

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expository Journey Through **1Peter** **1Peter 3:13-17**

35- Suffering for the Sake of Righteousness, Part 1

October 21, 2018

1 Peter 3:13-17

13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.
AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,

15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

To the Glory of God

Now the Apostle just finished a very important section of this inspired "Letter", in verse 12, about Prayer, when he quoted from **Psalm 34** and said:

FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.

... so, Peter was telling us that our Prayers will be "hindered" *even if we are saved*, unless we are pursuing "Righteousness". And the word "Righteousness", as used in this context, is talking about "Obedience". So, unless we are actively and consciously walking in "Obedience" to that which God has said, Peter says that our Prayers are hindered.

And, in context, the “Obedience” that Peter was referring to was with Husbands and Wives. Peter commanded believing Husbands to:

1 Peter 3:7b

... live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life,

... and Peter commanded believing Wives to:

1 Peter 3:1b-6

... be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be *merely* external — braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

In other words, there is a way to think and a way to live that will either *help* or *hinder* our Prayers. And from this, we can formulate a Doctrine, a Divine Teaching, a Biblical Truth that we can teach and learn and proclaim with great confidence from these texts:

Christians must endeavor to think and live in a way that does not hinder their Prayers.

... and this Doctrine has three parts to it:

1. Our Prayers *can* be hindered, even if we are saved. Our “prayer life” can be clogged and blocked.
2. What blocks Prayer is often the way we think and the way we live, the way we relate to Wives or Husbands or kids or parents or colleagues or neighbors, or even those who have wronged us.
3. Opening the way of Prayer to God involves a *conscious* endeavor. Peter is telling us to “do” something so that our Prayers will not be hindered.

... and the motivation behind us being of sound judgment and of having a sober spirit is:

The end of all things is near...

Jesus is soon to come. And He desires that when He bursts the clouds and comes back, that He finds us faithful, fruitful, and busy in the Work of the Lord. The Bible promises great Rewards for those whom the Lord finds like this. And the Bible promises terrifying Punishments to those who are not like this. And that knowledge will motivate us.

But this Doctrine tells us something else:

A free, open, real, satisfying life of Prayer is not automatic.

... so, it won't just *happen*. It isn't *automatic*. A free, open, real, satisfying life of Prayer doesn't *automatically* come simply because you are saved. Because it is possible that saved people can still sin. So, it matters how we think. And it matters what we believe. And it matters how we live our lives. And if that was not true, there would have been no reason for Peter to go to such length to talk about this.

So, the "name of the game", as it pertains to those who have *already* experienced the miracle of the New Birth, is "Righteousness". Because Righteousness or Obedience is the end result of our belief. The Apostle Paul taught that Salvation was a matter of what we believe with our hearts and what we confess with our mouths, when he wrote:

Romans 10:9

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

... but in the very next verse, the Apostle tells us what the results are of that belief and confession:

Romans 10:10

For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

... so, we are not to simply believe and confess. We are to believe *resulting in Righteousness* (Obedience), and we are to confess *resulting in Salvation* (new spiritual Life).

So, true, genuine, biblical Salvation *always* results in the individual being radically and eternally *transformed* so that he has both the power and the desire to follow Jesus, to walk in humble and joyful Obedience, to bear godly fruit, to love God and the things of the Spirit of God. So, Obedience (Righteousness) is the sign or the fruit or the goal or the result of correct belief. There is no such thing as anybody, who has truly experienced the miracle of the New Birth, who does not gladly pursue Obedience to what God has said.

The Bible teaches that saved people are to live our lives, in such a way, that two things are true:

- ✓ God is glorified
- ✓ Our Joy is made full

... and Peter says that living like that will always *guarantee* that our Prayers will be helped. And there are no exceptions to this Truth. Because even though his immediate audience is being horribly persecuted, Peter issues these Apostolic Commands.

So, what Peter has described so far in this First Epistle is what Faithfulness, to what God has said, looks like. He has told us how Obedience, to God's Commandments, will make us behave.

But, as we have discovered, all forms of "Obedience" are not the same. There are, at least, three *different kinds* of "Obedience" that are possible in a person's life:

1. *Forced* Obedience
2. *Fearful* Obedience
3. *Glad* Obedience

"*Forced* Obedience" occurs when there is some power or authority that is exercised *over* an individual that *compels* him to obey, such as in School, where the environment is controlled, and there are Teachers and Principals who will administer Punishment if the student doesn't obey. So, in this case, the motivation to obey is that *outside* or *external*

forces *cause* or *compel* the obedience. And that brings glory (or praise) to those *external* forces.

