

1 Peter

Chapter 4

Leon L. Combs, M.A., Ph.D.

1Peter 4:1-6

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, (2) so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. (3) For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

The “therefore” refers to what was covered in chapter three concerning the death of Jesus Christ for the sins of His people. Verses one and two can be rather confusing because of not knowing for sure who the “he” is in the verses. Peter is urging the readers to use Christ as their example in their suffering. The last part of verse one is certainly referring to Christ but not in the sense that He ever had sinned but that He finished dealing with the sin problem for His people. Christ suffered in the flesh and after His resurrection was finished with dealing with the sin problem: “When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.” (John 19:30) Peter is telling the readers to use arm themselves with Christ as their example so that they will have the courage to live the rest of their time in the flesh not spending any time with worldly lusts but living to carry out the will of God. The first three verses are also similar to the comments by Paul:

Rom 6:5-11 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, (6) knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; (7) for he who has died is freed from sin. (8) Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, (9) knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. (10) For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. (11) Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Christians are representatives of Jesus Christ to the world and must consider themselves dead to all worldly lusts and trust in the sovereignty of God to guide them in living that dedicated to serving Him. Christians must work on the mindset of knowing that they are spiritually seated with Jesus in heavenly places: “and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,” (Eph. 2:6) As they walk in the world they are indwelt with the Holy Spirit to enable them to live a holy life: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (1Co 6:19) Verse three was stated in the Introduction as one text proving that Peter was writing to a Gentile audience as the people were previously engaged in all sorts of sinful activities including idolatries. A primarily Jewish audience would not have been involved in such obviously sinful activities although, before God, they would have been sinfully seeking to work a righteous behavior.

1Peter 4:4-6

And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; (5) but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (6) For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

Peter now turns his attention to the people with whom the Christians will be interacting in the world. These are probably people with whom they had previously lived a sinful life as stated in verse three. They are wondering why the Christians do not continue to get drunk and do the other sinful things they had done. They are hoping to catch the Christians involved in sin so that they can say something like: “Aha! I knew that you had not really changed! You are still the same person who enjoys living for fun so stop pretending to be different now.” Peter tells them that such people will stand before the judgment seat of God and be judged so the Christians should just rest in the judgment of God and give the offenders a clear and loving explanation of the gospel message so that God may bring them to salvation also.

In verse six Peter is telling the readers that the gospel has been preached for the purpose of bringing sinners out of the wrath of God and with the promise of life forever with Him. He is reminding them that even those Christians whom they know who have died are living in the spirit according to the will of God. They were judged in the flesh as men and by men and may be those who were martyred but even though physically dead they now live for the glory of God. This would have been very rewarding and encouraging to those who had seen their brothers and sisters suffer for the gospel and encourage them as they faced persecution.

1Peter 4:7-11

The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. (8) Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (9) Be hospitable to one another without complaint. (10) As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (11) Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Most translations omit the “de” at the beginning of this verse that should be translated “now” or even “but” for this verse joins with the preceding verses. Common with much of the NT, eschatology is put forward to encourage the readers. When he writes that the end is “at hand” he means that all has been accomplished by Jesus Christ so that the end could come whenever the Father so desires. Since there is nothing else that needs to be done before Jesus returns they should use that knowledge to withstand any persecution. They are not to be celebrating without sound judgment and sober spirit with prayer in all that they do. He then gives them ways that they can act as people who are free from the wrath of God and living with other Christians to the glory of God.

The first requirement is that Christians are to fervently love each other. Although Christians will continue to sin even against other Christians, the love that they have for each other will help to overcome any such problems. John also continued to lift up this requirement of loving each other in his letters (1John 2:9-11; 3:14-15; 4:7-11; 4:20). Jesus also emphasized this love among Christians that they may be one:

John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 17:20-21 "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; (21) that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.

Those who really love each other will also be hospitable to each other as they meet the needs and share burdens: "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal 6:2) That Peter writes that this hospitality is to be without complaint indicates that it is not always an easy command to obey. In his time there were not the number of hotels available for travelers as there are today and often Christians had to open their homes to traveling missionaries and teachers like the apostles. Today the family structure is very tight and people might prefer to send travelers to a hotel. However Christians are all members of the same family and should be pleased to welcome traveling Christians into their homes.

