

Do Not Think It Strange **(1 Peter 4:12-19)**

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Do Not Think it Strange

- a. As we have discussed several times in previous lessons in this series, the overarching theme of **1 Peter** is on the topic of Christians suffering in this life.
 - i. Jesus suffered before entering into his glory; we should expect the same in our lives.
 - ii. We need to make sure that when we are suffering or being persecuted, that it is for righteousness' sake (as opposed to suffering for something we are doing that is unrighteous).
- b. Read **1 Peter 4:12-19**.
 - i. Points that Peter is making here include:
 1. Do not think it *strange*, "concerning the fiery trial which is to try you". As Christians, we should expect to face suffering and trials.
 - a. God is "*trying*" (or *testing*) us.
 2. When we are facing trials for our faith, we are "participating in the sufferings of Christ". This is a blessing in reality. The Spirit is upon us.
 - a. When modern evangelical Protestants present 'the gospel', it is often described along the following lines: "Christ suffered for us, so that *we don't have to suffer*."
 - b. In contrast, Peter said that Christ suffered before entering His glory, to show us the way. If we follow Him, we must expect to suffer in this life. Peter says that when we suffer for righteousness' sake, we are "participating in the sufferings of Christ".
 - c. Peter's explanation is totally consistent with what Jesus had said:
 - i. "...If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and

follow Me.” (Luke 9:23, NKJV)

- ii. “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you...” (John 15:20, NKJV)

3. Don’t be ashamed that you are suffering for the sake of Christ; glorify God through this.
4. When we face suffering for being Christians, we should rejoice.
5. When suffering for the sake of Christ, commit your soul to God and continue to do good.

c. How we should handle it when we are being *tried* or *tested*:

- i. “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;” (1 Peter 4:12, NKJV)

1. “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.” (1 Peter 4:12, ESV)
2. The Greek word used by Peter here, the noun *peirasmos* / πειρασμός, means a *trial* or a *test*.
 - a. Likewise, the verb form of this word (*peirazo* / πειράζω) means to put someone to the test.
 - b. When Satan is doing this to us, this word is generally translated as *temptation*.
3. Some places where we see that word used (in noun or verb form) in the New Testament and the LXX, to indicate a trial or test that comes from God, including:
 - a. “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6-7, ESV)
 - b. “Now you shall remember the whole way the Lord your God led you in the desert, to deal harshly with you and to test you, to know what was in your heart, whether

you would keep His commandments or not.”
(**Deuteronomy 8:2**, LXX, OSB)

- c. David says, “Prove me, O Lord, and test me. Try my reins (kidneys) and my heart in the fire.” (**Psalm 26:2**, designated **Psalm 25:2** in the LXX; OSB)
 - i. David actually asked the Lord to test him. However, the Lord will test those who follow Him *whether we ask for it or not!*
 - ii. Consider how we will typically *test-drive* a car before buying it. The car may look nice and shiny on the outside, but by test-driving it we can better determine how good the car really is: and what is under the hood, the condition of the unseen engine. Likewise, *the Lord will test us to see what is inside our hearts.*
 - d. Jesus said: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” (**Revelation 3:10**, NKJV)
4. This same Greek word is also used to refer to something done by Satan (a test from him that is a temptation):
 - a. “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’” (**Matthew 4:1-3**, NKJV)
 5. This same word also is used when people are putting God to the test (which is generally a *very bad thing* to do).
 - a. “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, “They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.” So I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest.”” (**Hebrews 3:7-11**, NKJV; quoting from **Psalm 95:7-11**, designated **Psalm 94:7-11** in the LXX)

