



LESSON TEN

The Christian Life and its Sufferings

Scripture Reading:

1 Peter 4

- 4:1** Since Christ therefore has suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind (because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin),
- 4:2** No longer to live the rest of the time in the flesh in the lusts of men, but in the will of God.
- 4:3** For the time which has passed is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having gone on in licentiousness, lusts, debaucheries, carousings, drinking bouts, and lawless idolatries.
- 4:4** In this they think it strange that you are not running together with *them* into the same flood of dissoluteness, slandering *you*;
- 4:5** Who will render an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.
- 4:6** For unto this *end* the gospel was announced also to *those who are now* dead, that they might be judged in the flesh according to men but live in the spirit according to God.
- 4:7** But the end of all things has drawn near. Therefore be sober-minded and be sober unto prayers.
- 4:8** Above all, have fervent love among yourselves, because love covers a multitude of sins.
- 4:9** Be hospitable to one another without murmuring,
- 4:10** Each one, as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God.
- 4:11** If anyone speaks, as *speaking* oracles of God; if anyone ministers, as *ministering* out of the strength which God supplies; that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.
- 4:12** Beloved, do not think that the fiery ordeal among you, coming to you for a trial, is strange, as if *it were* a strange thing happening to you;
- 4:13** But inasmuch as you share in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice exultingly.
- 4:14** If you are reproached in the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.
- 4:15** For let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler into others' affairs;
- 4:16** But if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name.
- 4:17** For it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God?
- 4:18** And if the righteous man is saved *only* with difficulty, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?
- 4:19** So then let those also who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls in well-doing to a faithful Creator.

QUESTIONS:

Section 1:

1. What is the role of suffering in our Christian life?
2. What does it mean to be armed with the mind of Christ? How can this help us to endure suffering?

Section 2:

1. How was the gospel 'preached to the dead'? What does this show about God's governmental administration?
2. What does it mean to undergo God's judgement? What are some examples of God's judgement in our life?

Section 3:

1. How can we say that the persecutions we suffer are the sufferings of Christ?
2. How is it that we can rejoice in our suffering?
3. What is the difference between the sufferings of Christ and suffering as a Christian?

Section 4:

1. What is the difference between dispensational discipline and eternal perdition?
2. What does it mean that "it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God?"
3. Who are "those who disobey the gospel of God" referring to?
4. What is disciplinary punishment of the "righteous" for?

ARMED WITH THE MIND OF CHRIST

In 4:1-6 Peter comes to the matter of the believers arming themselves with the mind of Christ for suffering. Verse 1 says, “Christ, therefore, having suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” The word “arm” indicates that the Christian life is a life of battle.

One main purpose of this book is to encourage and exhort the believers to follow the footsteps of Christ in their persecution (1:6-7; 2:18-25; 3:8-17; 4:12-19). They should have the same mind Christ had in His suffering (3:18-22). The main function of our mind is to understand and realize. To live a life that follows the footsteps of Christ, we need a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2) to understand and realize the way Christ lived to fulfill God’s purpose.

In our practical daily life, the strongest part of our being is our mind. Whatever we do in our living is directed by our mind. It is not the will but the mind that directs our life. All our activities are under the direction of our mind.

Because the mind directs our living, the preaching of the Word must change a person’s thoughts. One goal of preaching and teaching is to change people’s mind. If we think in a certain way, we shall be directed in that way. But if we change our mind and think in another way, our living will then have a different direction. What we think governs what we do, say, and practice. For this reason, Peter charges the believers in 4:1 to arm themselves with the mind of Christ.

To arm ourselves with the mind of Christ is to be armed with the thought and concept of Christ. This implies that we change our way of thinking. Many Christians think that as long as we love God and do His will, we shall be under His blessing, and we shall not suffer in any way. It is common for Christians to have the concept that those who love the Lord should not expect suffering. But consider the life of Christ. Did He not love God? Did He not do the will of God? Christ loved God to the uttermost, and He did God’s will fully and absolutely. But what happened to Him in His living? It seems that throughout His life on earth there was not any blessing, but only suffering.

The concept that the Christian life is a life of suffering is versus the natural, religious mentality, especially the natural mentality of

many Christians. A great many Christians think that as long as we belong to God, are the people of God, love God, and do God’s will, everything concerning us will be fine. According to this concept, we shall be blessed and may have a good job, a nice house, and an excellent family life. Christians who hold this concept may expect all their children to become well-educated, wealthy professionals. Some Christians who are successful and wealthy may say, “What blessings I have received from the Lord! All that I have and all that I have attained is because I love the Lord Jesus and do the will of God. Look how God has blessed me.”

