

# Commit Your Soul To God

*1 Peter 4:12-19*

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## **I. Fiery Trials**

**“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (1 Peter 4:12).**

### **Fiery Trials...Not Strange For Christians**

Peter here clearly dismisses any notion of the Christian faith which suggests continuous ease. Peter’s readers were living in a very dark era in human history. The covenant people of God themselves – the Jews – because of their evil and adulterous ways, were about to undergo all but total annihilation. Christians were under persecution from the state and religion.

The darker the culture, the greater the persecution. In our present culture, which is an evangelized yet apostate culture, we do not yet feel the heat of the evil which surrounds us simply because it hasn’t reached that fever pitch. But when people possess the light of Christ in the midst of darkness they should not think it strange to undergo fiery trial.

### **Lawnmower**

It is as if the people of God are a lawnmower. As the grass gets higher and contains weeds, rocks and debris, the lawnmower should expect it’s work to be harder. In the final analysis the weeds, rocks and debris will not prevail. It is the lawnmower (or more accurately the mower, that is, the Lord) who will prevail. But this will not happen without a great deal of suffering. But unlike a lawnmower which has blades that become dull from hitting the rocks, the Christian becomes sharper with conflict.

### **Refining Fire**

Peter writes of the “fiery trial”. This term is used of the burning by which metals are roasted and reduced. A refiners fire which removes rust, dross or fat. The fiery trial is used to speak of calamities or trials that test the character. Peter writes of the fiery trial “which is to try you”. That is the trial of man’s fidelity, integrity, virtue and constancy. It is not so much a test to see how you will do (although knowing how well we do at something is a necessary bit of information to determine a course for growth), it is a test to refine. Since we are aware that God is refining us through the course of events (even the sinful behavior of sinful people) we are called to a response. We are not to grumble and therefore curse the sovereignty of God.

## II. Communion In Christ's Sufferings

**“But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13).**

### Suffering For Good, Not Evil

Christians are called to rejoice. We are rejoice to the extent that we partake in Christ’s suffering. Christians come into communion or fellowship with Christ’s suffering when they suffer for their faith. Peter is going to make it quite clear that if you suffer for doing wrong you do not fall into this category. In verse fifteen he writes, **“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters.”** In other words if you’re suffering because you’re a thief who is not to be trusted or a busybody who meddles in other men’s affairs and is therefore avoided the suffering does not fall into this category.

In order for Christians to be glad with exceeding joy when Christ’s glory is revealed (perhaps an allusion to judgment day or perhaps periods in history when God brings His righteous judgments to bear on men) they must share in the kind of suffering Christ experienced which was for being righteous.

### Suffering Is Not Meritorious

We must also keep in mind that although God rewards Christians for suffering for their faith, their suffering is not meritorious. That means God, although He does reward godly suffering, is not obliged to do so. I may tell my daughter that if she is a good girl we will go to Disneyland. But being good does not earn her a ticket. Apart from my good graces her good deeds would yield nothing. If, in my absence, she went to the ticket counter and presented her good works as a means to entrance she would be turned away. Good works mean nothing apart from the graciousness of the Father.

### Suffering Signifies Something

But suffering for the faith is the sign of a great blessing in your life. Peter continues,

**“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified” (1 Peter 4:14).**

If we are the kinds of people who find ourselves to be the recipients of reproach (blame, shame and disgrace) from the wicked and ungodly because of our faithfulness to Christ it is a sign of something. It means that the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. Suffering for Christ signifies being in Christ. Here are the multifaceted way of viewing an

single event. You may be the object of a pummeling and reproach in which God is blasphemed (or spoken evil of). But on your part God is glorified.

### **Christian's Reproached, God Blasphemed**

What we see in the verse is that God so identifies Himself with His children that a reproach leveled at them is to be considered a blasphemy against Him. He also considers the insults of the ungodly upon His children to be glorious to His name. It is very important, as we entertain compliments and insults, to consider the source.

### **High Fives From Fools**

Solomon wrote, ***"It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools"*** (Ecclesiastes 7:5). We must be careful that in our wisdom, counsel and conduct we are not receiving 'high fives' from the ungodly. If Christians are to suffer, it should be due to faithfulness. And in regard to this type of suffering, we should never be ashamed but regard it as glorious to God.

***"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. <sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter"*** (1 Peter 4:15,16).

### **III. Judgment At The House Of God**

***"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God"*** (1 Peter 4:17)?

Peter's use of the phrase, "for the time has come" likely references a special time in history when God would visit His judgment on earth in a prophetic fulfillment. Ezekiel nine, Malachi three (as well as other prophecies – including Jesus' own prophecies of the destruction of the temple) may be in mind here.

### **The Genuine House Of God**

Judgment was going to start at the house of God. There was much debate about what the house of God was. Was the house of God still the temple? Or was it the church. The verse contains the answer. The house of God is made up of those who obey (have not refused to believe) the gospel. The distinction between the genuine, new covenant, house of God and the apostate house of God would soon be made manifest. The judgment on Jerusalem was eminent. Let's take a moment and read of the prophesied event in Ezekiel nine.

