

## Peter's Epistles #36

### Undeserved Suffering on the Cusp of the End Times

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:1-19

(also available on-line at [ichthys.com](http://ichthys.com))

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#### Paragraph I (vv. 1-6)

(1) Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that whoever has suffered in his flesh [as Jesus did] is finished with sin, (2) to the end that [we also like Him] may no longer live what is left of our lives on earth in human lusts but in God's will. (3) For the time which has already elapsed (in your life) is sufficient to have wrought what the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) desire, as they proceed [in their lives] in debaucheries, lusts, binges, orgies, drunken-parties, and [other] lawless idolatries. (4) [Unbelievers no doubt] find it strange that you do not rush to engage with them in such excessive carousing of this sort in the same way they do, and they slander your good name as a result, (5) but they are going to have to give an account [for all this] to the One who stands ready to judge the living (i.e., you believers) and the dead (i.e., the unbelievers who oppose you). (6) For it is for this [very] reason that the gospel has been proclaimed to the [spiritually] dead as well [as to you], in order that they [too], after they have been convicted in the flesh according to [their] human conduct, might live by means of the Spirit according to God[']s grace].

1st Peter 4:1-6

#### The Example of Christ (v.1):

Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that whoever has suffered in his flesh [as Jesus did] is finished with sin.

1st Peter 4:1

Not for the first time (cf. 1Pet.2:21-23), Peter directly appeals here to the example of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to prod us to follow in His footsteps, just as Jesus Himself told us to do.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Matthew 16:24 NKJV

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Mark 8:34 NKJV

Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Luke 9:23 NKJV

We belong to Jesus Christ. He bought us with His blood, His spiritual death on the cross whereby He paid for all of our sins. We owe Him everything: deliverance from death and judgment and our consequent eternal life. Therefore we should always be ready and willing to do what He wants us to do. He is our life, so we should always be willing to be living our lives for Him.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

It is important to note, however, that this is merely an analogy: Christ's suffering in the darkness on the cross in propitiating the sins of all mankind was in its smallest part far beyond anything we can imagine, far less endure. The judgment of our Lord Jesus in our place whereby He paid for the sins of the world was so intense that it is termed by scripture "death" (and even pluralized as "deaths" at Isaiah 53:9 to denote that intensity). It is that spiritual death, "the blood of Christ", to which Peter refers here in verse one of our chapter.<sup>1</sup> Just as Christ had to suffer physically to save us, and had to "set His face like flint" (Is.50:7; cf. Matt.26:38-42; Mk.14:34-36; Lk.22:42), in order to endure the immensity of the spiritual death of the cross, so it is incumbent upon us who belong to Him to emulate our Lord's example – *not* in paying for sin (something we could never do), but in resisting sin.

(15) But just as He who has called you is holy, you too should be entirely holy in your behavior. (16) For the scripture says: "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev.11:44-45; 19:2).

1st Peter 1:15-16

Christ is our example in all things, so that we who belong to Him should ever be "pursuing sanctification", that is, holiness, following in the footsteps of our sinless Lord and Savior (Heb.12:14). Those who have advanced in the faith to the point of spiritual maturity have "shared the suffering of Christ" in the testing received necessary to reach that mark. Having thus already endured much in terms of pushing through all resistance to spiritual growth, progress and production, so as to also have endured the testing of undeserved suffering as well, mature believers should, of all Christians, take care to avoid becoming weary so as to slack off on spiritual advance, or sloppy in their application so as to fall into unsanctified behavior. Having already suffered much for Jesus Christ, mature believers, of all Christians, should be dead set against backing off on the former through fatigue so as to become "weary of doing" the good things we should be doing (Gal.6:9), or on the latter through a careless attitude towards "the sin which easily besets" (Heb.12:1). The Spirit helps us avoid both negative extremes through helping us recall the example of Jesus Christ:

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<sup>1</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.4, "The Blood of Christ".

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith (cf. "Alpha and Omega"), who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

### **The Same Mind-Set (v.1):**

Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that whoever has suffered in his flesh [as Jesus did] is finished with sin.

1st Peter 4:1

The word translated "mind-set" is the Greek *ennoia* (derived from the preposition *en*, meaning "in", and the noun *nous*, meaning "mind"). "Thinking" and "thought pattern" would also be acceptable translations here. Believers are told to have the same mind-set, thinking and thought pattern that our Lord had and has – and the only way we can even hope to approach that lofty ideal is by infusing our hearts with the truth, which is the very thinking of Jesus Christ.

For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct Him? But we possess the very mind of Christ (i.e., the Bible which represents Christ's very thinking).

1st Corinthians 2:16

It is true that Peter is applying this principle in particular here to our resistance to sinful behavior, but this goal of emulating our Lord's thinking – and therefore our Lord's approach – should be one which believers have in view in regard to everything we think, because what we think is always reflected in what we say and do as well.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Matthew 16:24 NIV

Following Jesus Christ requires self-denial (that is, putting spiritual priorities ahead of worldly ones), embracing the allegiance we have sworn to Him in putting our trust in Him for life eternal (that is, keeping the cross, His sacrifice for us, and our response in gratitude to Him at the center of our heart), and following Him wherever He leads us (that is, responding to His guidance through the Spirit in spiritual growth, progress and production). All of these aspects of the Christian life are so much easier if we learn to keep our eyes focused on Jesus Christ – and really nigh on impossible if we fail to do so.

I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."

Psalms 16:2

I have kept the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved.

Psalm 16:8

My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.

Psalm 25:15 NIV

Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 37:4 NIV

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

Psalm 73:25 NIV

But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign Lord; in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death.

Psalm 141:8 NIV

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

(8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the deliverance (lit. "salvation") of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.

1st Peter 1:8-9

For [Moses] grew strong by seeing the One who cannot be seen (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye on the invisible Lord Jesus Christ).

Hebrews 11:27b

. . . turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith.

Hebrews 12:2a

### **Arm Yourself (v.1):**

Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that whoever has suffered in his flesh [as Jesus did] is finished with sin.

1st Peter 4:1

We have covered the Bible's frequent use of military analogies before,<sup>2</sup> an unsurprising device since warfare is a perfect descriptor of the Christian life: we believers find ourselves in enemy territory here in the devil's world; as a result, we are constantly in deadly combat with the evil

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<sup>2</sup> See [BB 6A: Peripatology](#), section II.2.D, "The Military Analogy".

one's forces, seen and unseen.<sup>3</sup>

For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:12

Stay sober and wide awake. Your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

1st Peter 5:8

This warfare of ours is not physical (as cults have sometimes construed it; cf. the "Crusades"), but spiritual. As such, the weapons of our warfare are likewise spiritual.

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

1st Thessalonians 5:8 NIV (cf. Is.59:17)

(10) So come what may, draw strength from the Lord and be strengthened through His powerful might. (11) Put on the full armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the tricks of the devil. (12) For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against [angelic] princes, against [angelic] authorities, against the cosmic powers of this [present] darkness, against evil spirits in the heavenly realms. (13) Keeping that in mind, put on God's complete set of armor so that you may be able to resist attack on the day evil surrounds you, and stand your ground – once you have done all that it is your responsibility to do (i.e., prior spiritual growth and present spiritual application). (14) So stand your ground, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (15) and having dressed your feet in preparation for [sharing] the gospel of peace (i.e., reconciliation with God as the result of faith in Christ). (16) And at all times take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery missiles of the evil one.

Ephesians 6:10-16

In order to be successful in this unseen spiritual combat to which we have been called, we need to "arm ourselves", and that is only possible to do through the truth of the Word of God.

And [in this spiritual warfare] put on the helmet of salvation and gird on the sword of the Spirit – which is the Word of truth.

Ephesians 6:17

Now in our context, the particular "armor" we are to don in order to carry out the will of God for our lives is the very thinking of Jesus Christ. This is essentially what all "armor up" passages in scripture are saying. For we cannot have righteous and hopeful thinking, for example, without first having "eaten" the truth and fully digested it in faith, so that in the time of testing we may

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<sup>3</sup> See [SR 4: Satan's World System](#), section I, "Strangers in the Devil's Realm".

have the will and the ability to apply that "sword of truth" through response to the Spirit's guidance as He mobilizes said truth in our responsive application of it to whatever we face in this life, the particular challenge in our context being the resisting of sin.

### **Whoever has Suffered in his Flesh is Finished with Sin (v.1):**

Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that whoever has suffered in his flesh [as Jesus did] is finished with sin.

1st Peter 4:1

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been redeemed from sin (Gal.3:13; Eph.1:7; Col.1:14). Therefore, in terms of our position in Christ, we are holy, sanctified, and sinless as those who are one with our dear Savior (Rom.8:1; cf. Acts 26:18; 1Cor.6:11; Heb.10:10; 10:14). Furthermore, once resurrected, we will be ultimately free from sin for all eternity. In between, however, we are left here in the world after salvation in these bodies still infected with the sin nature, and it is our job, our calling, to make our experience line up with our godly position in anticipation of that ultimate deliverance. We are followers of Jesus Christ, and it is our duty to behave in a way commensurate with that highest of all callings.

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, keep seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Keep thinking on the things above, and not the things on the earth.

Colossians 3:1-2

(7) You too once walked in these ways when your life was defined by them. (8) But now, see to it that you put away all these things, anger, wrath, wickedness, slander, [and all] foul talk from your mouth. (9) Stop lying to each other, having put aside your "former person" (10) and having put on the "new" one which is being renewed for the purpose [of attaining] a full and obedient knowledge [of the truth] (*epignosis*), [so as to model yourselves] in the image of the One who created it.

Colossians 3:9-10

Peter is addressing this epistle to Christians, many of whom have been in the faith for some time, and many of whom have endured significant testing and undeserved suffering on account of their faith. Peter's point is that for all of us who have made the sometimes painful investment to grow and advance spiritually, suffering through the testing and the trials which are needful to produce maturity and to make us seasoned warriors in this spiritual struggle (Jas.1:2-4; 1:12; 1Pet.1:3-9), it is needful to remember the price we have paid so far, and not allow ourselves to slip backwards – as if our previous sacrifices meant nothing. For when we suffered in emulation of our Lord, we proclaimed by our actions that the world meant nothing to us. It is therefore incumbent upon us not to allow our previous good spiritual offense to now be undermined by falling back into sinful activity, giving up the ground we have gained in spiritual advance by failing to muster an equally good defense. All believers need to persevere until the end, and not make the mistake of resting on our laurels – for that is not honoring to Christ (and is a sure path to spiritual ruin).

(32) Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. (33) For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. (34) You suffered from my chains, and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you possessed a more valuable estate, and a more lasting one. (35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, how short, how short [the wait], and He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay. (38) "Then shall my righteous one by faith live because of his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)."