What kind of mind is the mind of Christ? If we have the mind of Christ, we shall realize that we are living in a rebellious age and in a crooked, perverted generation. Because the age is rebellious and the generation is perverse, the more we love God and do His will, the more we shall suffer. We shall suffer because we cannot go along with the trend of this age. We care to do the will of God, but the will of God is absolutely contrary to the trend or tide of this age. We would love the Lord Jesus, but this is utterly against the trend of this corrupted world. Therefore, if we love the Lord and do God’s will, we are bound to suffer. This will be our outlook if we have the mind of Christ.

We need to arm ourselves, equip ourselves, with the mind of Christ. This indicates that the mind of Christ is a weapon, a part of the armor needed in fighting the battle for God’s kingdom.

If we arm ourselves with the mind of Christ for suffering, we shall be willing to endure suffering. We shall say, “Praise the Lord that my suffering is part of my destiny. God has appointed this for me. Suffering is the portion of God’s children in this age.” In 1 Thessalonians 3 Paul tells the believers that God has appointed us to suffering and persecution. God has not appointed us to material blessing; He has appointed us to suffering. Therefore, knowing that Christ suffered in the flesh, we also need to arm ourselves with the same mind. We should not have the mind to pray for material blessing. That is to have the wrong kind of mind.

SUFFERING IN THE FLESH AND CEASING FROM SIN

In 4:1 Peter points out that those who have suffered in the flesh have ceased from sin. Pleasure heats up the lusts of our flesh (v. 2); suffering cools them down. The purpose of

Christ's redemption is to deliver us from our inherited vain manner of life (1:18-19). Suffering responds to Christ's redemption in this purpose, preserving us from the sinful manner of life, from the flood of dissipation (vv. 3-4). Such suffering, mostly from persecution, is God's discipline in His governmental dealing. To undergo such suffering is to be judged, dealt with, and disciplined by God in the flesh (v. 6). Hence, we should arm ourselves with a sober mind to endure such suffering.

LIVING IN THE WILL OF GOD

In verse 2 Peter goes on to say, "No longer to live the rest of the time in the flesh in the lusts of men, but in the will of God." This verse indicates that we should live no longer in the vain manner of life handed down from the fathers (1:18), but in a holy and excellent manner of life (1:15; 2:12), pure in holy fear and good in Christ (3:2, 16), which is the will of God.

It is not easy to stay away from lusts and do God's will when we are rich in material things. This is the reason God assigns a certain portion of suffering to us. These sufferings restrict our lusts and preserve us in the will of God. In this sense we all should worship God for our sufferings. We should tell Him, "Lord, how I worship You that in Your sovereignty You have assigned sufferings to me so that I may be preserved in Your will."

We should not be afraid that our sufferings will be too great. The Lord knows how to assign sufferings to us. If He charges husbands to assign a certain portion of honor to their wives, surely He Himself knows how much suffering to assign to us. He will not assign either too little or too much. His assignment will be in the right proportion; it will be exactly what we need.

A brother may say, "Recently I have been so happy in the Lord. But today I lost my job and I am deeply depressed." This brother needs to realize that this suffering has been assigned to him from the Lord. However, the brother may say, "It was due to inflation and the poor economy that I lost my job. How can you say that this comes from the Lord?" Apparently, this brother lost his job because of the economy. But the economy and everything related to it is under God's sovereignty. Therefore, even losing a job is something assigned from the Lord. Likewise, the opposition we face, even from members of our own family, may be a suffering assigned to us by God for our good.

A PICTURE OF THE VAIN MANNER OF LIFE

In verse 3 Peter says, "For the time which has passed is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having gone on in licentiousness, lusts, debaucheries, carousings, drinking bouts, and lawless idolatries." Literally the Greek word rendered "desire" here is purpose, will; that is, intention, inclination; hence, desire. All the negative things listed in this verse are related to the vain manner of life (1:18).

