

June 29, 2008 by Steve Brandon



## If You Suffer for Christ ...

### 1 Peter 4:14-19

1. You are Blessed (verse 14).
2. Don't Be Ashamed (verses 15-16).
3. Glorify God (verse 16).
4. See God's Plan (verses 17-18).
5. Trust the Lord (verse 19).

Richard Wurmbrand was a pastor in Romania in the 1940's. He was jailed by the communist regime for his role as a pastor in the underground Romanian church. While in prison, he faced years of periodic physical torture. He experienced constant suffering from hunger and cold. He was brainwashed and faced untold mental cruelty. He spent months in solitary confinement. After 14 years in prison, he was ransomed out of prison by two Christian organizations and was allowed to leave Romania in 1965. With his freedom, he founded and led Voice of the Martyrs, a missions organization to the persecuted church.

Here is a portion of a book Richard Wurmbrand wrote shortly after being freed from prison and removed from Romania. It's entitled, "Tortured for Christ." Wurmbrand writes, ...

I worked in both an official and underground manner until February 29, 1948. On that beautiful Sunday, on my way to church, I was kidnapped from the street by the secret police. ...

Many at that time were kidnapped like this. A van of the secret police stopped in front of me, four men jumped out and pushed me into the vehicle. I was taken to a prison where I was kept secretly for over eight years. During that time, no one knew whether I was alive or dead. My wife was visited by the secret police who posed as released fellow-prisoners. They told her that they had attended my burial. She was heartbroken.

Thousands of believers from churches of all denominations were sent to prison at that time. Not only were clergymen put in jail, but also simple peasants, young boys and girls who witnessed for their faith. The prisons were full, and in Romania, as in all Communist countries, to be in prison means to be tortured.

The tortures were sometimes horrible. I prefer not to speak too much about those through which I have passed; it is too painful. When I do, I cannot sleep at night. ...

A pastor by the name of Florescu was tortured with red-hot iron pokers and with knives. He was beaten very badly. Then starving rats were driven into his cell through a large pipe. He could not sleep because he had to defend himself all the time. If he rested a moment, the rats would attack him.

He was forced to stand for two weeks, day and night. The Communists wished to compel him to betray his brethren, but he resisted steadfastly. Eventually, they brought his fourteen-year-old son to the prison and began to whip the boy in front of his father, saying that they would continue to beat him until the pastor said what they wished him to say. The poor man was half mad. He bore it as long as he could, then he cried to his son, "Alexander, I must say what they want! I can't bear your beating anymore!" The son answered, "Father, don't do me the injustice of having a traitor as a parent. Withstand! If they kill me, I will die with the words, 'Jesus and my fatherland.'" The Communists, enraged, fell upon the child and beat him to death, with blood spattered over the walls of the cell. He died praising God. Our dear brother Florescu was never the same after seeing this.

Handcuffs with sharp nails on the insides were placed on our wrists. If we were totally still, they didn't cut us. But in the bitterly cold cells, when we shook with cold, our wrists would be torn by the nails.

Christians were hung upside-down on ropes and beaten so severely that their bodies swung back and forth under the blows. Christians were also placed in ice-box "refrigerator cells," which were so cold that frost and ice covered the inside. I was thrown into one while I had very little clothing on. Prison doctors would watch through an opening until they saw symptoms of freezing to death, then they would give a signal and guards would rush in to take us out and make us warm. When we were finally warmed, we would immediately be put back into the ice-box cells to freeze. Thawing out, then freezing to within minutes of death, then being thawed out--over and over again! Even today there are times when I can't bear to open a refrigerator.

We Christians were sometimes forced to stand in wooden boxes only slightly larger than we were. This left no room to move. Dozens of sharp nails were driven into every side of the box, with their razor-sharp points sticking through the wood. While we stood perfectly still, it was all right. But we were forced to stand in these boxes for endless hours; when we

became fatigued and swayed with tiredness, the nails would pierce our bodies. If we moved or twitched a muscle--there were the horrible nails.

