

• *Suffering helps the Christian to break from sin*

**1. The people of God sometimes face purifying judgements**

• *Peter is building on an Old Testament idea*

• *Peter is not referring to the final judgement day*

• *The 'house of God' here is the church*

**2. God's enemies experience judgement - final and without remedy**

• *The judgement of God's enemies is often delayed*

• *God's wrath*

**3. God's chastening for the Christian**

• *Salvation takes place in stages*

'For it is the time for judgement to begin; and it begins at the house of God'. If the flow of Peter's thought is followed, it can be seen that by 'judgement' Peter is referring to what is happening in his own day. He has been writing about suffering. Suffering helps the Christian to break from sin<sup>□1</sup>. They are facing a 'fiery ordeal' and are likely to be ridiculed for the name of Christ<sup>□2</sup>. These are the thoughts that Peter is explaining when he says 'For it is the time for judgement to begin...'

**1. The people of God occasionally face purifying judgements.** Peter is developing the idea of the 'fiery trial'<sup>□1</sup>. Peter is building on the Old Testament idea that God's people get specially refined. 'You only have I chosen...' said God to Israel<sup>□2</sup>, 'therefore I will punish you for all your sins'. The people of God get disciplined for their sins, although for a while the world escapes the fullness of God's judgement. In Ezekiel 9, when God is about to chastise the entire nation of Israel and send the nation to exile in Babylon, God's judgement begins at the temple. Only those who have grieved over the sins of the temple escape the coming judgement<sup>□3</sup>. God says 'Begin at my sanctuary'<sup>□4</sup>. God said through Malachi 'He will be like a refiner's fire ... He will purify the Levites ... Then Yahweh will have people who bring offerings in righteousness...' <sup>□5</sup>.

So Peter is not referring to the **final** judgement day. 'Right now in our time', says Peter, 'it is a time when God's people are about to be refined'.

The 'house of God' is the church. Peter has already said<sup>□1</sup> that the church may be pictured as being a spiritual temple, a 'holy building' consisting of living stones built upon a living Saviour.

**2. The enemies of God experience judgement that is final and without remedy.** The judgements upon God's people are temporary, and they are purifying, but the judgements upon the world are different. 'And if it starts with us, what will be the end of those who do not believe the gospel of God?' <sup>□1</sup>.

The judgement of God's people tends to come swiftly; the judgement of God's enemies tends to be delayed. It is time, says Peter, for judgement to **begin** at the house of God – but elsewhere the judgement will be delayed. The ungodly 'store up wrath for the day of wrath'<sup>□1</sup>. But we may get some idea of what will happen to the ungodly from what happens to us. 'If this is what **we** have to endure, what will the **unsaved** have to endure?' asks Peter. If this is just a light, correcting rebuke, what will it be like to face the wrath of God without compassion or limitation?

**3. God's chastening lets the Christian know that he or she has a lot to learn.** There is much maturing that has yet to take place in the lives of each Christian. 'And if the righteous person scarcely is saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?' <sup>□1</sup>.

What does it mean that 'the righteous person scarcely is saved'? It must be remembered that salvation takes places in stages. We often are very preoccupied with the first stage. 'We are saved'. we say.

□1 4:1-6  
□2 4:12-16

□1 4:12  
□2 Amos 3:2  
□3 Ezekiel 9:4-6  
□4 Ezekiel 9:6  
□5 Malachi 3

□1 in 2:4-5a

□1 4:17

□1 see Romans 2:5

□1 4:18

Yes, it is true, the Christian is 'saved'. But actually that is not the entire story. The Christian is saved, he is being saved, and he shall be saved.

(i) Past

(i) He has been saved. He or she is justified; he is born again; he is clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. The righteousness of God is working in his life.

(ii) Present

(ii) He is being saved. God is progressively, day by day, delivering him or her from the power of sin.

(iii) Future

(iii) He will be saved. God will raise him from the dead and reward him or her for living for Jesus. His righteousness will be vindicated. Everyone will hear his being honoured by Jesus. His glory will shine out from his resurrected body.

• 'Scarcely saved' refers to stages two and three

• Sanctification is a battle

When Peter says 'the righteous person scarcely is saved' he is speaking of the second and third of these stages of salvation. He is 'righteous' already. The first stage has already been passed! That was the easy stage. Believing in Jesus is easy when the Spirit is working in our lives. But Peter is not referring to 'the lost' getting saved; he is referring to 'the righteous' getting saved! The righteous need to be progressively delivered from sinful ways, sinful habits, sinful attitudes that hang over from their old pre-Christian days. The righteous need to lay up treasure in heaven, so that Jesus will one day say 'Well done!' to them. But in **this** sense 'the righteous person scarcely is saved'. Sanctification is a battle. We tend to be slow in learning. That is why we need these purifying judgements. They drive us to God and speed up the process of sanctification. They carry forward our salvation. They drive us to the word of God which makes us grow in salvation<sup>1</sup>. 'The gate is small and the road is narrow that leads to life, and only a few find it'<sup>2</sup>.

1 2:2

2 Matthew 7:14

• Slow learners need purifying judgements

So if the righteous have a battle and have to endure purifying judgements, what hope is there for the unsaved?

**4. Peter encourages persistent faith**

**4. Peter encourages suffering believers in persistent faith.** Our task is to make sure we are in God's will and persist in faith. 'Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will, trust their souls to a faithful Creator when they do what is right'<sup>1</sup>. God is 'Creator'; He controls everything. He is faithful; we can trust Him. If we persist in doing what is right, we shall hear Jesus say 'Well done!'

1 4:19



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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