



SUFFER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE 1 PETER 3:13 - 4:19

INTRODUCTION

Peter began this epistle with an exposition of the living hope which is ours through the Lord Jesus Christ. He continued with an exhortation to holy living through an honorable and submissive lifestyle. Now he turns to give loving yet emphatic encouragement to those who are experiencing undeserved suffering. It is clear from this passage that Peter's original readers were being persecuted for their faith and slandered for their good behavior. They had come out of a pagan lifestyle which was devoted to pleasure and self-indulgence. Their old friends were offended by the change in conduct which they saw in those who had made a commitment to Christ. Has your lifestyle changed in any way since coming to Christ? Has the change in you caused a change in the attitude of your friends or family? Have those you love turned against you because they cannot seem to understand your new commitment? Are you hurt or angry, wondering if it is really worth it to follow Christ? If you have ever experienced any kind of persecution for your faith in Christ, this passage is especially for you. It will instruct you and encourage you in how to react in the face of persecution and suffering.

In this passage, suffering Christians are called to continue in good behavior with good conscience. Emulate Christ because He is your example. Do not live for your own comfort and pleasure or to please other people. Live expressly for the will of God. In doing so, serve one another in such a way that God may be glorified. God is your Creator and the Judge of all. Commit your soul to Him in always doing what is right.

OUTLINE OF 1 PETER 3:13-4:19

I. Don't Be Intimidated By Men - 1 Peter 3:13-14

II. Do Live For Christ - 1 Peter 3:15-4:16

III. Do What is Right - 1 Peter 4:17-19

I. Don't Be Intimidated By Men - 1 Peter 3:13-14

The rhetorical question Peter asks in verse 13 is, *who is he who will harm you if you become followers* (literally imitators or zealots) *of what is good?* The implication is that innocent, honorable, God-fearing lives are much less likely to provoke harm. As is written in Proverbs 16:7, *When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.* This is a general rule, but as Peter points out in verse 14, believers do

suffer for righteousness sake. This has been true of the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, and believers down through the centuries.

However, even if you should suffer unjustly for the truth, you are blessed by God. This was something that Peter learned from Jesus. *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven* (Matthew 5:10-12). Peter also quotes (in verse 14b) what he had learned from Isaiah the prophet. Those who fear God should never fear men (Isaiah 8:12). This thought is also expressed in Psalm 56:4, *In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? Jesus' teaching was similar in Luke 12:4-5, Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But.....fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him.*

II. Do Live For Christ - 1 Peter 3:15-4:16

Instead of being fearful and intimidated by men, Christians are called to, *Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts* (1 Peter 3:15). This means to set Him apart in your heart. Lift Him up and honor and revere Him as Lord of your life. Conduct yourself in a manner that is appropriate toward One so righteous and holy Who has condescended to be at home in your heart.

A. Be ready to defend your faith - 1 Peter 3:15

A holy life, lived for the Lord, may elicit questions about one's faith. A believer should always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in his or her heart. When the opportunity comes, the testimony should be presented boldly, yet in meekness and humility.

B. Be above reproach in your conduct - 1 Peter 3:16-22

Your life must always back up your words!

1. Christ-like behavior is necessary - 3:16-17

Christians must keep a good conscience, being satisfied within themselves that their conduct is pure. When slanderers find that they have nothing to criticize about you except that you are a follower of Christ, it will put them to shame. If you should suffer for doing what is

right, you may rest in the knowledge that God, in His perfect, will has permitted it. Furthermore, it is better to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong. Anybody can suffer for doing wrong. Christians are held to a higher standard.

2. Christ died and rose for sins - 3:18

Our Lord suffered and died on the cross for sins. His was the perfect sacrifice, offered once for all to reconcile unjust sinners to God. By His example He shows that suffering should not be for your own sins but for the sake of righteousness. But Christ is more than your example, He is your enabler. Through His death and resurrection, He has set you free from bondage to sin so that you may live a pure life. (For a better understanding of the meaning of Christ's sacrifice read Hebrews 9:11-26.)

3. Christians are vindicated - 3:19-20

These verses are very difficult and have been interpreted in many various ways. However, the final conclusion of each of the following interpretations is that Christians will be vindicated. In the end, God's justice will be done, and victory will be ours.

There are three main interpretations of the passage.

a. Preincarnate Christ preached through Noah

The Spirit of Christ preached through Noah (2 Peter 2:5) to the unbelieving and reviling generation before the Flood (Genesis 6-8), calling them to repentance. But they were disobedient. They were destroyed, and are now the spirits in prison referred to in verse 19.

According to this view, Peter's point is that God will vindicate Christians now just as He vindicated Noah then. In contrast to the ungodly men of his day, *Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household* (Hebrews 11:7), as God had commanded him to do. Noah and his family (eight souls) were saved. God brought them through the waters of the flood in the ark.

b. Christ announced victory to the spirits of Noah's wicked contemporaries

In the short interval between His death and resurrection, Christ descended into hell and announced His victory to the spirits of the disobedient contemporaries of Noah who had met destruction in the Flood. The point of this view is that just as Jesus was vindicated, Christians will also be vindicated.

c. Christ proclaimed victory to fallen angels

Christ proclaimed the victory of the gospel to imprisoned fallen angels, who are often identified with the sons of God in Genesis 6:2 and 4. One view is that this took place between His death and resurrection. The other is that it took place after His resurrection. The point here is also that Christians will be vindicated just as Christ was vindicated.

