

1 Peter 4:12-19

Suffering as a Christian

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief-maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name. For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And

'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?'

Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

A week or so ago I was part of an online fellowship group and we were reflecting upon grace. We started talking about receiving the punishment that should have rightly gone to our siblings as we were growing up. One spoke about how they would sometimes volunteer to take the punishment for a sibling as the punishment they would receive would be gentler for they were "in the good books" at the time.

We do not like being punished for what we have done, let alone for that which we have not done. Punishment and suffering can go hand in hand but we need to be careful that we do not equate suffering as being punishment; punishment may bring suffering but not all suffering is punishment.

As Christians we are likely to face suffering, sharing in the sufferings of Christ, suffering because we belong to Christ is par for the course and was mentioned by Jesus in what we call the beatitudes. In Matthew 5:10ff we read: -

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The suffering we endure now is nothing compared to the judgement which we deserve; the judgement which in grace, Christ took on himself for those who would believe in him and enter into a relationship with him.

Jesus is the one who endured the cross for sinners like you and me. He took our punishment upon himself not that the punishment would be any the less, for he was "in the good books." On the cross Jesus bore the full weight of the law to the point where he felt separated from love, "Why have you forsaken me?"

As Peter closed this section - "Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good."

We continue to do good for the glory of Christ, entrusting ourselves to the faithful Creator who entered into Creation in Jesus.