What the Communists have done to Christians surpasses any possibility of human understanding. ...

All the Biblical descriptions of hell and the pains of Dante's Inferno are nothing in comparison with the tortures in Communist prisons. ...

If I were to continue to tell all the horrors of Communist tortures and all the self-sacrifices of Christians, I would never finish.

[\[1\]](#)

These thoughts are sobering. Wurmbrand's experiences were extreme. The majority of Christians in Romania during his day weren't treated like this. Furthermore, few in the Bible suffered as much as Richard Wurmbrand did. And yet, these words introduce the topic of our text this morning: suffering for Christ.

Here in the United States, none of us have ever come close to facing this sort of suffering for Christ. I haven't heard of anybody being "kidnapped" by the police and thrown in a secret prison. I don't know of anybody who has been tortured for their faith in Christ. And yet, they are tortured for the very things that we do, like attending a church service, telling others about Jesus, wearing Christians t-shirts, or owning (and reading) a Bible.

And yet, that's not to say that we are without suffering. It's merely to say that our suffering is different. Our suffering normally comes by way of ridicule or verbal abuse. Later in his book, Richard Wurmbrand reflected upon his time in the United States and made the astonishing remark, I suffer in the West more than I did in Communist lands." [\[2\]](#) He goes on to explain, ...

My suffering consists first of all in the longing after the unspeakable beauties of the Underground Church. ... The Underground Church is a poor and suffering church, but it has few lukewarm members. ... Whoever has known the spiritual beauty of the Underground Church cannot be satisfied anymore with the emptiness of some Western Churches. [\[3\]](#)

At this point, it would be well for us to consider our text: 1 Peter 4:14-19.

1 Peter 4:14-19

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? and if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

As you read this text, one of the first things that you might notice are the number of conditional statements. In other words, notice how many times Peter uses the word, "if." In verse 14, we read, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ." Verse 16 says almost the same thing, "if anyone suffers as a Christian." Verse 17 contains an "if" as well, "if [judgment] begins with [the household of God]." Verse 18 has another "if," "if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, ..."

In every single one of these instances, the "if" contains the identical idea. In every instance it describes the possibility of suffering for your faith in Christ. Look at verse 14, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ." That is, if you are being insulted because you are a follower of Jesus Christ. The next "if" comes in verse 16, "If anyone suffers as a Christian." The idea here is that you are suffering because of your allegiance to Jesus. Look down in verse 17, "It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first." Peter is here talking about the persecution that comes from an unbelieving world upon the church of God. So, the suffering all comes back to your identification with Christ. Finally, look at the last "if" in verse 18, "If it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved." Again, you see the same idea. It's because of your righteousness that you are experiencing difficulty in your life.

In the other two verses that don't contain the word, "if" have this very same implication: If you are suffering because of your faith in Christ. Verse 15 says, "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler." In other words, "if you are suffering, make sure that your suffering is coming because of your righteous life, not because of your wicked actions." Verse 19 contains a similar thought. "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God." With these words, Peter is describing the suffering that is coming upon you precisely because you have submitted yourself to Christ and to His will.

My message this morning is appropriately entitled, "If You Suffer For Christ ..." This entire text talks about the implications of suffering for Christ. In some instances, Peter will comfort them. In some instances, Peter will give advice on how they ought to act. In some instances, Peter will give insight into what they ought to think.

If You Suffer for Christ ...

1. You are Blessed (verse 14).

Once again, look at verse 14, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

Peter here puts forth the scenario of those who are speaking badly of you because of your faith in Christ. You are "insulted" (NIV, ESV) and "reproached" (NKJV) and blamed and disgraced because you are a follower of Christ. Peter isn't here focusing upon physical sufferings as much as he is addressing verbal sufferings. Verbal sufferings are no less painful than physical sufferings. The simple saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," simply isn't true. Words that are spoken against us hurt. and they hurt deeply.