"*Fearful* Obedience" occurs when a Punishment is promised, and the fear of that Punishment is *greater* than any pleasure derived from the act. For example, many people don't do what they really want to do. And the *cause* of that restraint is a fear of repercussion or a fear of exposure or a fear of punishment.

And a person motivated by this fear may obey the law, or he may remain faithful to his wife, but he does so *not* out of any genuine love for his city or his wife, but because the Punishment (or publicity) is *greater* than he is willing to risk. So, in this case, the fear that he has *causes* his obedience. And the catalyst by which that fear is put into practice is his own human will-power and discipline to restrain himself, based in this fear. And that brings glory to the person.

But I suggest to you that *neither* one of these kinds of Obedience glorifies God. Now, to be sure, either *Forced* or *Fearful* Obedience is better than blatant Disobedience. But only "*Glad* Obedience", an Obedience or a Righteousness that is based in Joy, has the ability to bring Glory to God.

Now why is that? Because both *Forced* and *Fearful* Obedience has the wrong motivation. So, even though, from the outside, both of these kinds of Obedience look good, the motivation is all wrong. And so, neither one honors God.

The only kind of Obedience that honors God, and that displays the inherent Worth and Value of Jesus Christ, is an Obedience that is based in a transformed nature that now truly loves God and that seeks to please Him and one that trusts in what God has promised. And 1,000 years before Jesus was born, God the Holy Spirit "moved along" Israel's most beloved King to say:

Psalms 16:11b

In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

... and Jesus echoed that, when He said:

John 15:11

These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.

... so, there is a "Joy" that belongs to Jesus. It doesn't belong to you or me. This Joy is not of this world. It is a *supernatural Joy*, A *powerful Joy*, and an *eternal Joy*. This Joy is *different* from any other kind of "human happiness" that exists. David said this Joy was in the very Presence of God. So, you can't "work" this Joy up. You can't *manufacture* this Joy. And the phrase "the Presence of God" refers to this Righteousness and this Obedience. Obedience brings you near to God, while Disobedience would place you at a distance from God, out from His Presence.

And David said that these Pleasures were at God's "Right Hand", which is where Jesus is, Who *always* obeyed His Father. So, this Joy is a Gift from God through a *strong* and *real* and *powerful* and *obedient* Relationship with Jesus Christ. And we know that this Relationship is called "Salvation". Because Salvation brings us near to God; it empowers us to obey and to follow after Jesus Christ.

And we *receive* this Gift of Joy, the very same way we were saved in the first place, by Grace and through Faith. But the Grace and Faith of this Gift of Joy flows out from an Obedience that results from us already being saved. And that is why it must be a *Glad* Obedience, an Obedience that is based in Joy and *not* an Obedience based in either Fear or Force.

So, Righteousness is Obedience. And that means that Disobedience is Unrighteousness or Sin. But what exactly are we supposed to obey? We are either Obedient or Disobedient to what God has said, what He has decreed, and what He has commanded. So, we are either Righteous or Unrighteous depending on whether we have obeyed or disobeyed God's Commandments. Okay, but what are "Commandments"? Well, Commandments are "Mandates" or "Orders" given by God. And all Commandments have to do with one of two components of human existence:

1. Our Actions
2. Our Disposition

Most of the time, when we think about God's Commandments, we think about the Ten Commandments from **Exodus 20** like:

1. You shall have no other gods before the one, true, and living God
2. You shall not make an idol to bow down and worship
3. You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy
5. Honor your father and your mother
6. You shall not commit Murder
7. You shall not commit Adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not bear false witness
10. You shall not covet

... and from these Ten flow out literally thousands of other Commandments that pertain to our behavior. And the kinds of Commandments that pertain to our behavior almost always *limit* our behavior. They *restrict* what we do. So, Commandments that have to do with our behavior almost always are understood through us *refraining* from certain types of behavior.