NOT RUNNING INTO THE FLOOD OF DISSIPATION

In verse 4 Peter continues, "In which they think it strange that you are not running together with them into the same flood of dissipation, blaspheming." The Greek word rendered "strange" is *xenizo*. It means to be a host or a guest, to be foreign, alien; to entertain, to lodge, to think it strange. To live in the flesh in the lusts of men (v. 2) is common to unbelieving Gentiles, who are running together into the flood of dissipation. But to live a holy life in the will of God, not running together in the indulgence of lusts, is strange to them. It is a foreign thing, alien to them. They are surprised and astonished at it.

Your colleagues at work may think it strange that you do not use the weekend to indulge in worldly entertainment. Toward the end of the afternoon on Friday, some of them may ask about your plans for the weekend. They may boast of what they intend to do in the way of indulging themselves in their lusts, and they may eagerly press you to tell them what your plans are. Then you may explain that over the weekend you will be involved with the meetings of the church. Perhaps on a particular weekend you will be going out of town to attend a conference. Your colleagues may think it strange that you would do such things on the weekend. Some may even say to you, "Where did you come from? Are you from another planet? You are a stranger to us. You are an alien."

The word "dissipation" in verse 4 also indicates indulgence to excess. We all need to eat, but we should not eat in excess. We all need to drink, but we should not drink too much. Paul once told Timothy that, for the sake of his frequent illnesses, he should take a little wine. It is all right for someone with a special need to take a little wine for his health, but that one should not go too far and drink to excess. If we go too far in eating and drinking, that is indulgence, excess,

dissipation. As believers, we should not have any kind of dissipation. In our eating, drinking, shopping, and spending of money, we should have a limitation, a restriction. In none of these things should there be any dissipation. The worldly people follow the flood of dissipation to indulge in their lusts, but we do not go that way. They are following the current of this age, but we are moving against the current. To them, this is very strange.

-----[SECTION 2]-----

THE JUDGE OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

In verse 5 Peter goes on to say, “Who shall render an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” The relative pronoun “who” in this verse refers to the nations (v. 3), who are astonished at the believers’ different manner of life and speak evil of them (v. 4).

In verse 5 Peter says that the unbelievers will render an account to the One who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For anyone to render an account to God is to relate to Him all that he has done and spoken in his entire life. This reveals the government of God over all men. He is ready to judge all, both the living and the dead. His judgment is His governmental administration to deal with the situation among men.

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE DEAD

Verse 6 says, “For unto this end the gospel was preached also to the dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” For centuries, the meaning of this verse has been debated. What does it mean to say that the “gospel was preached also to the dead”? The dead refers to the dead believers in Christ, who suffered persecution because of their Christian testimony, as referred to in 1:6, 2:18-21; 3:16-17; and 4:12-19. This kind of persecution is considered by Peter in this book as God’s judgment, according to the government of God, which begins from the house of God (v. 17). The gospel was preached to these dead believers while they were living, in order that they might on one hand be judged, dealt with, by God through the opposers’ persecution according to men in the flesh, but, on the other hand, live by believing in Christ according to God in the spirit. This shows how strict and serious is the judgment of God in His governmental administration. If the believers, who have been obedient to the gospel, are dealt with by God’s governmental judgment, how

much more will those who oppose the gospel and blaspheme the believers be judged by God’s dealing!

In verse 6 “spirit” denotes the believers’ spirit, regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit of God (John 3:6; Rom. 8:10-11). In this way the believers’ spirit becomes a mingled spirit, in which they should live and walk (Rom. 8:4).

The word “dead” is used in both verse 5 and verse 6. In verse 5 the dead refers to all those unbelievers who have died and who will be judged by the Lord at the white throne after the millennium. In verse 6 the same word refers to dead believers. By the time Peter wrote this Epistle, a good number of the Jewish believers had died. The gospel had been preached to these believers while they were alive. Therefore, “the gospel was preached also to the dead” means that it was preached to certain believers who had died before this Epistle was written.

Peter says that the gospel was preached to the dead so that they might be judged according to men in the flesh. These believers were judged after they were saved. They were judged in the flesh while they were still living.

