



# Standing Strong in the Face of Persecution

1 Peter 4:7-19

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## BIG IDEA

Standing strong in the face of persecution not only demonstrates the reality of our faith but also reflects the power of Christ's victory over sin and death. By remaining steadfast and trusting in God's sovereignty, as believers we can be a shining light in a dark world, showing the transformative power of the gospel.

## OPENING THOUGHTS

Recently I have been rereading “*Tortured for Christ*” by Richard Wurmbrand. I have read it several times over the years. It is the story of a Romanian pastor who experienced 14 years of imprisonment for his faith in Christ. Instead of denying Christ, he chose to go to prison. While in prison he was able to continue preaching the gospel. Many came to Christ as a result of his time in prison. Upon his release he was able to get to the west and share the struggles and persecutions that believers were enduring at the hands of the communist. Many believers have given and still give their lives for the gospel around the world.

The churches that Peter was writing to were undergoing persecution in the form of opposition and hostility from the culture. Nero had chosen the Christians to blame for the great fire in Rome. The persecution included arrest and many different means of inhumane torture and execution. Nero is said to have taken Christians and use them as lamps in his gardens by covering them with animal skins and tar and setting them ablaze. Many died in the arenas. It is to these believers that Peter is writing to in hopes of encouraging them to stand strong in their faith.

Here in America we have enjoyed religious freedom. In some ways this freedom has caused us to become complacent in our faith. We may have even come to believe that we are immune from persecution. But, if you listen or read the news you quickly begin to see that the culture is persecuting those who stand for Christ. If you do not agree with the new progressive teaching of the culture you will be persecuted and ostracized. The day is coming when we are going to have to make choices about our faith. As believers we must be prepared to face the coming persecution and be steadfast in our trust in God's sovereignty.

## PREPARATION AND PURPOSE IN PERSECUTION

[1 Peter 4:7–11](#) (ESV)

*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

The glorious hope of the believer is the return of Christ. Since Christ's ascension back to heaven ([Acts 1:6–11](#)) believers have looked for and longed for the return of Christ. With this in mind, Peter is giving us six admonitions on how we are to live and prepare for the return of Christ.

**Live each day as though Christ could return at once** ([1 Peter 4:7](#)). Since we do not know the day or time of Christ return we should live as if it were any moment. Therefore we are to live with an ongoing attitude of anticipation or expectancy.

**Keep a clear head, not getting caught up in the things of the culture.** ([1 Peter 4:7](#)). We cannot get so caught up in the things of this world that we do not think straight. It is really easy in our culture to be constantly seeking the next best thing. Doing so will often cause us to take our minds off what is important. We seek to satisfy the present at the expense of the eternal. Peter is admonishing us to not get carried away in self-indulgence but to stay “sober-minded” so the we can be of great use to the Kingdom of God.

**Maintain a disciplined prayer life.** ([1 Peter 4:7](#)). As believers we are called to be a people of prayer. Rather than only having a quick mealtime prayer, we should set aside dedicated time daily to have a sober and direct communication with God. Peter is reminding us that a lack of prayer will render us unprepared for the end times and the persecution that comes from our culture.

**Make expressing love a priority** ([1 Peter 4:8](#)). As followers of Christ we are commanded to love one another; “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” ([John 13:34](#)). The Greek word Peter used for love was “agape”, it refers to a self-giving, sacrificial love that has the object of the love best interest at heart. We are called to have this kind of love toward others. In doing so we will be able to overlook the faults and shortcomings of fellow believers. As a part of having this kind of love we will be willing to show real hospitality.

**Remain faithful by investing your gifts, time, and talents where they will make an eternal difference.** ([1 Peter 4:10](#)). As followers of Christ we have each been given gifts and talents to be used for the work of the Kingdom. Peter is reminding us that as the return of Christ draws nearer it is vital that we use our gifts and talents faithfully. They are not to be used for self-advancement or as an attention-getter, but they are to be used for the benefit of others and the advancement of the gospel. We must always remember how we use our gifts will have an eternal significance.

**Remember to always praise God, who is the source of our energy and the reason for our service.** ([1 Peter 4:11](#)). Peter wants us to understand that we are to take seriously the gifts and talents that God has given us. A pastor friend, who is now in heaven, used to say, “For our good and His glory.” What he was referring to was that God gives to his children for their good but ultimately it is for His glory. God is the source of our strength and we must remain dependent on His strength. We need to have the Apostle Paul’s attitude, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)).

These admonishments of Peter will help us to be prepared and show us our purpose in persecution.