Part of following Christ means that you will be on the receiving end of hurtful words. Jesus said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). If you receive nothing but praise from men, it will not be well with you. You will face the woe of God. Following Christ means that you receive what He received. He received insults and reproaches and verbal slanders with great regularity. And we will receive the same.

Now, in your life, this may come from co-workers. It may come from neighbors. It may come from family members. It may come from teachers or from government officials or from people you meet on the street. Peter is talking about those who would speak poorly of you because of your association with the name of Christ.

Examples of this taking place are easy to find in the book of Acts. Peter and John were scolded by the religious leaders. Stephen was maligned. Paul was attacked. When these sorts of accusations came against these men, in some measure, they were true. But, in another sense, the facts were twisted so as to malign the followers of Christ.

This was the case with Stephen. The accusation against Him is that he spoke "blasphemous words against Moses and against God" (Acts 6:11). This was partially true, and partially not. By the businessmen of Philippi, Paul was accused of "throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans" (Acts 16:21). When Paul came to Thessalonica, the Jews became jealous of them and incited some wicked men to form a mob, setting the city in an uproar (Acts 17:5). They were shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also" (Acts 17:6). In Ephesus the idol makers accused Paul of destroying their prosperity by preaching Jesus (Acts 19:25).

Not only was Paul reviled from pagan Gentiles, but he was also reviled by the religious Jews as well. The rumor going around Jerusalem was that Paul was "teaching all Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs" (Acts 21:21). Such language was used to create hostility against him.

Paul was called a "real pest" (Acts 24:5). Festus told him, "Paul, you are out of your mind!" (Acts 26:24).

In the book of Acts, we see the early Christians being reviled for their faith. But, what about you? Have you been reviled for your faith in Christ? Have there been times when you have been ridiculed because you believe in Jesus? Maybe people have looked down at you. Perhaps you have been ridiculed behind your back. Perhaps others have merely thought you to be crazy. If you are ever very vocal about your faith in Christ, you will be reviled for the name of Christ.

But, in that moment, please realize that (1) You are Blessed (verse 14). That is, God's divine favor is upon you. Though the one speaking against you is opposed to you, at that moment, God is blessing you. Hear again the words of Jesus, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12).

Last week we saw the blessings that will come upon us, which cause us great reason to rejoice, as stated in verse 13, "to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." But, here in verse 14, the idea is more of a present thought. As you are being reviled for the name of Christ, you are being blessed.

Now, that's a difficult thing to grasp. You have embraced Christ as your Lord. You have set your heart about serving Him. Rather than being received and welcomed by others, you are cursed and reviled. And yet, at that very moment, Peter says, "You are blessed." How can this be a blessing? Being reviled hurts deeply. Hurtful words bring discouragements and doubts. Hurtful words stir up anger and bitterness. Hurtful words are hard to forget. How many of you can remember some hurtful words that were spoken against you? If you are anything like me, you can re-live the hurtful words again and again and again in your mind. And yet, when you are being reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed. Why? The answer comes in the last phrase of verse 14, "Because the Spirit of glory and of God is resting on you."

In other words, God is working in your life when you are being reviled for being one of His own! He is sustaining you. He is supporting you. He is strengthening you.

From other passages in Scripture, we know that the role of the Spirit is to be our helper (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit is known as a comforter. He is given to encourage us and counsel us. And when you do you need these things more, than when you are in distress and suffering? You are blessed to have such a help in your life! You are not alone in these times.

When Paul prayed for his thorn in the flesh to leave him. God said, "No." Three times he said, "No." Then God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). When you are weak, God is strong in your life. And when God is strong in your life, you are blessed.

Richard Wurmbrand wrote of the blessings involved in the persecuted church. He wrote, ...