THE VARIOUS JUDGMENTS OF GOD

If we would understand what Peter says concerning judgment in verse 6, we need to have a full view of the entire Epistle. The whole book of 1 Peter is on God’s government, and God’s government is carried out mainly by His judgment. God’s judgment began from the rebellious angels (2 Pet. 2:3-4) in Genesis 6. Then it passed through the generations of man in the Old Testament (2 Pet. 2:5-9). For example, God’s judgment was exercised upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The judgment of God was also exercised a number of times upon the children of Israel in the wilderness. Nearly two million Israelites died in the wilderness under God’s judgment. In a sense, even Moses died under God’s judgment. Aaron, Miriam, and Moses all died under the judgment of God, for they all had done certain things that were wrong, against God’s government. It is a serious matter that even a man of God like Moses could die under God’s judgment. The two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, were judged by God and died (Lev. 10:1-2). Furthermore, in one day more than twenty thousand Israelites were slain because of God’s judgment. Eventually, of all those who came out of Egypt at the time of the exodus, only two persons, Joshua and Caleb, entered into the

good land. Because they had been faithful throughout the journey, they did not come under judgment but rather were allowed to enter into the land of Canaan. But all the others, those who experienced the Passover, drank of the living water from the cleft rock, witnessed the miracles of God, and ate manna, became disobedient and died under God's judgment. Even a small degree of disobedience shown by Moses caused him to suffer God's judgment. All these instances should cause us to realize how serious God's judgment is.

In the New Testament age God's judgment begins from the house of God (1 Pet. 1:17; 4:17) and will continue until the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10), which will be a day of judgment on the Jews, the believers, and the Gentiles before the millennium. After the millennium, all the dead, including men and demons, will be judged and will perish (1 Pet. 4:5; 2 Pet. 3:7), and the heavens and the earth will be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10, 12).

Many Christians hold the concept that to be judged by God is to suffer eternal perdition. This is a traditional understanding of God's judgment. Actually, in the Bible there are varied judgments, and the results of these different judgments are not the same. Some judgments result in a disciplinary dealing, some in a dispensational punishment, and some in eternal perdition. By all these judgments the Lord God will clear up the entire universe and purify it so that He may have a new heaven and new earth for a new universe filled with His righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13) for His delight.

PERSECUTION REGARDED AS GOD'S JUDGMENT

According to 4:6, even persecution is regarded as a part of God's judgment. Verses 14 through 17 of this chapter indicate that persecution is the beginning of God's judgment. In verses 15 and 16 Peter says that we should not suffer as wrongdoers or as those who meddle into others' affairs. Instead, we should suffer as Christians. Then in verse 17 he goes on to say that it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God. This indicates that, according to Peter's understanding, even the persecution suffered by the believers was God's judgment.

Not many Christians realize that the persecutions suffered by the believers may be God's judgment upon them. I did not have this understanding of verse 6 until my recent study of this Epistle. As a

result of my study, I came to see that the judgment spoken of in verse 6 refers to the persecutions assigned by God to His chosen people. In order to keep us from sin or cause us to cease from indulging in our lusts, God may assign a certain kind of persecution to us. This assignment of persecution is God's governmental judgment; it is His judgment in His dispensational discipline. Therefore, persecution may be a dispensational discipline exercised by God over His chosen people. The judgment in verse 6 definitely is not a judgment related to eternal perdition, to eternal condemnation, but rather a dispensational discipline.

We have seen that God's governmental dealing is exercised through different kinds of judgment. He judged the rebellious angels, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the children of Israel in the wilderness. God also judges the New Testament saints. Persecution may come to believers because they are wrong in certain things. God may use persecution as a dispensational discipline. This dispensational discipline is God's governmental judgment exercised upon us to perfect us. The purpose of this judgment is that we may live according to God in the spirit.

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PURIFIED THROUGH FIERY ORDEALS

In verse 12 Peter says, "Beloved, do not think the fiery ordeal among you is strange, which is coming to you for a trial, as a strange thing happening to you." The Greek, for fiery ordeal, *purosei*, means burning, signifying the burning of a smelting furnace for the purification of gold and silver (Prov. 27:21; Psa. 66:10), like the metaphor used in 1:7. Peter considered the persecution the believers suffered as such a burning furnace used by God to purify their life. This is God's way to deal with the believers in the judgment of His governmental administration, which begins from His own household (4:17-19). The Greek word for strange in verse 12 is *xenizo*, the same as the word used in verse 4. Fiery persecution is common to the believers. They should not think it is strange or alien to them and be surprised and astonished by it. This persecution is a trial, a testing.

The positive purpose served by persecution and trial is the purification of our life. We can be compared to gold and silver. However, we still have some amount of dross. Therefore, we need purification. As gold and silver are purified

through burning, we also need to be purified in this way. In verse 12 Peter tells the believers not to regard the fiery ordeal as strange. As Christians, we should realize that fiery ordeals are common. Persecutions and trials are the common experience of Christians. Such things are not strange, alien, foreign, to us. On the contrary, they are common, for we have been appointed to them. It is our destiny to suffer in this age. Of course, this is not our eternal destiny. God has not destined us to suffer in eternity, but He surely has destined us to suffer in this age.