4. Christ's resurrection has saved you - 3:21

Peter sees the saving of Noah through the water as a foreshadowing of the sacrament of baptism. Noah physically came through the flood waters which judged sin (the death of the disobedient) and was saved. Water baptism is a symbol of judgment on sin (death to the world and the flesh) and salvation to new life in Christ. By adding, *Not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God*, Peter makes it clear that salvation does not come by the outward ceremony of washing with water, but by the spiritual reality which baptism symbolizes — the identification of the believer with Christ in His death and resurrection. *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* (Hebrews 9:14). *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water* (Hebrews 10:22).

5. Christ is exalted - 3:22

Having been resurrected, Christ has been exalted to the highest place of royal power, the right hand of God. With all angels, authorities and powers subject to Him, He is King over all, and will be for eternity (Ephesians 1:20-22). The glory which followed Christ's suffering should be more than an encouragement to suffering Christians. It should be reason for rejoicing. *Rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy* (1 Peter 4:13).

What might Peter's thoughts have been as he wrote of Christ having *gone into heaven* (1 Peter 3:22)? Remember, Peter was there — an eyewitness to Christ's ascension. Perhaps that is what gave him the courage and faith to endure his own sufferings.

C. Be Christ-minded - 1 Peter 4:1-6

In 1 Peter 2:21, Peter wrote that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example so we might follow in his steps. Now he adds that since Christ suffered for us in His flesh, we are to arm ourselves with the same

mind (or same purpose), putting on Christ's attitude with the same careful attention that a soldier puts on his armor. Since Christ suffered and died, we must be willing to take a share in His suffering and death. "All sympathy and tenderness for Christ as a sufferer are lost if you do not put away sin" (Matthew Henry, The Matthew Henry Commentary). A change of mind must result in a change of behavior! Can you say along with the apostle Paul, *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me* (Galatians 2:20)? Any person who can truthfully proclaim this is finished with sin and has turned away from the sinful life to Christ (see Romans 6:6-7).

1. Live for the will of God - 4:1-2

He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin (1 Peter 4:1). Just as a physically dead person has no desire or ability to sin, a person who is crucified with Christ is no longer alive to the allurements of sin, but only to God's will (see Galatians 6:14). Those who have put on the mind of Christ have counted themselves as dead to sin and committed their lives to the will of God rather than to their own fleshly lusts.

2. Live no longer for the lusts of men - 4:2-5

Old habits and sins should be a thing of the past. They belong to the old way of life before you came to Christ. You have already spent enough time indulging in ungodly ways. Perhaps you do not relate to any of the sins which Peter lists in verse 3, but surely you have some old habits you need to put out of your life. The apostle Paul gives a more thorough list of such fleshly habits in Galatians 5:19-21.

a. Expect persecution - 4:4

The results of a visible change in lifestyle can be a cause of persecution by one's old friends. That was the case with the first recipients of this letter. Their old pagan friends were speaking evil about them. The changed lives of the Christians were strange and incomprehensible to the unbelievers and resulted in open hostility.

b. Expect persecutors to be judged - 4:5

Those who speak evil of good behavior will one day face *Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead*. They will have to give an account for every evil word spoken. Jesus said, *For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment* (Matthew 12:36). Peter's reminder of this warning was meant to give a comfort to his original readers. Is it also a comfort to you in some way? Or perhaps the reminder of judgment has convicted your heart of some words you

have spoken which need to be confessed and forgiven. See 1 John 1:9.

3. Live above human judgment - 4:6

Because judgment is coming, the gospel was preached to those who are dead. Some take this to refer to those who are spiritually dead, as in Ephesians 2:1, *dead in trespasses and sins*. According to this view, the purpose of preaching the gospel is that those spiritually dead people who respond are made alive in the spirit. Even though they still experience physical death (are judged in the flesh as men), they continue to live in the spirit. This fits in with what Peter wrote about Christ in 1 Peter 3:18, *Put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit* (NASB).

Others view the dead as being martyred Christians. In this view, even though they had been judged by men and were put to death in the flesh, in respect to God, they were alive in the spirit.

In either case, the lesson is that Christians, being alive forever in the spirit, live above temporal judgment and the unjust treatment of men.

D. Be a servant - 1 Peter 4:7-11

But the end of all things is at hand (verse 7), is an encouragement and a motivation to be self-controlled and make wise choices rather than becoming rooted in the things of the world. The end of all things would mean an end of earthly plans, problems, pastimes and professions. The solemnity of that thought should lead one to be serious, sober, and dedicated to serving one another in love, to the glory of God.

