

1 Peter 4 Overview – Part B

As we continue the overview of [1 Peter 4](#), we have seen that [1 Peter 4](#) speaks about suffering more than any other chapter in the New Testament, and more than any book in the Old or New Testament except Hebrews. 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 of Chapter 4, 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. When speaking of the issue of biblical imminence, there are two things that are imminent. Obviously, the return of Christ is imminent, but death is always imminent as well – and maybe even in a more serious way than we often realize. I think that most people take their life and longevity too lightly simply because anyone of us could not be here tomorrow. So, for the lost person who is constantly debating whether or not they will come to Christ on His terms, that person thinks that they have the rest of their life to make that decision. The problem is that they have no idea how to quantify when the rest of their life will come to an end. Everyone thinks that they are the exception to dying early, but certainly that is a fantasy and illusion at best. No one knows, and without warning life can become very fragile and short-lived. Jesus gave the parable of a very foolish rich man in [Luke 12:16-20](#) when He said,

Lk 12:16 (NKJV) *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.* ¹⁷ **And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'** ¹⁸ **So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.** ¹⁹ **And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."** ²⁰ **But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'** ²¹ **So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."**

Then to make matters worse for the lost person, there is the aspect that if they did live, but Christ were to return in the near future, there is a good chance based on [2 Thessalonians 2:9-12](#) that those that we truly love, but who are lost, would have their fate eternally sealed and be eternally lost if they have been just living in outright sin and rebellion towards God. Listen carefully to what this passage says,

2Th 2:9 (NKJV) The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.¹¹ And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

It is only my opinion, but I believe that there are many more people than we might like to accept that are what we could define as “professing Christians only” that most likely would fall into this category. They have made themselves comfortable with both rejecting Christ and living in habitual sin, but because they have constantly avoided the demands of Christ on their life, they have yet to accept Him. In my understanding, these verses are specifically describing a certain kind of person. It is someone who has grown up with the truth, probably raised in a Christian home, yet they have simply refused to yield their life to Christ and chosen to live in open and known sin. It appears from these verses that that person will be sent a great delusion. Notice how Paul states it in v11 when it says two very important things. (1) “**And for this reason**” – that “**they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved**”, and (2) “**God will send them...**” Then in v12, he says “**that they all may be condemned**”. He says they simply refused to “**believe the truth**”. A person does not actually believe the truth until their life reflects that they believe the truth. Just saying the right things does not make someone a genuine believer. Even though every lost person will suffer God’s judgment for not trusting in Christ, they may never have been truly exposed to the gospel message in a meaningful way. I believe that after the rapture that they will still have opportunities to come to Christ. We know from [Revelation 12:6](#) that God will send an angel to preach the gospel to all who are on the face of the earth.

Rev 14:6 (NKJV) Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth--to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people--

The Scriptures are not necessarily clear on the impact of what this angel is doing, but obviously God is giving lost people an opportunity to repent. However, the person described in [1 Thessalonians 2](#) who knew the truth and rebelled against it, God will send them a very strong delusion and they will believe the lie (probably that the antichrist is God), and they will be condemned forever.

Listen carefully. 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 that 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*”.¹

¹ Schreiner, 211.

Then, in [1 Peter 4:12-19](#) the 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. Notice all of the warnings and encouragements that it gives. For instance, v12 in the NKJV says "**do not think it strange**" when these difficult moments come on you. I like the NASB, ESV, NIV, and HCSB which say "**do not be surprised**". I.e., do not let these very difficult moments which are right around the corner bewilder and confuse you. They are coming. Now, 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. [1 Peter](#) was written between 60-65AD, so it is hard to determine if Peter prophetically knew that an even more severe persecution was coming in 70AD, but certainly he may have been anticipating it to occur. The NKJV does not really bring out the text in v12 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.² We might describe it as being insulted, disrespected, snubbed, slurred, or slighted. 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. This happens all the time in other countries such as India, Pakistan, Indonesia, or the Middle East where people that leave the Islamic faith are not only reviled, but often times killed. We would be outraged if someone was intentionally murdered for denying the Christian faith.

However, because Peter has used the word "**fiery trial**" or "**fiery ordeal**" in v12, it is clear that Peter is anticipating a much greater kind of persecution. The NIV seems to completely miss the point when it

² Zodhiates, 1047.

translates the word “**fiery**” as “**painful**”. That is not the sense of the word at all. 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. It means that something is actually burning, not that something is painful. If you hit your thumb with a hammer, it will be painful, but not fiery. So, 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.

It is my personal opinion only that when these kinds of persecutions and trials begin to inflict people that the fiery trial is what generally precipitates an actual apostasy or falling away. So, as the church does get closer to the closing of the dispensation of the “**last days**”, and as the rejection, persecution, and trials of that time bear down on people’s lives, many professing believers who are not grounded in their faith and not committed to Christ will simply fall away from the faith that they claimed they had.

In v15, Peter encourages believers not to suffer for the wrong reasons. He lists three terrible sins – murder, stealing, and being evil. However, notice the fourth one which seems to be completely out of character with the other three – not being a “**busybody in other people’s matters**”. That is not even close to murder or being a thief or just being outright evil. The Greek Interlinear simply says “**or as a meddler**”. This is the only place this word is used in the New Testament, and it simply means to be busying yourself with things that simply do not concern you because if you do, it will bring on some form of suffering that you may not have anticipated. It does not mean that we should not care for people, but simply that we need to be careful about meddling in other people’s affairs.

Then lastly in v19, Peter encourages believers 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. However, we would be naïve if we failed to see that suffering is very often a very real part of God’s will for our life. Notice what Peter says regarding God’s will – “**those who suffer according to the will of God**”.

I know that is not something that any of us would enjoy or even like thinking about, but still genuine suffering may be a part of God’s sovereignty over the believer’s life. Very often His purposes will not correspond with ours, and it is important that we have a spiritual mindset that recognizes that simple fact or we may find ourselves always questioning His will for our life.

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