- b. When the people complained about no water soon after entering the Wilderness, the place was named “testing and reviling” on account of the people reviling and “tempting/testing the Lord”. See **Exodus 17:7** in the LXX.
- c. In **Numbers 14**, the Israelites reject the report of the two faithful spies (Joshua and Caleb) who reported back from their exploration of the Promised Land.
 - i. The Lord tells Moses, “all the men who are seeing my glory and signs, which I did in Egypt and in this desert, and put me to the test now these ten times and did not heed my voice... shall not see [*the Promised Land*]” (**Numbers 14:22-23**, LXX, OSB)
- d. One of the four sins of the people in the Wilderness that caused them to fall (including idolatry, sexual immorality and grumbling/complaining), which we are warned about, was “testing the Lord”.
 - i. “nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents;” (**1 Corinthians 10:9**, NKJV)
 - 1. Or, from the ESV translation: “We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents...” (**1 Corinthians 10:9**, ESV)
 - ii. This example stands as a stark warning *to us!*
 - 1. “Now all these things happened to them *as examples*, and they were written *for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” (**1 Corinthians 10:11**, NKJV)
- ii. Here is the ‘bottom line’ from Scripture regarding ‘*trials / testing*’:
 - 1. God tests His people (to see if we really love Him, and to refine us like gold in the fire).
 - 2. Satan also tests us (temptations, wanting to pull us into sin).
 - 3. However, we must *NEVER* put the Lord to the test.

- iii. Think about all the people that the Lord put to the test.
 1. Noah, Abraham, Job, Daniel, Daniel's three friends
 2. Jesus made perfect through suffering (**Hebrews 5:7-8**)
 3. Satan had asked for Peter to be "sifted like wheat". (**Luke 22:31**)

- d. An example of someone who understood this concept (we will be put to the test by God, but must never put the Lord to the test) is in the story of **Judith**.
 - i. The book of **Judith** is among the books of the *Apocrypha* (also referred to as the *Deutero-Canonical* books). Those books are found in the Old Testament of the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, and even were in the original KJV (from which they were removed in the late 1800's).
 1. Early Christians were familiar with and accepted these books, and quoted from them frequently. In general, they accepted them as part of the Scriptures.
 - a. For example, from Clement of Rome, bishop of the church in Rome, who may well have known Peter and Paul personally, writing c. 95 AD:
 - i. "Many women also, being strengthened by the grace of God, have performed numerous manly exploits. The blessed Judith, when her city was besieged, asked of the elders permission to go forth into the camp of the strangers; and, exposing herself to danger, she went out for the love which she bore to her country and people then besieged; and the Lord delivered Holofernes into the hands of a woman."
 - ii. (Source: Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, chapter 55; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 20)
 2. Also, if you read any Christian writers before the modern era (for example *Martyr's Mirror*, published in 1660), you will see they also treated these books with great respect, quoting them alongside the other Scriptures.
 3. Many have struggled with how to fit this book into the historical framework, particularly regarding the Assyrian empire.

- a. Protestants tend to use these challenges as reasons to dismiss this book.
- b. However, many conservative Catholic scholars over the ages have maintained that the narrative of **Judith** is historically accurate. (For further discussion of this, see the footnoted article on **Book of Judith** at the conservapedia.com website.)
 - i. Some of them have explained that these events took place during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar in the *Babylonian* empire. During that time, the Assyrians were under Babylonian rule. Therefore Nebuchadnezzar would have *ruled over* the Assyrians in Nineveh.
 - ii. With that understanding, the ‘Assyrian army’ would have been a local army operating within the Babylonian empire, under the king of the empire.
 - iii. If that understanding is the correct one, “the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar” (**Judith 1:1**) would correspond to c. 594 BC.
 1. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC, under Nabopolassar.
 2. Nebuchadnezzar (II) ascended to the throne of the Babylonian empire upon the death of his father Nabopolassar, c. 605 BC.
4. For more information regarding the historical (early Christian) view of the books included in what is called ‘the Apocrypha’, please see articles and audio lessons on this subject by David Bercot, including the 2-CD set, *The Apocrypha, Separating Myth from Fact*, available online or through Scroll Publishing.
- ii. The problem facing the Jews, in the opening chapters of **Judith**: they were under attack from their enemies, the Assyrians, who had already defeated the surrounding nations. The Assyrians, under King Nebuchadnezzar and his general Holofernes, demanded submission and worship of the Assyrians’ god (their king). The Assyrians have a vast army. They are arrogant and appear to be unstoppable.

- iii. Before the Assyrians attack the Jews, an Ammonite named Achior tells the Assyrian army commander about these people.
 - 1. Read **Judith chapter 5**.
 - 2. Achior reports that the Jews are different from all the other nations. They worship the God of heaven.
 - 3. The only way the Jews can be defeated is if they are disobeying the commands of their God and are sinning against Him.
 - 4. As a result, Achior is bound up by the furious Assyrians and left. He is later picked up by the Israelites, who treat him like a hero.
- iv. The Assyrians surround the Jewish city of Bethulia and cut off food and water. They call for the city to surrender.
 - 1. Read **Judith 7:19-32**.
 - 2. The people are discouraged and want to surrender to the Assyrians immediately.
 - 3. However, Uzziah (one of their leaders) asks for five days to pray to the Lord. Uzziah proposes that *if the Lord does not answer and deliver them*, they will surrender to the Assyrians at the end of the five days of prayer.
- v. Judith, a righteous widow of the city, hears of this exchange and Uzziah's plan; and she responds.
 - 1. Read **Judith 8:9-27**.
 - 2. She says they *must not test God*, treating Him as we might treat another human.
 - 3. Following the gods of the Assyrians is *never an option*, under any circumstances!
 - 4. God can do *anything*, whatever He wants.
 - 5. God is testing us. Just as He did our forefathers like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
 - 6. We are not being punished; we are being tested. God scourges those who draw near to him.
 - a. That statement reminds me of **Hebrews 12:3-11**. There, the **Hebrews** writer quotes from **Proverbs 3**

about how the Lord *scourges* every son whom He receives.

- vi. Whether you consider the book of **Judith** to be a part of Scripture or not, who can argue with her reasoning?
 1. God is *testing us through trials*, as He has always done to men and women of faith in the past.
 2. We must obey God regardless of the consequences, never compromising on that, and NEVER put God to the test.
 3. Christians throughout the ages have taken inspiration from this story, especially:
 - a. in the face of persecution, and
 - b. as an inspiring example of a woman who demonstrated great faith.
 4. You might want to read the rest of this story on your own, if you are not familiar with it.
- vii. Expect suffering. Don't think it strange.
- e. There is a natural tendency to equate suffering with rejection by God. Judith, in the prior story, reminded the people that God was testing them, not punishing them. Examples of those who thought (incorrectly) that trials were always a punishment and sign of God's disapproval include:
 1. Job's friends.
 2. The disciples of Jesus, in questioning why a young man had been born blind.
 - a. "And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" (**John 9:2**, NKJV)
 3. The Jews in Jesus' day who wondered about others who had died tragic deaths.
 - a. "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the

tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” (**Luke 13:1-5**, NKJV)

4. Cromwell, in the English Civil War of the 1600’s, who interpreted his victories in bloody *battles as a sign of God’s approval*.
 - a. Of course, going to war like this was completely against what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Cromwell was badly mistaken in believing God was pleased with the slaughter brought about by his army.

II. Other Examples of Those Whose Faith was Tested/Tried

- a. In **Hebrews 10-12**, Christians are urged to persevere in faith in the face of suffering, persecution, shame and hostility from the world. We also must faithfully endure, following the example of Jesus as well as the great “cloud of witnesses” from the past, the heroes of faith.
- b. Read **Hebrews 11:32-38**.
 - i. **Question:** Who “stopped the mouths of lions”?
 1. **Answer:** Daniel, in **Daniel 6**; perhaps also Samson, who tore apart a lion with his bare hands, in **Judges 14**.
 - ii. **Question:** Who “quenched the violence of the fire”?
 1. **Answer:** Daniel’s three friends, in **Daniel 3**.
 - iii. **Question:** Who was made strong out of weakness?
 1. **Answer:** Samson, in **Judges 16**; perhaps also Gideon, in **Judges 6-8**.
 - iv. **Question:** Which woman received back her dead, raised to life?
 1. **Answer:** widow of Zarephath, whose son Elijah raised from the dead, in **1 Kings 17**.
 - v. **Question:** Who was *sawn in two*?
 1. **Answer:** There is an old Jewish tradition (not contained in the Scriptures) that the prophet Isaiah was killed by being put inside a hollow log which was then sawn in two, during the time of King Manasseh. An account of this is in a Jewish work, *The Martyrdom of Isaiah*.