Hebrews 10:32-38 [index]

### **That We May No Longer Live in Lust (v.2):**

. . . to the end that [we also like Him] may no longer live what is left of our lives on earth in human lusts but in God's will.

1st Peter 4:2

If we have indeed gotten to the point in our spiritual lives of being able to be trusted with such testing, the testing of undeserved suffering, the testing of sharing the suffering of Christ, then it is high time that we also accept the corresponding responsibility of living up to a certain level of sanctification – not total sinlessness (which is impossible) but certainly at the very least of eschewing all evident and overtly gross sinning of the sort which is very bad for our Christian witness. Mature Christians have it as part of their basic view of the world, one they maintain in spite of all the "shot and shell" of daily life, that *this* life on *this* earth is very short and of far less importance than the new life and the new world to come. Being overly concerned with this life and this world, therefore, not to mention allowing ourselves to be caught up in it to the extent of sullyng our Christian witness through giving way to its lusts, is the direct opposite of the life to which we have been called.

In our context, the Greek word for "lust", *epithymia*, is sometimes distinguished from "desire" (*pathema*, e.g., at Gal.5:24), where the former describes active pursuit of things illicit which pull us toward gross sin (such as Peter will delineate below), while the latter refers to susceptibility to pressures which push towards worldly solutions to the problems of insecurity (such as the love of money). Here Peter uses the word to describe all the pushes and pulls of the sin nature when it runs after the temptations of the world wherein believers react and respond to the wrong things rather than to "the will of God". We know very well what the Lord wants us to do. Caving in to pressures or temptations so as to do things which are clearly displeasing to Him is spiritually dangerous – as we all know, since there is no believer who has not experienced divine discipline (Heb.12:8). "Arming ourselves" with the thinking of Christ, diligently training ourselves to be constantly looking to His example, keeping also in mind the suffering we have already endured in following Him so far, ought to be very good motivation in helping us cleave to the strait and narrow way as we refrain from turning to the left (in pursuing ungodly pleasures out of lust) or to the right (in racing after worldly security out of fear). By denying ourselves both false choices, we will not only keep ourselves safe from serious discipline and potential spiritual disaster but

we will also be following the way of blessing in this life – true blessing even if not in the world's eyes – and of eternal reward in the next.

The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.

Proverbs 4:18 NIV1985

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Matthew 16:24 NKJV

### **Time Past Living in Sin Sufficient (v.3):**

For the time which has already elapsed (in your life) is sufficient to have wrought what the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) desire, as they proceed [in their lives] in debaucheries, lusts, binges, orgies, drunken-parties, and [other] lawless idolatries.

1st Peter 4:3

Entrenched behavior is often hard to change, especially bad behavior. Just as in the case of Augustine's despicable prayer, "Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet", Peter was clearly anticipating resistance to his appeal and thus felt the need to take his efforts at persuasion to a higher level. Peter here shames his readers by reminding them that in the past they had already committed enough sins – not minor sins but the sort of degenerate behavior that was typical of unsaved gentiles in that time and place, "debaucheries, lusts, binges, orgies, drunken-parties, and [other] lawless idolatries". Assigning these disturbing and shameful behaviors to gentiles – that is, unbelievers as opposed to the "Israel of God" of which we believers are now a part (Gal.6:16) – is a double insult, definitely meant to get his readers' attention. For the fact that some of them are still (apparently) engaged in such behavior is shameful indeed – and incredibly spiritually dangerous.

What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is *death* (i.e., physical death, the sin unto death for believers who will not change their ways; or spiritual death, apostasy for those who abandon faith as a result).

Romans 6:21 NKJV

Time in this world is short – often shorter than we think. The man in the parable of the rich fool thought he would have plenty of years to enjoy his prosperity – but the Lord took his life that very night (Lk.12:13-21). The time to get right with the Lord, to confess our sins and repent of whatever foul behavior we are involved in is *right now today*. For there may be no tomorrow.

(4) Show me, LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. (5) You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.

Psalms 39:4-5 NIV

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

### **Debauchery et al. (v.3):**

For the time which has already elapsed (in your life) is sufficient to have wrought what the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) desire, as they proceed [in their lives] in debaucheries, lusts, binges, orgies, drunken-parties, and [other] lawless idolatries.

1st Peter 4:3

The first thing to note here is that this list, "debaucheries, lusts, binges, orgies, drunken-parties, and [other] lawless idolatries", is not meant to be comprehensive by any means. Peter chooses these notable, undeniably reprehensible, and in his day all too common behaviors to get his readers' attention, but adds the last element, "[other] lawless idolatries", as an elastic element meant to expand the list to any and all other such sinful activities which readers now as then may be or may have been involved in. That is to say, the last element makes it clear that, no, one is not "in the clear" just because one's particular, favorite transgression has not been mentioned explicitly: anything which is lawless (meaning anything forbidden by God: 1Jn.3:4) or idolatrous (meaning placing oneself and one's desires before the will of God, the opposite of denying oneself: Eph.5:5; Col.3:5; cf. Matt.16:24) is deserving of equal censure, even though not here named.

(19) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions (21) and envy; drunkenness, orgies – ***and whatever is similar to all these things***. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Galatians 5:19-21

Peter picks some of the most gross and overt sins of unbelievers of the sort that anyone in that society (or today) would realize as excessive to draw the sharpest possible contrast between the behavior of believers and that of unbelievers – because there are certain sins that the Lord is not going to allow believers to continue in for long. Of course we all sin, but gross, over the top sin, "high-handed" sinning in arrogant disregard of any noticeable fear of God is liable to be indicative of falling away from the faith into apostasy or to result in being taken out of this life in that most shameful end of the "sin unto death".<sup>4</sup>

(12) Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. (13) Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

Psalm 19:12-13 NKJV

### **Unbeliever Surprise and Slander (v.4):**

[Unbelievers no doubt] find it strange that you do not rush to engage with them in such

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<sup>4</sup> See Bible Basics 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

excessive carousing of this sort in the same way they do, and they slander your good name as a result.

1st Peter 4:4

Most believers have probably had the experience of secular acquaintances, relatives, or contacts at work expressing amazement at our unwillingness to involve ourselves in various behaviors common among unbelievers from which we distance ourselves out of our fear of the Lord. Perhaps it is that we do not gossip. Or that we do not take the Lord's Name in vain. Or that we do not drink to excess at the office Christmas party. Or that we stay away from flirtation. Add to that positive comments we may make about God and the Bible and it really is not "surprising" that we are often treated like pariahs. More than that, we are often looked down upon as those who must assume that we are "holier than thou", as those in our circuit take offense at our good behavior (and at our staying away from bad behavior). Both tendencies are "surprising" to unbelievers who are most often content to follow the crowd, especially because swimming against the current is both difficult and inviting of unwanted negative attention. Thus it can also seem to them (possibly only because in their heart of hearts even unbelievers recognize the folly of their ways) that by refusing to "rush to engage with them in such excessive carousing", we are judging them as somehow inferior to ourselves.

While it is true that many legalistic (and thus by definition immature) believers do indeed have – and often gratuitously share – that judgmental attitude, this is not what Peter is referring to here. Instead, Peter is referencing the surprise and inevitable, unpleasant response of unbelievers who take offense at our different approach – not because we verbally judge them or overtly express superiority of our behavior over theirs (mature believers want only to be left alone and for others to come to the truth that we know to be true), but because they *interpret* our good behavior as a subtle attack on their bad behavior, as irrational as that may seem. This makes them uncomfortable, for one reason because it causes unbelievers to have to examine their underlying assumptions about life. And nothing is more uncomfortable for an unbeliever than the prospect of scrutiny from the *actual* Judge, that is, of *God's* eventual judgment – especially for those who are determined not to change.

As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you."

Acts 24:25 NIV

Thus the "goodness" which believers should manifest as a matter of course will leave our unbelieving acquaintances with no *legitimate* charges to bring against us (Tit.2:8). And for unbelievers in our ambit who have not yet hardened their hearts against the truth, the witness we provide in not only staying away from outrageous behavior but also living good, respectable lives honoring to the Lord and without any discernible excessive worldly ambitions, may possibly lead them to have a change of heart as Peter has explained before:

Keep your manner of life among the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) [morally] good, so that although they slander you as evil-doers, yet when they look upon your good works (i.e., life and production) they may [yet] give glory to God on the day of visitation.

1st Peter 2:12

But for those who are determined not to find fault with themselves, it is a function of human nature to cast blame upon others, and we may thus expect to be slandered on account of doing what is right. Such undeserved slander may sting. No one wants to be spoken ill of. But we who entrust ourselves to the Lord in all things have nothing in fact to fear of such unwarranted criticism. In the end, all such unfair defamation will not be allowed to harm us.

Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest.  
Proverbs 26:2 NIV

### **Give an Account (v.5):**

But they are going to have to give an account [for all this] to the One who stands ready to judge the living (i.e., you believers) and the dead (i.e., the unbelievers who oppose you).  
1st Peter 4:5

For those who oppose us and slander us unjustly, believers need always to keep firmly in mind that we are not to become overly upset nor to take issues into our own hands. Our Judge is in heaven, and He will see to our vindication (Rom.12:19), but we will be blessed in spite of all opposition and indeed on account of it:

(11) "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (12) Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."  
Matthew 5:11-12 NKJV

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. (23) Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets."  
Luke 6:22-23 NKJV

Those who oppose us, those who attack us and slander us for Christ's sake on account of the fact that we are believers doing what is right, will face divine judgment:

#### 1) At the last judgment:

"Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, (15) to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (16) These are grumblers, complainers (lit. "lot-blamers"), walking according to their own lusts.  
Jude 1:14b-16a NKJV

#### 2) At the 2nd Advent:

(5) [These tribulations which you are enduring] are evidence of the righteous judgment of God in His [judging] you to be worthy of His kingdom on behalf of which you are also suffering. (6) Since indeed it is just for God to repay with tribulation those who are subjecting you to tribulation, (7) and to give you who are being distressed relief along with us at the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels, (8) wreaking vengeance in a flame of fire upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power, (10) when He comes on that [great] day to be glorified in the midst of His saints (i.e., resurrected believers) and to be marveled at among all those who have believed – as our testimony has been believed in your case.

2nd Thessalonians 1:6-10

3) And will be frustrated in all of their attempts against us in this life as well:

"No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me."

Isaiah 54:17 NIV

### **Gospel Proclaimed to the Dead (v.6):**

For it is for this [very] reason that the gospel has been proclaimed to the [spiritually] dead as well [as to you], in order that they [too], after they have been convicted in the flesh according to [their] human conduct, might live by means of the Spirit according to God[']s grace].

