

1 Peter 4:1-6

1Pe 4:1 (NKJV) **Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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*.⁵ They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.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.**

In our last study we looked at what it meant to “**arm yourselves with the same mind**” that Christ had, and we saw that we ALWAYS win or lose our spiritual battles in our mind. We saw that what we think and how we think will always govern what we do and how we live. We have to think biblically, we have to think strong, we have to prepare ourselves mentally for the kind of life that God actually wants us to live.

So, what does it mean at the end of v1 when Peter states that “**he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin**”? Is this something that is speaking of Christ or all believers, and what does it mean to have “**ceased from sin**”? Well, obviously it could not be speaking of Christ simply because He had never sinned. I.e., He could not have “**ceased**” from something that He was not doing, nor had ever done. So, in this context it has to be talking about believers. The continuation of the sentence in v2-4 seems to confirm this as well because it talks about how we use to live before we came to Christ and how the world now sees us because of our Christian lifestyle. John MacArthur in his commentary seems to think that it is talking about martyrs and how once they have died that they have actually “**ceased from sin**”. However, if that were true, then v3-4 would make no sense at all.

So, what is Peter addressing when he talks about those who have “**suffered in the flesh**”. Because these verses do not give us any indication as to what Peter means, we must obtain the meaning from the previous context, and it appears that [1 Peter 3:13-17](#) seems to do that the best. V14 talks about those who “**suffer for righteousness sake**” and that they are “**blessed**”. He says to not be afraid of the “**threats**” that people make on their lives. He says that they will be “**defamed as evildoers**” for their “**good conduct**”. Then he concludes by saying that “**it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil**”. That seems to be what Peter is addressing – the believer’s willingness to suffer rather than live in sin and disobedience. The phrase “**in the flesh**” or “**in the body**” (NIV) is often seen by many commentators as referring specifically to physical suffering of some kind. I personally understand it to mean any kind of suffering that one endures in their body, whether it be emotional, mental, or physical. For instance, in a Muslim country a mother could watch her young child or husband being beaten and even killed for his faith and the faith of his family – but her not be beaten or killed. Surely, she would be suffering emotionally and mentally for her faith. In some ways, it may be much more difficult to endure than some physical suffering because the pain of watching something like that happen to those that you love never goes away.

The idea in this phrase “**suffered in the flesh**” is that he believer is willing to suffer for doing what is right and that he is willing to make a decision to be obedient to Christ even though he knows it may impact his life in a negative way, even in physical suffering and many different kinds of hardships. I has been stated many times before, this is not nearly as much of a reality as it is in other parts of the world. When a believer’s heart is bent on obeying God and not on just avoiding hardship, inevitably the result of that kind of mindset is that it will have a deep strengthening impact on his life and how he lives. It is evidence that he is more willing to be obedient than he is to avoid various kinds of mental, emotional, and/or physical pain and hardships.¹ It is my opinion that the Laodicean church age mentality will be brutally unhelpful when the real testing of our faith begins to increase. My deepest fear is for the children in this church age who are just a part of a cultural church that lacks deep spiritual convictions that will drive them to faithfulness in the midst of ridicule and persecution that is inevitably coming.

Survey after survey have been taken to affirm that the majority of people connected with what is often called evangelical Christianity no longer believe in the authority of Scripture, they do not believe that Satan is a real spiritual being, they believe that there are multiple ways to God, and they do not believe that the church is making any significant impact in their lives (which I doubt that it is). Many of them believe the church should be very tolerant and that gay and lesbian marriages should be recognized. In reality, the modern day church goer is struggling to make sense of their faith. **How can you make sense of something to which you are not even committed?** You see, what Peter is doing for the modern church culture is bringing a high level of sanity into a spiritual environment that seems to be rotting on the vine. So many Christians just seem to be struggling with almost every area of their Christian life – with commitment, with church, with faith, with the Bible. Trusting a sovereign God seems so foreign to how they think or even perceive Christianity to be. If a believer does not understand who they are and what they have, then their entire Christian life will become and remain spiritually dysfunctional.

