

A Study of First Peter

Embracing Contentment as We Live Out God's Will (1 Peter 4:1-6)

"Look, as our greatest good comes through the sufferings of Christ, so God's greatest glory that He hath from His saints comes through their sufferings."

~ Puritan Thomas Brooks

I. An Introduction

As noted in chapter 3, our obedience to Christ, even in the midst of suffering, is based upon the blessings that await us and upon the model set forth for us by Christ. In other words, Peter's doctrine governs his ethics. We will observe this truth once again in chapter 4. Continuing his stress upon Christology and eschatology, the apostle calls for believers to persevere in their faith—a perseverance that will most likely face persecution and suffering.

II. Living as Christ (4:1-6)

v. 1 - Summarizing 3:18-22, Peter reiterates the value of imitating Christ's example of willingness to suffer. He commands believers to "arm" themselves with the intention that suffering is inevitable. This term "arm yourselves" has military connotations—connotations associated with the believer elsewhere in the New Testament (see Rom 6:13; 13:12; Eph 6:11-17; 1 Thess 5:8). What does this martial language indicate concerning the Christian life?

The final phrase of verse 1, "suffering in the flesh has finished with sin," is debated among scholars. Leading views include the following:

- The one who suffered was Jesus. However, the problems with this interpretation are (1) Jesus never sinned (3:18), and (2) the subject of the phrase is most likely believers based upon the syntax of the passage.
- The one who suffered was a reference to Christians and their death to sin. While we died with Christ and are freed from sin (Rom 6:7), the notion in 1 Peter 4:1 is "not that believers have died with Christ but that they should follow Christ in their daily lives by consenting to suffering" (Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 201).
- The one who suffered refers to believers who are called to suffer as evidence of their break with a life of sin. While Peter is not espousing sinless perfection for believers, he is stating that a saved individual "has most definitely acted in a way which shows that obeying God, not avoiding hardship, is the most important motivation for his or her action" (Grudem, *1 Peter*, 175).

v. 2 - There are only two ways for a believer to live his/her life—either controlled by human passions or by God's will. As we have noted earlier in our study of 1 Peter, God's will entails suffering for His people (3:17). Note that a believer recognizes this path is not limited to a particular season of life, but it is to span one's entire life on earth. There is no retirement plan for Christian service.

v. 3 - The reason for the command to live in accordance to God's will is because they had previously acted in keeping with pagans. Predominantly listing sins associated with the lust of the flesh, Peter notes the following vices:

- *Debauchery*. This term refers "to outrageous acts that offend a public sense of decency" (Marshall, *1 Peter*, 135).
- *Evil desires or lust*. The word implies sexual desires.
- *Drunkenness, carousing, and drinking bouts*. These three terms speak of a life bent on following physical desires.
- *Wanton idolatries*. The final vice indicates an unholy and profane lifestyle associated with pagan idolatry.

Does this list of sinful behaviors seem exhaustive? Does Peter intend to communicate every type of sin we should avoid?

v. 4 - Peter notes two worldly responses to Christian living:

- The first response entails shock. A believer's unwillingness to conform to cultural norms (see Psalm 50:18) surprises the world. Observe that Peter makes no allowance for an occasional indulgence.
- The second response results in slander. Objects of public ridicule and discrimination, these believers were being socially ostracized.

v. 5 - Once again, Peter looks to the "end game". Those who live out their evil desires and persecute the Church will give an account to the Lord. "Believers should not succumb to the temptation to renounce their faith so they can enjoy the approbation of society. Such approval is short-lived, and those who mistreat believers now will be judged in the future" (Schreiner, 205). All people, whether those who are alive or those who have died, will stand before the Judge (Jas 5:9; 2 Pet 3:10).

v. 6 - "who are now dead" - Since there is no opportunity for repentance and salvation after death (see Lk 16:26; Heb 9:27), and "dead" never refers to spiritual death in Peter's writings, the best interpretation of this phrase is that these are believers who have died physically. These are individuals who have believed the gospel when they were alive but have subsequently died.

"judged in the flesh by human standards" - All people, Christians and non-Christians, receive the judgment of death, which came with the sin of Adam (Rom 5:12; 6:23).

The glorious news is that this suffering and slander is temporary. Even death is not the last word. Believers will be vindicated through their resurrection and God's judgment upon their persecutors.

III. Intersect

A. Contentment does not necessarily call for the removal of the suffering, but it does require a proper perspective. We need to see the joy of identifying with Christ's suffering, the privilege of resting in Christ's love, and the hope of abiding in His presence for all eternity.

1 Timothy 6:11-16 -

B. We must guard our commitment to Christ—whether it is the temptation to flirt with sin or to bend under the pressure of our surroundings.

Colossians 3:17 -

C. Take comfort in knowing that the sufferings of this life are temporary. As one martyr for Christ stated to his fellow martyr, "Do, but shut your eyes. The next time they are opened you shall be in the presence of Christ."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 -

"Sufferings are but as little chips of the cross."

~ Puritan Joseph Church

For further thought . . .

Based upon our study this morning, you may want to spend some additional time this week reflecting on the following:

Take some time this week praying through this Puritan prayer (*Valley of Vision*, 212-213).

“Divine Support”

Happy in thyself, source of happiness in thy creatures,
 my Maker, Benefactor, Proprietor, Upholder.
 Thou hast produced and sustained me,
 supported and indulged me, saved and kept me;
 Thou art in every situation able to meet my needs and miseries.
 May I live by thee, live for thee,
 never by satisfied with my Christian progress but as I resemble Christ;
 And may conformity to his principles, temper, and conduct grow hourly in my life.
 Let thy unexampled love constrain me into holy obedience,
 and render my duty my delight.
 If others deem my faith folly, my meekness infirmity, my zeal madness,
 my hope delusion, my actions hypocrisy,
 May I rejoice to suffer for thy name.
 Keep me walking steadfastly towards the country of everlasting delights,
 that paradise-land which is my true inheritance.
 Support me by the strength of heaven that I may never turn back,
 or desire false pleasures that wilt and disappear into nothing.
 As I pursue my heavenly journey by thy grace
 let me be known as a man with no aim
 but that of a burning desire for thee,
 and the good and salvation of my fellow men.