

Living for God in difficult times
(Part 4)
1 Peter 4

Preface

This fourth volume in the series of studies of 1 Peter under the title 'Living For God In Difficult Times' begins with what is a continuation of an often recurring theme in Peter's letter, that of suffering. However, Peter does not stop there for he helpfully goes on to give us valuable teaching of how each Christian believer is to relate to God himself and also to each other. He then returns to the theme of suffering and takes us to Calvary and lessons we are to learn and apply to our lives from the way the Lord Jesus Christ behaved throughout his dreadful sufferings as our sin bearer.

I am indebted again to Howard Sayers who covered the material in this chapter in the *Sound Words* radio programme. His notes from those talks are the basis for this book and we thank God for Howard's valuable contribution to our understanding of this part of God's Word. Howard is pastor in the south of England with many years of service and experience of teaching the Bible to his congregation, and we are the beneficiaries of that through this book.

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Chapter 1 - Living For God In The Face Of Suffering, 1 Peter 4:1-6

Introduction

At the end of chapter 3 Peter has addressed the matter of suffering for Christ and the Gospel's sake, an issue highly applicable to his first readers and also for us today. Many Christian believers are facing persecution for the Lord's sake in various parts of the world. It is also true that many disciples of Jesus are not undergoing persecution at this present time, and you may be among them. We need to remember that the New Testament teaches that we still need to be prepared to face opposition because while we are in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33). This makes Peter's instructions relevant today whatever our outward circumstances may be, whether we are facing persecution or enjoying a period free of it.

Having stated the principles to apply (1 Peter 3:13-17), and laid out our example in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:18-2), Peter like all good pastors makes application of this to us (1 Peter 4:1-6).

1) Strive to cultivate the mind of Christ in suffering, 4:1-2

"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. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."

Peter writes *“arm yourselves with the same attitude...”* Because Jesus physically suffered for us, we must approach suffering like him. Let the knowledge that he suffered stimulate your discipleship in the matter of suffering. The best comment we can make on Peter’s words is found in Philippians 2:5-11,

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

This is something we therefore need to work out in our daily lives. It has implications for all of us. As Peter reminds us, we need to remember that we *“...have ceased from sin”*. Now that does not mean that we have arrived at sinless perfection. What it does mean is that we have been freed from the dominion and power of sin as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It will show itself because we shall *“not live for ourselves”*, nor shall we live for this world and only to enjoy its pleasures. We spent long enough doing that before we became Jesus’ followers. That is

where we were but now things have changed and this is why there is the suffering and the persecution. Then we will live with *“the will of God”* uppermost in our minds and our desires. We shall want to do what God wants us to do in our lives and our lives will be lived according to the teaching of the Bible, God’s Word to us. Paul puts it like this in Romans 12:1-2,

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

The humility of Christ (Philippians 2:5-11) is to be demonstrated in us as we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

2) Keep a right perspective towards those who trouble you, 1 Peter 4:3-5

“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. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”

We work this out first of all by leaving God to deal with the world that troubles us. After all Paul tell us that vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19.) The world will think that a strange thing to do. Peter tells us they think we are odd because we no longer behave as we once did. The Lord has rescued us from sin and so we no longer want to live in that sinful way any more. The world cannot understand it and therefore mocks us and speaks evil of us and even blasphemes our God but we need to remember that the world is accountable to Christ himself. It is accountable for how it treats us as believers. Zechariah, the Old Testament prophet, tells us in Zechariah 2:8 that we are the apple of God's eye whom he protects (see also Deuteronomy 32:10). When Jesus who suffered and rose again comes in glory it will be to judge the world including those who have so shamefully treated his people. Like Peter, Paul also made that very clear in his ministry, when he was preaching in Athens in Acts 17:31,

“For he, (that is God) has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed (that is Jesus). He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

Therefore we need to learn to commit ourselves into the Lord's hands and not to react to opposition in sinful ways, which we would have done before the Saviour rescued us from sin.

3) Keep the purpose of the Gospel clear in your mind, 1 Peter 4 v 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.”

It is very clear that the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is to be preached to every person. That is the great commission (see Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 24:46-49, Acts 1:8) and it includes those who are spiritually dead. When the gospel is preached it will either be an aroma of life or death to all those who hear it (2 Corinthians 2:16). It will convict men of sin and either brings them to judgement or to repentance. It is a very solemn fact that when we hear the gospel it will either bring us to judgement or repentance. You see, the gospel makes men accountable to God but when the Holy Spirit applies it to our hearts it brings eternal life. The gospel is a most wonderful thing and it is a most solemn thing. People who mock the gospel are bringing themselves under increased judgement from the Lord unless they repent (see John 12:48). We are constantly to remind ourselves of this. Persecution, however severe, will not last forever. Those who have opposed God and his people will be brought to justice by God himself, and we must leave that in his hands and also be encouraged that our present trials will be short, and are not worthy to be compared to the blessing that God has in store for us when Jesus comes again.

