

1 Peter Introduction – Part E

[1 Peter 1](#) – What Salvation is All About

[1 Peter 2](#) – Living Out the Christian Life

[1 Peter 3](#) - How to Be a Blessing to Others

[1 Peter 4](#) – What It Means to Suffer for Christ

Of the 19 verses in [1 Peter 4](#), v1-6 are about suffering and v12-19 are about suffering. It may be debated whether or not all of v1-6 are related to suffering, but certainly v1-2 address the issue and are a continuation of Peter's teaching about Christ's suffering in [1 Peter 3:18-22](#). The reason that we know that is because of the word “**therefore**” that points back to what Peter has just written. A form of the word “**suffer**” is used 13 times throughout [1 Peter](#), and of those 13 times five (5) of the usages occur here in [1 Peter 4](#). Now, please appreciate that there is not another book in the Bible that talks more about suffering than [1 Peter](#). For instance, the Old Testament only uses the word “**suffer**” or a form of it 11 times. The word is not even used in [Job](#), and is only used three (3) times in one Old Testament book (Proverbs). So, [1 Peter](#) uses the word “**suffer**” more than the entire Old Testament and more than any other book in New Testament. Other than Hebrews, there is not another New Testament epistle from [1 Corinthians](#) through [Revelation](#) that uses the word “**suffer**” in any more than three (3) verses. So in reality, [1 Peter 4](#) talks more about “**suffering**” than any other chapter in the entire Bible. Obviously, there are many other similar words like “**afflicted**”, “**pain**”, “**tribulation**”, “**endure**”, or “**tormented**” that I have not included in this analysis, but if we just take the word “**suffer**”, [1 Peter 4](#) has the primary teaching in the New Testament and Old Testament on this subject. If we are going to handle the Scriptures properly, then it is very important to recognize this.

Now, the problem that we have is that it is very difficult for us to relate to “**suffering**” for the purpose of following Christ because we have never really had this as a problem in our cultural context. We enjoy great freedoms, but in reality we are the exception as compared to many other places in the world where Christianity is abhorred and hated and Christians are constantly being persecuted and martyred for their faith. I mentioned it previously, but Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world. More Christians die for their faith every year than any other religion. The word that Paul uses for “**suffer**” is “*pascho*” and it means to experience that which is painful.¹ It carries the idea of being affected by something that is outside of what you may be able to control. In most instances it is referring to someone being subjected to that which is evil.² It is something that effects the individual in a fairly traumatic way both physically and emotionally.³ It is a word that expresses someone having to bear or endure very severe hardship.⁴ That could happen in many ways. Many people lose everything they have in a tornado, a hurricane, or an earthquake. People lose loved ones in accidents or wars. However, this word is not reflective of those kinds of trials and difficulties, but are specifically related to a believer's identification with Christ.

If you remember the story of Job, the problem that his so called friends had was that they ultimately said the reason that he was suffering was because of some secret sins in his life. In reality, he was suffering for the exact opposite reason. Job was suffering because he was a godly man. Now, Job's suffering impacted every single area of his life. It impacted him emotionally, it impacted his family, it impacted

his health, and it impacted what he possessed. There was not anything about his life that was not impacted. The suffering and misery that Job experienced was almost unbearable. However, at the end of the story, God fully restored everything he had lost. Now, without sounding overly pessimistic, the kind of suffering that Peter is addressing is not something that probably has any earthly returns and no restoration of what may be lost. Obviously, there will be eternal rewards, but in the kind of “want it all, have it all, do it all” culture that we live in, suffering will never be readily welcomed. So, if we have the kind of restoration mindset that someone may have after reading Job, then we may find ourselves disappointed. Many of the prophets, all of the apostles, and an innumerable number of Christians through the ages have suffered beyond description. Many were impaled on a wooden stake, dipped in tar, and then burned alive simply because they believed in Christ. It is interesting to me that very often the people who suffer the most are those people who are trying to rescue those who will actually persecute them and eventually kill them. If I can say it this way, it seems that the godliest individuals are the ones who generally suffer the greatest when persecution truly arises. In reality, it is their personal faithfulness and commitment to Christ that actually creates their crises of suffering.⁵