For example, in **Leviticus 18**, there are eighteen verses that forbid the kinds of sexual behavior that was common with both the ancient Egyptians and the Canaanites. And as you study this along with the rest of the Bible, you come to realize that every single expression of Human Sexuality is *forbidden* except one:

Between one (naturally born) Man and one (naturally born) Female,
within the confines of Holy Matrimony

... and every other expression of Human Sexuality is sin. But why is it that the only sexuality that is allowed by God is very narrowly understood? Sexuality is a *huge* part of who we are. Human Sexuality is a very powerful *biological* as well as an *emotional* Reality. Some would say it is even a *spiritual* Reality. The intensity of the desire of humans to procreate is second only to the intensity of self-preservation. And that is why sexuality is one of the most common areas where people sin. But why would a Good and Gracious God *limit* the sexual behavior of human beings so drastically, knowing how large an issue it is? Well, we have two choices:

1. God is a "kill-joy"
2. God is Wise

God is either an "old-fashioned fuddy-duddy", Who doesn't want anybody to have any "fun", or there is a very wise Reason behind such a radical Restriction. And if you think that God doesn't want anybody to have any fun, you haven't read the Bible very much. God is more concerned about Joy and Happiness than we are. God promotes things like Joy and Pleasure and Love and Happiness on nearly every page of sacred Writ.

So, it is precisely because Sexuality is so important that it is restricted so drastically. It is precisely because Human Sexuality is so different from almost any other Act that makes sexual sins so devastating. And it is because the ramifications about engaging in sexual expressions are so deeply experienced and bring about such a depth of despair and turmoil as to why God forbids it almost exclusively.

So, there are two reasons why God tells us not to engage in certain activities:

- A. They do not honor Him
- B. They hurt us

The main reason that God forbids certain behaviors is because they do not bring Him Glory. Those behaviors *dishonor* God. And that is the biblical definition of Sin, whatever doesn't glorify God. And that is enough. There doesn't have to be any other reason why God forbids certain behaviors other than that they dishonor Him and rob Him of the Glory that belongs only to Him.

But, many times, there *is* another reason why God forbids certain behavior. You see, God loves *everyone* in the sense that He provides many Good and Kind and Merciful things for us in this life. It is an expression of God's overall Love and Kindness to all of Mankind that gives us nice sunny days and barbeque and children's laughter and comfortable chairs and antibiotics and waterfalls, even though most people sin against God with impunity. So, the fact that there is any laughter at all in this broken world, the fact that there is any peace,

any joy, any goodness and any kindness shown to any extent to anybody at any time, is a testimony of God's "General Love", His "Common Grace", to all of Mankind.

Now it is true that this "general Love" doesn't save anyone. But the many ways that God demonstrates this "Common Grace" is an expression of the fact that, to some extent, God loves *everyone*, even those He has no intention of saving.

But God loves His elect even *more* than this "general" expression. God loves those He has chosen to save to such an extent that He will *invade* their lives and *interrupt* their plans and *forcefully* transform their nature, so they will be saved.

So, it is God's overall Love for all of Mankind that results in such a *narrow* allowance of Human Sexuality, firstly because these expressions do not bring Him any Glory. They *dishonor* and tarnish the Vision of Jesus Christ and His Church. That is the main reason God restricts our behavior as it pertains to sexuality. But God also tells us, "No", because without these Restrictions found in the Commandments, human beings would annihilate ourselves. Left to ourselves, we would ruin genuine love, and we would not only become hard-hearted and diseased, but we would become more and more miserable.

But there are other Commandments that don't have *anything* to do with our Behavior. And they aren't *restrictive* in nature either. These Commandments have to do with our *Disposition*, and they *enlarge* our capacity not restrict it. For example, in the very beginning, God said:

Deuteronomy 6:4&5

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

... and Jesus underscored the importance of this Commandment, when He said:

Matthew 22:37&38

***YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'* This is the great and foremost commandment.**

Jesus said that the greatest and foremost Commandment of God was *not* "keeping the Sabbath", or "reading the Bible", or "praying", or "keeping ourselves sexually pure". The most important Commandment that God ever gave was *not* telling us to "refrain from Idols" or "honoring our parents". In fact, the greatest Commandment has *nothing* to do with any action on our part at all. It has nothing to do with any will-power we can demonstrate, or any discipline we can muster. The foremost Commandment has to do with the disposition of our hearts. We are commanded by God to love Him.

But how do you *command* somebody to love you? Why would God have to *order* us to love Him? Shouldn't love flow out from our hearts *naturally*? If you have to command it and coerce it, is it really Love? If God is as Good and as Lovely and as Beautiful and as Wonderful as the Bible says, why would He have to threaten us to love Him? And the fact that He does this, does this not indicate to us that any love we might have for God is *Forced*?

So, just how do you order or issue a mandate to love? Isn't Love a product of the heart? And by definition, doesn't Love have to be *voluntary*? And if it isn't voluntary, how is it Love? How do you *order* the human heart to produce Love? Would that not constitute "*Forced Obedience*"?

