

# The Christian's Strange and Fiery Trials

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Now we'll continue with 1 Peter, chapter four, beginning with verse 12, and reading the rest of the chapter. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 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. For the time is come, that judgment must begin at the house of God. And if it first began at us, what shall be the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

Those words of Peter continue his epistle upon which I have been preaching sermons now for some time. He says here in the opening verse, beloved, think it not strange. Now here is a curious and lovable twist in human nature that we can bear adversities better if we can get three things straight. We can bear adversities better; first, if we can identify them. Strange evils, are always more terrifying. We're always afraid of that which we can't identify. If we don't know what it is, we're scared. That's human nature. And I suppose it isn't anything for us to worry about.

Or imagine that we need to see a head doctor. It's just humanity that half the victory is won over fear when we can identify the object of our fear. When we know what it is that's troubling us, much of the trouble disappears. I might add that that is one of the half-dozen, maybe four basic tenants upon which psychiatry is established. And they are right that far, that if you can identify your troubles, you have them half-wiped. Maybe not the other half way, but at least half. And Peter said, beloved, think it not strange. He was identifying their troubles for them and pointing out that these were not strange, but that they were familiar, and that these persons were suffering along with all the rest.

And the second thing that helps us to bear adversity is when we expect them. Unexpected blows are always the ones that do the deadliest work. A blow that is expected, we can brace against both physically and psychologically. But a blow that comes out of nowhere is the one that does the greatest harm.

And the third thing is if we know that the adversities are common to all. It is I say a lovable, if queer twist in human nature that, if we know that everybody else is as bad off as we are, it makes it easier for us to be bad off. Now, I can't explain that, I only know that it works that way. The last three weeks we have had frightful heat. And let me ask you, suppose that you had been cut out from all the 4 million in the Chicago area and subjected to three weeks of that frightful heat knowing that everybody else in the city of Chicago, from the greatest to the least, was comfortable and relaxed and going about in comfortable clothes. It would have stepped up the intensity of your suffering very greatly. But there's something half humorously comforting in the knowledge that if you're sweating, everybody else is too. And that if you have to go out and face the hot breath of nature, everybody else does. And even if they're in an air-conditioned office, you know, they'll step out onto the street and nearly fall over. And somehow you get a restful feeling well. I'm not alone in this.

Now I say, that is not a divine thing, and it's not a spiritual thing, but it is a natural thing. And remember this, that there are three things that God takes account of in human life: those things that are natural and good; and those things that are natural and bad; and those things that are spiritual. So there are some things that are natural and bad. That is, they stem out of an evil disposition, which is natural, but bad. Then there are things that stem out of nature itself and that are not tainted, particularly like this. These things of which I speak are part of our human nature. They're neither to be apologized for nor repented of it. It's that it comforts you to know that you're only one of 4 million other suffering people. Don't let that bother you. Just take what comfort you can out of it when it gets hot.

So, Peter identified the fiery trials for them. And this cooled the fire of the furnace very great. He said, little children, beloved, think it not strange concerning the fire, a trial which has come upon you, which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you. No. This that's happening to you isn't strange, it's familiar. It's a part of the pattern of life under the sun. Then he said, rejoice ye, and they are told here to rejoice that they are given a part in the pains of Christ.

Now this knowledge took the rest of the fire out of their sufferings, that they were not only suffering familiar sufferings. That their adversaries were familiar adversaries known to all good peoples since time began. But that they were given the high privilege of suffering and bearing the pains of Christ. These first Christians were uncritically simple. The involved reasoning with which we overcast everything now. The pale cast of thought, that takes away the simplicity of our living, wasn't known to them. Those first Christians trusted the sufferings of Christ. And they related their sufferings to His. Christ was the great Sufferer, they said. And when we suffer for His sake, we're relating our suffering to Him and bearing His suffering along with Him. Then they related their reward to His. Peter said that plainly here. Rejoice because you know that you will also be partaker of the glory that follows. And so they rejoiced in the great honor that was done them in being permitted to suffer for Christ's sake, and thus endure the pains of the Lord Jesus after Him.

And then he said, if ye be reproached for the name of Christ. Now it's hard for modern men to understand this, if ye be reproached for the name of Christ. But if you will imagine a man whose whole person was wonderful. A man around whose head clustered miracles and healings and deliverances and kind deeds and forgiving words and consolations and encouragement. Who shone like the sun on men. Who fell like the gentle rain on the hearts of men. Who breathed on men and made them strong again. This man, whose bold claim was that he was the one whom the world had long expected. The one whom the prophets wrote about. This one who is adored by children and outcasts and honest men and serious women, and yet was hated by organized religion. Institutionalized religion could not find a place for Him. He was the stone that didn't fit into the building. You read that in the Bible; of the stone that they couldn't make fit. They had all the stones they wanted. And when the Chief Cornerstone appeared, the architects got busy but they couldn't find a place to fit this stone in.