Conclusion

To summarise Peter's teaching on suffering for Christ's sake so far:

- Christians need not be afraid of suffering, 1 Peter 3:14
- Christians should be prepared to suffer, 1 Peter 3:15
- Suffering is nothing to be ashamed of, 1 Peter 3:16
- God has a purpose in suffering, 1 Peter 3:17
- Christ himself is the greatest example to us of suffering for righteousness' sake, 1 Peter 3:18-22
- We are more than conquerors over suffering in Christ, 1 Peter 3:18-20
- Cultivate the mind of Christ with regard to suffering, 1 Peter 4:2
- Keep a balanced perspective with regard to those who cause you to suffer, 1 Peter 4:3-6

Chapter 2 – Christian living, 1 Peter 4:7-11

Introduction

I wonder, do you ever find sometimes that you are talking with someone about a matter when suddenly a completely different subject comes into your mind? I mention this because this is what we find now with 1 Peter chapter 4. In the opening six verses Peter has been writing about suffering for the Lord's sake, and it is as if his mind is then directed to a different subject. We need to remember, of course, that Peter was being guided by the Holy Spirit as he wrote his letter, so this change of subject must be important. We also need to say that there is a link between these verses and what precedes and what follows them.

Peter's mind goes forward to the judgement day, when the believers he has been writing to, and we can add ourselves, will have to give an account to God for the way we have lived our lives as the followers of Christ. Christians therefore need to live in the light of that day and in preparation for it. Peter makes this emphasis because the end of all things is at hand or imminent. In other words it is just around the corner. In his second letter Peter writes about a thousand years being like one day in God's sight and one day like a thousand years. He is pointing out to us that our Lord's return will be sudden and unexpected. So Christians need to give careful and special attention to that day and make sure they are living in the right way when it comes. With that in mind he teaches us there are a number of matters we must give special attention to.

1) The believer's relationship with God, 1 Peter 4 v 7

"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."

As a general principle our prayer life is a good indicator of the state of our relationship with the Lord. In any healthy relationship there is regular and meaningful fellowship and communion. It is no different in our relationship with God. God has fellowship and communion with us through his Word as he speaks to us through the Bible. Then the believer has fellowship and communion with God through prayer as we speak to him. When our prayer life is deficient our relationship with the Lord is equally deficient.

Peter's reference to prayer in this context helps us to see that it is a serious matter. It is not something we should ever take lightly, nor something that we should neglect. If we are serious in our prayer life it indicates that we are serious about God and our relationship with him. Consider just two examples of this. First, what is known as the 'Lord's Prayer' (Matthew 6:9-13). It is a prayer that breathes seriousness, and Jesus taught it to be the pattern for our praying. Second, the Lord's own prayer which is recorded in John 17 and is often referred to as his High Priestly prayer. There he interceded for his disciples and all who would come to believe in him up to the end of time. It is a prayer which is seriously in earnest, and again is an example for our praying.

So we shall need to watch over ourselves and be careful and clear in what we are praying for so that the overriding feature of our prayers is the same as it was in the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6 and in the prayer that Jesus prayed in John 17, 'Your will be done, Lord'.

When the Lord comes again we must be right with God or we are forever lost. Cultivate that relationship by fellowship with God in serious and watchful prayer. Consider these quotations from two older Christian authors. First, William Penn has written, "*...they that know Him most will see most reason to approach Him with reverence and fear.*" Second, William Plumer declared, "*There can be no true piety without a devotional spirit. He whose soul does not thirst after God, and seek fellowship*

with Him, is an entire stranger to godliness." This is exactly why Peter is urging us to make sure our personal relationship with God is a healthy one.

2) The believer's relationship with other believers, 1 Peter 4 v 8-10

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

Our relationship with the Lord will show itself in our relationships with other Christians. There are many references in 1 John which declare this such as 2:9,

"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble." (See also 1 John 3:14-15.)

