

15. I would expect people to say that knowing our suffering is within the will of God makes it both harder and easier. Harder because we find it hard to understand how God can love us and allow such things to happen. We can see good reasons from this letter, we can understand the discipline of a loving father, but accepting it is hard in practice. But knowing that this is not just a random chance event, but actually has purpose within the love of God should also make it easier to bear.

*David Phillips,
November 2016*

The First letter of Peter

LEADERS NOTES

Week 9 (1 Pt 4.12-19)

1. Behind this question lies a difficult issue. There are various passages in the Bible which assure us that if we trust in Christ then we will not fall. This is what is known as “the perseverance of the saints”. Alongside this was have Jesus’ Parable of the Sower in which He says that some will grow but when troubles come they will not endure. Others passages in the New Testament encourage us to stand firm implying that it is possible to fall.

Therefore it would seem that “fiery trials”, what Jesus calls “tribulation or persecution” (Mtt 13.21), as well as “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches” (Mtt 13.22) serve to show whether faith and spiritual growth is genuine. But if we endure fiery trials, or temptations and continue to trust in Christ, then though we do sometimes stumble, we will not fall from grace.

A difficult issue has been how to respond when people did cave in under “fiery trials” and then, often when the danger had passed, they claimed to still believe. This was the issue that sparked off the Donatist controversy in the fourth century.

Similarly some Protestant Reformers notably repudiated their faith under threat of death. One was Thomas Bilney who later regretted his action and became very forthright in opposing catholicism leading to his eventual martyrdom. Bilney’s anguish at what he did encouraged others to stand firm. More famously Thomas Cranmer repudiated his views under pressure. However, on the day he was to be burned he said that the hand which had signed the repudiation would burn first. He then denounced the Pope as Antichrist. At the stake he duly put his hand in to the flames as they rose.

3. I like to think that I warn people about the cost of discipleship in evangelistic preaching and we often deal with passages which show

the dangers. I don't know if that is what others think about my preaching.

4. Your church may support ministries involved in support for the persecution church around the world. If so then try to find out more about what to pray for. If not, then why not?

The point of referring to 1 Pt 5.9 is that knowing that the same kind of suffering is being endured by others should encourage us both to see that it is possible and that it is not just us, but something many believers encounter. We can be tempted to think that if it is just us then we must be at fault, but we should see we are not alone and as we have seen it should not be a surprise.

- 5a. God's power guards us and purifying fire purifies faith.
- b. Jesus' example shows us that beyond suffering is glory.
- c. Suffering now is nothing compared to what we will have.
- d. Our suffering have a purpose, God is with us in it.
- e. By remaining steadfast we bring glory to God.

6. "Great is your reward in heaven".

7. He says in verse 14 we are blessed "because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" evidently referring to the Holy Spirit. What exactly this means I am not sure. Clearly it is a blessing to know that the Spirit rests on us. Perhaps it is like the hymn Abide With Me - under suffering "all other helpers flee" and so we become more acutely aware of the blessing of knowing of that God the Holy Spirit abides with us for ever (see Jn 14.16 - King James translation).

8. Some possible answers

- Nazarenes - 24.5
- brethren - Acts 11.29 - although not usually a title
- elect
- saints - very common in Paul's letters
- believers
- disciples
- the Church

9. Advantages:

- Terms like "disciples", "church" or "believers" could apply to other groups - "Christians" is unique.
- Terms like "believers" and "saints" are man-focused, and in a some ways vain, as if we were claiming to be holy when others are not. But "Christian" puts the focus on Christ.
- The title conveys so much about what we believe - that Jesus is the Christ. Of course that would need explaining to most non-Jews in those days as it does today. But we can imagine someone asking what the title means giving an opening for a gospel conversation.

Many names start as nicknames which were intended as an insult - for example the Lollards or Methodists, but there doesn't seem to be any reason think this was so with the title "Christians".

10. One disadvantage is that in the west so many non-churchgoing people seem to think of themselves as Christian, whereas in others places, such as the Middle-east "Christian" seems often to be a cultural thing, or about history rather than present faith.

Another disadvantage is that within the churches many seem to believe things which are far from what we think of as genuinely Christian. Therefore we end up using qualifiers such as "born again Christian", "bible-believing Christian" and "evangelical Christian" to distinguish us from others.

12. Hopefully people will be aware of examples. According to Wikipedia American football quarterback Tim Tebow is "an outspoken Christian". Whilst proper football manager Jurgen Klopp is "a Protestant Christian who has referred to his faith in public", as if this was an unusual thing to do. In contrast Roman Catholics who are not just nominal are often referred to as "devout Catholics".

14. We are familiar with the idea of earthly fathers who don't just let their children do whatever they want. It is because God is our heavenly Father that we endure troubles now but we can know that because He is our Father then we are spared the judgement to God. In contrast without Christ we face would face the final judgement without hope.