of disobedience. Yes, please?

Participant: I was traveling in the lobby of this hotel and I had CNN on, which I don’t watch much anymore. And there was a commercial for atheism, with Ronald Reagan’s son.

Bruce: Yes, I’ve seen that.

Participant: At the very end, he actually says, “From an atheist who’s not afraid to burn in hell.” And I could not believe my ears at that statement of disobedience. I started to weep at that moment because he doesn’t know any better. And that’s blatant disobedience. Have you seen that?

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: What is this?

Bruce: Ronald Reagan’s son.

Participant: I just wanted to comment on the blatancy of that disobedience.

Bruce: May God have mercy on his soul.

Participant: Amen. Yeah.

Bruce: See, you’ve got to understand, folks, that we have made the gospel an option. It would be like this. You’re a recruit at the Marine Depot at Paris Island, South Carolina. And the drill sergeant says, “Right face” to the young recruit.

And he says, “Aah, check with me later.” (*Laughter.*) I don’t think that’s going to be too well received.

Now that’s a crass example of what I’m saying. Look at those verses, men. You’ve got to understand these verses. Let me give them to you again. Romans chapter 2 verse 8.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 2:8. “But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”

Bruce: Acts chapter 19 verse 9. Let’s take a look at John 3:36. The seriousness of this! “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

You see, belief and obedience are synonyms. When you disbelieve, you’re being disobedient. And the reason you’re disobedient is because you don’t believe.

What is our role in the church? To go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creatures. Now that doesn’t mean that you go beat people over the head. You’ve got to do it with grace and truth. But all I’m saying is take seriously what it means to proclaim the gospel of Christ and the seriousness of what it means in our culture, because when you and I take that approach, we’re going to be viewed as being different. And that may cause us to suffer some persecution. Take seriously the proclamation of the gospel. Far be it for us to make optional what the Scripture says is a command.

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Now notice verse 18. If you were saved with difficulty, just think what it means for the disobedient.

Now what this means is this. Many of us were unwilling and many of us had to be dragged out of our sin by God to be saved. We had to be dragged out of our own sin. If it was difficult for that to happen—and certainly God can do it; with God all things are possible—but he’s basically saying this. Some of you were dragged out of your sin. That was a difficult thing. You resisted, you fought,. You were dragged and everything else. If it was difficult for you to be saved, if that’s possible, guess what’s going to happen to the disobedient?

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: If it’s difficult for you,. Just think what it’s going to be for the person who is disobedient and unsaved.

Take a look at Genesis chapter 19 as an example of this. Lot was unwilling and had to be dragged out of the city of Sodom. He was unwilling and God had to drag him out! Sometimes, men, it’s tough for God to save someone just because He has to drag us out of our sin. Now that does not say that God is weak. I’m not saying that at all. I’m saying this. The issue is that with the sinfulness of that person, it just takes a lot of effort to drag that person from his sin because He has chosen that from before the foundation of the world for His glory and grace. And He drags them out of their sin and sometimes that’s a difficult thing for us, certainly not for God.

So if that’s the case, what’s it going to be like for those who are disobedient? If it was hard for us to be saved because of our sin, what’s it going to be like for those who are disobedient and continue in their sin? Don, does that answer your question?

Don: Yes.

Bruce: Did I do okay?

Don: Yes, yes. (*Laughter.*) I was just wondering about the righteous one being scarcely saved , when Paul talks about “abundant grace,” and says that “He lavished His grace upon us.” But I think you did very well there.

Bruce: Thank you. (*Laughter and applause.*) Yes, sir?

Participant: Matthew 19:24, where it talks about that it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle—

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: Than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Bruce: That’s right. Talk about it. We’re so wrapped up in our sin. What did it cost God to save us?

Participant: Everything.

Bruce: It cost Him His Son! That’s a lot of effort!

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: If it cost Him the life of His Son to save us, what is it going to be like for those who reject Him by being disobedient to the gospel?

Participant: There is no salvation.

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

Bruce: There is none. Exactly. My point is this. Charles Spurgeon says that sometimes people need to be kicked and dragged into the kingdom of heaven because they resist and they love their sin so much.

Participant: Yeah.

Bruce: But it cost God His Son in order to do that. What’s it going to be like for those who are disobedient? That’s the point that he’s making.

So when you and I suffer because of our Christlikeness, we rejoice in it. We praise God for it. It’s an affirmation of our salvation and it’s a refinement of our character. It purifies us to make us more Christlike.