John is concerned that we live in the light and obviously he is taking us back to his gospel where Jesus is 'the light', John 1. If we are claiming to be Christians, living in the light of Jesus Christ we must love one another. Indeed, John goes on in his first letter in chapter 3:14 to say that we know that we have passed from death to life. In other words, we can be confident that we are right with God because we love the brothers and the sisters in Christ. This is something you often see worked out with somebody who

is not a believer and who despises Christians and mocks them and ridicules them. When they themselves come to know the Lord's forgiveness there is a tremendous change. Those they once despised they now value highly and go out of their way to help. They start putting God first, then others, then themselves and that leads us on to Peter's next point because Christians do not just love each other, they love each other very fervently, deeply (v8). This means the characteristics of love which we find in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 are to be seen in action. Some of the older versions of the Bible use the word 'charity' in place of love. Now both are quite acceptable words but 'charity' in some ways emphasises the practical nature of the love that Paul is concerned about here. So he speaks about the love that Christians have to one another being full of longsuffering. To use Peter's words, *"it covers over a multitude of sins."* Love does not excuse sin, neither does it pretend sin never happened, but instead bears with the other person's weaknesses and failings. That is what Christian practical love is all about.

Again, this is opposite to the way the population of our unbelieving world thinks. The world loves to point out people's faults and failings, and in newspapers and on the news we hear this again and again, whereas the believer wants to cover over a multitude of sins. He wants to put them from view. He does not pretend that they are not there. That is not how God deals with sin. He does not pretend it never happened. Instead, he forgives us and he can only forgive us because our Saviour paid the penalty

for our sin and our Saviour made restitution to God for our failings. So God has not pretended our sins have not happened. No, the penalty has been paid, restoration has been made, he can forgive us. And if the Lord has forgiven us then we need to be forgiving in turn. We must reflect that in our life and relationship with each other. And when God forgives the repentant sinner he does not bring that sin up again. He covers it so it is out of sight and he remembers it no more. The Christian believer is to do the same. Sin is not excused but we bear with each other's weaknesses and failings, and Biblical forgiveness is exercised.

In addition, cheerful hospitality is exercised between believers (v9). Now some may be tempted to think that this does not have much to do with our spiritual lives, but those who think that way are wrong. If we go back to Psalm 133 in the Old Testament we read these words,

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life for evermore."

When brothers live together in unity, when they love one another, when they care for one another, when they are hospitable to each other they are expressing all that fellowship in Christ is about. It is the beginning of our

heavenly fellowship on earth. Indeed, that lovely Psalm tells us that when brothers are living together like that in precious unity and fellowship, it is like the precious oil that was poured on Aaron's head and ran down his face and down his clothes. It is a wonderful demonstration of the Holy Spirit's anointing of the believer.

Throughout the Bible meals are used as a symbol of fellowship. There is that great feast to come, the marriage supper of the Lamb to which we look forward. At the Lord's table we fellowship with him and with each other. Here, Peter is encouraging us to have fellowship with each other around a meal. So hospitality, while providing a meal for somebody is very practical, is also a tremendously useful tool to encourage our fellowship with each other and our love for each other. It is refreshing to our fellow believers as well and that comes out in Psalm 133. It is like the dew of Hermon falling on Mount Zion and the picture there is of the refreshing dew falling on a dry and parched land and turning into a stream and then ultimately into a river that flows into the sea. In a similar way when we have fellowship with each other our hearts go out to one another and we are refreshed physically and spiritually. To encourage us further to do as Peter directs, whenever this fellowship is enjoyed, Psalm 133 tells us, *"there the Lord bestows his blessing"*. He commands his blessing to be given and the blessing is life for evermore. There are many Christians in trouble in this world and they desperately need this hospitality. It may be costly for many of us to show generous hospitality and in Peter's day

if one Christian entertained another, they could well face persecution for doing so, so we are taken back to the Lord. He suffered persecution for our sake that he might bring blessing and joy and life to us. Are we willing to suffer persecution for Christ's sake that we might be a blessing to our brothers and sisters in him? This is challenging but we need to remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Peter adds that generosity is to be shown in v10,

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

All that we receive comes from God whether materially or spiritually for all is a "grace of God". Equally we are stewards of all that we possess. We must therefore use all for the Lord since he has entrusted all to us for that purpose.

To help us further in this very practical aspect of Christian fellowship we need only to consider how precious such conduct is to the Lord Jesus himself. We read in Matthew 25:34-40

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you

clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

3) The communication of what we have received from God, 1 Peter 4 v 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.”

A logical question arises out of the principle of generosity as to how we communicate “the gift” to others. We communicate what we have in one of two ways, by word or by deed. We cannot do it by thought! We are to serve one another in our holy and spiritual things. This is done by speaking and is what Peter has in mind here. It refers to situations such as Malachi 3:16; Proverbs 25:25; Isaiah 50:4; Joshua 4:6. We are to speak to one another appropriately. When speaking about God, his Word and ways it should be with due reverence. We must rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with those that weep. We

are to bring the Word of God to each other, seeking each other’s spiritual improvement.