I can never describe the beauty of this Church! Often, after a secret service, Christians were caught and sent to prison. There, Christians wear chains with the gladness with which a bride wears a precious jewel received from her beloved. The waters in prison are still. They receive His kiss and His embraces, and would not change places with kings. I have found truly joyful Christians only in the Bible, in the Underground Church, and in prison. [\[4\]](#)

Let's look at my second point. If You Suffer for Christ ...

## 2. Don't Be Ashamed (verses 15-16).

You can see the exhortation there in verse 16, "but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed." This is in contrast to suffering for other reasons, which Peter listed in verse 15, "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler." If you suffer as a murderer, your suffering is just. If you suffer as a thief, you deserve to suffer. If you suffer as an evildoer, you have no one to blame, but yourself. If you suffer as a troublesome meddler, you will have no reason to expect a blessing. Rather, you obtain the blessing from God when you suffer as a Christian.

I trust that you can see how Peter is again attempting to clarify his main point. It's suffering for Christ that brings you blessing. It's "when you suffer as a Christian" that you will be blessed. Now, before we move on here, I want for us to spend a bit of time thinking about these sins that Peter mentions. When we think about sin, we often think of killing somebody or stealing something or doing some form of blatant evil. Peter covers these things with his first three sins: murderer, thief, or evildoer. We all think of these sins as something worthy of suffering.

However, I'm not sure that we too often think about this last sin mentioned by Peter. He said, "or a troublesome meddler." Though this is the only place that this word is used in the Bible, it's meaning is quite clear. Literally, you could translate it, "spying on other people business." The New King James Version translates this word, "a busybody in other people's matters." It describes the person who is meddling in the affairs of others uninvited and unnecessarily.

You mothers know what it is to be bothered by the child who is always asking, "Whatcha doin'? Why? Why? Why?" It's easy to lose patience with our children and scold them, so that they leave, feeling ill-treated. Now, parents, I'm not excusing your sinful response to your child. But, you know how much your child was provoking you and needed to be told to leave your presence. Peter says, "Don't meddle in the affairs of others in such a way that you become a pain in their neck. Any verbal suffering that you receive at their hands is deserved."

I have known people who stick their nose into other people's business. And they are quite irritating. When they are spoken against. They aren't suffering for Christ. They are suffering because they are a pain in the neck. But, Peter says, if you suffer, make sure that you suffer as a "Christian."

Now, when we hear this word, "Christian," I don't believe that we hear it quite the way that the early church heard it. We use this word to describe those who follow Christ. We are "Christians." It's the universally accepted name for those who follow after Christ. It's a very honorable name. It's a very accepted name.

I don't believe that it was like this when Peter wrote these words. In the early church, when people first began following Jesus, they weren't called Christians. On the day of Pentecost, when thousands repented of their sins and believed on Christ, they weren't called Christians. They were simply identified as "believers" ("those who had believed" - Acts 4:32). Soon, they embraced the official title, "disciples" (Acts 6:1, 7; 9:1, 19, 26), that is, learners and followers of Jesus.

It was probably some 5 to 7 to 10 years later, that they were first called "Christians." This information is given in Acts 11:26, "For an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." It wasn't the disciples themselves who picked this name. It was those outside the church in Antioch. I believe that they used the word with a somewhat deprecating tone, those are the "Christ-ones" -- the ones always talking about the Christ.

The only other time that the word, "Christian" is used in the Bible is found in Acts 26:28, when Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." "You, persuade me? To be a Christ-follower? Are you kidding me?"

Like the only other two instances in the Bible where the word, "Christian" is used, here in 1 Peter, it's not those who are the Christians who are using this word. It's others who are using this word. And, I believe that they are using it in a condescending way. "Oh, those Christians." Their usage of this word would be similar to a racial slur that is used today.

Regarding this particular term, "Christian," perhaps the modern-day equivalent might be, "Jesus Freaks." "Look at those Jesus Freaks! Though the crowds are using this word in a derogatory way, take up the word with honor and don't be ashamed.