And lastly, let’s wrap it up and look at verse 19. We are to commit ourselves because of it. When you and I are suffering in the will of God because of our righteousness, our Christlike conduct, we’re to commit ourselves to God in the care of it. And how do we do that?

Well, notice what he says at the very end of that, in 1 Peter chapter 4. How is it that you and I commit ourselves to that? The word *commit* is a technical term for depositing money with a friend. That’s how it was used in the Biblical times. It was a technical term. Sometimes they didn’t have banks. They didn’t have banks then. Before going on a journey, they would let their money stay with the safekeeping of a friend. And the person was bound by honor to protect that wealth and return it when the person came back from their trip.

That’s the same word Jesus used when He said, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit”—Luke chapter 23 verse 46. Christ committed and entrusted His life to God in the midst of the anguish of the cross because He was certain that in committing Himself to God that God would take care of Him in the midst of that trial. That’s the same thing that Jesus is telling us. You can commit yourself to God in the midst of your trials. You expect it. You rejoice in it. You praise God for it and you commit yourself to it.

How is it that you commit yourself to it? Look at the very last words of chapter 4. “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing—“ Complaining. (*Laughter.*) What does it say?

Participant: Good.

Bruce: Do you know how you commit yourself in the midst of persecution?

Participant: Do good.

Bruce: Do good. What was it that got you in trouble in the first place with the world?

Participant: Doing good.

Bruce: Doing good. How is it that you commit yourself to God in the midst of being persecuted by the world for doing good? Do good. That’s what you and I continue to do. The way that we commit ourselves to doing good is this, because when you’re committing yourself to doing good and continue to do that, you’re basically saying, “I know that God is in control of this. This is something that He has sovereignly ordained. And I’m entrusting myself to Him because I’m going to continue what I’m going to do, and that is do good because I know God will care for me.” That’s how you commit yourself to God in the midst of your suffering. You continue to do good.

“Suffering According to the Will of God Part 2”

In the Sermon On the Mount Jesus says that in the goodness that you do, let all men see the goodness that comes from God because you’re doing good. That’s the way that you and I commit ourselves. It’s to continue to do good. It was good that got us into trouble in the first place with the world. And the way that we commit ourselves is to entrust ourselves.

Notice that word *entrust*. There’s a difference between being submissive and entrusting. Jesus entrusted Himself to God. He never submitted Himself to God. He submitted to men but entrusted Himself to God.

You take that act of submission and you entrust that to God. You put it on deposit because you know this. He will care for it and give it back to you when He returns in all of His glory. That’s the idea of committing yourself. It’s a technical term. Just as I would leave my money with you and you are honor bound to protect it until I come back, when I commit myself to God in the midst of persecution, I’m saying that He will take care of that. I will commit that to Him and He will give me back the glory that is due when He returns in all of His glory. Tom?

Tom: What hit my mind was when Jesus was on the cross and commits Himself to His Father, His Father has already rejected Him. And yet He trusts God to that extent. That’s mind-boggling.

Bruce: Yes, it is. Well, men, a basic summary is this. The way we commit ourselves to God in the midst of being persecuted is by continuing to do good. When evil is returned for good, that’s satanic.

Participant: Come on!

Bruce: Returning evil for good is satanic. Returning good for good is human. But returning good for evil is divine.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: See the difference? Returning evil for good is satanic. That’s what Satan does. He makes evil things happen to good people for acts of goodness. That’s satanic. Humans do one good thing in return for another good thing. But only the follower of Christ can return good for evil. That is divine.

And as we commit ourselves to the Person and work of Christ in all of His glory, may God bind our hearts in humble allegiance to the cross and render us more radiant for the benefit of a dark and perishing world to the praise and the glory of His grace, as we commit ourselves in the midst of being persecuted by a world that is anti-Christ by continuing to do good things because it calls attention to our spiritual prosperity and reveals the location of the Lord. It’s an affirmation of our salvation and our regeneration. And it’s a refinement of our character to become more Christlike. And we continue to do good things for Him for His glory. May God be pleased to do that for His sake.

Let’s pray. Father, thank You for the help that You give us, how to live a life that is Christlike and not to live a life as a self-appointed overseer in somebody else’s life. Help us not to be meddlers. Help us to be missionaries. Help us to be men of God who are committed to You by continuing to do good things for Your glory. And may it be done for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Men: Amen. (*Applause.*)