We may have abundance of material provisions. These are to be used for the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ. By love we are to serve one another (Galatians 5:13). Our service is to be appropriate to our resources. God has given various things which are all to be used for him and in the service of his people. By serving them we serve him.

Peter adds that we are to do everything for the glory of God and not for any self-praise at all. All belongs to Christ for he made all things (Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11; Hebrews 1:2). All exists for the glory of God: you and I, all that we are, all that we possess, material and spiritual. All is subject to his authority (Matthew 28:18). Then let us seek to use all and do all to that end so that when Christ comes again in his glory he will find us like men waiting for their Lord (Luke 12:35-48).

Chapter 3 - Responding To Reproach, 1 Peter 4:12-19

Introduction

Increasingly we are being made aware that we live in a world which is at times very unjust. Regularly we hear news of innocent people becoming the victims of unscrupulous individuals who inflict all kinds of pain and distress for which there is absolutely no justification. There are many families where there is much heartache and sorrow because husband or wife physically and mentally

abuse the other. Only a short while ago while visiting another country I spoke with a man whose son had been kidnapped a month before simply because his father was a Christian believer. Now sadly this is not something which should surprise us because Jesus himself told us that in this world we would have trouble, but we also have to say it is not easy to be on the receiving end of such hostility.

In his fourth chapter Peter has been writing about 'Christian Living' concerning the believers' relationships with God (v7) and each other (v8-10). Christian living involves communicating what we have received from God to those around us. Sadly not everyone will receive either us or our testimony and service gladly. There will be those who will react against us, sometimes quite violently. We speak of the things of God that are so real and precious to us (v11a) and yet people refuse them. We try to minister in a practical and loving Christian way (v11b) and they reject us. Peter tells us not to be surprised at this.

All this raises a very important issue for the followers of Christ. How should we respond when it happens to us? What should our reaction be when we are unjustly accused, or attacked, or persecuted because we love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ? Peter urges us to react in a Christian way, and he shows how we can do this.

1) Look on these rebuffs as tests of your faith, 1 Peter 4 v 12-13

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

Peter addresses his readers in a very tender way as he calls them his 'Dear friends'. The term literally means 'beloved'. He is not writing in some superior manner to these suffering believers. He does not rebuke them for their fears and struggles. Instead he is deeply concerned for them. They are his 'dear friends'. The importance of this is that he has to tell them some difficult news to receive, namely, that they should not think it strange or unusual that people's reactions to practical Christianity are often hostile. In fact, God is using even this unjust suffering for his glory. God is using these people and this opposition to test us.

Peter uses the picture of a crucible containing gold or silver in a fire. The refiner of that precious metal is proving, he is evaluating, he is assessing the value and the purity of that precious metal, and when these things happen to us our Christian life is being evaluated by God. He is seeing whether those experiences that we claim to have of him and his love and grace are genuine or otherwise. He is seeing whether we are yet ready to go to glory to be with him, while at the same time like the refiner he is removing those impurities he sees in our character to make us more like Christ. God does that when people reject and refuse

the gospel that we bring and the help that we offer to them. The way that we react to their rejection and refusal shows how deep and real our conviction is of the faith that we profess. God is testing the reality of our conviction of those things that we claim to believe. For example, we believe that he has saved us and saved us to serve him. So he tests us to see if we will go on serving him even when people refuse our help. So the refiners fire is in many ways like a school where further lessons are learnt as the Lord deals with us through them.

The effect this should have on us is to make us rejoice! We are reminded of our Lord's sufferings when he purchased our salvation. It brought him a crown of glory. Philippians 2:9 and the following verses make that clear and they also make it very clear that they will bring a crown of glory to us as well one day. In Hebrews 5:8 we read that our Saviour learnt through his sufferings, he learnt wonderful lessons. That is hard to understand but it is so wonderfully true. *"Although he was a son, (that is Jesus), he learned obedience from what he suffered."* It is amazing, that the Son of God had a lesson to learn. Not that he did not understand, but he learned the experience of suffering and that is what we have to do. You see, when we suffer, when people reject our preaching of the gospel, when they reject our offers of help and love, they are simply treating us in the same way as they treated our Master and that should encourage us. This is the way the Master went, ought not the servant to tread it as well (see John 15:20). When we look at things in that light, it does

not fill us with flippant happiness but there is a deep rejoicing because we are walking with the Lord.

