

- I. I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
 - A. I Peter 4:12-19 . . . 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 on you. [15] Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; [16] but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. [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, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.
 - B. Pray
- II. Four primary kinds and causes of suffering in the world
 - A. First, there is the universal suffering that comes upon us all as a result of universal sin. In other words, there are numerous and varied forms of suffering that come upon us as a result of living in a sin infested, and therefore, imperfect world.
 1. Things break or wear out. Germs and sickness spread. Cancer strikes, coughs linger, skin is easily cut, bones break, teeth get cavities, and eyes don't see without glasses. There are floods, droughts, hurricanes, tornadoes, forest fires, and hail storms. People let us down, hurt us, and even mistreat us – and I think you get the idea.
 2. But there is not one of us who is an innocent victim, for all of us have contributed our sin to the problem, and some of us continue to do so.
 3. Now because sin has wages and those wages are destructive – in some form or another – our world is filled with the destructive consequences of sin. Therefore, there is a general presence of suffering in our world that afflicts us all – rich and poor, righteous and unrighteous, male and female, young and old.

B. Second, there is the personally specific suffering that comes as a result of knowingly and willingly committing specific sin(s). Just as a good parent applies specific discipline for specific misbehavior, so God applies specific consequences for our misbehavior. Therefore, added on top of the universal suffering as a result of sin, we personally suffer the direct consequences of our own sin – thus making our life harder and more painful than it needs to be. Here is what God’s word says about this –

1. Deuteronomy 11:26-28 . . . See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: [27] the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; [28] and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known.
2. Galatians 6:7-8 . . . Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.
3. 1 Corinthians 11:27-31 . . . Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. [28] But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. [30] For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. [31] But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

C. Third, there is the suffering brought upon us by God, or allowed by God, for the sake of testing our spiritual stature, the godliness of our character, and the strength of our faith – with the goal of further transforming us into the likeness of Christ. God’s word speaks to this as well –

1. James 1:2-4 . . . Count it all joy, my beloved, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
2. 1 Peter 1:6-7 . . . In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, [7] so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. . .

3. 1 Peter 4:1 . . . 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.

D. Fourth, there is the suffering inflicted on God's people by ungodly people.

1. Matthew 5:10-12 . . . Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
2. 1 Peter 2:13a, 21 . . . Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority . . . [21] For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.
3. 1 Peter 3:13-14a . . . Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? [14] But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.

III. The suffering Peter addresses is for our testing and a result of righteousness

A. 1 Peter 4:12 . . . 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 . . .

1. According to scripture and church history, Christians were enduring ill-treatment and forms of persecution at the hands of religiously zealous Jews and unbelievers – be they those in authority, co-workers, neighbors, or family members.
2. It also clear that Peter is being very realistic in describing the suffering, for he calls it a fiery ordeal. In other words, the suffering described is the kind most of us would rather avoid, for it is both intense and painful.
3. But even though the suffering is intense and painful, it has an intended purpose – which is to test us, and in testing us to expose our maturity level as Christians, the strength of our faith, the extent of our denial of self, the magnitude of our love, the depth of our allegiance to God, the strength of our commitment to stand together with the Church, and the degree to which we want God to be glorified. But as I have already said, testing is not just to expose, it is to provide a basis for moving forward and becoming that much more of what Christ saved us to be.

4. Finally, Peter cautions us against being surprised or caught off guard by such suffering, for this kind of suffering is normal for the normal Christian – that is, for the sincere, intentional, spiritually hungry Christian who longs to be holy in all his behavior just as God is holy.
 5. Paul clearly stated this truth in his second letter to Timothy, where he said: “Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, [11] persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! [12] Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:10-12).
- B. I Peter 4:13 . . . 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.
1. Three main reasons to rejoice at sharing the sufferings of Christ.
 - a. First, there is the rejoicing that comes from knowing that such suffering brings spiritual profit and further transformation – profit and transformation that cannot be gained any other way.
 - (1) The point here is that we will rejoice when we cherish the spiritual profit that comes from such suffering more than relief from the suffering.
 - (2) James speaks of this in James 1:2-4. Paul affirms this truth in Romans 5:3-5. And Peter includes it in I Peter 1:6-7.
 - b. Second, there is the rejoicing that comes from being counted worthy by God to share in the sufferings of Christ – that is, to be ill-treated like Christ for living a righteous life and serving God as Christ did. Included in this rejoicing is the joy of knowing that such rejoicing will continue throughout eternity.
 - c. Third, there is the rejoicing that comes from joining Christ in being salt and light, in sowing seed, in reaping harvests, in building His kingdom, and in bringing glory to God – even though it means added suffering for us.
 2. To help you get the point made here, ponder this question: “When suffering, what rises to the top: joy over the prospect of spiritual profit for God, Christ, and yourself gained from the suffering, or a longing for relief?”
- C. I Peter 4:14 . . . If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

