

A Study of First Peter
Week Four
1 Peter 4:1-19

Day One

4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

v. 1 – In all the talk about spiritual warfare, you never hear anyone urged to arm themselves with an attitude that is ready to suffer. I am not against some of the spiritual warfare teaching, but I think that there are times when we cannot escape the fix we are in no matter what spiritual technique or discipline we employ. Because Jesus suffered, we are going to follow in His footsteps and do the same.

The word “arm” used here could be a military term and refers to an attitude that is prepared. When I first met the Lord, I did not have this attitude. I assumed that everything would go smoothly now that I was serving the Lord. But suffering has been and is an important part of my development as a believer, learning to trust the Lord in difficult times. And suffering keeps me from being self-absorbed and sensitive toward God and the condition of others who may be sharing something similar to what I have experienced or am experiencing.

There are a few theories as to what Peter meant when he said that those who suffer have ceased from sin. It could be that those who were suffering for their faith and were perfectly willing to do so would never have to worry about denying Jesus in times of trouble. I have always felt that it related to what I said in the previous paragraph: That those who suffer are delivered from the sin of selfishness. When I suffer, I seek the Lord and am more open to how my unconscious ways may offend him. I can be much more empathetic to others, praying with more compassion and regularity for their needs. But I cannot say I am sinless when I suffer, for I can whine and complain and make others around me miserable.

So I’m not sure what Peter meant here exactly. But I do know that he directed us to have a mind to suffer and to not be surprised when the suffering came, because that is what Jesus did.

v. 2 – This verse leads me to believe that my sense of what verse one means is correct. Anyone who is actively involved in serving the Lord, which will bring suffering, greatly reduces their tendency and capacity to sin. **Do you agree or not? If not, what do you think Peter was referring to? How are you handling the suffering that is in your life? Are you using spiritual warfare properly or are you trying to get God to take away the unpleasant circumstances that are the source of your suffering?**

v. 3 – Peter reminded the readers and he reminds us that we have spent enough days in our past life serving sinful desires. The pagan world was full of such temptations and Peter was reminding them that they had invested enough time in sin. And of course, there are no less and perhaps more temptations today for any believer, so the admonition still holds true: Don't invest any more energy or time in sinful behavior. Serve the Lord, even if it means that you suffer for righteousness sake.

Day Two

4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. 5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

v. 4 – The believers were being abused not for their wrongs but for their avoidance of wrong. And the pagans, who were convicted in their sin by the good behavior, tried to soothe their consciences by accusing the Christians of being weird, antisocial or whatever other label or name they could come up with.

Recently, we had a company send us a check we didn't deserve. We had asked for them to remove a charge on an account that we had not paid and did not owe. They made a mistake and sent us a check instead. When I later told an employee what we had done, she said, "You're crazy! I would have kept it." Another time, I had lost a phone and the sales agent wanted me to lie so she could get me a new one at no cost. When I said, I couldn't do that, she looked at me in disbelief and asked why. I replied, "It's not worth getting in trouble with God over a cell phone." She thought I was strange, too.

v. 5 – While you may be criticized for your godly behavior now, eventually your critics will answer to God. And that, in part, is why Peter and other writers advised us to put our trust in God and not try to vindicate ourselves.

First, God wants our critics to come to the truth. So there is a more important issue involved and, if we seek to prove our critics wrong, will cause our priorities to be confused. (It is more important that someone come to know Jesus than that they come to know that you aren't as bad as they think you are.)

Second, there is always a chance that at least a part of what are critics are saying is true. So we try to listen to what they are saying and ask God to show us the truth. Defending ourselves can shortcut that process. And finally, it is a good chance to learn to trust God for our reputations when we focus on Him and not our critics. **Can you think of any other reasons why we should not try to respond to those who are maligning us?**

v. 6 – This life isn't the only chance for you to be vindicated. If God doesn't do it now, He will do it in the age to come. The benefits of the gospel aren't just for this life; the

gospel was preached to those who are dead and they will be judged according to the promises of God.

I am so glad that God doesn't have to settle every account or score where I am concerned in this life. And I am glad that He is the one who judges what needs to be settled. I know I would be biased in that regard and would be neither objective nor merciful. So I forgive and go on, learning to trust God for my reputation and for Him to keep accurate accounts and records.