† **What does to God look like to you? In what ways is it more than one action? What are the ongoing actions you take to commit to God?**

† **Why should love be top priority for Christians awaiting the end?**

## PERSPECTIVE IN PAINFUL TRIALS

[1 Peter 4:12–14](#) (ESV)

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

Unfortunately, many times our response to suffering is “*Why me?*” Peter is telling us don't be surprised when trials and suffering come. The mere fact that we are a follower of Jesus Christ will put us at odds with a culture that is controlled by Satan and his demons. Followers of Jesus are being told to conform to the culture or face persecution for nonconformity.

***The purpose of trials is twofold: to test us and to allow us to share in the sufferings of Christ.*** While the word *test* can be rendered *temptation*, in this context it referred to the process of purification. God does not introduce temptations into our lives in order to lure us into sin ([Matt. 6:13](#); [Jas. 1:13](#)). He does allow us to experience difficulties in order to prove us as fire refines precious metal. Peter had alluded to this kind of trial in [1 Peter 1:7](#).

Peter reminds us that when we suffer, we are sharing in Christ suffering. Peter was not equating Christians' suffering with the atonement of Christ, but was emphasizing they were suffering because they were in Christ.

When we decided to follow Jesus and proclaim the gospel, animosity and persecution from an unbelieving culture was inevitable. Any time the followers of Christ take a stand against sin and evil, they can expect it to result in push back from the culture. The world hates the things of God ([1 John 3:13](#)). Jesus told us that being a disciple would have cost ([Matt 10:38-39](#); [16:24-26](#); [John 12:24-26](#)).

When we suffer and are persecuted, others can see the strength of Christ in us. They see that our faith in Christ is a living reality and they can be drawn to Christ, to His salvation and love and care and strength. When others see us suffering for the hope of salvation and eternal life, the Holy Spirit uses our suffering to speak to the hearts of the persecutors and observers. He convicts them, and some eventually turn to Christ. Our faith is proven to be true, and it bears fruit. When we suffer persecution it will drive us to have a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. We will be able to experience real joy because we can be confident in the fact that God is in control of every area of our lives.

***Why should a Christian not be surprised at rejection and hurt because of his faith*** (see [John 15:18–25](#); [James 1:2–4](#); [1 Peter 1:6–7](#))?

***Trials—as difficult as they may be—can yield results*** ([1 Pet 4:12](#); compare [1:6–7](#)). Read [Matthew 5:11–12](#). What does Jesus have to say about serving him and what we should expect?

## PERSEVERANCE THROUGH GODLY SUFFERING

[1 Peter 4:15–19](#) (ESV)

*But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.*

The apostle Peter concluded this section of his letter by summarizing his instruction. Followers of Jesus Christ can endure persecution by remembering three truths.

***First, Even our suffering is according to God’s will.*** Peter did not mean God’s will is for His children to suffer. Instead, he is describing the fact we are suffering because we are living according to God’s will. More specifically, we are going to suffer as a result of doing what is good. When we choose to follow God’s commands and His will, it is going to bring us in to opposition to a world that wants to have nothing to do with God.

***Second, we can take comfort in that we suffer for doing good rather than for doing evil.*** Peter wants us to make sure our suffering is because of our faith in Jesus and not because we are criminals. Doing the will of God and the good deeds of our faith will sometimes bring suffering. But in that suffering we will also experience blessings.

***Third, we can entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator.*** God, who created us in the beginning and recreated us through the blood of His Son, can certainly sustain us. We have nothing to fear when suffering because we are doing the will of God. Our faithful heavenly father will victoriously sustain us to the end.

Suffering for Christ’s sake should not confuse or dismay us. After all, Jesus warned His followers that persecution and tribulation would be the normal. Jesus glorified God by His sacrifice for our sin on the cross. We, too, can glorify God by courageously accepting persecution for His sake.

† ***What does [1 Peter 4:15–19](#) say about the relationship between suffering and our identity as Christians?***

† ***Read [Mark 8:27–9:1](#). How can you find more boldness in your faith, even when it’s difficult? How can you better embrace what it means to follow Jesus?***

## **APPLICATION**

- When facing criticism or judgment from the culture, remember that your identity is found in Christ, not in the opinions of others. Choose to find your worth in God's love and approval, rather than seeking validation from the culture. Pray for humility and strength to remain steadfast in your faith, even when faced with opposition.
- When confronted with trials, hold fast to your hope in Christ's return. Let the anticipation of His coming motivate you to persevere with joyful endurance.
- When experiencing trials or suffering from the culture, remember that God uses adversity to strengthen your faith and reliance on Him. Choose to view challenges as opportunities for growth and transformation. Lean on God's promises and seek His presence through prayer and fellowship with other believers.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

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