Yes, it would, until you realize that we are fallen. And unless and until God sovereignly and powerfully *intervenes* in our lives to give us the Gift of Love for Himself, no human being would ever love God. The Reality is that *nobody* loves God on their own. We *lost* that desire and ability in the Fall. So, without God granting us a Love for Himself, nobody *could* love God.

But while we are pondering this, we must also understand that loving God is not optional. We are *commanded* to love God. And God has promised terrible and frightening and eternal Punishments to those who will *not* love Him. The Bible says that God casts people into Hell because they don't love Him. So, not only am I *ordered* to love God, but He has promised Eternal Damnation to me if I don't. And since that is true, how do I prevent any Love that I might could muster up for God *not* being a love based in Fear?

Well, it *would* be "Fearful Obedience" if we could muster up a Love for God on our own. But we can't. Love *for* God must come *from* God. Every son and daughter of Adam are entirely *incapable* and *unwilling* of

loving God, unless and until God graciously gives them that ability. From the moment Adam sinned, loving God became *abnormal* for anyone. It became completely *unnatural* for any human to love God.

It is strange, odd, and weird for any of us to love God. We should be amazed that we love God. It ought to startle us. It should flabbergast us that we could love God, because loving God is only "by permission". No human can *manufacture* a love for God; it does not originate from inside any human. And nobody can work it up. Love *for* God is a Gift *from* God.

But then it gets even worse. Because in **John 14:15**, Jesus linked all of our Obedience to *all* of God's Commandments to our love for God, when He said:

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

Jesus says here that me keeping or me obeying God's Commandments is the result of, it is a product of me loving Jesus. So, my Obedience to those Commands that involve action on my part (i.e., refraining from sexual immorality, keeping the Sabbath, honoring my parents, refraining from murder and idolatry, etc.), *proves* that what I say about my love for Jesus is true. And that means that Obedience is the *outward* and *visible* and *tangible* "proof" of my love for Jesus Christ.

So, even though I am not always successful, the fact that I am willing to struggle against the various lusts of my flesh, and strive to obey God's Commandments, *proves* that I love Jesus, that I value Jesus, and that I see Jesus as the Treasure of the Universe.

Okay, I got that. But how do I make myself love God in the first place? How can I suddenly just turn on the switch that will allow me to obey the Command to love the God of the Universe? How can my very unpredictable heart begin to love God?

In His Mercy, God has chosen the most unusual way of all, Suffering. And not just *any* kind of Suffering. It isn't that an increase of pain or agony brings about a love for God. No, simply hurting doesn't make anybody love God. But Peter talked about a special kind of Suffering that does have this effect on us. The Apostle called it:

Suffering for the sake of Righteousness

... Suffering "for the sake of", Suffering "for the purpose of", Suffering "for the cause of" Righteousness, for the sake of Obedience. Here is what he said:

1 Peter 3:13-16

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. *AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED*, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

Peter says something here that is almost ridiculous. It simply makes no sense to the natural mind. God the Holy Spirit "moved long" this man, who walked on water with Jesus, to say:

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.

So, there is a version of Suffering that has, as its end goal, "Righteousness" or "Obedience". And Peter says that it is for the "sake of" this Righteousness that we suffer. In other words, *this* form of Suffering brings us into a "right standing" with God. This form of Suffering transforms us and brings about an Obedience in us. And the way this is worded here, in the original Greek, tells us that this Righteousness, this "right standing with God", this Obedience, is a product of, a result of, our Suffering.

But what is also curious about this is that Peter doesn't specify what Righteousness or Obedience he is talking about. He doesn't *limit* this Righteousness or this Obedience to simply the Commandments that require action on our part. No, this is "all- inclusive". So, the Righteousness that Peter is referring to here, that is the product of this kind of Suffering, has to do with *all* of God's Commandments, even those that pertain to our Disposition.

So, in *that* sense, this kind of Suffering will produce in us an *all-inclusive* Obedience, a *comprehensive* Righteousness about the Command to love God, the Command to enjoy God, the Command to

find our complete Satisfaction in God, as well as the many, many Commands to “do” certain things or to “refrain from” doing other things. And that is *why* the Apostle tells us that we are “blessed” when we suffer like this.

