

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Suffering is Certain: The Reasons Vary

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. (1 Peter 4:14–16, KJV 1900)

Over time, I have slowly come to realize that various books of the Bible emphasize certain truths. We often read these books without realizing the major emphasis the inspired writer places on his dominant theme. First Peter serves as a good example of this point, for it develops and emphasizes throughout the various factors that relate to our suffering. If you have faced a greater than average number of trials recently, spend lots of time with First Peter. If you are feeling conviction for your sinful rebellion to the Lord and sense that His judgments shall soon appear in your life, read First Peter. In either case, as in many others, you will realize that you are not alone. Others have walked the same path that you now walk. The Lord made a point of not calling "Trail-blazers" who would create a path where none have ever walked and, in a pretense of honorarium to Him, name their new trail with His name. He rather calls **followers**. He walked the path that we should walk, and He carefully and clearly marked it so that we may frequently check the waymarks and verify that we are on the path that He made for us—and commanded us to walk in it.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. Few of us have faced significant reproach for our devotion to the Name of Jesus, so the experience of which Peter writes seems strange to us. You might get just a bare taste of it if you notify your supervisor that you will not report for work next Sunday because you are going to church. You might taste a hint of it if your supervisor directs you to do something that is not altogether upright, and you refuse based on your Christian convictions of right and wrong. Most of us who have worked long in this world have lived through such moments, brief and slight as they are, compared to the intense sufferings that many Christians in the past faced.

We may face reproach for any number of reasons, but our typical response is not happiness, is it? We probably feel highly offended, mistreated, and perhaps under-appreciated at the least. To endure reproach for one's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ does not automatically produce the happy reaction that Peter here describes. This happy state of mind and heart only comes when our whole

being has been so focused on Him that we are full of love and worship to Him for His mercies in our lives. If our heart and faith's eye are tightly focused on Him, we hardly notice the afflictions of the moment in this brief world. We are set on Him on our pilgrimage through this wild region, to Him and to His—and our—homeland.

One of the first miracles after Jesus ascended (The first being the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, ten days after His ascension) occurred when Peter commanded a lame man to stand up and walk—and he did. Because of the public display of God's power in this man's healing, the leaders of Judah summoned Peter and John to a hearing. The same Peter who was so fearful just a couple months ago now seems fearless as he speaks with boldness and power to the very men who had demanded Jesus' crucifixion at the hands of the Romans. After the rulers threatened them if they refused to stop preaching Jesus and the resurrection, they were released. In our day, sadly often someone who goes through a bitter trial will avoid church. Not these men! The first thing they wanted to do was to find their brothers and sisters and tell them what had happened. And just as quickly, the assembled church began praising God for faithful grace. Notice their words, the closing segment quoted below.

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:29-33 KJVP)

These first generation believers exemplify the truth that Peter teaches. They discounted the persecution, rejoiced, and prayed for grace to preach with greater boldness.

...on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. When the wicked rulers of Jerusalem and Judah saw how steadfastly the disciples preached Jesus and the resurrection, they tried all the harder to speak evil of Him—and of them. And the more they spoke out against Jesus the more those disciples rejoiced and became still bolder in praising and preaching Him all the more.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Peter understood a truth that today's superficial Christian doesn't at all grasp. The choice as we deal with our faith in our lives, in our workplace, our families, or our neighborhoods, is not between suffering as a Christian or hiding our Christianity and enjoying the good life. For Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit to write God's truth, suffering in this life is inevitable. No matter what we do, we cannot escape it. In one form or another, suffering shall invade every life. We can do nothing to permanently and surely avoid suffering. However, we can take bold steps to control why we shall suffer. If we follow the siren song of today's culture, we shall suffer as a murderer (Think of murder in terms of how Jesus defined murder in Matthew 5:21-22, speaking to or about your brother or sister in anger), a thief an evildoer, or a busybody. I've given you a Biblical definition of a murderer from Matthew 5:21-22. Take the time to examine each of the other behaviors in this list and study the Scriptures to find a Biblical definition or description of these traits. You'll find this study quite surprising and rewarding. However, be prepared for a major assault against your pride.

We can avoid suffering for these sinful actions only by not committing those sins. And if you choose to commit the sin, do not complain when you suffer for it. The sinful shifting sand of our present culture manifests itself clearly in the popular attitude that something is wrong only if your action is discovered. Based on this relativistic, sinful idea, you can do just about anything you wish, and the culture will smile politely and approve so long as your wrongs are not discovered and publicized. But if your wrong actions become known, the culture will cluck at you for the wrong.

The Bible affirms a fixed moral code that God gave to humanity, and He has never revised that code. When God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, He wrote them in stone, not silly putty. God's moral governance of humanity is fixed on that moral code. In its broader context in the Law that God gave to Moses, it has been fulfilled and replaced. However, God's moral code in the New Testament affirms the same moral laws that appear in these Ten "Words." You may break one of these laws and take the fact secretly to your grave. That secrecy doesn't in any way lessen the character or

the degree of the sin. While humans may never know, God knows, and His Law is the final criteria.

Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. To suffer is not a disgrace unless the suffering was caused by a disgraceful action. Based on Scripture, being a Christian is the right and honorable thing for a believer in Jesus to be.

The fifth chapter of Acts records an instructive episode in the life of the early church. After the Ananias and Sapphira event, the chapter goes into significant details about the boldness and power with which the apostles preached and healed many who were sick. This was not a charade like some folks in our day that claim to heal the sick, but do not at all do so. They really did heal these people by the kind grace and power of God. Their gracious conduct was quickly noticed by the rulers. Acts 5:17 says that they were filled with indignation, and the marginal reading suggests the word "Envy." They threw the apostles in prison in an effort to stop their preaching and healing. The Lord delivered the apostles from the prison, and they immediately returned to their good works of preaching and healing. Soon these godly men found themselves back before the rulers. The discussion among the rulers is enlightening. Eventually, the rulers decided that their only action was to beat the apostles, threaten them if they again preached Jesus and helped the hurting, and let them go. How did the apostles react to the beating and threats? Acts 5:41 tells us that they left the gathering of the rulers *"...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. (Acts 5:41 KJVP)* They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name! Think about your present situation in today's culture. If the local police invaded our church service on a Sunday morning, arrested the preachers, and threatened all, what would you think? And if those preachers eventually showed up and reported that they had been tortured and threatened if they preached Jesus again, what would you think? Would you go to church next Sunday, or would you find a convenient excuse to avoid the gathering? What would the preachers do? These men rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame before wicked men for Jesus' name. Their reaction exemplifies Peter's admonition to his readers. He had lived through this event. His words recall his personal experience, and he admonishes others to follow. They all rejoiced at the situation. Not a one of them complained at being mistreated. We read not one word that someone suggested a dark, sinister conspiracy against Christians. They rejoiced! For these men, honoring and obeying God settled the question. They loved Him that much. We should pray daily that such persecution not come, but we should also pray for grace to react as these men did, should the day come? Can we do so? His grace enables those who see Him with the same devotion that these men manifested.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor