

Don't Be Surprised

“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 ... Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” 1 Peter 4:12, 19.

That which pleases God and that which pleases people are often two different things. In fact, they're regularly opposed to one another, to the point that one cannot do both at the same time. This creates one of the difficulties of being a Christian. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean that all our problems go away. It's true that the largest and most urgent of our problems are solved: Our sins are forgiven and our relationship with God has been restored. But now it means that we have a new set of problems. Before we could have dropped our convictions and picked them up when convenient, but now we must behave in such a way that reflects our understanding that our actions on earth affect our eternity. The problem, then, comes from the fact that what pleases God upsets people and what pleases people upsets God. This understanding is the basis for Peter's statements.

In real life situations, do we experience persecution for our beliefs – whether physical harm or mocking or simply enduring others thinking we're unintelligent for believing in a religion? Do we experience discomfort in confronting a coworker about their moral laxity because they're creating an unhealthy work environment – and then experience their anger after we tell them not to do what they know they shouldn't be doing in the first place? Do we experience trials and troublesome times because we have a set of moral ethics and beliefs which we uphold and by which we live?

If Christians are taught to expose the works of darkness (Eph. 5:11), and if we are taught that darkness doesn't want to be exposed (John 3:20), then naturally it follows that Christians will incur the anger of those who practice wickedness and don't want their wickedness called out. This is why Peter writes not to be surprised when difficulties come. It's not something abnormal. It's the way God has chosen to deal with a world that rejects Him. Peter writes that suffering for doing good is according to God's will. When we suffer, we should entrust our souls to God, not to people. People aren't rejecting us, they're rejecting God. Besides, it's far easier to endure the anger of people than the wrath of God.

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