1st Peter 4:6

The "very reason" for the proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers, the spiritually "dead", is on account of the judgment mentioned in the previous verse: destruction and condemnation of unbelievers is the last thing God wants. God the Father wants all to be saved (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; Acts 17:27; 1Tim.2:4; 2Tim.2:24-26; 2Pet.3:9; cf. Lam.3:33), and Jesus Christ has already paid the entire price – a very steep price indeed – for all of their sins so that they might be saved (Jn.1:29; Rom.5:18; 2Cor.5:14-15; 1Tim.2:5-6a; 1Jn.2:2). Peter's hope, expressed here in the Spirit, is that all unbelievers might be "convicted in the flesh according to their human conduct", that is, brought to see – through observing us as well as through God's direct intervention in their lives – that their behavior merits only death . . . so that they might turn to Jesus Christ and be saved, gaining life eternal "by means of the Spirit according to God[']s grace]" through responding to the truth of the gospel. Before our Lord's return, that gospel will be proclaimed to all (Rev.14:6; cf. Matt.10:23); but, in spite of God's desire and in spite of our efforts on behalf of the gospel in the witness of words and also the witness of our lives, only those who deign to respond to God's grace in the gift of Jesus Christ will be saved.

"The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

John 3:18 NASB20

## **Paragraph II (vv. 7-11)**

(7) The end of all things has drawn near. Therefore exercise discretion, and maintain sobriety for [the benefit of your] prayers. (8) Above all, be sure to maintain your love towards each other resolutely, because "love covers a multitude of sins" (Prov.10:12; cf. Jas.5:20). (9) Be hospitable to each other without complaining. (10) As each one [of us] has received a [particular spiritual] gift, [so let us be] ministering it to each other as good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God. (11) If anyone communicates, let him do so as if he were speaking words directly from God. If anyone serves, let him do so from the strength which God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1st Peter 4:7-11

## **The Imminence of the End (v.7):**

The end of all things has drawn near. Therefore exercise discretion, and maintain sobriety for [the benefit of your] prayers.

1st Peter 4:7

Having just reminded us of the last judgment and the fate of unbelievers who fail to respond to God's great gift of grace in Jesus Christ, Peter now prompts us to remember that the eternal perspective is the one which should be first and foremost in our own hearts as well. Nothing which might be achieved in this temporary life can hold a candle to the importance of the smallest spiritual accomplishment – because the former are temporary but the latter last forever. And nothing gained in this life apart from Him, neither wealth, nor power, nor fame, nor possessions, nor pleasures of any kind, will be capable of bringing even a smile to our lips – when they are burned up before the judgment seat of Christ. And if the pursuit of such "happiness" has hindered our spiritual growth, progress and production, then when the smoke clears, we may find we have little to show for our time down here on earth, no "gold, silver and precious stones" which elicit a "well done!" from our Lord, glorifying Him and delighting us for all eternity.

The Church Age, as the mystery age, by definition stands on the threshold of the end: there are no more prophecies needing to be fulfilled before the commencement of the end times. Only the necessity to complete the Body of Christ has brought about this present postponement in the plan of God, represented by the gap in the Jewish ceremonial calendar between the fall and following spring festivals. We now know that this pause has lasted for the better part of two thousand years, two "millennial days" corresponding to the penultimate and antepenultimate days of the seven days of God's reconstruction of the world following its devastation in the judgment of Satan's revolt on the far side of the Genesis gap. But while the length of the pause for the insertion of the Church Age was always predictable (based on the Jewish calendar and the seven days of re-creation, along with other biblical evidence), God has always been free to accelerate matters as He wills. For that reason, and because nothing in prophecy contradicted an immediate bringing on of the end times even during Peter's day, scripture is consistent in portraying them as "imminent" throughout this mystery age. For us today who do indeed stand on the threshold of the end in every possible way, Peter's words here, meant to provoke a sense of urgency in his

readers to turn away from all that is wrong and problematic and to instead embrace spiritual growth, progress and production with gusto, should be felt with all that much more force – and taken deathly seriously. We will be seeing the Lord soon enough. How then should we be conducting our lives?

(10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in which (i.e., over the course of which) the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare [for the Lord's inspection]. (11) Since the universe is going to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought we to be, [walking] in a sanctified and godly way, (12) eagerly looking forward to the coming of the Day of God (i.e., the day of eternity)? For on that day the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt. (13) But we are awaiting new heavens and a new earth just as He promised – [a world] where righteousness dwells.

2nd Peter 3:10-13

### **Discretion and Sobriety (v.7):**

The end of all things has drawn near. Therefore exercise discretion, and maintain sobriety for [the benefit of your] prayers.

1st Peter 4:7

The two words here, "discretion" and "sobriety", together sum up the self-control believers are always to exhibit in the face of temptations and pressures to sin. The former, the Greek *sophroneo* which we are translating as "exercise discretion", refers more to mental control, while the latter the Greek *nepho* which we are translating as "maintain sobriety", refers more to physical control. To be *sophron*, is to be, literally, "safe-minded", and in the Greek language and culture this means having the mind-set to prudently stay away from bad influences and all questionable behavior. To be *nephon*, is to be, literally, abstemious in regards to alcohol, but the word is often used with a wider scope as is the case here to refer to abstention from all manner of excessive and deleterious behavior. These two synonyms taken together serve to sum up what is often called "restraint" in scripture (Greek *egkrateia*: Acts 24:25; 1Cor.7:9; 9:25; Gal.5:23; Tit.1:8; 2Pet.1:6), and to reinforce Peter's instructions. In contemporary vernacular, they mean, "don't do it – and don't even think about doing it!" That is surely good advice wherever it is a matter of any and all gross sin (of the sort referenced in verse three above: "debaucheries, lusts, binges, orgies, drunken-parties, and [other] lawless idolatries"). For where such clearly willful and outrageous violations of God's clearest commands are concerned, their ability to cause serious spiritual troubles – and to bring on correspondingly heavy divine discipline – is not to be minimized.

Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

Psalms 19:13 NIV

### **For the Benefit of your Prayers (v.7):**

The end of all things has drawn near. Therefore exercise discretion, and maintain sobriety for [the benefit of your] prayers.

1st Peter 4:7

It needs to be pointed out that Peter is only using prayer here as an example of why self-control in regard to excessive sin is important. Clearly, if we are involving ourselves in the behaviors of verse three "and whatever is similar to all these things" (Gal.5:21), it cannot help but be destructive to our Christian witness, our spiritual peace (on account of intensifying divine discipline), to our spiritual safety (because such behavior left unchecked leads to the sin unto death or apostasy), and to whatever ministries we may have been entrusted with. But since every believer prays – or should – Peter makes use of this example to remind us that departing from a prudent and sober course has immediate and potentially drastic consequences. Where would we be without the ability to bring our concerns directly to the Lord in prayer at all times? If we are out of fellowship with the Lord, refusing to repent and confess our sins, then should we expect our prayers to be heard (Job 35:12-13; Prov.1:28-31; 15:8; 15:29; Jn.9:31)?

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

Psalm 66:18 NIV

Having one's prayers answered is the province of the righteous (e.g., Jn.9:31; Jas.5:16-18). And to Peter, keeping this avenue of help from God clear was of the utmost importance – for we know that he wrote with the Spirit of God:

(7) Likewise [you] husbands are to live together [with your wives] in accordance with [biblical] knowledge (i.e., according to what the Bible has to say by word and example about how to properly treat one's wife), [behaving] as [one ought] towards persons [who, as women, are] weaker. [You husbands] must bestow [all appropriate] honor [on your wives] as fellow heirs of the grace of [eternal] life, ***so that your prayers may not be hindered*** (i.e., sin in this regard compromising prayer).

1st Peter 3:7

Rather than limiting the call to prudent and sober self-control, therefore, the reference to prayer here is Peter's way of explaining how critically important such restraint really is for all believers who want to please Jesus Christ. Our relationship with Him is the most important thing in this life, and we ought to want to be able to put our requests before Him with confidence and without shame at all times, as that is one of the many wonderful features of that blessed relationship.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16 NKJV

### **Maintain your Love (v.8):**

Above all, be sure to maintain your love towards each other resolutely, because "love covers a multitude of sins" (Prov.10:12; cf. Jas.5:20).

1st Peter 4:8

Love, of course, is *the* cardinal virtue of the Christian life.

(34) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (35) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35 NIV

But [until that future time of our Lord's return] there now remains faith, hope and love, these three [cardinal virtues] – and the greatest of these is love.

1st Corinthians 13:13

And [as the capstone] over all these things put on love which is the unifying [virtue] of [spiritual] maturity.

Colossians 3:14 (cf. Eph.4:2-3) [INDEX]

A believer who is truly walking in love, as the last verse cited demonstrates, is spiritually mature and capable of putting into practice all of the other Christian virtues as well – because it is love that binds them all together as one.

(36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' (38) This is the first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 22:36-40 NIV

We love God, "because He loved us first" (1Jn.4:19). And because we love Him, the Father and His dear Son our Lord Jesus who died for us, we also love our brethren who likewise belong to Him. Jesus Christ died for our brothers and sisters just as He died for us, so that we ought to have the same attitude of self-sacrifice on their behalf that He demonstrated for them and for us.

(10) This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (11) Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1st John 4:10-11 NIV

We have covered the meaning of the Greek word *agape* previously in this series where Peter uses almost precisely the same terminology ("love one another resolutely"; 1Pet.1:22).<sup>5</sup> The word translated "resolutely" in both instances is from the Greek *ektenes* meaning, etymologically, "stretched to the limit": we are to put no limits on our love for the Lord who paid for our sins on the cross nor on our love for our brethren for whom He also died. And while love is often emotional, just as genuine love for our brothers and sisters is manifested by what we actually do for them (praying for them, ministering to them according to the spiritual gifts we have severally been given), so also it is through our obedience to Him that our love for God is manifested: He

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<sup>5</sup> Peter's Epistles #32: "A Challenge to Grow Spiritually: 1st Peter 1:21-25"

has called us to grow spiritually, progress in our walk with Him, passing whatever tests He brings our way, then to help others do likewise primarily through the proper functioning of whatever gifts the Spirit has given us. Whether we are emotional about this or not, **doing it** is what love is all about; and even if we are extremely emotional, failing to actually **do it** is not biblical *agape* – it is not really "love".

(46) "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? (47) As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. (48) They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. (49) But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."  
Luke 6:46-49 NIV

### **Love Covers a Multitude of Sins (v.8):**

Above all, be sure to maintain your love towards each other resolutely, because "love covers a multitude of sins" (Prov.10:12; cf. Jas.5:20).

1st Peter 4:8

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.

Proverbs 10:12 NKJV

(19) My brothers, if someone of you wanders from the truth, and someone [else] turns him back [to the faith], (20) he should know that the one who turns [the] sinner back from the error of his way will save his life from [the sin unto] death, and will [thus] cover a multitude of sins (i.e., the result will be forgiveness instead of the sin unto death).