Certainly, this goes against our grain. It's easy to be ashamed when others are calling you derogatory names. It's easy to be ashamed when others don't think well of you. But, when someone identifies us with Jesus, we ought never to be ashamed! If someone calls you a "Jesus Freak" in a derogatory way, don't ever be ashamed of such name calling. Rather, it ought to come as a great encouragement to your soul. They have looked at your life and have interpreted your life correctly. Your life is all about Jesus. He died for you. You believe in Him. You love Him. You talk about Him. You want the world to know about Him.

How fitting are Peter's words in chapter 1, verse 8 and 9, "And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

You may be ridiculed as following a dead man. You may be ridiculed for believing in something that you cannot prove. You may be ridiculed for being irrational. You may be ridiculed for being stuffy and old fashioned. You may be slandered unfairly. But, if those ridiculing you understand and interpret your life correctly--that you love an unseen Savior--you ought to rejoice, with joy inexpressible and full of glory (1:9). You have no need to be ashamed of Christ! What you have is so much better than the world. The world simply doesn't know it!

I trust that you remember the children's story of Rudolf, the Red-nosed Reindeer. The words are common to us all, ...

Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer

Had a very shiny nose  
And if you ever saw it  
You would even say it glows  
All of the other reindeer  
Used to laugh and call him names  
They never let poor Rudolph  
Play in any reindeer games

You know the rest of the story. Rudolph was ashamed at his nose. He tried to cover it up with dirt, but that made him speak funny. Rudolph didn't realize that his nose was going to help Santa on that foggy evening. Rudolph's nose saved Christmas that year. After that Christmas, Rudolph realized the greatness of his red, shiny nose. And never again was he ashamed at his nose.

If only we would come to realize the saving power of our Christ, we would never be ashamed at taking on His name! Yet, because He is invisible and we don't see Him now, there can easily be a sense of shame at the name of Christ. It wasn't without accident that Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (Rom. 1:16), because, it is easy to be ashamed of the gospel.

It is easy to be ashamed of Christ. Peter was ashamed of Christ when he denied Him on three occasions. Even Timothy, himself, Paul's protégé in the faith was ashamed. He was timid (2 Tim. 1:7). But, Paul said, "Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of Me His prisoner, but join with me in the suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:8-9).

Don't be ashamed at identifying with the name of Christ. His arm is mighty to save! He has saved us and called us with a holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9). This was Paul's point in Romans 1:16, which I quoted earlier. Let me quote the entire verse, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation." If we fully knew how powerful Christ is to save, we would never be ashamed.

It's important that we are not ashamed of Christ. Listen to the words of Jesus, "Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

My third point comes there in verse 16 by way of contrast. If You Suffer for Christ ...  
3. Glorify God (verse 16).

You can see the contrast there in verse 16, "If anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name."

I don't believe that Peter put these two points of counsel together by accident. I believe that you glorify God in your suffering as a Christian when you are not ashamed at your suffering. I believe that you are not ashamed at your suffering for Christ when you glorify God through your suffering.

The apostles gave God much glory when they went away from their flogging, "rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). Stephen gave God much glory when he was stoned with an attitude of forgiveness upon his lips, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:59). Paul and Silas gave God much glory while suffering for Christ in the prison in Philippi when they were "praying and singing hymns of praise to God" (Acts 16:25). Paul's words to the Philippians gave much glory to God, when he said, "I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20).

You glorify God in your sufferings for Christ, when the sufferings don't deter you from worshiping Him! You glorify God in your sufferings when you continue to rejoice in the very things that brought your suffering on in the first place.

Most often, the reverse happens. We shy away from the pain. We touch something hot and immediately pull our hand away. We walk outside on a sunny day and shield our eyes from the blazing sun. And when difficulties come because of our faith in Christ, we shy away from putting Christ first and central, because it brings pain. But, God is especially glorified, when we continue in our same path as before. It puts God on display as being more important than our own personal comfort.

During the days of Daniel, Darius, the king made the decree that "any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides [the king] ... is to be cast into the lions' den" (Dan. 6:7). But, Daniel, knowing of the decree, "entered his house, ... and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously" (Dan. 6:12).