- vi. **More Questions:** Who was stoned? Who was *tortured and refused to accept deliverance*?
 - 1. For many who are familiar with the Old Testament stories, these may appear to be *harder questions to answer* than the previous ones.
 - 2. Can you think of anyone before the time of Jesus who was *tortured and given an opportunity to deny their faith, but refused*?

- c. The story of *Eleazar*, an old man who was one of the Jewish scribes.
 - i. Read **2 Maccabees 6:18-31**. This is from another book included in the *Apocrypha*.
 - 1. This takes place during the time of the Greek empire (successors of Alexander the Great), who ruled Judea after the Persians but before the Romans.
 - ii. This hero of faith was a *90-year-old* man!
 - 1. As I grow older, it is encouraging to see great examples of men who showed great faith in their advanced age, beyond the age of 70 (other examples include Moses, Joshua, and Caleb).
 - iii. A memorable statement from this passage: “He welcomed an *honorable death* rather than a *defiled life*.”
 - iv. Eleazar responds to the challenge of his opponents by saying, “Send me to Hades, immediately!”
 - 1. His response reminds me of the famous Clint Eastwood line, “Go ahead, make my day!”
 - v. He refused to eat pork, which would violate the Law of Moses. His friends, trying to spare his life, suggested that he fake it by eating some other allowable meat (like lamb) and just *pretend* it was pork. However, *at the cost of his life*, he would not do even that.
 - vi. **Question:** *Why would he not accept the proposed compromise?* He was provided a way out, a way to save his own life without actually violating the letter of the Law of Moses.
 - 1. He did not want to set a bad example for the younger ones.
 - 2. They would think he abandoned the faith just to gain a few more years of life!

3. He wanted to show himself worthy of the old age he had attained.
 4. He set a noble example of *how to die a good death*.
- d. The story that immediately follows this tells of the mother and her seven sons who faced similar persecution, in **2 Maccabees 7**.
- i. Read **2 Maccabees 7:1-23**.
 1. The oldest six of the mother's seven sons are tortured and then face a horrible death, one by one, because of their faith.
 2. One of the sons boldly proclaims that he will receive back the limbs of his body that had been severed by torture, at the resurrection of the dead.
 3. Their mother, who sees her sons being tortured and killed before her eyes all in one day, encourages them to remain strong and faithful to the Lord.
 4. They "...were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection" (**Hebrews 11:35**).
 - ii. Read **2 Maccabees 7:24-42**.
 1. For the last son, King Antiochus even tries to *bribe him* to compromise, offering him wealth and a high government position.
 2. The king also tries to get the boy's mother to persuade him to go along. However, she urges her last son to accept death and not fear the executioner. She is convinced that if he remains faithful to God, she will receive him back, along with all his brothers, at the resurrection.
 3. The young man boldly addresses the sin of the king and warns him of the judgment to come, willingly giving up his life.
 4. Last, after watching the death of each of her seven sons, the mother also is put to death.
- e. Early Christian writer Cyprian, a bishop in Carthage at a time of very severe persecution, wrote (c. 250 AD) about the suffering that Christians should be prepared to face, including torture and martyrdom. He often had to work 'underground', and ultimately was captured and executed by the Romans.
- i. (The quote that followed in the audio lesson is an excerpt from Cyprian's Letter to the People of Thibarais, Exhorting to Martyrdom.

See the appendix to these notes for the full text and reference, as well as an additional quote from Cyprian on the same subject.)

1. To inspire fellow Christians facing persecution and possible martyrdom, Cyprian pointed not only to the teachings of Christ, but also to the example He set with His life.
2. Cyprian also pointed to the examples of the heroes of faith who had gone before and were tested through threats and suffering at the hands of the wicked of this world.

III. Concluding Remarks

- a. Let us not be surprised if and when we face suffering and persecution.
- b. Christians have been relatively free from persecution in the U.S. for many years. However, that could change dramatically and quickly, at any time. We do not know what the future holds here.
- c. Let us be spiritually prepared for the suffering and trials we may be faced with in the future. When our day of testing comes, may our faith be proven genuine, that we may attain the resurrection of the righteous and participate in the glory to come.