Now, most of the time, we sense that we are “blessed by God” when we get a raise on the job, or when we are able, by God’s Mercy, to buy something that we need, or when we get over a bad disease, or when we *escape* a terrible and painful situation. But, Peter says here that we are “blessed”, we are “favored by God”, we are in a “good place with Jesus”, when we suffer for the sake of Righteousness!

But that also explains why the Apostle didn’t use words like “endure” here. No, he used the word “blessed”! Peter said:

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed

So, this is not talking about a Suffering that we need to close our eyes and grit our teeth and hope we can outlast or endure. This is *not* a Suffering that the only way we are blessed is after it is over. No, this is a Suffering that should illicit a praise from us toward God, a thanksgiving to God! In other words, we are “better off” having suffered like this. We are *more* obedient, *more* Righteous, *closer* to God, in *more* of a right standing with God precisely *because* of this Suffering than we would have been if we had *not* suffered! Truly these are strange words.

Now, most of my journey as a Christian, when this Passage has been read or studied, the Teacher or Preacher has gone past this as fast as possible. And I think there are a few reasons for this. But the main reason is because nobody wants to suffer in the first place. The line for receiving spiritual gifts is real long. The line to receive material blessings is also very long. But the line to receive sufferings is almost non-existent.

But the second reason is because very few people actually understand God’s Purpose behind why genuine believers suffer. There is very little Teaching about Suffering, in general, and what little Teaching is out there is mainly about how we can avoid Suffering or get out of it. But I want you to please turn with me to read what the Apostle Paul wrote about this from **Philippians 3:8-15**:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

Now this is a lot to grasp, but it echoes *exactly* what Peter is talking about, so we need to try to grasp it. And I have found that the best way to grasp deep and profound Truths is to take them one bite at a time. Here, in verse 8, Paul says:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ

Now, the “**all things**” that Paul is talking about here, the things he counted to be “loss” in view of the surpassing value of Knowing Jesus, are *not* his many sins and transgressions. No, Paul is *not* talking about all wicked things that God had forgiven him for in this Passage. The things that Paul counts as nothing but “loss” are all the things that Paul had already accomplished in his life, *before* he was gloriously saved by Jesus, that he lists back in verses 5&6:

Philippians 3:5&6

Circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

... in other words, Paul was talking about all the things that God had blessed him with, all of his religious and spiritual accomplishments, all of his efforts at studying and learning the Bible, and his zeal at protecting Pharisaical Judaism from this new, upstart religion (Christianity) that, before he was saved, he viewed to be a radical departure from the Truth and a heresy.

We must understand that Paul persecuted the Church, he had men and women killed, he made children to be orphans, and did as much as he could to destroy Christianity, *not* because he was an atheist who didn't believe God existed, not because he saw religion as the "enemy of the State", or the "opiate of the people"¹. No, Paul did great damage to the Church because he loved God! Because he was defending his warped understanding of the 39 Books of the Old Covenant.

And Paul said that he counted all his accomplishments as "rubbish". Now this is an interesting Greek word that has to do with "rotted human excrement". So, because of the surpassing Value of knowing Jesus, Paul counted, not his sins, but he counted all of his human accomplishments, before Jesus, things that most people would consider to be "blessings from God", as "rotted human excrement"!

Now why was that? The Issue at stake here, the situation that God has worked to deliver him out of, was a *wrong* understanding of Righteousness. Paul said:

... that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,

... so, in order to come into the Truth concerning Righteousness, Paul had suffered. And he suffered the loss of the very things that most people would consider to be "good things", and things worthy of praise. And that tells us that this Suffering was *not* a punishment for his many sins. It wasn't Divine Retribution for his unwillingness to repent or his refusal to believe. No, this Suffering was God's Mercy, bringing Paul into a correct understanding of Righteousness. So, Paul's Suffering was exactly what Peter said:

¹ Karl Marx; *Das Kapital*; 1867; the actual quote was, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people"

Suffer[ing] for the sake of righteousness

... and just like Peter, Paul said that he was “blessed” for having suffered like this. He was “better off” for having suffered. His life with Jesus was made *more favorable* because he had suffered. In other words, Paul’s Suffering was *not* something for which we should offer him *condolences*, but something for which we should desire to have as well.

But, to what end was this “Suffering for the sake of Righteousness”? Four things. Paul said that he suffered the loss of all things so that he could:

1. Know (Experience) Him (Jesus Christ)
2. Know or Experience the “Power of Christ’s Resurrection”
3. Know or Experience the “Fellowship of Christ’s Sufferings”
4. Be Conformed (Changed/Transformed) to Christ’s Death

... but to what end? What would be the goal of knowing or experiencing these four things? Paul said:

... in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

... which is simply another way of saying that Paul desired to remain faithful to the end, so that what is promised to all believers could be his.