So, they threw Him aside and rejected Him as being useless. And then they finally executed Him by trickery and sent Him out to die on a cross. And now worst of all for them, it was claimed that many had seen Him alive. And that this criminal who had been put to death wasn't dead anymore, but that He was now alive and was more at the head of His followers than He had been before.

Now, can you imagine the violent effect that that name would have. That name would have not only reasonable meaning, it would have violent emotional explosive power. Because the name of Christ, divided to clave asunder like an earthquake cleaves a mountain. And every man stood to be counted. He was either for Christ or against Him. You either reverently worshipped him and believed that He was God indeed and knelt in quiet worship, for the clusters of healing and hope and consolation and peace and rehabilitation, were around the head of Jesus, or they accepted the beliefs of organized religion. And they said, He was a madman filled with the devil and was out to destroy organized society. There could be no neutrality there. They had to get on one side or the other. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, He said.

Now you can see under that simple, quick sketch, against that backdrop, you can see how it was that they were reproached for the name of Jesus in this smoothed over age, it's not so violent, not so sharp. Men are not so lined up as they were then, because they're not so simple, not so direct, not so human. In this age of plastic, men are not so simple. And yet it was this simplicity that Jesus Christ praised above all human virtues, when he said, except ye become as little children. It was a simplicity of childhood, not the ignorance of childhood, not the dirt of childhood, not the noise of childhood, but the simplicity of it. Little children have lots of qualities that we're praying they will outgrow as fast as they can. You know how that is. But the one thing that we don't want them to outgrow, but yet grievously, with great grief, see them outgrow, is simplicity. That direct immediacy that belongs to the unspoiled human breast.

So, they got on one side of the other, and His detractors flared into fury at the mention of His name. And His followers bowed their heads and said, my Lord and my God. That was the division, the sharp cleavage, and it's existed wherever the church has been pure. It's existed wherever men have put away their half-knowledge and have come like children to look into the face of God.

And he said, here now, let none of you suffer as an evildoer. And here we see the salty practicality of the Christian way. The Christian faith is not to provide immunity for wrongdoers. It's often done it. We admit that. It has often done it. But according to the Bible, it's never to be so. Let none suffer as an evildoer. If you suffer, remember, it's not a strange thing, but easy to understand. And your Lord went that way before you. But if any of you are being reproached for wrongdoing, don't hide behind your Christian immunity. The Deacon who doesn't pay his bills. The pastor who leaves the city owing debts. He cannot, he dare not hide these evils behind clerical immunity or Christian immunity. The Bible says no, let nobody suffer as an evildoer. To use the faith of Christ to hide evil is to prove ourselves false and bring down judgment on our own heads. And judgment must begin at the house of God.

Now this is a club often used against Christians. Judgment must begin at the house of God. People shrug their shoulders, toss their nose in the air and turn away from the church saying, let judgment begin at the house of God, or more simply, sweep your own doorstep first. But I wonder if they read the rest of that verse? Judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it begin at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?

There is one thing brother that God won't permit. He won't permit an outsider to interfere in His family affairs. He just won't permit it. He will not allow the outsider to quote or misquote garbled or emasculated Scriptures. He won't allow them to use a club over the head of His child. He says judgment must begin at the house of God. And the angry unbeliever says, yes, judgment must begin with you. Why don't you mind your own business. And then God adds, but if it begin among My own children, how terrible it will be for those who did not even care to become My children. The ungodly and the sinner, where shall they appear? One of those dramatic questions that has no answer, a rhetorical question that carries its own answer rather in it, where shall they appear? For the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, David had said centuries before and now Peter repeats it almost word for word.

And now we come to the conclusion. Wherefore, let them not suffer according to the will of God. Commit to keeping of their souls in well doing unto a faithful Creator, whatever kind of suffering that may be. If you suffer out of the will of God, you have no reward, no encouragement from heaven or earth. But if you suffer according to the will of God, then we're told plainly what to do. Commit your soul in well doing unto a faithful Creator.

I love words. And I love to unwrap them and unwrap them and find out what they have. Sometimes by unwrapping a little further, you will find a buried gift there you didn't know is in it. Commit says here, and what does commit mean? It means to deposit for protection.

A man buys a safe deposit box and puts deeds and insurance policies and things he wants to keep. He puts them there for protection, knowing that by and large, they're safer there in a bank surrounded by guards and with steel gates and all the rest. They're safer there than they would be in his bedroom or in a cookie jar. He puts them where he thinks they're safe. He commits them. He deposits them for protection. And so, salty old Peter says, your sufferings are not strange. They're familiar. Everybody's had to endure them. And if you're suffering in the will of God, why, turn your soul over to God for protection? Deposit it. Make a deposit of your soul. Deposit means take your hand off the thing.