1. Pray - 4:7

First of all, a Christian should be serious and watchful in order to pray. Prayer should be the first order of a believer's life. How much time do you dedicate to prayer?

2. Love - 4:8

Peter has already exhorted his readers to fervent love in 1 Peter 1:22. Now he gives the reason, *for love will cover a multitude of sins*. Proverbs 10:12 states that, *Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins*. The meaning is that love does not look for or keep a record of wrongs. Love overlooks errors, and when love is sinned against, love forgives. When Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother, suggesting perhaps up to seven times, Jesus replied, *I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven* (Matthew 18:21-22).

3. Be hospitable - 4:9

One way love can be shown is through hospitality. In Peter's day, hospitality was especially important and appreciated by persecuted Christians who had been forced to leave their homes and had no place to stay. Today we can show love by making one another feel welcome in our homes and giving of ourselves and our resources generously and cheerfully. When was the last time you opened your home to Christian friends? It is sad that today we often meet for fellowship in restaurants or at church and never see the inside of one another's homes. We miss the warmth and joy of sharing Christian hospitality. Perhaps there are some Christian friends you could invite to your home soon.

4. Share spiritual blessings - 4:10

Spiritual gifts are given by God's *manifold* (rich in variety or variegated) *grace*. The gifts are given so we may minister to others, being good stewards of what we have received from God. Peter's original readers would have understood that a steward was a household manager. He had no wealth of his own, but administered his master's wealth in accordance with his master's will. In the same way, Christians do not minister from what is their own, but only from what God has given. Are you a good steward of all that God has entrusted to your care?

5. Minister for the purpose of glorifying God - 4:11

Whether God has gifted you to speak forth His word or to serve, be sure that you are empowered and directed by God. The exercise of a gift is by God working through us and all the glory goes to Him. Teachers and preachers are to give forth only the pure unadulterated word of God. Nothing is to be added or taken away. Those who perform acts of service are to rely upon God and never go forth in their own wisdom or strength. Glory and dominion do not belong to man but to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. And to that Peter adds, *Amen*.

6. Rejoice in trials - 4:12-16

Peter writes of the fiery trial which his readers must endure. Some scholars believe that Peter was referring to the persecutions of Nero, his blaming the Christians for the burning of Rome (A.D. 64), and inflicting punishment by using Christians as human torches to light the palace gardens at night. Just the knowledge of such an appalling action would strike fear in the hearts of the Christians in the provinces. There was the possibility that such atrocities could spread!

a. Don't be surprised by trials - 4:12

Peter has already made it clear that Christians should expect to suffer just as Christ did (1 Peter 3:13-17 and 4:12-19).

b. Partake of Christ's sufferings - 4:13

Because Christians are united with Christ and identify with Him, we partake of His sufferings when we are mistreated as He was. If we rejoice in present sufferings for Him, we will rejoice with Him in glory.

c. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed - 4:14

Peter had learned this from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5. God is with His saints in their suffering, bestowing special grace through the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is clearly seen in the stoning of Stephen in Acts 6 and 7.

d. Do not suffer because of sin - 4:15

This is a warning against sin. Make sure that you do not suffer justly as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or by meddling in other people's affairs. There is no comfort or joy in suffering if you bring it upon yourself because of your own sin.

e. Do not be ashamed to suffer as a Christian - 4:16

The term "Christian" occurs only three times in the Bible (here and in Acts 11:26 and 26:28). It may have been used by unbelievers as an insult, an expression of reproach. Peter writes that those who suffer and endure as Christians should not be ashamed of any reproach they must bear for that name. Roger M. Raymer in [The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#), says, "Anything we suffer for Christ is a privilege, not a penalty."

III. Do What Is Right - 1 Peter 4:17-19

A. Expect to suffer judgment - 1 Peter 4:17-18

Saved people are not exempt from discipline and judgment in this world. When you sin, you should expect discipline as the natural consequence of sin. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews quotes from Proverbs 3:11 in saying, *My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives* (Hebrews 12:5-6).

Judgment comes upon believers for the purpose of purifying our lives and strengthening our faith. These judgments are actually light and short for us as we look forward to eternal grace and glory (1 Peter 1:13 and 5:1). For the ungodly, judgment will come and it will be profound and eternal. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 and 2 Peter 3:7 tell us what will become of the godless man and the sinner.

B. Entrust your soul to God - 1 Peter 4:19

Christians who are suffering for their faith, whether through persecution or through the discipline of the Lord, should commit their souls to God. Peter has already written in 2:23 that Christ entrusted Himself to His Father, the just Judge. We are to follow His example and rest our case with our faithful Creator. *God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able* (1 Corinthians 10:13). Have you committed your soul to God and to His will?

Application

1. Does your life reflect a fear of what others think of you or a healthy and humble respect for God?
2. In what ways are your actions and words a witness for Christ?
3. Are you experiencing suffering because of sin in your life? Will you ask God for forgiveness and turn away from that sin to live a holy life for God?
4. When you are busy living for the Lord and loving others, it takes your mind away from your own troubles and gives you an inner joy. How are you using your God-given gifts to love and serve others?