Next Peter brings up the topic of spiritual gifts. The Biblical principle is that each member of God's family is to minister to the others. Today members of congregations tend to believe that they are paying a few people to take care of the needs of the group rather than each person being responsible for each other. Paul discusses the spiritual gifts in several of his writings such as:

Rom 12:4-8 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (6) And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; (7) if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; (8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Paul expands upon the gifts considerably in:

1Cor 12:4-31 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. (5) And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. (6) And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. (7) But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (8) For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; (9) to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, (10) and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. (11) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (12) For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. (13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (14) For the body is not one member, but many. (15) If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a

part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. (16) And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. (17) If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? (18) But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. (19) And if they were all one member, where would the body be? (20) But now there are many members, but one body. (21) And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (22) On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; (23) and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, (24) whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, (25) that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. (26) And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (27) Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. (28) And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. (29) All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? (30) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? (31) But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

I have also written an article on spiritual gifts that can be read at the following web site: <http://LivingTheology.com/HolySpiritII.htm>. The major point in all of these writings on spiritual gifts is that "no man is an island" for each person is supposed to use his spiritual gifts for the edification of the entire body of Christ. When even one person does not obey this command then the entire body suffers.

If the gift is speaking, serving or any of the other gifts, each Christian is to exercise that gift to the glory of God through Jesus Christ. Peter then ends this section with a doxology to God for the glory belongs to Him alone forever and ever and he then has to add: "Amen".

1Peter 4:12-14

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; (13) but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. (14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Since Jesus Christ suffered, there should be no surprise that His followers will suffer also just as He warned:

John 15:18-20 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. (19) "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (20) "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.'

If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Paul also wrote of the suffering that disciples of Jesus Christ will endure:

Rom 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

2Cor 1:5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

Phil 3:8-11 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, (9) and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, (10) that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; (11) in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

All Christians should rejoice as they suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ for they are promised that they will rejoice at the revelation of His glory. This revelation is the second coming of Jesus that Christians should keep in their focus. Jesus further told His disciples of their suffering for Him:

Matt 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. (12) "Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Christians are blessed when they are reviled for the sake of Christ because the Holy Spirit rests on them and in them.

1Peter 4:15-19

By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; (16) but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. (17) For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (18) And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? (19) Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Of course not all the suffering of people is because of their obedience to Christ. Much suffering in the world is because of sin and Christians can still sin. If a Christian suffers because he is a murderer, thief, evildoer, or a troublesome meddler then his suffering is deserved and he will not receive any comfort or rewards. However there is no shame for suffering due to remaining true to his Christian convictions and he should even glorify God in that suffering.

In the OT we also read about judgment beginning with the people of God before it comes to the nations (Ezek. 9:6, Zech. 13:7-9; Mal 3:1-5). Judgment for the rest of the world will come later but God judges His people for their cleansing while they are physically alive:

1Cor 11:31-32 "But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. (32) But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world."

Heb 12:7-8 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (8) But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

The judgment of Christians is not for their condemnation (Rom 8:1) but it will be for the condemnation of the world as seen in the following and other verses:

Mat 13:41-42 "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, (42) and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Mat 13:49-50 "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, (50) and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But what does Peter mean by verse 18? He is referring to the difficulty of Jesus' life and His receiving the wrath of God for our sins on the cross. There are no works that will save a person from the wrath of God but only the double imputation that God does for His children. The suffering of Jesus was a terrible price God paid for the salvation of His chosen people. Paul draws the distinction between the persecution of Christians and the awful judgment of the godless man and the sinner:

2Th 1:5-10 This [persecutions and afflictions] is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. (6) For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, (7) and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, (8) dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (10) when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed--for our testimony to you was believed.

The godless man is someone outside of the righteousness of God and obviously outside of the body of Christ (the church). The sinner is anyone who practices sin, which could include someone professing to be a Christian but is actually apostate.

Peter ends this session by telling his readers who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to Him. In calling God the faithful Creator he is reminding them that God is sovereign. Jesus was involved in the creation of everything and He holds all things together so they should trust Him:

Col 1:16-17 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him. (17) And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.