James 5:19-20

One very good reason to take pains to be loving in the genuine Christian sense is because love is the most powerful counterweight to sin available to us. Sin is sin, and only Jesus Christ could take away sin – which He did, in dying for all human sins on the cross (Jn.1:29; Heb.9:28; 1Jn.2:2). We receive redemption from our sins when we believe in Him (Eph.1:7; Col.1:14), and we receive forgiveness for our sins when we confess them (Ps.32:6; 1Jn.1:9; 2:1). But as these scriptures tell us, walking in love has a palliative effect that acts as a damping field against sin, both in our own lives and also in those with whom we interact. And when we minister to others who are in the grip of sin's embrace, our intervention, through prayer or encouragement or guidance, may be the means God uses to deliver the person in question, so as to "save his life from death". By walking in love, therefore, loving the Lord with all that is in us and proffering that love to our brethren, we not only keep ourselves safe but also contribute to the spiritual safety of the Christian brothers and sisters with whom we interact and to whom we minister – so that the negative effects of sin are often swallowed up in God's mercy and forgiveness as a result.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

### **Hospitable without Complaining (v.9):**

Be hospitable to each other without complaining.  
1st Peter 4:9

The first thing to notice about this command is that it holds true for our dealings with believers who are walking with Jesus Christ but is *not* a requirement for the way we are to comport ourselves towards unbelievers or apostates:

(9) Anyone who wanders away from this teaching has no relationship with God. But anyone who remains in the teaching of Christ has a relationship with both the Father and the Son. (10) If anyone comes to your meeting and does not teach the truth about Christ, don't invite that person into your home or give any kind of encouragement. (11) Anyone who encourages such people becomes a partner in their evil work.  
2nd John 1:9-11 NLT

The second thing to notice is that the word translated "hospitable" does not have the same specialized meaning in Greek that it does in English. When we hear this word in English we immediately think of having someone over to our house for a meal or even giving them lodging for the night. While that is a possible application, the main thrust of this command is to counter exclusivity in our communion with others in regard to sharing the truth of the Word. We should want to spread the Word and therefore we should be open to friendly communication of the truth we know and believe to others – rather than keeping exclusively close to our own circle of acquaintances who are blessed as we are to already be receiving in-depth instruction in the truth. We should not view our fellowship in the Word, whatever form it takes, as some sort of special, secret club. We should do what can reasonably be done to make those who might come to us and to our fellowship in order to hear the Word feel comfortable and welcome rather than the other way around. This may perhaps constitute a burden for some of us some of the time – as we are not always going to be naturally *sympatico* with everyone who shows up at our fellowship. While there are good and reasonable bases for keeping a distance from strangers, this verse tells us not to allow superficial dislikes and prejudices to prevent us from putting the Lord and His Word first – and also tells us not complain about having to do so (we ought rather to be joyful about sharing the truth).

### **Gifts (v.10):**

As each one [of us] has received a [particular spiritual] gift, [so let us be] ministering it to each other as good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God.  
1st Peter 4:10

During the Church Age, the Holy Spirit gives every believer at least one spiritual gift at salvation (1Cor.12:4-11).<sup>6</sup> The purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify the Church of Jesus Christ, that is, to

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<sup>6</sup> See Bible Basics 5: Pneumatology, section II.3.d.1, "Spiritual Gifts".

contribute to the spiritual growth, spiritual progress and spiritual production of other believers. Spiritual gifts can be broken down into two basic categories: gifts designed for the communication of the Word of God (such as teaching and evangelizing) and gifts which support that communication of the truth (such as service, encouragement, giving, superintendence and charity). All gifts are important, and the Body of Christ cannot perform up to its full potential unless all are working together in harmony (1Cor.12:12-31). Needless to say, then, we should all strive to do what Peter is here encouraging us to do, namely, to develop and deploy the gifts we have been given.

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying [goal] of belief in and full-knowledge of the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity of the fullness of Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model. (16) In this way, the entire body of the Church, fit and joined together by Him through the sinews He powerfully supplies to each and every part, works out its own growth for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16

For it is from this Source, [Jesus Christ], that the entire body [the Church] is [truly] supplied and instructed through [all] its joints and sinews, and [thus] produces the growth that God has given.

Colossians 2:19b

### **Ministering it as Good Stewards (v.10):**

As each one [of us] has received a [particular spiritual] gift, [so let us be] ministering it to each other as good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God.

1st Peter 4:10

The verb translated "ministering" is from the same root as the noun *dikonos*, the source of our English loan word "deacon". A deacon, in Greek, is first and foremost a servant, and the service we as Christians are to perform is the utilization of our spiritual gift or gifts for the benefit of the Church of Jesus Christ. As to precisely how we are to do this, it is important to say that there are as many different varieties and variations of individual gifts, not to mention combinations of gifts, as there are believers. No two of us are the same, so that the ways in which we are going to be called by the Lord to employ our gifts through His grace and the power of the Spirit are also highly diverse, variegated, kaleidoscopic – or as Peter says here, "multifaceted".

As we grow spiritually, we will be made aware of precisely where our individual talents and gifts lie, and we should at that point, once we have matured, be open and receptive to the opportunities for service which our Lord will undoubtedly put in our path. As with spiritual growth, progress

and production where there is an overlap in these three functions even as there is also a clear progression as well, so it is in terms of using our gifts: there are certain things all Christians can and should do from early days, even before we have been led to see where our primary area of service will eventually be. For example, regardless of our level of maturity, we can all pray; we can all give; we can all encourage others. But the Christian life is addition rather than subtraction, so that as we grow we can both continue to do the things common to all Christians, even as we specialize in the development of our own unique manifestation of gifts and talents given to us for the sake of the edification of the Church.

The word translated "stewards" is the Greek *oikonomoi* from *oikos* meaning "house" and *nomos* having the notion here of "management". This position was a very important one in the Greco-Roman world since households were normally composed of many generations and much extended family possessing a large number of servants as well (most of whom were slaves). The steward performed the duties of a CEO of a small company or the general manager of a restaurant. He was responsible for almost everything, whether material concerns and supplies, personnel issues, finances and general operations. The master of the house would ideally have no need to concern himself with any of these matters – if he had a good steward (we may think of Joseph's exemplary management of Potiphar's household: Gen.39:2-6).

In the analogy, the Lord Jesus Christ is our Master and the household is His Church. We all have jobs to do in this operation, and the better we do them, the better the household will run and the better it will be for us as well, since we will be rewarded according to our service. We all need some training (spiritual growth); but as soon as we are able, we should be eagerly on the lookout for how best to make this household with its Master we esteem a smoothly functioning one – so that it may carry out its purpose of supplying the needs of all who belong to it.

To use a modern variation of the above, we may think of the local church as a restaurant. Its primary purpose is to feed its customers well – not to entertain them, nor to provide them with a social venue, nor to lighten their wallets, but to provide them with good nourishment. For this operation to be successful, there will have to be someone to stock the pantry, someone to handle the receipts, someone to buy the supplies, someone to keep up the building, someone to clean the floor, to wash the dishes, to set the tables, to take the orders and serve up the food – and someone to cook it. Many of these duties can be picked up with a minimum of specialized training since they depend upon skills which have already been developed in other venues of life. A good chef, however, is often the key to whether or not the restaurant is going to be successful – because if the food is not good, there is a limit to what ambience and other extraneous matters can accomplish. This will serve to illustrate that pastor-teachers, those who communicate the Word of God, need specialized training. A person may be talented, a "natural cook", but rarely do great chefs arise without a long period of apprenticeship at the very least.

The above parallel, like any parable, cannot be pushed too far, but one point of comparison is certainly true: there is plenty of work to do in Lord's household, plenty of opportunities to help out in the cause of spreading the truth of the Word of God. Those who are spiritually mature are best able to do that work, and thus fulfill the purpose of the spiritual gifts they have been given. Regardless of our gifts, we all have equal opportunity in this life to earn eternal rewards – depending upon performance.

The one who plants and the one who waters have one [and the same] purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.  
1st Corinthians 3:8 NIV (cf. Gal.6:9; Heb.10:35; 2Jn.1:8)

### **Communication and Service (v.11):**

If anyone communicates, let him do so as if he were speaking words directly from God. If anyone serves, let him do so from the strength which God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.  
1st Peter 4:11

As mentioned above, communication and service are the two basic areas of spiritual gifts. Peter here gives us both of these general categories without naming the specific gifts and that has the benefit of making the purpose of gifts of either category plain: spreading the truth. The Body of Christ, as Paul explains (1Cor.12:12-31), is composed of many members, all of which are important to the proper functioning of the whole. Communication of the truth cannot take place without the support of service, and there would be no spiritual point to service without communicating the truth. This is the essential biblical principle of spiritual gifts, even though in Laodicea the rule is little to no communication of the truth and much service to no particular point.

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.  
1st Corinthians 11:17 NIV

In our present verse, however, Peter's primary purpose is to emphasize the proper manner in which our gifts are to be employed. Those who evangelize, teach the Bible, or otherwise communicate the Word of God are to do so "as if speaking words directly from God". That is to say, all who communicate the truth are to hold their ministries in deadly earnest, never losing sight of the fact that, indeed, these are God's words – if we are genuinely communicating the truth of scripture as we should be. This leads us to understand that an occupational hazard of teachers, evangelists, apologists and all others who communicate the Word is to lapse into a lackadaisical and self-centered approach to their ministering, focusing on self and the way in which their presentations are received. There is a great temptation in this sort of ministry to want to be popular and well-received, to want to bring those listening into a state of emotional response, to be esteemed for the presentation . . . instead of for the content. In other words, "preaching" is apt to replace teaching whenever a communicator of the Word forgets his purpose and gives way to ego instead. But this is about the Lord and His truth, not about us. If we make it about us, then truth will fall by the wayside and little or nothing will be accomplished for Jesus Christ. Whereas our entire object as those who are sharing the truth ought to be "*that in all things **God** may be praised through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*"

Similarly, those who serve, all who are not tasked with communicating the Word directly but given gifts to support the communication of the Word and its reception, need to keep firmly in

mind that God is the One who is doing the empowering of their service. For the occupational hazard of those involved in service is to think too highly of their own contributions and as a result to seek praise from men instead of from God. Those who fall into the trap of such thinking will tend to be drawn to "ministries" which are likewise all about worldly success and showmanship, where numbers and fame and finances dominate everything, with the result of empowering pointless distraction from the truth instead of actually supporting the spread of the Word of God. But if those who are called to serve would have as their primary concern "*that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen*", then ego would not be allowed to interfere with humble support of ministries which are actually accomplishing the will of God – even if little worldly glory attends to such truly godly efforts.

Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.  
Psalm 115:1 NIV

Approaching spiritual gifts with the correct perspective outlined by Peter here is absolutely essential if we wish to fulfill God's purpose for our lives – and earn the rewards our Lord Jesus Christ desires for us. We need to "compete according to the rules", keeping ever in mind that it is the Lord Jesus Christ we are serving, not ourselves (Col.3:23-24).

(24) Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. (25) And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one.  
1st Corinthians 9:24-25

(4) No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. (5) Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. (6) The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. (7) Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.  
2nd Timothy 2:4-7 NIV

### **Paragraph III (vv. 12-19)**

(12) Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness. (14) If you are [indeed] being reproached on account of Christ's name, you are [truly] blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of power, even the Spirit of God, rests upon you (i.e., to support you in the trial). (15) Now let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler, (16) but if [anyone should suffer for being labeled] as a "Chrestian", let him not be ashamed of it. Let him rather glorify God under that name. (17) For it is time for the

judgment to begin, starting with God's household. And if it first begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not believe God's gospel? (18) For [as it says], "If the righteous man is barely saved, where will the ungodly and sinful turn? (Prov. 11:33)". (19) Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives – while doing what is good – to a Creator who is faithful.  
1st Peter 4:12-19

### **Don't be Alarmed (v.12):**

Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you.  
1st Peter 4:12

The word translated "be alarmed" here comes from the Greek root *xen-* relating to otherness (cf. xenophobia), and so literally means "think it strange" (this is the way many versions render it). However, what Peter is referring to here is the shock or astonishment or surprise that comes from unexpected events: even experienced and veteran troops can succumb to panic if subjected to a radically unexpected shock. This is the first thing mature Christians need to learn to avoid, namely, an initial reaction of panic or anger when a test falls upon us unawares. For we often will find, if we can just withstand that first blow, that first emotional and all too natural reaction on hearing terrible news, that with the Spirit's help we will be able to rally our inner spiritual resources and put our trust in the Lord to make a safe way for us through this new sea of trouble.

(1) And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. (2) Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." (3) And when he saw that, he arose and *ran for his life* . . .  
1st Kings 19:1-3a NKJV

Does anyone really doubt that if Elijah had sat still for a day and put the matter to the Lord in prayer, that he would have then still "run for his life"? But once we allow panic and alarm to set in, recovery becomes that much harder to achieve. The devil is a past master of the counter-attack. Counter-attacks are often successful – as was the case with Elijah above – because they generally find the enemy at his most vulnerable, namely, both disorganized after his own attack and feeling confident from his own success, an illusion which a swift riposte may easily shatter. So it is in spiritual terms as well.

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?  
Galatians 5:7 NIV

Therefore while it is certainly true that all believers need to master the art of dealing with testing, and especially difficult and long-lasting testing, the first order of business in passing any test is to avoid the initial mistake of overreacting and failing to trust God at the outset. As the old adage goes, "Don't panic now! There'll be plenty of time to panic later". Which is to say, we need to develop the spiritual habit of being *always* on the alert. This is all enemy territory down here on planet earth. Things may be calm and peaceful now, but our "enemy the devil prowls around like

a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1Pet.5:8 NIV). We can be sure that he and his minions are always on the lookout for an opportune time to hit us – and hitting us when we least expect it is usually a perfect time.

(6) Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever. (7) He will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. (8) His heart is secure, he will have no fear; in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.

Psalm 112:6-8 NIV1985

This is true. But having confidence in the Lord and complacency are not the same things. Believers who are doing what our Lord requires, growing, progressing and producing for Him, need not look over their shoulders or walk on egg shells in fear of unexpected disasters. We have every right to be "bold as a lion" in our Christian walk (Prov.28:1), because *we* know that it is the Lord who is looking out for us and that He is the One who is really fighting these battles for us. But we also must keep in mind that this is the devil's realm, and that we are interlopers herein.<sup>7</sup> As those who are followers of Jesus Christ, and especially if we are truly fulfilling God's plan for our lives in honoring our Savior, we are prime targets for Satan and his followers, and we will face resistance and opposition sooner or later.

So we should not "think it strange" that testing, trials, trouble and tribulation come our way – that is "situation normal" for believers on the battlefield of this temporary life. None of us can afford to become spiritually lackadaisical just because we have been given a period of respite. If things are going well, that is reason to praise and thank the Lord (Jas.5:13b), and it would be inappropriate to worry about losing whatever we have been given (Prov.10:22). But testing will come, sooner or later. And when it does, we need to resolve ahead of time not to immediately lose our composure, but instead to maintain a godly calm and presence of mind "under fire", something that it is especially necessary to do at the initial onset of trouble.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 16:33 NIV

Human beings have a tendency – an old sin nature tendency – to imagine the worst, to fear that the worst will happen once it seems to have begun to happen, and to fear that there will be no way to ward off threatening disaster, and no respite or deliverance thereafter. But how many times in our lives has the Lord delivered us? If we are honest with ourselves, we will recall that He has saved us more times than we can remember from all manner of troubles, often when we were powerless to save ourselves – and He has saved us all from the lake of fire by dying on the cross for all of our sins. Having done that for us, the one thing we had absolutely no power to cope with, the thing that cost Him more than we can imagine in a life time of imagining, don't we understand that He will certainly deliver us from whatever relatively small troubles confront us now, now that we belong to Him?

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<sup>7</sup> See especially part 4 of the SR series: Satan's World System, part I, "Strangers in the Devil's Realm".

(31) So what shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for our sake, how will He not also graciously give us everything [we need] along with [that gift of] Him?

Romans 8:31-32

So when trouble comes, when disaster looms, we need to **not** panic. Instead, we need to stand fast and trust the Lord. We need to put the matter to Him in prayer immediately and in complete faith that He loves us and is for us. We need to remember all of the very many times He has rescued us in the past, times when there seemed to be no hope; but He was our hope and our help. He will never ever let us down – for He is absolutely and perfectly faithful.

(1) God is our refuge and strength. [He is] our help in [times of] tribulation, [and] very quick to be found. (2) Therefore we shall not fear when the earth totters, when the mountains quake in the heart of the seas, (3) [when] its waters roar and foam, when the mountains shake on account of its swells.

Psalm 46:1-3

### **Fiery Ordeal (v.12):**

Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you.

1st Peter 4:12

Testing in general and undeserved suffering in particular come in many forms and are seldom completely lacking in the life of a Christian walking closely with the Lord. Occasionally, however, we find ourselves beset by a true "trial by fire". That is to say, we should distinguish between minor inconveniences on the one hand, and large, difficult tests of faith on the other. Even though it is appropriate to find fault with Elijah's poor reaction to Jezebel's threats, it is certainly true that being threatened with death by the de facto ruler of the land, a shameful person who had carried out such many threats swiftly and remorselessly in the past, was no small thing. It is also good to consider that Elijah is one of the greatest and strongest believers of all time. If he could be tripped up by a sudden shock, we should humbly realize that we ourselves are not immune to making similar mistakes. That is why this event is in the biblical record, after all, precisely so that we may **not**. When we do face a particularly difficult test, an extraordinary calamity falling suddenly upon us, quickly orienting to the situation and immediately getting our spiritual feet set soundly beneath us is of the utmost importance. When disaster strikes, as those who belong to Jesus Christ, as those who trust Him and trust in His promises to us more than we trust in what we see or hear or feel, we need to . . .

1) Take a deep breath and **refuse to panic** when the unexpected test falls upon us (this step is all the more important to the degree that we have for any reason let our spiritual guard down and have thus been caught unawares).

"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

Psalm 50:15 NIV

(14) "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. (15) He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. (16) With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Psalm 91:14-16 NIV

(23) Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. (24) You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. (25) Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (26) My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 73:23-26 NIV

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2nd Timothy 4:18 NIV

2) Recognize that we are being tested and *renounce fear*.

(3) When I am afraid,  
I will trust in you.

(4) In God, whose word I praise,  
In God I trust; I will not be afraid.

What can mortal man do to me?

Psalm 56:3-4 NIV1985

3) Remember that since the Lord is with us, *surviving* the disaster and passing the test is not only possible but *certain* if we trust Him, because He has promised us that, and He is all-sufficient to see us through.

You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:13

4) Determine to *pass the test* by relying on Him.

He only is my rock and my salvation;

He is my defense;

I shall not be moved.

Psalm 62:6 NKJV

5) Then and only then *do what is needed* to do with the resources, strength and wisdom that the Lord has given us, *trusting in Him* to deliver us, not ourselves.

"All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that *the Lord* saves; for *the battle is the Lord's*, and he will give all of you into our hands."

1st Samuel 17:47 NIV

6) And finally, we must never forget that even if the worst does happen, God is *working it all out* together *for our eternal good* (Rom.8:28)

Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His godly ones.  
Psalm 116:15 NASB

For this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto death.  
Psalm 48:14

(1) The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. (2) Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.  
Isaiah 57:1-2 NIV

(21) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (22) If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! (23) I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.  
Philippians 1:21-23 NIV

Testing is an inevitability of the Christian life since in one way or another, sooner or later, all believers are going to be opposed by the evil one and his unseen forces. But testing is also very necessary; there is no spiritual growth without testing. Without testing, how can we demonstrate our faith? How can we show that in face we *do* trust the Lord more than anything and anyone else, unless we are given some opposition to confront? It cannot have been easy for Abraham to take Isaac up to the mountain, bind him to the altar and prepare to sacrifice him. But that particular test, one of the hardest any believer has ever faced, brought him eternal glory . . . when he *passed* it.

(11) But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. (12) "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."  
Genesis 22:11-12 NIV

(21) Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (22) You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. (23) And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.  
James 2:21-23 NIV

(17) By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, (18) even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." (19) Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.  
Hebrews 11:17-19 NIV

Abraham clearly trusted the Lord "no matter what". Even though none of us is going to be tested to like degree or in like fashion to Abraham, that does not mean that we will not face testing which is very difficult *for us*. Let us resolve ahead of time to follow in Abraham's footsteps and to aggressively trust that the Lord is with us, cares for us, and will deliver us "no matter what". Let us recognize that "this is a test" – and that the Lord Himself, according to all of His many merciful promises, is sure to bring us safely through it, "no matter what".

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the *tribulation* and *kingdom* and *perseverance* in Jesus was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 1:9

Life, the Christian life, *is* a test. Here on earth we have suffering and tribulation, but on the other side we are eagerly looking forward to the kingdom of God. When our Lord returns, all will be bliss. We will receive a resurrection body which will never die nor ever know any pain or discomfort again. We will be reunited with those we love who have gone on before us, and all will be one in Jesus Christ. And we will be rewarded bountifully for all the suffering we have had to endure in this life for the sake of Jesus Christ, living with Him and the Father and the Church in New Jerusalem forever, enjoying our inheritance and rewards therein for all eternity.