1. In applying Christ's teaching from His sermon on the mount, Peter points out that we have entered into or gained a significant measure of true happiness when we are reviled for the name of Christ. Why?
 2. Because, if we are being reviled for the name of Christ it is a strong indication that we are living, day in and day out, a life that exemplifies and honors the Christ-like life. And though the world despises and condemns this kind of life, it is the Christian's sure path to immense joy, profound inner peace, and intimate union and communion with our Loving Father. And without question, there is no more blessed or happy life than this!!
- D. I Peter 4:15 . . . Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler . . .
1. This is both a strong statement and an inclusive statement, for it begins with "MAKE SURE" and continues on with "NONE OF YOU."
 2. It is possible that some of us who read this statement excuse ourselves from being included because we either no longer see ourselves or simply do not think of ourselves as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer. And of course, it is good that we are not those things.
 - a. But have we put an end to despising or possibly hating a fellow Christian, or a family member, or some neighbor?
 - b. Have we returned everything we have borrowed – in equal or better shape than when we borrowed it?
 - c. Have we held on to bitterness of any kind, or entertained lustful thoughts, or spoken unkind words for which we not sought forgiveness, or returned evil for evil in some way?
 3. And why do I add these questions to the list? Because Jesus did. He is the one who taught us take the graphic or strong word and apply it broadly, even to those sins that are far less graphic but still related to the word.
 4. Now in case we can pass the test provided by the first three words, Peter adds a fourth evil – being a troublesome meddler, which simply put is meddling or interfering in or involving ourselves in someone else's business – uninvited.
 5. The point here is that we are not to suffer the displeasure of others because we have mistreated them and therefore sinned against them in some way – for such suffering is not only a blemish on the reputation of the Christian faith and the Church at large, it is also a blemish on our personal reputation as a Christian.

- E. I Peter 4:16 . . . but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.
1. Why would we tend toward being ashamed if we are suffering as a Christian? The most likely answer is because such suffering often includes harshly critical and fiercely derogatory attacks on our character, intentions, the way we practice Christian love, and what they perceive as our judgmental intolerance.
 2. Now it is easy to feel ashamed when being attacked in this way. But Peter warns us not to give in to shame. Rather, in the face of such gross misunderstanding and unfair criticism, we are to glorify God by continuing to live like a Christian ought to live. Or as Paul said in Romans 12:21 . . . we are to overcome evil with good.
 3. But there is a second reason to not cave in when being attacked by unbelievers, and that second reason has to do with what comes next.
- F. I Peter 4:17-18 . . . 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?
1. Sometimes, we are so hurt or discouraged by the unfair attack of unbelievers against our way of life that we look forward to the day of judgment when the critics and maligners and opposers of the Faith will be put in their place and get their just dues.
 2. On one hand, such thoughts are okay. But may we never forget that as with Israel, so with the Church – God’s judgment on unrighteousness begins with His people, and then it moves on to unbelievers. And since our judgment is more imminent than theirs, we are wise to live like a Christian ought to live – regardless of the circumstances.
 3. Now even as I say this, I know there are three powerful enemies fighting to hold you back from living like a Christian ought.
 - a. First, there is your flesh or selfish inclinations, the world, and the devil – which when taken together form a formidable foe. However, they look like the enemy – and that makes it easier to identify them and resist them.
 - b. Second, there is the modern day grace theology coupled with the eternal security teaching which has gained wide acceptance in the church today. To the degree that these two teachings lull you into thinking that God is tolerant of your sin in the same way the world asks you to be tolerant of homosexuality or premarital

sex or abortion, these two teachings are your enemy, for they hold you back from living like a Christian ought.

- c. Third, the current model of Christianity pervading the American Church today is generally immature and weak in the daily practice of godliness. But sadly, this low standard of maturity and practice has become so common that it is now taken by many as the new normal for Christianity. To the degree that this low standard of Christianity lowers your perception of what is acceptable to God, it is your enemy, for it will hold you back from living the Christian life as you ought.
4. And why am I telling you this? Because God judges His own children first, and then He judges those who do not belong to Him. And if we are judged, even though we are God's children, you can be assured that unbelievers will also experience the due consequences of their choices.
5. To give you a sense of the seriousness and severity of God's judgment on unrighteousness, be it the unrighteousness of His children or the unbelieving world, here is what the writer of Hebrews says: "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31), and again, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).
6. Therefore, Peter says, since God judges the lives of His people first, all of us who are God's people are wise to live a life that adequately prepares us for His judgment.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Though this isn't the end of this section, I am going to end.
- B. Next Sunday, I want to begin by examining Peter's statement in verses 18-19, which say: "And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."