SHARING THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

How can the persecutions suffered by us be the sufferings of Christ? If we were not Christians, we certainly would not suffer the kind of persecution described in verses 12 and 13. Such persecutions are due to the fact that we are Christians, men of Christ. Because we believe in Christ, love Christ, live Christ, bear testimony to Christ, witnessing of Him in this age, the world rises up against us. This age is under the hand of the evil one, and for this reason unbelieving ones persecute those who believe in Christ and witness of Him. In the sight of God this kind of suffering is regarded as the sufferings of Christ. For example, a certain brother may have had the opportunity to become rich. But because he believes in Christ, loves Christ, and follows Christ, his business may suffer, and he may lose the opportunity to become wealthy. Actually, he may even be in poverty. This kind of poverty is the suffering of Christ. Those sufferings that are for Christ are counted by God as the sufferings of Christ.

Christ lived a life of suffering, a suffering life. Now we are His partners living the same kind of life. According to the book of Hebrews, we are not only partakers of Christ but are also His partners (Heb. 3:14). We cooperate with Him in living a life of suffering. We follow Him along the way of suffering. This means that what Christ suffered, we also suffer. Therefore, when we suffer for Christ in this way, our sufferings are counted by God as the sufferings of Christ.

We should not be discouraged because we must suffer as Christians. These sufferings are positive and very precious. What a privilege it is to experience the sufferings of Christ! Paul could even say that he made up what was lacking of the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His Body, the church (Col. 1:24). He also speaks in Philippians 3:10 concerning the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Today we should be Christians,

followers of Christ, who undergo the sufferings of Christ. We need to participate not only in the riches of Christ, but also in the sufferings of Christ. If we take this point of view, we shall be encouraged whenever we suffer for Christ. We may even welcome this kind of suffering. Yes, we may face fiery ordeals, but these are the sufferings of Christ in which we have the privilege to participate.

REJOICING EXULTINGLY

In verse 13 Peter says that as we share the sufferings of Christ, we should rejoice so that at the unveiling of His glory we may rejoice exultingly. In this verse Peter speaks of rejoicing exultingly. According to my understanding, this means that we shall not only be joyful inwardly, but we shall sound out our joy. At the same time, we may stretch forth our arms and also leap for joy. This is to exult and to rejoice exultingly. At the time of the unveiling of the Lord's glory, we shall exult. I believe that we shall shout, rejoice, and perhaps even leap for joy. We shall be excited to the uttermost, beside ourselves with joy. Today we may rejoice, but when the Lord is unveiled we shall rejoice exultingly.

REPROACHED IN THE NAME OF CHRIST

In verse 14 Peter goes on to say, "If you are reproached in the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." "In the name of Christ" is actually in the person of Christ, in Christ Himself, because the name denotes the person. The believers, having believed into Christ (John 3:15), and having been baptized into His name (Acts 19:5), that is, into Himself (Gal. 3:27), are in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30) and one with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). When they are reproached in His name, they are reproached with Him, sharing His sufferings, in the fellowship of His sufferings .

The reason the persecutions we suffer are the sufferings of Christ is that we suffer in the name of Christ. According to Peter's word in verse 14, we are blessed if we are reproached in the name of Christ. Do not think that it is a curse to be reproached in the name of Christ. This is to be blessed. However, it may be a curse if people appreciate us too highly. Regarding this matter, we need to have a change of concept.

Today the opposers spread rumors concerning us and accuse us of teaching heresy. I can testify that I am a fundamental Christian and that I love the holy Word very much. I do not teach anything

except the Bible with Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, I am accused of teaching heresy. In a sense, I welcome this kind of reproach, for it is actually a blessing, not a curse.

THE SPIRIT OF GLORY RESTING UPON US

Peter tells us in verse 14 that if we are reproached in the name of Christ, the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. Literally, the Greek says “the Spirit of glory and that of God.” The Spirit of glory is the One through whom Christ was glorified in His resurrection (Rom. 8:11). This very Spirit of glory, being the Spirit of God Himself, rests upon the suffering believers in their persecution for the glorification of the resurrected and exalted Christ, who is now in glory.