In between the present troubles and future joys, as in the verse quoted above, Revelation 1:9, there is *perseverance*. That is what connects the suffering we are enduring now with eternal blessings we hope to receive in the glorious future to come. Perseverance is thus the essential element in our Christian walk from one to the other. No one who fails to maintain faith in Jesus Christ will pass from one to the other. Having determined to hold onto our faith in Him no matter what, even if it be the will of God for us to face martyrdom during the Tribulation's Great Persecution, does it not also behoove us to persevere in the face of whatever tests come our way in between, be they large or small? Indeed, passing the small tests now, and passing the occasional large tests now, not only contributes to our growth and builds our reward – developing that spiritual grit will prove to be of great benefit when and if we have to face the worst that antichrist and his crew will throw at us. This prior tempering may even prove to have been essential.

### **Rejoicing in Participating in Christ's Sufferings (v.13):**

But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.

1st Peter 4:13

Needless to say, if a Christian is suffering on account of divine discipline for some malfeasance or other, that is not "sharing the sufferings of Christ" (cf. 1Pet.3:17; 4:15).

Now no punishment (i.e., divine discipline) is a cause of rejoicing as it is being experienced, but rather of regret – only later does it bear fruit for those who have been trained through it – the fruit of [personal] righteousness which corresponds to peace (i.e., restored wholeness and completeness in our relationship with God).

Hebrews 12:11

As the verse above assures us, however, when we do repent and confess even suffering for divine discipline does have salutary effects. But for those who truly are suffering not for discipline but precisely because they belong to Jesus and are walking closely with Him and are thus incurring the opposition of the devil and his followers, seen and unseen, that is honorable in every way and no cause for shame or regret. Indeed, we believers are specifically called to share in our Lord's sufferings, that is, to be witnesses for Him as we become the new focus of the plan of God, prime targets of the devil's opposition now that our Master has ascended in glory, and likewise objects of interest to the elect angels as they observe us in our fight (Matt.18:10; Lk.15:10; 1Cor.11:10; Heb.1:14; 1Pet.1:12).

Now I think that God has made us apostles appear to be the lowliest of men, as though we had been condemned to death, for we have become a sort of public amusement for the whole world, both for angels and for men.

1st Corinthians 4:9

What was true of Paul to an extraordinary degree is also true of the rest of us – when we are walking with Christ. We provide a witness to angels and mankind both when we are called upon to suffer for the Lord, and all the more effectively to the degree that we bear up under that suffering in a courageous and honorable way, giving glory to God without complaint.

(24) "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. (25) It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!"

Matthew 10:24-25 NKJV

(20) "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. (21) But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me."

John 15:20-21 NKJV

All who want to live a godly Christian life "will be persecuted" (2Tim.3:12), and the verses above make it clear why that is: we believers belong to Jesus Christ; as His servants, we are the targets of the devil's opposition until He returns. When our Lord was here with us, the opposition came His way; now that He has ascended to the third heaven, we are the ones upon whom the evil one and his forces focus their attention. Rather than being a cause for despair, however, this "sharing of our Lord's sufferings" should be a cause for rejoicing.

(12) Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it . . .

1st Peter 4:12-13a

We should rejoice because this suffering we are enduring is *for Jesus Christ*. We are getting hit with it because we are doing what He wants to do. Therefore, truly "sharing in Christ's suffering", being oppressed and opposed by Satan's minions seen and unseen precisely because we are persevering in our godly Christian walk, is in fact a *verification* that we are doing what Jesus wants us to do. Counterintuitive as it may seem, it is often the case that believers who are living "nice lives" without any sort of trouble we can discern are likely not receiving opposition, pressure, testing, suffering precisely because they are not the worthy targets that we are, if indeed we are growing, progressing and producing for Jesus Christ while they are not.

(2) Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to *be joyful*.

(3) For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to *a full reward*, having been found lacking in no respect.

James 1:2-4

Those who quote the first verse in the passage above often fail to continue with what follows. That is unfortunate because verses three and four explain verse two. Why would anyone "rejoice" when being tested? Why should anyone be happy to be suffering? James is *not* saying that at all. He is saying that we should rejoice *in spite* of the trouble and pain and suffering we are receiving – because we have our eyes on the larger picture. And what is that larger picture? Testing properly negotiated leads to spiritual growth which in turn results in a bountiful *eternal reward* (cf. Matt.4:12; 5:3-12; Lk.6:20-23; cf. Acts 5:41; Col.1:24).

Now without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.  
Hebrews 11:6

We have elsewhere developed the doctrine of crowns and Christian rewards.<sup>8</sup> The verse above confirms that it is legitimate – and in fact necessary – for believers to be motivated and to motivate ourselves by means of anticipating a good report from our dear Lord Jesus at His *bema*, the judgment seat of Christ.

(10) For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal (*bema*), so that each of us may receive recompense (i.e., be rewarded) for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless.

2nd Corinthians 5:10

It is precisely because we know that everything which is happening in this world only has any meaning as it relates to the plan of God that we believers have the capacity to look past the pain and trouble our sufferings are causing, and to remember that 1) they have a greater purpose, and 2) they will be amply rewarded by our Lord on the other side. Therefore while it is absolutely contrary to worldly thinking, suffering – *for Christ* – is a privilege. That is because such testing, rather than a roadblock or even a speed-bump, is an opportunity for us to accelerate our growth

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<sup>8</sup> See especially CT 6, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

and to validate the level of spiritual maturity we have received, with the result of honoring our Savior in this life and being commensurately rewarded by Him in the next.

And if we are God's children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is ***if we have indeed suffered*** with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

Romans 8:17

For it has been ***granted to you*** on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also ***to suffer for Him***.

Philippians 1:29 NIV

If we persevere (i.e., maintain faith in spite of suffering), we will also reign with Him.

2nd Timothy 2:12a

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your ***joy*** overflows, though at present it may be your lot ***to suffer*** for a time through various trials (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, ***will result in praise, glory and honor*** for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

1st Peter 1:6-7

But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, ***be joyful*** about it, so that at His glorious revelation, ***you may also rejoice*** with great gladness.

1st Peter 4:13

The last passage above, our verse in context, carefully considered, means precisely what we have been saying throughout, namely, that to participate in suffering for Christ's sake as a witness to Him and for Him is a privilege, and that we should be joyful about it, ***not*** because anyone enjoys suffering but because of what it says about our spiritual progress here and now and because of what it promises for our eternal future. The "glorious revelation" of our Master comes at His second advent return, which is followed by the judgment seat of Christ which takes place very soon thereafter (Matt.16:27; Rev.22:12). Given where we are on the eschatological time-line, that glorious event will occur in next to no time at all. Believers who have committed to doing what our Lord wants us to do, to deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow Him in quest of spiritual growth, progress and production, need to determine ahead of time not to wilt under testing, not to give up and give over to complaining if called upon to endure suffering for Jesus Christ, but instead to aggressively call to mind that our Lord is trusting us with this test, whatever the test entails, and to purpose to pass it – to His glory and our eternal joy and reward.

(20b) "Be happy, even though you are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. (21) Be happy, even though you are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Be happy, even though you are crying now, for you shall laugh. (22) Be happy when people revile you and exclude you and reproach you and disparage your reputation on account of the Son of Man. (23) Rejoice and leap for joy in [anticipation of] that [future] day, for behold, ***your***

*reward in heaven is great*; after all, your ancestors treated the prophets in the same way."  
Luke 6:20b-23

Our treasure is in heaven (Matt.6:21; Lk.12:34), not on this earth where everything is mere vanity (Eccl.1:2). To gain the entire world at the cost of one's eternal life is the epitome of folly (Matt.16:26; Mk.8:36; Lk.9:25). But if we lose everything for Jesus Christ, we have in truth gained more than we can presently understand.

(7) But whatever I had gained [in my former godless life], compared to Christ I have come to consider these things as losses. (8) Indeed, I consider everything to be a loss compared to the surpassing importance of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord, for whose sake I have suffered the loss of everything, and consider [everything I have lost] as garbage, compared to gaining Christ.  
Philippians 3:7-8

(15) Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.  
1st John 2:15-17

So when things are darkest, when we are experiencing pain and trouble and setbacks, when opposition and disaster comes our way, even though like Job such tribulation is not a consequence of any bad behavior on our part, we need to remember where we are: in the midst of the devil's world; and we need to remember what we are doing here: serving our Lord and Master in whatever way He chooses to make use of us. If this involves serious "suffering for Christ", we have a right – and a duty – not to become despondent, but instead to commit ourselves to our God (1Pet.4:19), putting ourselves in our Lord's hands, trusting that, no matter what our eyes and ears and emotions tell us, He is indeed "working everything out for our [eternal] good" (Rom.8:28).

### **The Spirit of Glory Rests upon You (v.14):**

If you are [indeed] being reproached on account of Christ's name, you are [truly] blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of power, even the Spirit of God, rests upon you (i.e., to support you in the trial).  
1st Peter 4:14

Genuine suffering for Christ, described here in terms of the hostility of unbelievers towards us merely because we are believers, constitutes a blessing. Peter repeats this principle in order to bring in another major reason why it is that we should "count it all joy", considering the trouble we are enduring as something positive from the divine point of view: to the extent that we are troubled, to that extent we receive help and support directly from the Holy Spirit to endure and pass the test.

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of compassion and all encouragement, (4) the One who encourages us in all our tribulation so that we in turn may be able to encourage those in all types of tribulation by means of the very encouragement which we ourselves received from God. (5) Because as our sufferings for Christ multiplied in service to you, so through Christ did the encouragement we received [through the Spirit] multiply to the same degree.

2nd Corinthians 1:3-5

The Spirit is described in our context as "the Spirit of glory" – calling our attention to the rewards we shall receive in resurrection when we are glorified (Rom.8:30; cf. Rom.8:11; 8:17; 2Cor.4:14), a topic also covered above. But He is also described here as "the Spirit of power", and it is good to remember that the Holy Spirit who indwells us *is God*. Nothing is impossible for God. So whatever we truly need to get through the suffering for Christ we are enduring is completely known to the Spirit – and the Spirit is completely capable of providing it.

And the Spirit helps us in our weakness in a similar way. For we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us also with anguished supplications which words cannot express.

Romans 8:26

The Spirit is in us; He is for us; He knows what we truly need (while we really do not); and He is said here in our context to be "resting upon us" in a special ministry of provision to give us absolutely everything necessary to endure and persevere, most particularly the encouragement we need not to *give* up but instead to *bear* up under whatever test the Lord Jesus sees fit to let come our way. As Paul testifies (2Cor.1:3-5), we can be confident that to the extent that trouble increases, to that same extent we may be sure that the encouragement from God Himself, the Spirit who indwells us, will also increase not only commensurately but superabundantly.