I had endured what I considered to be a wrong against me a few years ago. It was really bothering me. Then one morning in prayer, I had this question in mind: "Would you rather God vindicate you or give you ministry opportunities?" After some thought, I chose the opportunities. The very next day I had the idea to do these Bible studies, which at this time are sent to 6,000 people every week all over the world. I think I chose wisely, don't you?

Day Three

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

v. 7 – Was Peter referring to the end of the age, when Jesus will return? I doubt it. People ask me from time to time, "Do you think the return of the Lord is near?" My standard answer is "I don't know and neither does anyone else!" Every generation has believed that they were the last generation, convinced that the evil of their generation was the sure sign of the end. I have never understood the infatuation with end times that so many have. I watch a certain television show and this man talks about the return of the Lord every week! I don't get it, do you? If you do, write and share it with me.

I think that Jesus dealt with His disciples questions about the future in a direct and to-the-point manner.

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

So what lesson should we take from Peter's words that "the end of all things is near"? I am almost 56 years of age and I am more aware than ever that for me, the end of all things is near. That means I must take advantage of every opportunity and it means that I must pursue holiness, for soon I will see Jesus. I don't think it has to mean any more than that.

And that is where Peter took his admonition, for he urged his readers who had this mindset to stay focused on prayer. **How is your prayer life doing? Are you living like the end of all things is near? What difference has that attitude made in your behavior?**

v. 8 – Peter assumed that the believers had a close relationship with one another. When you are close to someone, they can hurt you and you can take offense. Peter urged his readers to keep their love strong for one another. **Are you close enough to people in your fellowship that they can hurt you?** If not, then you aren't living up to the biblical standard for fellowship. You must have the kind of love that can cover someone else's sins. As stated in an earlier study, this kind of relationship can't be cultivated simply by walking the church door, singing some songs, listening to a message, then leaving, getting in your car and going home.

Who do you know and love from your church body? What are you doing to pursue fellowship? Are you living a life of love, which means a life of forgiveness? Are you getting to know people well enough that you know and see their weaknesses? Have any of these weaknesses offended you? If you answered "yes" to the last question, you are doing well! And if you answered "yes," are you allowing your love to cover their sins? I hope you are!

v. 9 – **When is the last time you had someone from your church over to dinner, or at least over for coffee or tea? Have you ever had your children sleep on the floor, so they could give their bed to a visiting missionary or church speaker? Do you have clothes in your closet or books in your library that you aren't using, that you could give away to someone? These are all expressions of ways that you can "practice" hospitality. Can you think of any others? But more than think of them, are there any expressions of hospitality that you can perform today or this week?**

Day Four

10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

v. 10 – I have gifts and you do, too. But those gifts aren't for my benefit. They are under my control, so to speak, but they are to be used to serve others. Since my gifts are under my control, I am to faithfully express and develop them. **What are you doing to perfect your gifts?** Perhaps the best way to perfect them is to *use* them. Paul was concerned with this issue as well:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13-14).

Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church (1 Corinthians 14:12).

Perhaps a better question, however, is: Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? There are many gift profiles available. I would urge you to find and take one and do whatever else you can do to identify your spiritual gifts.

v. 11 – When I speak, I usually pray for two things: the miracle of speech and the miracle of hearing. When I pray for speech, I usually say, “May I speak the words that Jesus would say if He were standing here today.” When I do, I think of this verse. I want to be the best speaker I can be, one whom people enjoy listening to and from whom people learn:

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight (Mark 12:35-37).

The people enjoyed Jesus because He had something to say, had authority when He said it and was entertaining, using parables as a teaching tool.

Peter used service as another example of a spiritual gift. He urged that those who serve to do so in the strength that God gives. Yet too many I fear are waiting for God’s strength, when God’s strength only comes when you are doing what God wants you to do, not before you do what He wants. Consider this verse from Hebrews:

Quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies (Hebrews 11:34).

Notice that those with faith became powerful *in* battle, not leading up to the battle. You only need God’s strength if you are doing something that you can’t do on your own—not wishing or talking about doing something.