When faced with a choice between being obedient to God, which brings suffering and being silent about God, which avoids the suffering. The choice to be obedient brings God much glory.

I love the story that Richard Wurmbrand told of the deal that the prisoners made with the guards. He writes, ...

It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners, as it is in captive nations today. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this receive a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted their terms. It was a deal: we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching; they were happy beating us--so everyone was happy.

The following scene happened more times than I can remember. A brother was preaching to the other prisoners when the guards suddenly burst in, surprising him halfway through a phrase. They hauled him down the corridor to their "beating room." After what seemed an endless beating, they brought him back and threw him--bloody and bruised--on the prison

floor. Slowly, he picked up his battered body, painfully straightened his clothing and said, "Now, brethren, where did I leave off when I was interrupted?" He continued his gospel message. [\[5\]](#)

That's the type of thing that brings great glory to God. When God is treasured beyond our earthly comfort, He is greatly glorified.

If You Suffer for Christ ...

#### 4. See God's Plan (verses 17-18).

This comes in verses 17 and 18, which read, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? and if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner."

These two verses say practically the same thing. Verse 17 says it with Peter's own words. Verse 18 is a quote from Proverbs 11:31. The message in both of these verses is the same. Difficulty comes upon followers of Christ in this life, but the difficulty that we face is nothing compared with the final destination of the unrighteous.

In verse 17, it goes like this: "It is time for judgment to begin with the household of God." Difficult times are coming upon those in the church, those who obey the gospel of God. And if it begins with those seeking to follow after God, what will become of those outside the church? In verse 18, it goes like this: "If it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved." Difficult times are coming upon those who follow God. And if the righteous are facing difficulty, what will become of those who have no regard for God?

Both verses 17 and 18 put forth a rhetorical question. The answer to the question in both of these verses is the same: terrible judgment and condemnation await those who are not a part of the household of God, who are not obeying the gospel of God, who are not walking righteously, who are godless, and who are sinners.

The sufferings of Christ that come upon the church are only a small taste and shadow of those that will come upon the wicked. This is God's plan. It's suffering for those who follow Christ now. It's greater suffering for those who refuse to follow Christ now.

There are some who believe that the Christian life is all blessing, and that if you are experiencing some hardship and difficulty, it must be because you are sinning in some way or another. To some extent, this is true. Hebrews 12 says that "God deals with [us] as sons; [and] what son is there whom his father does not discipline" (Heb. 12:7). And so, when difficulties come upon our lives, it may well be the discipline of the Lord as a result of our sin, training us to walk in holiness and righteousness. He loves us too much to let us walk in our sin.

When we are tested by trials, it demonstrates the genuineness of our faith. But, this isn't always the case. It may be God's way of purifying the church. In the parable of the sower, three out of the four seeds that were sown found reception in their respective soils. However, "when affliction or persecution arises because of the word," the seed on the rocky soil will fall away (Matt. 13:21). "When the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth" comes upon the seed on the thorny soil, this seed will also fall away (Matt. 13:22). It's only the seed on the good soil that will endure through these difficulties.

That's the path that God takes us down when we embrace Christ. He brings us through the difficulties to test us and purify the church. It may be that in the process those who are spurious believers will be pruned from the flock. So, if you suffer for Christ, see God's plan. Know what's happening.

Richard Wurmbrand also tells the deal that the prisoners made with the guards.

When the Russians occupied Romania, two armed Russian soldiers entered a church (in Romania) with their guns in their hands. They said, "We don't believe in your faith. Those who do not abandon it immediately will be shot at once! Those who abandon your faith move to the right!"