This is an important principle to digest here and now, given "the day and the hour". If we find ourselves reproached for the sake of Jesus Christ today, we can be sure that this is going to happen to an extreme degree during the Tribulation. Having the Spirit's help to get through that most difficult time will be essential. We are assured by the scriptures above that we do have that help, but how, exactly, do we access it fully?

(5) Those who are oriented to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those who are orientated to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For the thought-pattern of the flesh results in death, but the thought-pattern of the Spirit results in life and peace. (7) Now the thought-pattern of the flesh is [one of] enmity towards God, for it does not obey God's law, nor is it [even] able [to do so]. (8) And [so] those who are under the control of the flesh (i.e., unbelievers enslaved to the sin nature) are not able to please God. (9) But you are not under the control of the flesh, but under the control of the Spirit – if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Him.

Romans 8:5-9

For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the [true] sons of God.

Romans 8:14

(16) But I tell you, walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out what the flesh lusts for. (17) For what the flesh lusts for is contrary to the Spirit's will, and the Spirit is opposed to what the flesh lusts for. Since these are diametrically opposed to each other in this way, what you are doing is not what you yourself choose. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (19) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; (21) drunkenness, orgies – and whatever is similar to all these things. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, uprightness, faith, (23) humility, self-control. Against such things, there is no Law. (24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its weaknesses and its lusts. (25) If we live because of the Spirit, let us also walk by means of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-25

As these passages show, benefitting from the ministry of the Holy Spirit is a function of following His lead. Appropriating the Spirit's help is thus neither passive (requiring no action whatsoever on our part – we have to follow Him), nor is it self-generated (i.e., we do not control the Spirit; we receive His help when we are doing things the correct way **by** following His lead).

Thus the key to accessing the Holy Spirit's help and encouragement to the fullest extent is to be found in our responsiveness to Him – the Spirit prods us through our consciences and our memory of the truth we have believed. The more mature we become, the more of God's truth we have learned and appropriated by believing it, the better we **can** hear His "still, small voice" (1Ki.19:12). What we do with that is still a question of our free will responding in faith – or not. When we do respond to the Spirit's reminders, He encourages us and empowers us and guides us. When we pay attention instead to emotions, or to our own selfish priorities, or to the nay-saying of the world, or the influence of the evil one, then we miss the opportunity to benefit from the One who is in us "to will and to do" (Phil.2:13). But we need not become depressed about this when we do fail to take full advantage of what the Spirit offers us, because we will always have abundant opportunities to be filled with and fulfilled by the Holy Spirit (Eph.5:18), whenever we **are** willing to respond to Him and His ministering to us.

And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

1st Samuel 30:6 KJV

This verse is a good example of how the process works. David was "distressed", "feeling the pressure" in the Hebrew, literally. But instead of giving in to the despair, David took action, "encouraging himself **in the Lord**". Now David could not have done this without the help of the Holy Spirit. Every good thing we do is through the Spirit (e.g., 1Cor.12:3). Secondly, David could not have done this without being a mature believer, that is, without having the spiritual capital of sufficient truth in his heart, believed and retained and crystalized through much prior

application of that truth, whereby his faith had been greatly strengthened so as to be able to believe in God's promises, even when the situation was dire (as it was here). Finally, even though the Lord was the One who brought deliverance and success, and even though the Spirit was the One who reminded David of the truth and led him to encourage himself rather than to give up, David himself actually had to take action and encourage himself "in the Lord his God", by remembering God's promises to him and choosing to believe them.

Thus it always is in the Christian life. God directs. God empowers. But we need to respond to the truth we have previously learned and are now being called on by the Spirit to apply in whatever crisis or test we find ourselves. Thus the empowerment of the Spirit, the guidance of the Spirit, the encouragement of the Spirit is not "automatically successful". He is God and nothing can stand in His way. But we are required to allow Him to work by listening to His gentle guidance and responding in the good and godly way we have been trained to do. That is why scripture continually *commands* us to take action, and never suggests that God will override our free will.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.  
Deuteronomy 31:6 NIV

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.  
1st Corinthians 16:13 NIV

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, keep seeking after the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Keep thinking on the things above, and not the things on the earth.  
Colossians 3:1-2

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.  
Philippians 4:8 NIV

It is not possible to fulfill any of the above commands – or any other similar command – without responding to the Holy Spirit and making the necessary application of the truth we have believed. Indeed, it is not too much to say that all the many commands and exhortations given to believers in the Bible can *only* be complied with by means of this same process, namely, listening to the Spirit and actively responding to the truth. While this was possible before the cross, believers today who have the Holy Spirit actually indwelling us have no one to blame but ourselves when we fail to accept the guidance, encouragement and empowerment the Holy Spirit continually offers us.

(16) I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Encourager to be with you forever – (17) the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, for it neither sees Him, nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He abides with you, and will be in you.  
John 14:16-17

But the Encourager, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My Name, that One will teach you all [the truth] and will remind you of all [the truth] which I spoke to you.  
John 14:26

But as for you, the anointing which you received from Him remains in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you [this (i.e., v.26 and previous)]. But just as His anointing teaches you about all things and is true and not false, so also as He has taught you, remain in Him.  
1st John 2:27

Finally, it is most uplifting to know that to the extent we are facing exceptional troubles, the Spirit's help likewise abounds to see us through.

Because as our sufferings for Christ multiplied in service to you, so through Christ did the encouragement we received multiply to the same degree.  
2nd Corinthians 1:5

If you are [indeed] being reproached on account of Christ's name, you are [truly] blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of power, even the Spirit of God, rests upon you.  
1st Peter 4:14

When troubles come, therefore, we do what we have to do in whatever trial we face, in complete faith and confidence that the Holy Spirit is the One who is supplying the power for us to do it – and that He *will* see us through it, if only we let Him do so.

### **Not as Murderer or Thief or Evildoer or Meddler (vv.15-16):**

(15) Now let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or a meddler, (16) but if [anyone should suffer for being labeled] as a "Christian", let him not be ashamed of it. Let him rather glorify God under that name.  
1st Peter 4:15-16

The first three derogatory titles in verse fifteen, murderer, thief and evildoer, all represent serious crimes. Murder and theft need no elaboration, except to say that these two represent the sixth and eighth commandments, and thus violate respectively the sanctity of life and the sanctity of property, both necessary elements for survival in the world to the end that everyone may be able to seek after God (cf. Acts 17:26-27). The word "evildoer" is the Greek *kakopoios*, so that this conventional translation is a literal reflection of the word's etymology (with *kakos* meaning "evil", and *poieo* meaning "to do/make"). In terms of actual Greek usage, however, the word covers a large swath of noxious criminal activities, large and small, so that the practical effect of its use here, occurring directly after murder and theft, is to expand the area of ill-repute to be avoided by Christians to "any and all misdemeanors and felonies". "Meddling", that is, being a busybody, prying, and gratuitously involving oneself in other people's business, is likewise meant to cover a good deal of semantic territory, embracing all other scandalous activities which, while perhaps not illegal (as the other three named behaviors are), are equally to be spurned by Christians who wish to give no offense to man or God.

Suffering for murder or robbery or other crimes, and suffering for abysmal behavior which leads to reproach, is not only fair but also to be expected in the normal course of justice and human relationships. The hypothetical person Peter has in mind has gotten his bad reputation entirely through his own foul actions and is therefore justly named, "murderer", "thief", "evil-doer", and "meddler". Far be it from any follower of Jesus Christ to have any such name placed upon him or her with just cause! But what if we are ill-spoken of not for any actual malfeasance, but precisely because we *are* followers of Jesus Christ? That is no cause for shame at all; rather it is an honor to suffer for Christ in such a way as we have seen, and results in eternal reward.

The unbelievers Peter is concerned about, however, had no idea what a "Christian" was, because at the time he wrote this epistle, the word most likely had not even been coined (and even if it had, it was certainly not in wide circulation nor generally accepted by the church as the most appropriate term to use for followers of Christ).<sup>9</sup> What we have here in the best of the Greek manuscripts, Sinaiticus, is instead the word "Chrestian", spelled with a long 'e', not a long 'i'. The difference is significant. "Chrestian" is not a word that believers coined to describe themselves. This term was invented by unbelievers to negatively characterize followers of this new and, to them, strange group. As Peter has already remarked, they "found it strange" that believers were averse to running after all manner of illicit practices with which paganism was enamored, and they resented this standoffish "prudishness" (1Pet.4:4). Therefore, as a term of derision they called Christians "goody-goodies", the essential meaning of "Chrestian" (from the Greek *chestos*, meaning "good").

No one so labeled could expect to be admitted to the closest counsels or society of pagans who looked down their noses at such aloof behavior, so that enduring ostracism – and all the potential disadvantages that entailed – was part and parcel of the suffering for Christ which walking in a godly way produced. Even today we may say that standing apart from many of the "cultural activities and practices" of our present society likewise often results in Christians being branded "holier than thou" and avoided (and often penalized) as a result. Today we may bear this sort of reproach under the name "Christian", and no believer should ever feel ashamed of being called a follower of Christ, especially on account of walking in a sanctified and godly way. In Peter's day, the process and the results were much the same, but the name invoked was different, one considered by pagan unbelievers in turning things upside down to be as equally repulsive as "murderer", "thief", "evil-doer", or "meddler" – but a name which Peter, writing in the Spirit,

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<sup>9</sup> This is the original spelling at all three places where the word occurs in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and in our context). Later scribes changed the spelling to accord with the practices of the church-visible. Widespread adoption of the term "Christian" may be as late as the third or fourth century A.D. In his article, "*Chrestianoī / Christianoī*" in *Hermes*, vol. 30.3 (1895) pp. 465-470, F. Blass has demonstrated that the earlier (correct) form is the only one found to occur in many archaic Christian grave steles, showing that these early believers embraced Peter's advice – and also that they did not yet know of the term "Christian". See also the *BDF* grammar 5.2, fn. 3, where it is demonstrated that the word "Christian" is a Latin adjectival formation, suggesting that therefore "Christian" is a transformation of "Chrestian" (cf. Suetonius' use of the word "Chrestus" in place of Christ, *Div. Claud.* 25). See also at Ichthys, "The Name 'Christian' ": <https://ichthys.com/mail-the-name-Christian.htm>

tells his readers to embrace: if we suffer reproach for Christ's sake when we do what is right and refuse to do what is wrong, we should never feel ashamed for that, no matter how much the taunts and exclusion may sting. It is our Lord Jesus we are here in the world to please – not the world which knows Him not.

### **Time for the Judgment to Begin (v.17):**

For it is time for the judgment to begin, starting with God's household. And if it first begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not believe God's gospel?

