

• Peter restarts his teaching about suffering

1. They should not be surprised at troubles and tribulations

• Some troubles are necessary

2. Rejoice in sufferings

• We rejoice, not in the trouble itself but in the fact that we know what God is doing

3. Special promises for those who suffer

• The very word 'Christ' often rouses the furious animosity of the world

The last words of 1 Peter 4:11 ('...to whom belongs the glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen') almost sounded like the end of the letter. What happened was that Peter was led away by the flow of his thought into a slight digression and allowed his treatment of suffering¹ to shade off into appeals for godly living during such difficult times². So he ends the digression with an ascription of glory to God, and restarts his teaching about suffering³.

1. They should not be surprised at troubles and tribulations. We Christians always seem to be surprised when troubles come. 'Surely this ought not to be happening to me!' is our feeling. Actually the very opposite is the case. '*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is coming among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you...*'¹. We have been told very clearly that it is 'by means of many tribulations' that we shall enter into an experience of God's kingdom. We actually need some troubles to bring us to be everything that we ought to be for God. This is why Peter says they come 'if it is necessary'². It has been granted to us – as an act of God's generosity! – to suffer for Christ's sake³. We should never be surprised by troubles.

2. He urges them to rejoice in sufferings. This is a common theme in the New Testament. James and Paul say much the same thing¹; and the early Christians really did rejoice in suffering (see Acts 5:41 – in which Peter was involved). Now Peter says the same thing. '*Do not be surprised...*'², *but as you share Christ's sufferings, rejoice, in order that also in the revelation of his glory you may rejoice and be glad*'³.

Of course, the Christian does not exactly rejoice in the trouble itself! We are not expected to enjoy suffering. 'All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful'¹. What we rejoice about is not the trouble itself but the fact that we know what God is doing. 'Consider it all joy ... **knowing** ...'². 'We also rejoice in our tribulations, **knowing**...'³. There is something that we know! We know that God is taking tough and speedy measures to shape our character and purify our faith. Also – Peter's point here – we know that sharing Christ's sufferings will bring abundance of joy in the day when Jesus comes. We rejoice now knowing that we shall doubly rejoice then. We rejoice at the prospect of rejoicing!

3. There are special promises for those who suffer for they are associated with Christ. Peter says: '*If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed! For the Spirit of glory and of God is resting upon you*'¹.

It seems that the persecution that was beginning in the days of Peter, in and around Roman Asia Minor, had fixed itself not on any particular crime, but upon the mere fact that some people were claiming Christ as their Saviour. The very word 'Christ' was making pagans angry. Often what rouses the furious animosity of the world is not any particular thing we are doing but the mere fact that out of regard for Jesus we are living a godly life. Somehow it makes them feel horribly guilty.

¹ 3:13-4:6
² 4:7-11
³ 4:12-19

¹ 4:12

² 1:6
³ Philippians 1:29

¹ see James 1:2; Romans 5:3

² 4:12

³ 4:13

¹ Hebrews 12:11

² James 1:2
³ Romans 5:3

¹ 4:14

• *Jesus went around doing good but some hated Him*

• *Also true for Christians*

• *A foretaste of glory*

4. The persecuted Christian goes on to glorify God

• *We belong to Christ – so shame!*

• *Trusting and glorifying God*

Think of Jesus. He went around doing good and healing people and teaching them about the kingdom of God. He never did anyone any harm. The ordinary people liked to hear Him. Yet there were some who hated Him, and from the earliest days were looking for ways to get rid of Him. Why? What had He done that made them so bitter? It was simply that His pure and sweet love of God aroused their feelings of guilt. They knew that they were not like Jesus, and that made them angry.

The same thing is likely to happen to the Christian. No matter how sweet-natured we may be, some will dislike our love of God. Our refusal to join in with their sins will make them resentful, and soon we find we are being persecuted just for the very name 'Christ'.

Our sufferings should not be caused by our own crimes! Peter says: 'For none of you must suffer as a murderer or thief or a wrongdoer or as an agitator¹ but if one suffers as a "Christian", let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name'².

There are special promises for the Christian who suffers for Jesus in this way. 'For the Spirit of glory and of God is resting upon you'. In such a situation we can expect more of the power of the Holy Spirit. He will give us a foretaste of glory. A little of the final rejoicing of heaven will come to us even now.

4. The persecuted Christian goes on to glorify God. 'Let him not be ashamed!' says Peter. There is a temptation to be ashamed when we are being badly treated. We tend needlessly to blame ourselves. 'What have I done', we ask ourselves, 'that I should be experiencing such unreasonable treatment? Why is this person endlessly slandering me, criticizing me, looking for ways to twist and misinterpret my every action, refusing to allow me even to finish a sentence in my own defence...?'

Let such a person not be ashamed! Perhaps we have made a few mistakes, but the persecution is far greater than anything that could be explained by a few mistakes on our part. If we suffer as a 'Christian' – because it is known that we belong to 'Christ's people' – then no shame or guilt attaches to that! 'Christian' means 'one of Christ's supporters' just as 'Herodian' (in Peter's day) meant 'one of Herod's supporters'.

We go on trusting God! And we glorify God in that name of 'Christian'.

1 4:15
2 4:16



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