Some moved to the right, who were then ordered to leave the church and go home. They fled for their lives. When the Russians were alone with the remaining Christians, they embraced them and confessed, "We, too, are Christians, but we wished to have fellowship only with those who consider the truth worth dying for. [\[6\]](#)

This is what God does with the church. He brings judgments and difficulties and hardships upon it, so as to purify it. And those who endure, will see the glory of Christ in the future. Jesus said, "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved" (Matt. 10:22).

This is God's plan. Do you see it? If so, you will be comforted in your trials, knowing of a greater reward that awaits you.

If You Suffer for Christ ...

#### 5. Trust the Lord (verse 19).

This comes in verse 19, "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."

Again, we see in these words that Peter is encouraging his readers to continue along the obedient path. "Do what is right." Suffering is no excuse for sin. Throughout your suffering, you need to continue to do what is good and right (2:11-13, 18; 3:1, 9, 14).

One motivating factor in this is that your suffering comes from the hand of the sovereign God. Peter clearly states that when you suffer, it is "according to the will of God."

Now, there are some who want to deny this, saying that it is never God's will that we suffer. "God only has good in store for us. God only has a wonderful plan for our life," they say. I think that the motive of those who speak this way is good. They are trying to protect the goodness of God. But, in protecting the goodness of God, they have lost their comfort. Because, the comfort in your suffering will come when you realize that God's hand is upon your suffering. Your suffering will not be too intense for you to bear. Your suffering will not be too long for you to endure. Rather, the suffering you experience will purify you and conform you more to the image of Christ.

And so, when suffering comes, "entrust your soul" to your faithful creator. This is what Jesus did. When Jesus was suffering the reproach of evil men, He entrusted His soul to the Lord. Look back at chapter 2, verse 23, "And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (2:23). So, trust the Lord in your trials.

I close my message this morning by telling one last story from Richard Wurmbrand's book. It's a fitting conclusion to Peter's admonition here to trust the Lord. Wurmbrand writes, ...

I was taken away from my wife and I did not know what happened to her. Only after many years I learned that she had been put in prison, too. Christian women suffer much more than men in prison. Girls have been raped by brutal guards. The mockery, the obscenity, is horrible. The women were forced to work at hard labor building a canal, fulfilling the same workload as men. They shoveled earth in winter. Prostitutes were made overseers and competed in torturing the faithful. My wife has eaten grass like cattle to stay alive. Hungry prisoners ate rats and snakes at this canal. One of the joys of the guards on Sundays was to throw women into the Danube and then fish them out, to laugh about them, to mock them about their wet bodies, to throw them back and fish them out again. My wife was thrown in the Danube in this manner.

My son was left to wander on the street when his mother and father were taken away. Mihai had been very religious from childhood and very interested in matters of faith. At the age of nine, when his parents were taken away from him, he passed through a crisis in his Christian life. He became bitter and questioned all of his religion. He had problems that children usually don't have at this age. He had to think about earning his living.

It was a crime to help families of Christian martyrs. Two ladies who helped him were arrested and beaten so badly that they were permanently crippled. A lady who risked her life and took Mihai into her house was sentenced to eight years in prison for the crime of helping families of prisoners. All of her teeth were kicked out and her bones were broken and she was never able to work again. She too will be a cripple for life.

At the age of eleven, Mihai began to earn his living as a regular worker. Suffering had produced a wavering in his faith. But after two years of Sabina's imprisonment he was allowed to see her. He went to the Communist prison and saw his mother behind iron bars. She was dirty, thin, with calloused hands, wearing the shabby uniform of a prisoner. He scarcely recognized her.

Her first words were, "Mihai, believe in Jesus!"

The guards, in a savage rage, pulled her away from Mihai and took her out. Mihai wept seeing his mother dragged away. This minute was the minute of his conversion. He knew that if Christ can be loved under such circumstances, He surely is the true Savior. He said afterward, "If Christianity had no other arguments in its favor than the fact that my mother believes in it, this is enough for me." That was the day he fully accepted Christ

Church family, trust the Lord in your suffering!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 29, 2008 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

---

[1] Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*, pp. 33-37.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 114.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 45-46.