The more we suffer and are persecuted, the more glory there will be upon us. I can testify that the more I am persecuted and evil spoken of, the more I am empowered. Persecution and reproach does not hold me down. On the contrary, it lifts me up. Therefore, we should rejoice when we are reproached in the name of Christ, because the Spirit of glory is resting upon us.

SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN

Verse 15 says, “For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler into others’ affairs.” Literally, “a meddler into others’ affairs” is an overseer of others’ affairs. This denotes one who causes trouble by interfering in others’ business. If we are careless in the church life, we may interfere, meddle, with the affairs of others. To gossip about the saints is to interfere with others’ affairs. If we suffer because we do such things, that kind of suffering does not mean anything. It is part of the vain manner of life.

In verse 16 Peter continues, “But if as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name.” In verses 14 and 16 we have two names. The first name is Christ, and the second name is Christian. If we suffer because of these two names, that is glorious. This kind of suffering is a glory to God. It glorifies God because, when we suffer in the name of Christ and as Christians, the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of glory, rests upon us. When we suffer for Christ, glory rests upon us, and that glory is actually the Spirit of glory Himself.

Today the term Christian should bear a positive significance, that is, a man of Christ, one who is

one with Christ, not only belonging to Him, but having His life and nature in an organic union with Him, and who is living by Him, even living Him, in his daily life. If we suffer for being such a person, we should not feel ashamed, but be bold to magnify Christ in our confession by our holy and excellent manner of life to glorify, express, God in this name. To glorify God is to express Him in glory.

JUDGMENT BEGINNING FROM THE HOUSE OF GOD

As we have pointed out, Peter’s use of the word “judgment” in verse 17 indicates that persecutions and sufferings are a kind of judgment. This judgment, however, is not for condemnation to eternal perdition. It is a judgment for discipline, a dispensational discipline to purify our life. This judgment is a fiery ordeal, a burning furnace, to purify us and remove any dross. We can be compared to gold, but we still have a certain amount of dross from which we need to be purified. No teaching or fellowship can accomplish this purification. The disciplinary judgment of the burning furnace is necessary to carry it out.

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DISPENSATIONAL DISCIPLINE

The thought of dispensational discipline is found not only in the writings of Peter, but also in the Epistles of Paul.

We should not be ignorant of what the Bible says concerning God’s judgment. Many of today’s Christians do not know anything about God’s dispensational discipline. When they read about judgment, they may say, “Oh, we have been redeemed by the Lord, and we can never be judged. It is heretical for anyone to teach that a Christian can be judged by God.” As we have seen, this is not a heretical teaching or anyone’s personal teaching. This is the teaching of the holy Word. The matter of God’s dispensational discipline was taught by both Peter and Paul. Therefore, we need to believe and accept this teaching from the pure Word of God.

We, the saved ones, will not have any share in the judgment for eternal perdition. There is no need for us to be afraid of that judgment. As far as judgment for eternal perdition is concerned, God has passed over us in Christ as our Passover Lamb. However, we should not think that, because God has passed over us concerning this judgment, we could not have any problems and

will not suffer the judgment of God's dispensational discipline.

Our situation as believers in Christ can be compared to that of the children of Israel. They experienced the Passover, and they were redeemed by the Passover lamb. After they made their exodus from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, they enjoyed the living water out of the cleft rock and the heavenly manna. They saw the miracles God did for them. Nevertheless, out of more than two million people who came out of Egypt, only two, Joshua and Caleb, escaped the judgment of God leading to death. All the remainder, including Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, died under God's judgment. This does not mean that they were under God's curse. It means that they were under the judgment of God's dispensational discipline. As we have pointed out, this kind of judgment is not for eternal perdition. It is related absolutely to God's dispensational dealing. Moses, of course, was saved. God intended to preserve his body so that Moses could appear on the mount of transfiguration to be with the Lord. But because Moses made a mistake, God apportioned to him a particular disciplinary judgment.

We need to see the truth concerning God's judgment and have a holy fear of God. This judgment is God's discipline, a discipline that is a dispensational judgment exercised over the believers who are wrong in certain matters. This is one of the basic teachings of the apostles, and it was taught by both Peter and Paul.

JUDGMENT BEGINNING FROM THE HOUSE OF GOD

First Peter 4:17 says, "Because it is time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who disobey the gospel of God?" We have seen that this Epistle shows the government of God especially in His dealings with His chosen people. The sufferings they undergo in fiery persecution are used by Him as a means to judge them that they may be disciplined, purified, and separated from the unbelievers and not have the same destiny as unbelievers. Such disciplinary judgment begins from the house of God.