Just as an example of how this seems to be playing out, I seem to be getting a lot of questions about the rapture and whether or not Christians will have to go through the Tribulation. I personally believe in a pre-tribulation rapture which means that the church will be removed prior to the seven years of tribulation. However, in reality it does not matter to me whether there is a pre-tribulational rapture or not. Someone will say, “*Well why not?*” Well, it is because true Christians have always suffered for their faith. Just read [Hebrews 11](#) if you want a glimpse into what genuine faith is like. Just read “The Voice of the Martyrs” monthly magazine if you really want a dose of spiritual reality.

The issue for most people is that they simply are afraid to die. They are not really that confident in their faith, so the idea of going through the Tribulation utterly frightens them to death. The issue, however, should never be whether we go through the Tribulation or do not go through it, but whether or not we are prepared to go through it if that is the ultimate outworking of God in our lives and in history. The issue is whether or not we truly believe in the sovereignty of God over all things. If God is sovereign, and if God is in control of history (which He certainly is), then it does not really matter what we may have to go through. What is important is that no matter what happens that we as followers of Christ will remain faithful and true and obedient whatever the cost to us or to our families. Trust me, but that kind of message is not well received in the weak and spiritually impotent church age of which we are a part.

¹ Grudem, 166-167.

My concern is not whether or not I may have to go through the Tribulation, but rather that when the rapture does occur that many people in churches will be left totally behind with nothing to spiritually strengthen them in the worst time that history has ever known.

It is my deepest conviction that if the rapture happened today that the vast majority of young people in the world today would be left behind and they would succumb to the diabolical call of Satan and the Antichrist like never before. I am often stunned at how many young people from all over the world are joining these militant groups like ISIS. Do you want to know why? It is because the modern, liberal, free-thinking, laissez-faire, tolerating, cutting edge, avant-garde, entertaining, progressive church of the 21st century has nothing to offer but praise bands and programs – none of which will help when things finally get heated up. The Emergent Church has not strengthened conviction, but simply replaced it with entertainment and storytelling. Listen very carefully. Satan could care less about the 21st century church. He knows exactly what Jesus said about it in [Revelation 3](#), and he is more than willing to let it just do its thing! The modern liberal church and all of its false teachers have so re-defined Christianity that no one seems to even know what Christianity or discipleship even means any more.

Now, just think about this for a moment and how the prevailing Christian culture has become adept at changing all of the various attributes that mark a genuine believer. There are the Rob Bell's of the world, the Joel Osteen's, the Joyce Meyer's, the Benny Hinn's, the T.D. Jakes, the Rod Parsley's, the ruling denominational hierarchies, the cultural shift to the seeker sensitive movement, the downgrading of missions, the lack of meaningful discernment and discipline in churches, the lust for power and fame among many pastors who are trying to ride the elevator of success to the very top, the shallow teaching material promoted by denominations that for the most part just dumb down their audience, the infatuation with music and creative programs, and the almost utter vacuum of true disciples in local churches who are willing to obey Christ no matter what the cost.

The list is endless, and the late 20th century church culture and the 21st century culture have bought into all of it and unfortunately have become overly satisfied with what [Revelation 3](#) declares to be nauseating to Christ. Everything that was just described is exactly where the modern day church is headed. The 21st century church has completely misdefined almost every meaningful aspect of its existence and is more absorbed in convenience, options, and programs than it is in truly following Christ. The average professing Christian in many churches does not even bring a Bible with them to church. They are more enamored with what time the service will be over than what is being taught in the Word of God. They get nervous and anxious at noon for fear of not beating the crowd to the local restaurant. Unfortunately, the church has become a well-oiled machine that is much more satisfied with all of its programs and pragmatism than it is with following the Living Head of the church which is Christ.

Please turn for a moment to [1 John 3:1-3](#).