IV. Appendix – From Letters of Cyprian, Regarding Facing Persecution

- a. From Cyprian's *Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus*:
 - i. "The blessed Apostle Paul proves; who by the divine condescension, being caught up into the third heaven and into paradise, testifies that he heard unspeakable words, who boasts that he saw Jesus Christ by the faith of sight, who professes that which he both learnt and saw with the greater truth of consciousness, and says: 'The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory which shall be revealed in us.' (**Romans 8:18**) Who, then, does not with all his powers labour to attain to such a glory that he may become the friend of God, that he may at once rejoice with Christ, that after earthly tortures and punishments he may receive divine rewards?"
 - ii. "If to soldiers of this world it is glorious to return in triumph to their country when the foe is vanquished, how much more excellent and greater is the glory, when the devil is overcome, to return in triumph to paradise, and to bring back victorious trophies to that place whence Adam was ejected as a sinner, after casting down him who formerly had cast him down; to offer to God the most acceptable gift—an

uncorrupted faith, and an unyielding virtue of mind, an illustrious praise of devotion; to accompany Him when He shall come to receive vengeance from His enemies, to stand at His side when He shall sit to judge, to become co-heir of Christ, to be made equal to the angels; with the patriarchs, with the apostles, with the prophets, to rejoice in the possession of the heavenly kingdom!

- iii. “Such thoughts as these, what persecution can conquer, what tortures can overcome? The brave and steadfast mind, founded in religious meditations, endures; and the spirit abides unmoved against all the terrors of the devil and the threats of the world, when it is strengthened by the sure and solid faith of things to come. In persecutions, earth is shut up, but heaven is opened; Antichrist is threatening, but Christ is protecting; death is brought in, but immortality follows; the world is taken away from him that is slain, but paradise is set forth to him restored; the life of time is extinguished, but the life of eternity is realized.
- iv. “What a dignity it is, and what a security, to go gladly from hence, to depart gloriously in the midst of afflictions and tribulations; in a moment to close the eyes with which men and the world are looked upon, and at once to open them to look upon God and Christ! Of such a blessed departure how great is the swiftness! You shall be suddenly taken away from earth, to be placed in the heavenly kingdoms. It behoves us to embrace these things in our mind and consideration, to meditate on these things day and night. If persecution should fall upon such a soldier of God, his virtue, prompt for battle, will not be able to be overcome. Or if his call should come to him before, his faith shall not be without reward, seeing it was prepared for martyrdom; without loss of time, the reward is rendered by the judgment of God. In persecution, the warfare,—in peace, the purity of conscience, is crowned.”

- 1. (Source: Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise No. 11: Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, pp. 506–507)

- b. From *The Epistles of Cyprian, Epistle No. 55: To the People of Thibaris, Exhorting to Martyrdom*:
 - i. “Cyprian to the people abiding at Thibaris, greeting.
 - ii. “I had indeed thought, beloved brethren, and prayerfully desired—if the state of things and the condition of the times permitted, in conformity with what you frequently desired—myself to come to you; and being present with you, then to strengthen the brotherhood with such moderate powers of exhortation as possess. But since I am

detained by such urgent affairs, that I have not the power to travel far from this place, and to be long absent from the people over whom by divine mercy I am placed, I have written in the meantime this letter, to be to you in my stead.

- iii. “For as, by the condescension of the Lord instructing me, I am very often instigated and warned, I ought to bring unto your conscience also the anxiety of my warning. For you ought to know and to believe, and hold it for certain, that the day of affliction has begun to hang over our heads, and the end of the world and the time of Antichrist to draw near, so that we must all stand prepared for the battle; nor consider anything but the glory of life eternal, and the crown of the confession of the Lord; and not regard those things which are coming as being such as were those which have passed away.
- iv. “A severer and a fiercer fight is now threatening, for which the soldiers of Christ ought to prepare themselves with uncorrupted faith and robust courage, considering that they drink the cup of Christ’s blood daily, for the reason that they themselves also may be able to shed their blood for Christ. For this is to wish to be found with Christ, to imitate that which Christ both taught and did, according to the Apostle John, who said, ‘He who says he abides in Christ, ought himself also so to walk as He walked.’ (**1 John 2:6**) Moreover, the blessed Apostle Paul exhorts and teaches, saying, ‘We are God’s children; but if children, then heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.’ (**Romans 8:17**)
- v. “Which things must all now be considered by us, that no one may desire anything from the world that is now dying, but may follow Christ, who both lives for ever, and quickens His servants, who are established in the faith of His name. For there comes the time, beloved brethren, which our Lord long ago foretold and taught us was approaching, saying, ‘The time comes, that whoever kills you will think that he does God’s service. And these things they will do to you, because they have not known the Father nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, you may remember that I told you of them.’ (**John 16:2-4**)
- vi. “Nor let any one wonder that we are harassed with constant persecutions, and continually tried with increasing afflictions, when the Lord before predicted that these things would happen in the last times, and has instructed us for the warfare by the teaching and exhortation of His words. Peter also, His apostle, has taught that persecutions occur for the sake of our being proved, and that we also should, by the example of righteous men who have gone before us, be