1st Peter 4:17

Peter offers the observation above as a means of encouragement. We believers may be enduring undeserved suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ at the hands of unbelievers, but judgment is coming. This reminder should be encouraging to us for three reasons. First, remembering that our time here on earth is short – and even shorter than some may assume when we consider the swiftly approaching Tribulation – helps us to focus instead on the glories to come (cf. 1Cor.10:11). There is no judgment of the Church until we have been resurrected, given beautiful and wonderful new bodies which will never become sick or grow old or experience pain ever again. We may be suffering now, physically and emotionally, but the day is rapidly approaching when we will never ever suffer again in any way whatsoever.

(42) So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body sown is corruptible, the one raised incorruptible. (43) The body sown is dishonorable, the one raised glorious. The body sown is weak, the one raised powerful. (44) The body sown is suited to physical life, the one raised to spiritual life. If there is a physical body (and there patently is), then there is also a spiritual one. (45) For as it has been written that "Adam, the first man, became a physical being, possessing life", so Christ, the last Adam, became a spiritual being, bestowing life. (46) However it is not the spiritual body, but the physical body which comes first, and the spiritual body follows. (47) The first man was earthly, being taken from the ground. The second Man is heavenly. (48) And as was the earthly man, so also are we of the earth. And as is the heavenly Man, so also shall we be when we too take on heavenly form. (49) For just as we have born the image of the earthly man, so also shall we bear the image of the heavenly Man.

1st Corinthians 15:42-49 [index]

(13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, "These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?" (14) And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. (16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., "fountains of waters of life"), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes".

Revelation 7:13-17

(3) And there was a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is [now] with men. And He has taken up residence with them, and they will be His people, and He Himself will be their God. (4) And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And there will no longer be any death, or cries of pain, or grief. For the previous things have passed away."

Revelation 21:3-4

As mentioned above, we have covered elsewhere the doctrine of Christian rewards and the judgment we shall all receive before Christ's *bema*.<sup>10</sup> Suffice it to say here that this is the second reason why Peter's remark about the imminence of judgment should be encouraging to us: we are going to be rewarded for everything we have done for Jesus Christ in this life, even something so seemingly insignificant as a cup of cold water offered in His Name (Matt.10:42). Remembering the wonderful treasures that await us at the resurrection is, as we have seen, an essential tool in our box for enduring suffering: along with our father Abraham, we are looking beyond this life towards that eternal city "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb.11:10), namely, the heavenly New Jerusalem. There is where our true citizenship and eternal habitation lies, the place Jesus has made for us to be with Him and each other together forever (Jn.14:2-3). There are the gates of pearl, the foundations of precious stones, the streets and building made of translucent gold, the tree of life bearing twelve crops, the crystal waters of the river of life – and the Father and the Lamb with whom we shall be and whose glory we shall see face to face forevermore.

The third reason why this statement about impending judgment is meant to be encouraging is because of the just desserts about to fall upon our persecutors. True, we rightly feel godly trepidation about our own appearance before Jesus Christ to be judged for "the things done in this body" (2Cor.5:10). That is surely true for us all, if we are thinking aright, even for such a great believer as the apostle Paul (2Cor.5:11). But we who believe in Jesus Christ know that whatever few painful moments we may have to endure when our Lord evaluates our lives, our position as part of His Church, His Bride, is secure. He has died for our sins and we have redeemed by His blood, His death for us on the cross (Rev.7:14; 22:14). Our discomfort will last but a moment and will swiftly be swallowed up by the ecstatic joy we shall experience with Him and with each other in the New Jerusalem forever, fully rewarded for all the spiritual growth, progress and production we have accomplished through the Holy Spirit. But for unbelievers, for all those who persecuted us, who shunned us, who cast our name about as something evil, their eternal portion is the lake of fire (Rev.20:11-15).

(41) "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, (42) and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Matthew 13:41-43 NKJV

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<sup>10</sup> See especially CT 6, section I.7, "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

## The Righteous Barely Saved (v.18):

For [as it says], "If the righteous man is barely saved, where will the ungodly and sinful turn? (Prov.11:33)".

1st Peter 4:18

As believers in Jesus Christ, we know that we are saved (e.g., Jn.3:18; Acts 16:31; Eph.2:8-9). But it is also true that in order for us to come into all the glories we have been promised in the gospel, we first have to cross the finish-line with our faith intact, we have to "hold fast to our original conviction firmly to the end" (Heb.3:14; cf. 1Cor.15:2; Col.1:21-23; 2Thes.2:11-13; Heb.3:6). Bible teachers (of whom Peter was not only one of the best but whose words here are of course inspired by the Spirit) do need to give those whom they instruct the proper confidence in the truth. We have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved – that is the security of our salvation, invincible as long as we win the victory of faith (1Jn.5:4-5; Rev.2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21; 21:7). But Bible teachers must also not fail to warn their listeners about "the other side of the coin" in all matters that have this double aspect such as is the case in salvation: our salvation is absolutely secure *just as long as we hold fast our faith*. Believers are saved. Unbelievers are not, not even if they once believed. Apostasy is a reality, and never will that be more obvious – and never will it be more pronounced – than during the Great Apostasy of the Tribulation where fully one third of believers alive at that time are predicted to fall away from the faith.

The one who believes in Him is not being judged, but the one who does not believe has already been judged on the grounds that he has not put his faith in the Name (i.e., the Person) of God's only Son.

John 3:18

So then, my brothers, just as you have always been obedient [to the truth], not just when I was present [with you] but even more so now in my absence, go to work on your salvation with fear and trembling.

Philippians 2:12

Our salvation is *not* hanging by a thread. Jesus Christ loves us and died for us. All of our sins have been forgiven, and our Lord and Master deeply desires us to remain part of His Body, His Bride, His Church, for all eternity. Our job is to hold onto that salvation, to persevere until the end, not allowing the pressures and trials and tribulations of this life to swamp our faith.

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

Never will perseverance in faith be more difficult than during the Tribulation, when we may be called upon to give up our lives for the Lord rather than take the mark of the beast. Keeping our eyes on the prize of salvation, with all the glories of the resurrection that accompany it, will be absolutely necessary for believers to negotiate that most difficult of times with their faith intact.

(10) And at that time many will fall away and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:10-13

Contemplating the severe challenges of that terrible time soon to come may seem daunting, and we may be tempted to ask along with the disciples, "Lord, who then can be saved?" (Matt.19:25). So we need never to forget His answer to them:

"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:26b NKJV

### **Those who are Suffering (v.19):**

Therefore let all those who are suffering according to the will of God entrust their lives – while doing what is good – to a Creator who is faithful.

1st Peter 4:19

Suffering, especially when it is unexpected, undeserved and onerous, is one of the main ways people fall into apostasy, that is, when instead of trusting God, and instead of persevering in doing good, and instead of having confidence in His total faithfulness, understanding that this suffering is "the will of God", they allow themselves to become angry, or sullen. or lapse into despair, and so eventually fall away from the faith.

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (*skandalizetai*; i.e., he apostatizes).

Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root [of faith] in themselves, but are only temporary [believers]. When tribulation or persecution because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up (*skandalizontai*; i.e., they apostatize).

Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed of faith fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but ***in time of testing*** they apostatize.

Luke 8:13

In our present verse, Peter gives us the secret to enduring suffering for the sake of Christ. Believers must remember that whatever we have to suffer, even the horrors of the Tribulation, that "this is the will of God" for us (1Thes.5:18). For ***whatever*** happens in our lives is "the will of God". God's plan is absolutely comprehensive and all-inclusive. He has taken into account

every single thing that has happened, is happening, or will ever happen. Indeed, nothing could possibly happen without His allowing it to happen. To human eyes, while things may seem to occur by chance or arbitrary happenstance, we believers know and understand that all things are under the supervision of the beneficent gaze and mighty hand of God, having been decreed in eternity past in complete detail, taking into account every single decision, large or small, of every human being made in the image of God (Rom.8.28-30). We may be tested in this life; we will be tested in this life; this life *is* a test – of our desire to be with the Lord (or not), and of the depth of the love we feel for Him for rescuing us from death and damnation (or lack thereof). Passing the test requires faith, and faith is trust. We trusted the Lord to save us from the grave when we first put our faith in Jesus Christ. And we trust Him, trust His words of truth to us, at every step of the way in our spiritual journey of growth, progress and production thereafter.

But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!  
Philippians 3:16

(6) So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way], (7) rooted and built up in him, established in the faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving.  
Colossians 2:6-7

Since faith is the key to salvation and that same faith is the key to our spiritual advance, it should come as no surprise that faith is also the secret to enduring suffering for Christ's sake: we understand – *by faith* – that whatever we suffer is the will of God; we understand – *by faith* – that even though the world doesn't see it, these troubles we are encountering are in fact God working everything out together for true, divine good in our case (Rom.8:28), strengthening our faith thereby (Jas.1:3), and preparing us for tests still to come to the end of our Lord's glorification and our own great eternal reward (1Pet.1:7). He made us for His own glory – He is our "Creator" and we belong to Him. And He is unchangingly "faithful" to us. We will never regret trusting Jesus Christ. And if we commit ourselves to doing so when the times are the toughest, we will find that the greatest moments of fellowship with Him are precisely when we do trust Him with all our hearts in the very midst of the fiery furnace.

(24) Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." (25) "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."  
Daniel 3:24-25 NKJV

Daniel's three friends entrusted their lives to the Lord – and He delivered them in a miraculous way, giving them an exceptional experience unparalleled in the history of the world. They had confidence that their God was *faithful*, and that He was fully capable of delivering them. But, as they told the king (Dan.3:16-18), whether it was the Lord's good pleasure to save them or to suffer death for His sake, they were determined to do His will. Let us likewise adopt that same godly attitude and resolve to persevere with it regardless of whatever undeserved suffering we may be called upon to endure, even it should be our lot to face the fiery furnace of the

Tribulation, continuing to "do what is good" for the sake of Jesus Christ and His Church, come what may.

If anyone [is marked] for captivity, he is going into captivity. If anyone [is marked] for death by the sword, by the sword [he must] be killed. Therefore endurance and faith [on the part] of [my] sanctified ones is [called for].

Revelation 13:10

(12) [But] the saints have perseverance, [even] those who in this way (i.e., by refusing the mark and worship of the beast) keep God's commandments and [retain] their faith in Jesus. (13) And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on so that they may rest from their labors", says the Spirit. "For their deeds follow with them."

Revelation 14:12-13

(12) "Behold", [says the Lord], "I am coming quickly, and I bring my wages with me for each to be repaid according to his work. (13) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (14) Happy are they who wash their robes so that their right of access to the gates will also be like their right of access to the tree of life, that they may enter the city."

Revelation 22:12-14