1Jn 3:1 (NKJV) Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

My intent is not to depart from [1 Peter 4](#), but in this passage, John has a very clear and distinct message for the believer that I think is directly related to what Peter is teaching. This is what that message is. John says that we are “**children of God**” and that we are destined for glory and to be like Christ. Because of those two life transforming truths, we are to be holy in all that we do. Without overstating the issue, the Christian life in order to be meaningful is filled with conditions that are utterly vital and essential to the believers walk and their fellowship with God. John seems to sum this up in [1 John 2:29](#) when he says this,

1Jn 2:29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

John calls it “**practicing righteousness**”. It could be stated this way – you are in Christ, Christ is in you, and something very vital has happened to you.² Nothing could be more important than to know those simple truths. I.e., the person who is not really that understanding of what it even means to be a Christian will not have much motivation to live for Christ at all - none. Words like dedication, sacrifice, and commitment will have no impact on them, and just fall off of their Christian life like water on a ducks back. They will see those kinds of words as simply a little too “over the top” and completely irrelevant to the Christian life. If Christ is righteous, then the Christian is to live righteously. It is an unavoidable and governing reality of the Christian life, and at times that reality may very well lead into the kind of inevitable suffering that Peter is addressing. If it can be stated in a stronger way, the issue of living a righteous life is not negotiable. Because we live in a Christian culture that has so radically misdefined what it even means to be saved, living a righteous life is no longer seen as being non-negotiable, but as something optional and quite un compelling. This is a very damning twist to the Scriptures. I hope that there is no one who would think that the idea of a righteous life can be removed from the biblical definition of salvation or from the call to suffering.

In [1 Peter 4:1](#), the phrase “**ceased from sin**” simply means that the believer has made a very conscientious break with sin. It does not mean that they are sinless, but rather that they are “**done with sin**” (NIV) as a way of life. The verb for “**ceased**” means that the believer has made a decision to refrain from sin, to be done with the sin in which he previously lived.³ That really should be true of each of us. There should be a knowledge of that time in our life when we know that we made a break with sin and in that moment that we willingly chose to live for Christ and not for sin. The verb is in the indicative mood, perfect tense, and middle voice. I love the middle voice because it simply means that the individual himself understood their responsibility and they made a very conscientious decision to break with the sin in their life that they knew was contrary to what God really wanted for them. The perfect tense, however, is the most revealing aspect of this verb because it reveals that the decision was made in the past, but it is still spiritually impacting the person’s life right now. The perfect tense generally indicates something permanent and ongoing that has happened in a person’s life. God brought them to a moment of realization about an area of their life, and they made the right choice and have since lived out that conviction that God created in them. Once again, that should be true of each of us.

² Lloyd-Jones, 272-273.

³ Zodhiates, 1132.

These are godly decisions that we all have to make throughout our entire life. We have to make these kinds of choices all the time. It can be any kind of area that God chooses to touch in our life, but when He touches that area of our life and He creates a conviction within us about something, we need to respond with resolve and determination. It is part of what we addressed in the first part of this verse in the last message and the need to “think strong”, to think biblically. A lot of people make emotional type “decisions”, but the long term impact of those decisions is often very short lived and ultimately meaningless for their life. In my mind, the believer that makes good decisions, but fails to follow through with them, is very susceptible to ongoing failure and despair. God is constantly working in us to change us. He is always working on different areas of our life, but it is still up to us to consistently find ways to integrate and assimilate His work into our life. If you are someone who struggles in this area, if you are the person with good intentions who never follows through with those intentions, then what you need is another mature believer to help you and to hold you accountable – and you should seek that person out. It is my personal conviction that God never intended for us to do everything alone.

V3 will tell us that all believers used to live in sin, but that that old lifestyle is no longer that for which they now live. In reality, they are now willing to endure scorn and ridicule and contempt and sarcasm for their personal faith in Christ. If I can say it this way, it actually becomes a badge of honor for them. They are not afraid to suffer for their faith, but are more than willing to endure whatever God may allow to afflict them. The problem is that for many Christians, they are doing everything they can to avoid any and all conflict. If they have to, they will do whatever is needed to find a way around the pressure to be godly. They will ignore opportunities to honor Christ and they will disregard the conviction that the Holy Spirit seems to always be creating in their life. The result of these kinds of decisions is that that believer will ultimately succeed in that effort and become what we addressed in the first part of v1 as becoming spiritually “neutralized”. They eventually just become numb and totally unresponsive to what God really wants for their life. Spiritually this is a dangerous place to find ourselves and I personally do not know how to quantify the spiritual consequences. May God help us all to be “**overcomers**”!

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