The Greek word rendered "house" in verse 17 also means household. Here the house, or household, refers to the church composed of the believers (2:5; Heb. 3:6; 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19). From this house, as His own house, God begins His governmental administration by His

disciplinary judgment over His own children so that He may have strong ground to judge, in His universal kingdom, those who are disobedient to His gospel and rebellious to His government. This is for the establishment of His kingdom, which is covered in the second book (2 Pet. 1:11).

THOSE WHO DISOBEY THE GOSPEL OF GOD

In verse 17 the word "disobey" has a particular and specific meaning. Many Christians, however, do not realize this. Here in 4:17 "disobey" is used with regard to the unbelieving Jews mainly, not to the unbelieving Gentiles. As God's people, the Jews had received the Mosaic law and also the ordinances and rituals of the Old Testament. But by the time this Epistle was written, the dispensation had changed. The Old Testament was the old dispensation, and the New Testament is the new dispensation of God. The dispensation first began to change at the coming of John the Baptist. Of course, it changed even the more with the coming of the Lord Jesus.

According to Matthew 3:2, John preached in the wilderness, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." John the Baptist's preaching was the initiation of God's New Testament economy. He did this preaching not in the holy temple within the holy city, where the religious and cultured people worshipped God according to their scriptural ordinances, but in the wilderness, not keeping any regulations of the old dispensation. This indicates that the old way of the worship of God according to the Old Testament was repudiated, and a new way was about to be brought in.

Actually, the preaching of the gospel began not with the Lord Jesus but with John the Baptist. John said to those who came to be baptized by him, "I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance; but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to bear; He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire; whose winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor and will gather His wheat into His barn, but He will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11-12). Here John seems to be saying, "The One who comes after me will baptize you either in the Spirit or in fire. He will put you either into the Spirit or into the lake of fire. Only He has the power to do these things. Therefore, you must genuinely repent."

We have pointed out that the book of 1 Peter was written to Jewish believers. In particular, this Epistle was written to the “chosen pilgrims of the dispersion” (1:1). The word “dispersion” was a term familiar to all the scattered Jews among the nations. This term clearly indicates that this Epistle was written to Jewish believers. These believers, who had been scattered throughout the Gentile world, were suffering persecution. It is important for us to realize that this persecution did not come mainly from the Gentiles; most of it came from the opposing Jews, the Jews who did not obey the gospel.

In 4:17 “those who disobey the gospel of God” refers mainly to unbelieving Jews. In the sight of God, the unbelieving Jews were disobedient. God gave them the law through Moses, and they accepted it. But when God’s dispensation changed and He wanted to give them the gospel, the Jews disobeyed the gospel and rebelled against it. If we would understand verse 17, we need to realize that “disobey the gospel” refers mainly to the disobedience of the unbelieving Jews.

THE RIGHTEOUS SAVED WITH DIFFICULTY

In verse 18 Peter goes on to say, “And if the righteous is saved with difficulty, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?” Here “the righteous” refers to the believers, who became righteous by being justified through their faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1) and by living a righteous life in Christ (Phil. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rev. 19:8).

If God’s children, the members of His own household, are saved with difficulty, do you think that those Jews who do not believe but who disobey God’s gospel will escape God’s judgment? Certainly they will not escape. If God’s chosen pilgrims are disciplined by God and judged by Him, how much more will the ungodly be judged?

In verse 18 “saved” does not mean saved from eternal perdition through the Lord’s death, but saved from the coming destruction (1 Thes. 5:3, 8) through the trials of persecution as God’s disciplinary judgment. The believer, who has been disciplined by God through the sufferings of persecution to purify his life, is saved with the difficulty of persecution from the destruction of God’s wrath toward the world, especially toward the unbelieving Jews, with the coming destruction of Jerusalem in view.

Among the early apostles there was a strong belief that the Lord Jesus would come back soon to judge the unbelieving sinners, who are ungodly and disobey His gospel (2 Thes. 1:6-9). Peter’s word here should refer to this. In God’s government, if the righteous, who has obeyed His gospel and lives a righteous life before Him, is saved with difficulty, suffering persecution as the means of His disciplinary punishment to purify his life, where will the ungodly, who disobeys His gospel and lives a sinful life against His government, stand when the destruction of His wrath comes?