Some people, some old misers we hear about sometimes in the newspapers, love their money so much that they will not give it up. They want to count it when the lights are low and the window blinds are tight and the doors are locked. They want to take it out and feel it. They can't deposit it because they feel if they can't keep body contact with it, it isn't safe. They don't know that it's more safe away from them than it is with them. But that's peculiarity of people sometimes.

So we must deposit our souls. Turn them over to God. I have likened committal to God to the mailing of a letter. You take a letter and drop it in a mailbox, and you hold on to it and pull it back out and look to see if it's stamped and addressed correctly. Give it that last minute look. You still have your letter. Uncle Sam can't touch it. Not all the soldiers in Cook County dare lay a finger on that letter. President Eisenhower could not under the law take that letter out of your hand, nor McCarthy. Nobody can take that letter from you. That's your letter, and you hold it. It's yours to do with as you please. You wrote it. You addressed it. You stamped it. You sealed it. You carried it there to the corner. If you finally put it back in your pocket, you've still got your letter.

But if you want to deposit it, you have to let loose of it. Put it in there, at least through the slot and then let go. And until you've let go, you have not made your deposit. When you let go, then you don't dare touch it. Then, any cop in the city can arrest you if you touch it. After you drop it in, Uncle Sam has it. His big star-spangled hand closes on your letter and you're through with it. And if you'd reach your arm in there, if that were possible, and pull out that letter, you can be arrested. Committal means committal brethren. It means depositing for protection. Then it means something else. It means to deliver to another's charge and to mark an absolute transfer, or make an absolute transfer to a superior power.

So, Peter says, now make a transfer of your soul to a superior power. Turn yourself over to God. Have you done that? If you haven't, then I do not know that I have much consolation for you, because you're a victim of the ebb and flow of circumstances. You're a victim of every new fear

that comes on the horizon. You're a victim of luck and chance and happenstance and perchance and possibility, enemies known and unknown, the latest germ that slips in. You're a victim of all the uncertainty of the world if you have not made that deposit. But if you have made that deposit, you're a victim of none at all.

Nobody ever worries about a letter that he's dropped in the mailbox. It will get there all right. It'll get there. For four years and over, I have been sending almost daily packets, letters, packages, air mail special delivery mostly and we've never lost one. And there's never been one sent us, that we know about, that ever has been lost. It always gets there. Uncle Sam is pretty trustworthy when it comes to the mail. It may be a little slow, a little expensive, but he'll get it there, if you'll commit it.

So, you commit your soul in well doing unto a superior power and then you won't have to worry about yourself. Now that's the only true peace I know and the only way I know how to tell you to find peace. If I tell you death isn't real, I'm lying to you. If I tell you there are no enemies, I'm lying to you again. If I tell you that you have absolute assurance of so many years ahead for you, I'm lying some more. If I tell you that pain isn't real, it's only thought to be so, you know I'm not telling the truth. But if I tell you yes, death is real. Pain is real. Adversaries are real. But I know where you can put yourself, like a document in a safe deposit vault, where nobody can get to you, where you're as safe as the character of the bank that holds you. Not a bank this time, but Almighty God called here, a faithful Creator.

Turn yourself over to a faithful Creator through Jesus Christ. Put yourself in His hands by one final act of your soul and say, Lord, suffering or rejoicing, whatever the circumstance, I turned myself over to Thee and you will be as safe as the throne of God. For God is a faithful Creator. A dollar is only worth as much as the government back of it. You buy a government bond and you're assuming the government is going to stand. But if it falls, your bond will be no good. Your bond, the currency of a country, is only as safe as the government of that country. Let the government fall, and your bonds and your currency and everything else falls to the ground.

Now, when I tell you, you commit your soul to God in well doing, turn yourself over, take your hands off, and deliver over to that Higher Power for keeping, then I have to qualify it by saying, you'll only be as safe as God. Is that enough for you? If that isn't enough, what can you add? Where can you go? Where can you turn? If God isn't enough, where will you look? But God is enough.

We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship Thee, the Father Everlasting. To Thee, all angels cry aloud, the heavens and all the powers therein. To Thee, seraphim and cherubim continue to cry, holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabbath. Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of Thy glory. If he isn't enough, better had we never been born. But God is enough. He upholds the heaven and the earth.

I quote to other congregations occasionally. Maybe I ought to quote to you again that wonderful saying of the Archbishop of Tours where he said, God is above all and beneath all and outside of all and inside of all. He is above, but not pushed up, beneath but not depressed, outside, but not excluded, inside but not confined. He is above all, presiding, underneath all, sustaining. Outside of all, embracing, and inside of all, filling. This is God. He's enough. So, commit the keeping of your soul to your Creator. Turn yourself over to God, through Jesus Christ, and you will be all right. Amen.