joined to the love of God by death and sufferings. For he wrote in his epistle, and said, 'Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, nor do you fall away, as if some new thing happened unto you; but as often as you partake in Christ's sufferings, rejoice in all things, that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. If you are reproached in the name of Christ, happy are you; for the name of the majesty and power of the Lord rests on you, which indeed on their part is blasphemed, but on our part is glorified.' (**1 Peter 4:12-14**)

- vii. "Now the apostles taught us those things which they themselves also learned from the Lord's precepts and the heavenly commands, the Lord Himself thus strengthening us, and saying, 'There is no man who has left house, or land, or parents, or brethren, or sisters, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive sevenfold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.' (**Luke 18:29-30**) And again He says, 'Blessed are you when men shall hate you, and shall separate you from their company, and shall cast you out, and shall reproach your name as evil for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven.' (**Luke 6:22-23**)
- viii. "The Lord desired that we should rejoice and leap for joy in persecutions, because, when persecutions occur, then are given the crowns of faith, then the soldiers of God are proved, then the heavens are opened to martyrs. For we have not in such a way given our name to warfare that we ought only to think about peace, and draw back from and refuse war, when in this very warfare the Lord walked first—the Teacher of humility, and endurance, and suffering—so that what He taught to be done, He first of all did, and what He exhorts to suffer, He Himself first suffered for us.
- ix. "Let it be before your eyes, beloved brethren, that He who alone received all judgment from the Father, and who will come to judge, has already declared the decree of His judgment and of His future recognition, foretelling and testifying that He will confess those before His Father who confess Him, and will deny those who deny Him. If we could escape death, we might reasonably fear to die. But since, on the other hand, it is necessary that a mortal man should die, we should embrace the occasion that comes by the divine promise and condescension, and accomplish the ending provided by death with the reward of immortality; nor fear to be slain, since we are sure when we are slain to be crowned.
- x. "Nor let any one, beloved brethren, when he beholds our people driven away and scattered by the fear of persecution, be disturbed not

at seeing the brotherhood gathered together, nor the bishops discoursing. All are not able to be there together, who may not kill, but who must be killed. Wherever, in those days, each one of the brethren shall be separated from the flock for a time, by the necessity of the season, in body, not in spirit, let him not be moved at the terror of that flight; nor, if he withdraw and be concealed, let him be alarmed at the solitude of the desert place.