**“Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, “Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each *with* a deadly weapon in his hand.”<sup>2</sup> And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them *was* clothed with linen and had a writer’s inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.<sup>3</sup> Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who *had* the writer’s inkhorn at his side;<sup>4</sup> and the LORD said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.” (Here we see the great misuse of the Biblical notion of the mark. God was marking out those who are His. The mark of God or the mark of the beast are determined by those who have a heart after God and those who have no God but Caesar. Not subcutaneous computer chips)<sup>5</sup> To the others He said in my hearing, “Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity.<sup>6</sup> “Utterly slay old *and* young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom *is* the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who *were* before the temple.<sup>7</sup> Then He said to them, “Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!” And they went out and killed in the city.<sup>8</sup> So it was, that while they were killing them, I was left *alone*; and I fell on my face and cried out, and said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?”<sup>9</sup> Then He said to me, “The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah *is* exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, ‘The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!’<sup>10</sup> “And as for Me also, My eye will neither spare, nor will I have pity, *but* I will recompense their deeds on their own head.”<sup>11</sup> Just then, the man clothed with linen, who *had* the inkhorn at his side, reported back and said, “I have done as You commanded me” (Ezekiel 9:1-11).**

### **A Warning To Elders**

All of this is a reference to the fall of Jerusalem. The temple had become a desolate abomination. And those who associated only with the temple, and not with Jesus, would find this siege at their doorstep. It is no wonder that at the beginning of chapter five Peter exhorts the elders in their roles of leadership. The elders of Jerusalem had become blind guides for which reason Jesus said to them, **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15).**

## God Judges In History

Let's make no mistake about it. God judges. Not merely in eternity but in history as well. As it has been stated. Nations are not judged in heaven, they are therefore judged in history. We read this as a clear and repeating action of God throughout the Old Testament and we shouldn't think God no longer functions in this manner. The proper response of the Christian to these types of judgments is addressed in the next verse.

### IV. Committing Our Souls

**“Now ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’<sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to *Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:18,19).**

#### Proverbs 11:31

Peter is most likely quoting from Proverbs 11:31 which reads, **“If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, How much more the ungodly and the sinner” (Proverbs 11:31)**. Notice where the recompense (or payment) is made... on the earth. Jesus, speaking of this judgment makes the comment, **“And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:22)**.

#### A Judgment Felt By All

In other words, God was going to visit His judgment on the earth. It was a judgment that would be felt by those who trust in God and believe in Jesus and by the ungodly (those who have no reverence for God) and the sinner (those who have no justice toward men). Though this judgment would be painful for all, God would provide deliverance for His children. The ungodly however would find this visitation to be overwhelming.

#### Three Kingdoms – Two Destroyed, One Strengthened

There were essentially three kingdoms existing at the time of this epistle – the kingdom of Rome, the kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Christ. The smallest and seemingly most insignificant of these kingdoms was the kingdom of Christ. Rome would destroy Israel in A. D. 70. Rome itself would eventually crumble. But it would be the Kingdom of Christ that would continue. The heavenly judgment destroys Nations who take rank against the Living God but the judgment of God only strengthens the Kingdom of Christ.

## **Common Grace Versus Judgment**

It is for this reason Peter would finish this section by writing, **“Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19)**. Truly the rain falls on the just and the unjust. This common grace grows the crops of all men. But the judgments of God which God visits upon people in history will either strengthen or debilitate. If you are in Christ it’s design is to strengthen you.

## **The Will Of God**

The suffering the righteous go through, Peter tells us, is according to the will of God. Never did a martyr have to resign himself into thinking that the flames surrounding him were somehow outside the pale of His loving Father’s sovereign hand. Some seek a false comfort by assigning these tragedies to the complete and ultimate control of the enemy. And although He may be instrumental (as with the cross) an instrument is all he is. He is never in control.

## **Commit My Soul**

I am therefore called to commit my soul<sup>1</sup> (to give to someone for safe keeping) to the creator and owner of my soul. I am not to allow myself or my soul to be tempted by fear or personal retaliation. Christians are to be committed to doing good for the simple reason that, even in the face of what appears to be tragic, good is done to us.

How many families have broken up and how many nations have deteriorated because people react to the sin of man rather than the goodness of God. How tempted we are to commit our souls to ourselves in personal vindication.

## **The Just For The Unjust**

Every single day we must recall that the just died for the unjust. The just one is Jesus and the unjust my friends is you and me. God’s righteous judgments should overwhelm us all – in history and in heaven. But God graciously judged His own son in our place. We are to rest our souls in that truth. And that is sufficient for any man, who by the grace of God has the eyes to perceive it, to commit in doing good.

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<sup>1</sup> Soul can be translated ‘self’.