

## 1 Peter 4 Overview – Part A

Most of the information this morning I have provided previously in the initial overview of each of the chapters. However, since that has been over two years ago, it seemed prudent to at least refresh us again as to what [1 Peter 4](#) is addressing. As far as this chapter is concerned, it is important to be able to see the whole before we can fully understand the details.

Of the 19 verses in [1 Peter 4](#), v1-6 are about suffering, v12-19 are about suffering, and v7-11 are encouragements in the midst of 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**” in v1 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. So, 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**” as related to following Christ because we have never really had this as a problem in our cultural context. We just enjoyed Thanksgiving because we have so much for which to be thankful. 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. Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world. In fact, more Christians are martyred for their faith every year than any other religion in the world. Since 2005, the average number of believers that are martyred for their faith is over 90,000 per year. That is nearly 250 every day. Some have called it a global war against Christianity.

The word that Paul uses for “**suffer**” is “*pascho*” and it means to experience that which is painful.<sup>1</sup> 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 harsh, callous, and evil.<sup>2</sup> It is something that effects the individual in a fairly traumatic way both physically and emotionally, not to mention their families.<sup>3</sup> It is a word that expresses someone having to bear or endure very severe hardship.<sup>4</sup> That could happen in many ways. Many people may lose everything they have in a tornado,

<sup>1</sup> Strong, 1300.

<sup>2</sup> Zodhiates, 1127.

<sup>3</sup> Renn, 944.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, *pascho*, ep.

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, with someone faithfully following Christ. The problem that we have created in Christianity is that we have made salvation to be an event. If you were to ask someone about their salvation, they would most likely tell you when they were saved. However, even though everyone who is saved is saved at a certain point in time, the New Testament does not primarily associate salvation with an isolated event, but with actually following Christ as the person's way of life. We all know people who have made spiritual decisions, but those decisions never impacted their life.

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. He just wanted to die. It impacted his family. His wife just wanted him to curse God, and he lost all of his children in the process. It impacted his health. He was cursed with boils from his head to his toes. It impacted what he possessed. He literally lost almost everything that he owned. There was not anything about his life that was not impacted. The suffering and misery that Job experienced was almost indescribable, unbearable. However, at the end of the story, God fully restored everything that he had lost.

Now, without sounding overly pessimistic and contrary to what was just stated about Job, 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, name it and claim it" 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 deeply disappointed. It is my personal conviction, right or wrong, that as we get closer to the end and many of our Christian rights and freedoms are removed, that Christians will become the target of various kinds of hatred, persecution, and even martyrdom. It may seem somewhat removed at the present, but the global war on Christianity certainly has taken target on America. The result will be that the church will become just another part of the great apostasy and falling away that awaits the end times. The conviction level of many Christians is nominal at best and will not be able to weather the potential suffering that may prevail itself on believers.

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 reach 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.<sup>5</sup>

If we can draw some obvious conclusions from this, the godlier that someone chooses to live, in all likelihood the more suffering they will eventually experience because of it. In a country like the United States, we have laws that currently grant people certain religious freedoms and protect them from

<sup>5</sup> Harris, *pascho*, ep.

persecution, but that is not normally the case in other parts of the world – nor will it always be the same in America. In reality, 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 the persecution of believers will come. It is the nature of sin. 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.

**1Pe 4:2 (NKJV) that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. <sup>3</sup> For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. <sup>4</sup> In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.**

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 and HCSB translate this. It says “**For this is the reason the gospel was**

<sup>6</sup> Strong,

<sup>7</sup> Wuest, 1 Peter, 110.

**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...**” The ISV says “**to those who have died**”. 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.<sup>8</sup> They were martyred, but the last part of the verse states that now they live gloriously “**in the spirit**”, or in the spiritual realm, in the spiritual sphere.

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.<sup>9</sup> 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. I think of Brother Eddie and his willingness to take the gospel and the message of the Reformation to a continent that has already martyred over 1800 missionaries for bringing that message to South America. Eddie and Elia already have the mindset and I know that both are willing to suffer and even die if necessary. 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.

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<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, 231.

<sup>9</sup> Schreiner, 207-208.

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