- xi. “He is not alone, whose companion in flight Christ is; he is not alone who, keeping God’s temple wheresoever he is, is not without God. And if a robber should fall upon you, a fugitive in the solitude or in the mountains; if a wild beast should attack you; if hunger, or thirst, or cold should distress you, or the tempest and the storm should overwhelm you hastening in a rapid voyage over the seas, Christ everywhere looks upon His soldier fighting; and for the sake of persecution, for the honour of His name, gives a reward to him when he dies, as He has promised that He will give in the resurrection. Nor is the glory of martyrdom less that he has not perished publicly and before many, since the cause of perishing is to perish for Christ. That Witness who proves martyrs, and crowns them, suffices for a testimony of his martyrdom.
- xii. “Let us, beloved brethren, imitate righteous Abel, who initiated martyrdoms, he first being slain for righteousness’ sake. Let us imitate Abraham, the friend of God, who did not delay to offer his son as a victim with his own hands, obeying God with a faith of devotion. Let us imitate the three children Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who, neither frightened by their youthful age nor broken down by captivity, Judea, being conquered and Jerusalem taken, overcame the king by the power of faith in his own kingdom; who, when bidden to worship the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had made, stood forth stronger both than the king’s threats and the flames, calling out and attesting their faith by these words: ‘O king Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer you in this matter. For the God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hands, O king. But if not, be it known to you, that we do not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up.’ **(Daniel 3:16-18)** They believed that they might escape according to their faith, but they added, ‘and if not,’ that the king might know that they could also die for the God they worshipped. For this is the strength of courage and of faith, to believe and to know that God can deliver from present death, and yet not to fear death nor to give way, that faith may be the more mightily proved.
- xiii. “The uncorrupted and unconquered might of the Holy Spirit broke forth by their mouth, so that the words which the Lord in His Gospel

spoke are seen to be true: 'But when they shall seize you, take no thought what you shall speak; for it shall be given you in that hour what you shall speak. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.' (**Matthew 10:19-20**) He said that what we are able to speak and to answer is given to us in that hour from heaven, and supplied; and that it is not then we who speak, but the Spirit of God our Father, who, as He does not depart nor is separated from those who confess Him, Himself both speaks and is crowned in us. So Daniel, too, when he was required to worship the idol Bel, which the people and the king then worshipped, in asserting the honour of his God, broke forth with full faith and freedom, saying, 'I worship nothing but the Lord my God, who created the heaven and the earth.' [from the end of **Daniel 12** in the LXX text]

- xiv. "What shall we say of the cruel tortures of the blessed martyrs in the Maccabees, and the multiform sufferings of the seven brethren, and the mother comforting her children in their agonies, and herself dying also with her children? Do not they witness the proofs of great courage and faith, and exhort us by their sufferings to the triumphs of martyrdom? What of the prophets whom the Holy Spirit quickened to the foreknowledge of future events? What of the apostles whom the Lord chose? Since these righteous men were slain for righteousness' sake, have they not taught us also to die?"
- xv. "The nativity of Christ witnessed at once the martyrdom of infants, so that they who were two years old and under were slain for His name's sake. An age not yet fitted for the battle appeared fit for the crown. That it might be manifest that they who are slain for Christ's sake are innocent, innocent infancy was put to death for His name's sake. It is shown that none is free from the peril of persecution, when even these accomplished martyrdoms. But how grave is the case of a Christian man, if he, a servant, is unwilling to suffer, when his Master first suffered; and that we should be unwilling to suffer for our own sins, when He who had no sin of His own suffered for us! The Son of God suffered that He might make us sons of God, and the son of man will not suffer that he may continue to be a son of God!"
- xvi. "If we suffer from the world's hatred, Christ first endured the world's hatred. If we suffer reproaches in this world, if exile, if tortures, the Maker and Lord of the world experienced harder things than these, and He also warns us, saying, 'If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hated you. Remember the word that I said to you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.' (**John 15:18-20**)"

Whatever our Lord and God taught, He also did, that the disciple might not be excused if he learns and does not.

- xvii. “Nor let any one of you, beloved brethren, be so terrified by the fear of future persecution, or the coming of the threatening Antichrist, as not to be found armed for all things by the evangelical exhortations and precepts, and by the heavenly warnings. Antichrist is coming, but above him comes Christ also. The enemy goes about and rages, but immediately the Lord follows to avenge our sufferings and our wounds. The adversary is enraged and threatens, but there is One who can deliver us from his hands. He is to be feared whose anger no one can escape, as He Himself forewarns, and says: ‘Do not fear those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.’ (**Matthew 10:28**)
- xviii. And again: ‘He who loves his life, shall lose it; and he who hates his life in this world, shall keep it for life eternal.’ (**John 12:25**) And in the Apocalypse He instructs and forewarns, saying, ‘If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, the same also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, mixed in the cup of His indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torments shall ascend up for ever and ever; and they shall have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image.’ (**Revelation 14:9-11**)
- xix. “For the secular contest men are trained and prepared, and reckon it a great glory of their honour if it should happen to them to be crowned in the sight of the people, and in the presence of the emperor. Behold a lofty and great contest, glorious also with the reward of a heavenly crown, inasmuch as God looks upon us as we struggle, and, extending His view over those whom He has condescended to make His sons, He enjoys the spectacle of our contest. God looks upon us in the warfare, and fighting in the encounter of faith; His angels look on us, and Christ looks on us. How great is the dignity, and how great the happiness of the glory, to engage in the presence of God, and to be crowned, with Christ for a judge!
- xx. “Let us be armed, beloved brethren, with our whole strength, and let us be prepared for the struggle with an uncorrupted mind, with a sound faith, with a devoted courage. Let the camp of God go forth to the battle-field which is appointed to us. Let the sound ones be armed, lest he that is sound should lose the advantage of having lately stood; let the lapsed also be armed, that even the lapsed may regain what he has lost: let honour provoke the whole; let sorrow provoke the lapsed to the battle. The Apostle Paul teaches us to be armed and prepared,