But who among us would *not* want to “know or experience Jesus Christ”? Who among us would not want to know or experience the “Power of Jesus’ Resurrection”? Again, the line to desire these two things is very long.

But, without the *last* two, we simply will never experience the *first* two. Without God being Good to grant us the ability to:

- ✓ Know/Experience the “Fellowship of Christ’s Sufferings”
- ✓ Being Conformed to Jesus’ Death

... we will never:

- ✓ Know/Experience Jesus
- ✓ Know/Experience the “Power of Christ’s Resurrection”

... because the first two brings about the last two. But based on what is being taught in the modern church, the line to receive the kind of Suffering for the sake of Righteousness, which will produce in us a deep and powerful knowledge of Jesus Christ, and which will produce in us the Power of Christ's Resurrection, is almost non-existent.

And yet Paul actually *prayed* for these things. He *asked* for them. He *sought* them. He *volunteered* for them. These hardships didn't just happen to him. They weren't some random accidents or products of Chance or Fate. And God didn't merely push this kind of Suffering onto him for no reason. No, Paul *desired* this. Why? Because he saw the benefit of it. So, he earnestly desired to experience this.

Now this is almost beyond comprehension. A man, who had accomplished in life, what most people could only dream of, sincerely asked that God would take it all away. Why?

... in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ...

So, how does a person get like this? How does an individual become a person who would earnestly desire that God would strip him of all his worldly accomplishments so that he could possess Jesus to that extent? Suffering for the sake of Righteousness.

And that means that this kind of Suffering, the kind of Suffering for the sake of Righteousness, is to be *desired*, it is to *prayed for*, and it is something we should sincerely *request*. Not because we simply want to hurt, not because we are gluttons for punishment. Not so that we can wallow in our misery. Not because we are brave or courageous, or so that we can prove to everybody how spiritual we are. Why? One reason:

The surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord

Now all of this should work to make sense as to *why* Peter asks a seemingly silly Question in verse 13:

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

What is Peter talking about? There are several groups of people, who would love to harm these “scattered aliens” to whom the Apostle addresses this Epistle. There are the unbelieving Jews, and there are the pagan Romans, both of whom would *gladly* do the believers great harm. So, *why* is Peter asking this Question?

I mean the very fact that the people he is talking to have been forcefully removed from their homes and are now refugees, doesn't that Reality answer the Question? Has Peter forgotten how these people have become displaced? We have to remember that the reason why Nero has forcefully removed these people from their businesses and their homes was because they were trying to live the Christian life. So, the fact that these people were already “zealous for what is good” is the reason they are suffering right now. So, why is Peter asking this Question?

Peter is focusing on what is really happening to these people. Because Peter knows that, since God is absolutely Sovereign over everything, all the time, that evil men couldn't touch these believers unless God had sovereignly *allowed* it. And if their Heavenly father, Who loves them with an everlasting Love, has voluntarily “stepped aside” and has allowed evil men to touch His elect, then there is a very Good and very Wise and very beneficial Reason behind it. And that Reason is Righteousness.

The fact that Nero has been allowed by God to drive these people from their homes and make them to be “scattered” throughout very dangerous pagan lands tells the Apostle that God is at work in their lives to bring about a great transformation. God has allowed evil men to do great harm to God's people so they can become Obedient, *gladly!* Peter says:

1 Peter 3:14-16

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

This doesn't sound like the language that helpless victims use. This sounds like the language that people, who are being used by God, in Evangelism use. This doesn't sound like people, who are sitting down waiting to be slaughtered. No, this sounds like people, who are faithful and fruitful and busy in the Work of the Lord.

This sounds like the language that people use when they are in the safest place in all the world, the Hands of God. People use language like this who are being transformed into the Image of Jesus Christ. So, this is the language of Sanctification, not Martyrdom. This is the language of "growing in respect to Salvation" not annihilation.

This is not the language of being a sheep led to the slaughter. This is the language that people use who are more than conquerors in Jesus Christ. People don't talk like this who are simply trying to outlast their tormentors and hold on till Jesus rescues them. No, people talk like this who are actively being used by God to help expand the Kingdom of God, one converted soul at a time.

And the reason I know this to be true is because of what Peter says in the very next verse:

1 Peter 3:17

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

... and we'll get into this more, Lord willing, next time.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.