It’s not about our gifts, the people we serve or about us at all. It’s always about Jesus as Paul, Peter, John and all the writers of Scripture were so ready to point out. *Lord, help me keep focused on You and Your purposes for my life and work. Amen.*

Day Five

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you

are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

v. 12 – It is always a surprise when we encounter the painful trial, don't you agree? There are so many questions to ask when we do: Is it lack of faith? Have I sinned? Is this the devil? Did I miss the Lord? But suffering is part and parcel with the Christian walk, in spite of those who have devised theological systems to the contrary. No matter how much faith you have, the world still experiences tsunamis and hurricanes. There are always those who hate God and His followers and consequently persecute them. So don't be alarmed or fearful when the painful trial comes. It is part of following Jesus!

v. 13 – We are not only not to be surprised, we are to rejoice! **Are you rejoicing in your trials?**

If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer (2 Corinthians 1:6-7).

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:2-5).

We can rejoice because we know that suffering is redemptive. It produces something in us and prepares us to rule with Christ. Suffering delivers from self and makes us more conscious of and dependent upon God. So we have much to celebrate when we rejoice. **Are you rejoicing?**

v. 14 – Wow! Here is another reason to rejoice. When I suffer because I am a believer, God's Spirit of glory rests on me. So when I pray for a double portion of God's Spirit and presence, does that mean that I get a double portion of suffering? I need to be careful what I pray!

I think Peter made a good case for the need and purpose of suffering. Are you convinced? Are you ready to suffer? Are you ready to laugh out loud when you do, rejoicing and keeping focused on God? Not sure? Well, neither am I! I know I should rejoice when I suffer, and I am prepared to do so before the suffering starts. It's after it begins, however, that I become ambivalent.

Day Six

15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

v. 15 – Peter was careful to point out that only suffering that comes from being a Christian and following Jesus qualifies. If you suffer for your sins, then that is just a matter of reaping what you sow. If you refused to be generous and now are suffering from lack, that isn't the kind of suffering to which Peter referred. You are suffering due to disobedience, not for following Jesus.

Jesus also taught on this subject, as we have seen in past studies:

“Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets” (Luke 6:22-26).

I think it is clear that God values unjust suffering and allows it to play an important role in our spiritual development. Would you agree?

v. 16 – Suffering must be God's will, for He predicted it would be a part of Paul's life. God could have stopped it if He wanted to, but He didn't. He won't necessarily prevent it from happening in your life, either.

The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him *how much he must suffer for my name*" (Acts 9:11-16 emphasis added).

Jesus said that Saul “must” suffer for the name of the Lord. If that's true, then you and I must suffer as well if we are to embrace our purpose and meet a need in this life. And that has been the entire thrust of Peter's letter—suffering is an important part of who we are and who we are to become in Christ.

Day Seven

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

v. 17 – God’s first priority is his own family and it is there that He concentrates His watchful eye to discipline and train His children. It may seem that the wicked and unbelievers don’t have the trouble that God’s people do and, in some ways, this is a true statement! It is like a parent who can be around any number of unruly children, but the parent picks out his or her own to address and correct, not attending to any that belong to someone else. God is the same. His eye is on His children for good and for judgment. But of course, His goal is salvation for His own but wrath for those who aren’t His.

This issue was a concern for the psalmists, who wrote on one occasion:

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret — it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace. (Psalm 37:7-11).

Are you uptight that you seem to endure trials while the wicked go their merry way? Then you must take today’s verse and the passage from Psalm 37 to heart!

v. 18 – It is hard for the righteous at times. I have felt like I would not make it at various times in my walk with the Lord. It was just too hard, or so it seemed. And it did seem to me at times like God played favorites and I wasn’t one of them! I have recently considered life, marriage, raising children and careers and said, “I don’t know how people handle it all without the Lord!” I barely did all that with Him; I could not even imagine doing those things without Him. Yet with Him seems to make those things all the more difficult at times.

But the key word is “seems.” Peter goes on to sum it all up in the next verse.

v. 19 – We will suffer according to the will of our Creator. When we do, we should commit our way to Him and continue to do what He commanded us to do. This verse tells us life can be tough, but that doesn’t exempt us from serving the Lord and doing His will. So, are you ready to suffer? Are you ready to do God’s will no matter what the conditions? Not sure? I know how you feel! It takes faith to commit to that. But without faith, it is impossible to please Him, so I guess we have no choice.

It is all right to admit that the Way is hard sometimes and that we cast a glance at the wicked to see that they don’t seem to be suffering as we are. Just don’t get bogged down in that attitude and the consequent bitterness or discouragement it can foster. Acknowledge your feelings, pray, trust God and do good. If you do all that, you will make it through the toughest times.