saying, 'We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against powers, and the princes of this world and of this darkness, against spirits of wickedness in high places. Therefore put on the whole armour, that you may be able to withstand in the most evil day, that when you have done all you may stand; having girded your waist with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one; and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God' (**Ephesians 6:12-17**)

- xxi. "Let us take these arms, let us fortify ourselves with these spiritual and heavenly safeguards, that in the most evil day we may be able to withstand, and to resist the threats of the devil: let us put on the breastplate of righteousness, that our breast may be fortified and safe against the darts of the enemy: let our feet be shod with evangelical teaching, and armed, so that when the serpent shall begin to be trodden and crushed by us, he may not be able to bite and trip us up: let us bravely bear the shield of faith, by the protection of which, whatever the enemy darts at us may be extinguished: let us take also for protection of our head the helmet of salvation, that our ears may be guarded from hearing the deadly edicts; that our eyes may be fortified, that they may not see the odious images; that our brow may be fortified, so as to keep safe the sign of God; that our mouth may be fortified, that the conquering tongue may confess Christ its Lord: let us also arm the right hand with the sword of the Spirit, that it may bravely reject the deadly sacrifices; that, mindful of the Eucharist, the hand which has received the Lord's body may embrace the Lord Himself, hereafter to receive from the Lord the reward of heavenly crowns.
- xxii. "Oh, what and how great will that day be at its coming, beloved brethren, when the Lord shall begin to count up His people, and to recognise the deservings of each one by the inspection of His divine knowledge, to send the guilty to Gehenna, and to set on fire our persecutors with the perpetual burning of a penal fire, but to pay to us the reward of our faith and devotion! What will be the glory and how great the joy to be admitted to see God, to be honoured to receive with Christ, thy Lord God, the joy of eternal salvation and light—to greet Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and martyrs—to rejoice with the righteous and the friends of God in the kingdom of heaven, with the pleasure of immortality given to us—to receive there what neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man!

- xxiii. “For the apostle announces that we shall receive greater things than anything that we here either do or suffer, saying, ‘The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come hereafter which shall be revealed in us.’ (**Romans 8:18**) When that revelation shall come, when that glory of God shall shine upon us, we shall be as happy and joyful, honoured with the condescension of God, as they will remain guilty and wretched, who, either as deserters from God or rebels against Him, have done the will of the devil, so that it is necessary for them to be tormented with the devil himself in unquenchable fire.
- xxiv. “Let these things, beloved brethren, take hold of our hearts; let this be the preparation of our arms, this our daily and nightly meditation, to have before our eyes and ever to revolve in our thoughts and feelings the punishments of the wicked and the rewards and the deservings of the righteous: what the Lord threatens by way of punishment against those that deny Him; what, on the other hand, He promises by way of glory to those that confess Him. If, while we think and meditate on these things, there should come to us a day of persecution, the soldier of Christ instructed in His precepts and warnings is not fearful for the battle, but is prepared for the crown. I bid you, dearest brethren, ever heartily farewell.”
1. (Source: Cyprian, *The Epistles of Cyprian, Epistle No. 55: To the People of Thibaris, Exhorting to Martyrdom*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, pp. 347–350)