If we can draw some obvious conclusions from this, the godlier that someone chooses to live, in all likelihood the more suffering they will experience because of it. In a country like the United States, we have laws that grant people religious freedom and protect them from persecution, but that is not normally the case in other parts of the world. However, we would be amiss if we thought that our freedoms will actually solve the problem. Historically, every nation and every culture eventually moves further and further away from Christianity, and eventually persecution of believers will come. I think the Word of God somewhat guarantees some of this when it says the following in [Philippians 1:29](#),

Php 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

If I read that verse correctly, Paul is saying that having the opportunity to actually “suffer” for Christ is a great honor. [2 Timothy 3:12](#) says,

2Ti 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Now, what Peter says in v1 is that we are to “**arm ourselves with the same mind**” that Christ had regarding suffering. The word for “**arm**” is the word “*hoplizo*” and means to arm yourself with weapons that can protect you.⁶ It was a word that was specifically used of a very heavily armed foot-soldier who had multiple kinds of weapons and shields for the battle.⁷ In this case, it is specifically speaking of having the “**same mind**” that Christ had regarding suffering. The mindset of Christ was that the will of His Father was more important than any suffering that He would have to endure.

In v2-4, Peter simply says that we have spent enough of our life doing the wrong things, so it is time that we live for the will of God. Somewhere in every believer’s life they have to decide who and what they are going to live for – themselves or God the Father. There is no escaping this spiritual reality for the believer.

V6 at first seems like somewhat of a strange verse when it says,

1Pe 4:6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

Once again, this is one of those verses that seems to have many varied interpretations that just seem to leave the reader hanging at times. For instance, some say it refers to those who are “spiritually dead”. Some teach that it refers to those who were martyred. Others teach that it is referring to people who were saved and died. Some teach that it is talking about [1 Peter 3:19](#) when Jesus went and preached to the “**spirits in prison**”. It seems that the simplest and clearest interpretation is that before some of the believers that many of Peter’s readers knew actually physically died that they had the gospel preached to them and they believed - “**For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead...**” I like the way that the NIV translates this. It says “**For this is the reason the gospel was preached to those who are NOW dead...**” The word “**now**” is not actually in the Greek text, but because the NIV is more of an “idea for idea” translation (dynamic equivalence) than a “word for word” translation (complete equivalence), the translators chose to “interpret” what they believed Peter was trying to convey. In this case it seems correct. The AMP does something similar and says “**For this is why the good news (the Gospel) was preached [in their lifetime] even to the dead...**” Then, the second part of the verse notes that after they believed that they were “**judged according to men in the flesh...**” The implication of that verse is that the believers were physically put to death because of their faith in Christ.⁸ They were martyred, but the last part of the verse states that now they live gloriously “**in the spirit**”.

What Peter is saying in all of this is that it seems to an unbeliever that there is no advantage to suffering, to being persecuted, or to being martyred, but what they fail to see is the whole picture. From God’s perspective, the believer enters into the most glorious life possible. Think of it this way. Persecution and death is never the final word for believers – not at all.⁹ It is actually the beginning of the most glorious life possible, and for those who are martyred for their faith there appears to be an even greater reward. Now, why even mention all of this? Well, the reason is simple. If we wait until the actual persecution or suffering happens to become mentally, emotionally, and spiritually prepared to accept it in a way that honors Christ, it will be much too late. Having a mindset and spiritual perspective that desires for the honor of Christ to govern and control a person’s entire life is not something that they can just conjure up and spiritually activate when needed – never. This kind of mindset has to be developed in the person’s mind and heart and in their will long before suffering ever comes. The individual who has no meaningful relationship with Christ will not be able to beckon forth some kind of great spiritual strength when they begin to suffer persecution. To the contrary, the testimony of history is that they will surely fall away.

Next in [1 Peter 4:7-11](#), Peter provides a compilation of six different exhortations – “**be serious, be watchful, have fervent love, be hospitable, minister, speak, and minister**” again. Now, if we take these verses in their contextual flow, we should notice in v5-6 that Peter talks about the final judgment both for the unbeliever and the believer. No one will escape that moment in eternity when they have to give an account of their life to God. So, in v7, Peter simply says “**the end of all things is at hand**” or “**is near**”. New Testament prophecy is always built around the simple fact that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ inaugurated what the Scriptures consistently call “**the last days**”. Notice that in the middle of v7 that Peter uses the word “**therefore**” which is pointing his readers back to this statement that he has just made that “**the end of all things is at hand**”. The theological term for this is that the return of Christ is imminent, or that it could happen at any moment. That does not mean that it will be today, next year, or 100 years from today. Imminence simply means that there is nothing

preventing Christ from coming whenever God so chooses. Many New Testament passages speak of this aspect. For instance, [Romans 13:11-13](#) says,

