

Review

We are in a study through the epistle of 1Peter. He is writing to Christians everywhere, most recently regarding the fact that we need to love one another and use our spiritual gifts to serve the church.

4:12 Fiery Trials

Ordeals. Trials. The difficulties we face in life. By definition, they are anything that tests us.

You're in the car on the way to church, and end up in a major fight with your spouse. Your heart is tested: "Am I going to recognize this as an attack of the enemy and being loving and forgiving?" That's your trial, that's your test.

You are falsely accused at work for something and lose your job. Your faith is tested: "Am I going to become bitter and give up? Or am I going to have faith that God is sovereign over my life and is about to make known the next step of His plan?" That's your trial, that's your test.

The list of possible trials is endless. And notice that Peter describes them as "fiery." Literally, they are burning, which is God's method of refining. Trials and tribulations, tests and difficulties, they are the way that God refines us.

Don't Be Surprised

I have been a Christian long enough now to be amused at our reaction to trials. You see, almost without exception, people are surprised when a trial hits. "I wasn't expecting this! It came out of nowhere!"

But I always wonder, "Why are we surprised?" Because Peter says, "Your fiery ordeal isn't as if some strange thing were happening to you." As a matter of fact, the strange thing is having no trials. When life is free and easy, and everything is smooth sailing - that's when we should be surprised!

Personally, I get a bit paranoid when everything is going well. Because the harsh reality is that the Christian life tends to be made up of fiery ordeals. Jesus promised us long ago,

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me

you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

He has given us the key: stop looking for peace that comes from good circumstances, and instead find peace in our good God. If we learn this, then we have learned one of life's greatest lessons.

4:13-14 Keep On Rejoicing

The biggest trial that the Christians in Peter's day were suffering was persecution. We as Americans have a hard time understanding true persecution for our faith, and as a result, our sufferings for Christ tend to be more along the lines of "He thinks I'm crazy for being a Christian," or "She won't talk to me ever since I witnessed to her."

Whether our sufferings are relationally difficult or physically painful, Peter tells us that we are sharing the sufferings of Christ, and we're blessed, so we should rejoice.

Of course, Jesus told us the same thing:

Matt. 5:10-12 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

But it's one thing to be able to repeat what Jesus says. It's another thing to take such a hard truth and apply it. But once again, Peter knows what he's talking about. You may recall that the book of Acts tells us that he and the other apostles were arrested and brought before the Council. They were reminded that they had been ordered not to teach in the name of Jesus.

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

Then, they were flogged and warned...

Acts 5:4-420 ...not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been consid-

ered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

And so when Peter tells us to rejoice when we suffer for Jesus, it's not academic. He counted it a privilege, and expects us to do the same.

4:15-16 Don't Be Bad

Now, Peter clarifies that if you're suffering for doing wrong, it's your own dumb fault. No doubt he'd seen his share of criminals in the prisons he'd been thrown into. He warns Christians that they'd better "make sure" that they're not involved in this. Saints, I want to be just as frank as Peter is here: If you get arrested for theft, or drugs, sexual misconduct, drunk driving, fighting, etc., it's your own fault and you deserve what you get. So knock it off now before you end up in jail.

As A "Christian"

Peter says, "but hey, if you suffer as a 'Christian,' that's different. Here's a trivia question: how many hundreds of times do you think the word "Christian" shows up in the Bible? Two hundred? Three hundred? Actually, believe it or not, the word "Christian" shows up a grand total of three times in the entire Bible.

You see, followers of Jesus Christ weren't always called Christians. As a matter of fact, the word started being used in the city of Antioch (Acts 11:26). It was used as an insult.

King Agrippa mockingly told the apostle Paul that if didn't stop witnessing,

Acts 26:28 ...“In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”

Understanding the word "Christian" as an insult makes Peter's tone more understandable:

1Pet. 4:16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

4:17-19 Saved With Difficulty

Those who insult us by saying, "you Christians with your blind

faith and gullible minds are fools," are someday going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ

Phil. 2:10-11 ...at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...

I have heard far too many people make salvation an easy, all-encompassing plan. Anybody who is nice, anybody who's a good person, any person who is religious, anybody that we like... they're all going to make it to heaven just fine.

But guess what? Jesus said,

John 8:24 "...unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins."

Salvation is exclusive to those who have believed in Jesus Christ as Lord. But you know what? It gets even more exclusive than that. Jesus also said,

Matt. 7:21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."

Matt. 7:14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Many who lived their lives going to church and believing that they were saved will have an unfortunate confrontation with God at the judgment. This is why we are called to...

Phil. 2:12 ...work out your salvation with fear and trembling

This is why we must be focused on doing the will of God and living in righteousness.

So, if it's this difficult for us, then just imagine what is going to become of those who persecute us and have refused the gospel of God... May God have mercy on them, and may He use us to continue to present the gospel to them while they are still able to hear it.