

Text: 1 Pt 4.12-13

In our text today, we find ourselves moving on into a new section. The last bit ended with a doxology, now Peter begins, “Beloved...”

If you have a paragraph Bible, you will have a new paragraph here.

The theme of suffering for Jesus’ sake continues. Here the focus is the inner man, how we should react *spiritually* to attacks *externally*.

The opening word, “beloved,” speaks both to Peter’s care for his readers and, indeed, the Lord’s personal care for them as well.

We are just going to look at vv. 12-13 tonight, so continuing at a snail’s pace through the epistle.

Read 1 Pt 4.12-13

Proposition: The fiery ordeal of trial for one’s faith should not surprise, but instead produce rejoicing.

I. What is a fiery ordeal?

A. The word literally is “a fire”

1. Used of the burning of Babylon the great in Rev 18.9, 18 — a literal sense to “burning”
2. Here it means something painful, but not necessarily literal

B. The scope is far more than state persecution

1. Widespread myth: the Roman empire broadly persecuted Christians in the 1st century
 - a. They sometimes persecuted Christians
 - b. Most such were local (Nero in Rome, others in local jurisdictions)
2. Nothing in our text (or even in 1 Peter) suggests that simply “state persecution” in view
3. The antagonism could come from anywhere, from individuals to groups

C. The burning is painful, but not every Christian “among you”

1. Some might experience the burning
2. Others might only observe
3. Yet all are to think the same way

Anything from physical attacks to verbal abuse come under the header, the “fiery ordeal.”

Probably verbal abuse is more frequent, and may be more painful.

II. What reaction is prohibited?

A. NAU: “do not be surprised”

1. The word shares a root with “strange” in the same verse (and same word in 1 Pt 4.4)
2. The is ξενίζω, “do not be surprised” (“strange” is ξένος)
3. ξένος (xenos) means “alien, sojourner, stranger”

We get xenophobia from this root: “fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign”¹

4. How do we get “do not be surprised” from this?

a. Two meanings² to verb:

- 1) “to receive as a guest, to entertain hospitably” (to entertain a stranger)
- 2) “to surprise or astonish by the strangeness and novelty of a thing”

b. The idea of a stranger is someone who is strange to you, someone who could conceivably surprise or shock with his strangeness

¹ Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

² Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889), BibleWorks, v.8.

We will talk about a baby who “makes strange” with new people — the are fearful of anyone new.

c. My vernacular trans., “don’t be weirded out by the burning”

B. The reason for the prohibition

1. The burning is expected

^{1Th 3.3} so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.

^{2Tim 3.12} Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2. The burning is a testing (for purification)

Another widespread theme in the Bible (see Pr 27.21, Ps 66.10, Zech 13.9)

3. The temptation of the burning

a. The temptation to shrink back

b. The temptation to flee

c. The “stony ground” test (sower and seed)

Several commentators point out that Gentile Christians particularly had little experience with persecution for beliefs. They might be shocked.

- Christianity promises forgiveness of sin
- Christianity promises spiritual peace, joy
- What one might forget: the burning of rejection, mockery, persecution

4. The imagery of a burning test is spiritual purification

a. Especially see Mal 3.1-4

b. This is the refiner’s fire

Since these burnings are expected, for a purpose, “their sufferings are not a sign of God’s absence but his purifying presence”³

III. What reaction is expected?

A. Strong contrast here: “but” (strong adversative)

1. Your fellowship with Christ

- a. By faith we enter a union with Christ that saves us from sin
- b. But union with Christ also brings reproach

Jn 15.18 ¶ “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it* hated you.

- c. The union here is *koinonia*, partnership: we partake of everything in him, we are partners with him

Col 1.24 ¶ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.

“While Christ’s sufferings for sin were complete, He did not endure all the sufferings required to build His church. Those who serve Him participate in that.”⁴

2. To the degree:

- a. We don’t all suffer the same sufferings
- b. We don’t all suffer the same amount of sufferings
- c. To the degree we suffer for Christ’s sake, we become partners in his sufferings

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, v. 37 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 218.

⁴ Robert E. Picirilli, “Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Peter,” in *James, 1, 2 Peter, & Jude*, ed. Robert E. Picirilli, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 1992), 198.

B. In all of that: keep on rejoicing!

1. Present tense imperative: a call to constant attitude
2. A shocking response: joy!

Ac 5.41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.

3. A motivation: a spectacular result
 - a. If you rejoice to suffer for his name
 - b. When he appears in glory, your joy will be all the more sweet

“The end makes the former suffering worthwhile.”⁵

Conclusion:

Proposition: The fiery ordeal of trial for one’s faith should not surprise, but instead produce rejoicing.

⁵ Picirilli, 198.