Ro 13:11 *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.* ¹² **The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.** ¹³ **Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.**

Personally, I am very grateful that the end has not yet come simply because we all have loved ones that are not yet saved. If Christ were to return today, there is a good chance based on [2 Thessalonians 2](#) that those that we truly love, but who are lost, would have their fate eternally sealed and be eternally lost. Every day counts and the goal of the Christian life is to always be living in such a way that it is honoring to Christ. Obviously, the Scriptures never speak about doing unusual things like selling all you have and just waiting somewhere gazing into the sky. What is encouraged, and especially here in this portion of [1 Peter 4](#) is believers should live out their lives every day by being spiritually alert, caring for other believers, and using the gifts that God has given to them for the benefit of other people. Surely God will save some. I love what Martin Luther said when he was asked what he would do if the end were to come today. He simply said “*I would plant a tree and pay my taxes*”.¹⁰

Then lastly, in [1 Peter 4:12-19](#) this chapter closes out with another major teaching on the believer’s willingness to suffer for God’s glory. This may be the most significant teaching in the New Testament on Christian suffering. What these Christians did not necessarily understand was that a severe outbreak of persecution was very near and that many of them would be martyred for their faith. It is hard to determine if Peter prophetically knew that a severe persecution was coming, but certainly he may have been anticipating it to occur. The NKJV does not really bring out the text as well as some of the other translations which use the word “comes”, specifically the NASB and the ESV. For instance, [1 Peter 4:12](#) in the ESV says,

1Pe 4:12 **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.**

That really seems to best capture the idea of the Greek text - “**when it comes upon you**”. Obviously, many were actually suffering at the time of Peter’s writing, but for others the intense trials were simply on the way. The tense of the word for the ESV translation of “**do not be surprised**” and “**comes**” are both in the present tense, so that certainly says that the “**fiery trial**” was something currently happening, but it did not preclude other testing that historically was just around the corner. Being prepared is much better than being surprised.

So, Peter’s encouragement in v13 to the believer is to actually “**rejoice**” when the difficult times do arrive. That almost seems like an oxymoron, but it is the very nature of what it means to live our lives for Christ. Peter’s encouragement in v14 is that when the believer is “**reproached for the name of Christ**” that the Spirit of God actually rests on them. The word “**reproached**” means to be defamed and to be reviled, and to be railed at with abusive words.¹¹ This same word is used by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 5:11](#) when He says,

Mt 5:11 "**Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.**

It clearly appears that the implication of [1 Peter 4:12-19](#), based on the word “**reviled**”, “**reproached**”, or “**insulted**” in the various translations is that Peter is not primarily talking about physical suffering , but about verbal and emotional abuse because of a believer’s commitment to Christ. However, because he has used the word “**fiery trial**” in v12, it is clear that Peter is anticipating a much greater kind of persecution. The term “**fiery trial**” in the Greek text is just the word “**fiery**” with the idea of it being a “**trial**” being understood. It refers to something that is actually burning. In this context, “**fiery trial**” is metaphorically referring to that which actually refines the believer and proves the validity of their faith. [Psalm 66:10](#) has the same sense,

Ps 66:10 For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined.

Then Peter closes it out in v15 by encouraging believers not to suffer for the wrong reasons and lastly in v19 to simply “**commit**” their lives to Christ in doing that which is good. The word “**commit**” is an imperative mood verb in the present tense which simply means that committing ourselves to our heavenly Father is to be a continuous part of our life. It is that kind of enduring mindset that actually strengthens the believer for the very difficult moments that they may face in their life. Peter then says that our God is a faithful Creator which implies that He will not be forgetful of that which we may suffer for Him.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Strong, 1300.
- ² Zodhiates, 1127.
- ³ Renn, 944.
- ⁴ Harris, *pascho*, ep.
- ⁵ Harris, *pascho*, ep.
- ⁶ Strong,
- ⁷ Wuest, 1 Peter, 110.
- ⁸ MacArthur, 231.
- ⁹ Schreiner, 207-208.
- ¹⁰ Schreiner, 211.
- ¹¹ Zodhiates, 1047.

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