We can illustrate this from the life of a lovely believer known to us who had been serving the Lord in a country where it is very dangerous to share the gospel. One day he was arrested by the police and he said, "I thought it was a tremendous privilege that I was counted worthy to suffer for the Lord's name." That is very challenging and is exactly what Peter is teaching us.

2) Be objective about what is happening to you, 1 Peter 4 v 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."

We are so easily and far too often governed by our subjective feelings and experiences. Now it is right to have feelings and experiences of God's grace and mercy, such things are good. We do not want a religion that has no feelings about it, but neither do we want a religion that consists only of feelings. There are many people like that today; they want a 'feel good' religion. The problem with that is that our feelings are so changeable. We need to remember the Christian faith is an objective faith which the renewed mind receives and believes. It is no use putting our faith and our hope in our feelings because we might be feeling good today and we might be feeling very down and despondent tomorrow. Our faith has to be anchored in the object truth; the doctrines of God's Word the Bible.

There are two things we must remember.

a. Our reproach is because of the name of Christ, v11a

We recognise that that is not easy when pain comes and when distress strikes us, but we need to focus not on the pain and the distress but on our Lord. We are to remind ourselves that the reproach we face is because of the name of Christ. It is not that people are simply ungrateful and scorning what we are saying and doing; it goes far deeper than that. They are not rejecting us, they are rejecting our Lord because we are speaking in his name. We are serving them as unto the Lord. That is the real problem.

We can think of Moses when the people argued with him and would not submit to his authority. In effect God told Moses not to worry because it was not him they were rejecting but God himself. Although none of us is a Moses, we who preach the gospel or who share it with our friends through our personal testimony and witnessing or live it out in our lives, the same principle applies. It is our Lord they are rejecting. Therefore, the effect should be not to stop us but to move us even more to preach the gospel and share the love of God with others because we want these people to be saved.

b. The Holy Spirit is resting on us, v11b

The second objective truth about suffering and reproach is that the Holy Spirit is resting on us. We are living as we do because of God's work of grace within us. We could not

live like it otherwise, neither would we live like it were it not for the Holy Spirit's enabling and grace. We are living as we do, not to earn any merit, nor to be better than anyone else. It is all prompted by our love for the Lord. Why do we love him - because he first loved us. Why do we love him - because his Holy Spirit is resting on us and dwelling within us and when we live the Christian life properly, what is actually shining through that life is the work of God in our hearts and men hate God's work in us!

This of course is very sad, because when we become believers in the Lord Jesus the Holy Spirit changes us inside and we only want to please him and to help others, yet still they react strongly against us at times. We may well ask the question, 'Why do they act in that way?' One of the easiest ways to answer that question is simply to quote an old hymn written by Isaac Watts. First of all read his words and then we will explain them because Watts uses picture language.

"Lions and beasts of savage name put on the nature of the Lamb.

While the vile world esteems it strange, they gaze and admire and hate the change.

May but this grace my soul renew, let sinners gaze and hate me too;

Word that saves me does engage a sure defence from all their rage."

When Watts wrote, *“Lions and beasts of savage name...”* he was referring to us before we became the Lord’s disciples. We did not want to submit to the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God. In our sinfulness we were like wild animals as we rebelled against the Lord. But then by God’s grace we were changed and *“...put on the nature of the Lamb”*. The reaction of the unbelieving world to this follows. *“While the vile world esteems it strange, they gaze and admire and hate the change.”* Men cannot help but admire the Christian but they hate the change that has taken place in their life, no doubt because it exposes their own sinfulness. And so Isaac Watts goes on to say this, *“May but this grace my soul renew, let sinners gaze and hate me too; the Word that saves me does engage a sure defence from all their rage.”*

Men are blaspheming God while we are glorifying him.

3. Be sure you are glorifying God, 1 Peter 4 v 15-16

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

Peter wants us to be sure that if we are suffering reproach, it is for the right reasons. The list of things in v15 bring reproach that is deserved. If we are murderers or thieves, criminals of any sort, any criticism and trouble that comes as a result is quite justified. If we get involved in those things, we deserve all we get and we should be ashamed of

ourselves as well as others being ashamed of us. If the Christian suffers he must suffer for Christ’s sake alone then there is nothing to be ashamed of. You praise God that you are a Christian. That puts things in the right perspective and that is exactly what the Apostle Paul did in 2 Corinthians 12:10 writing of his own experience,

“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Paul could rejoice in these sufferings, not in pride, but because they were evidences that he was the Lord’s.

4. Be warned, 1 Peter 4 v 17-18

Peter wants us to be warned in these verses.

“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? And, ‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’”

The testing that believers go through now foreshadows the testing of the day of judgement. God is testing us now as part of his family. He is purifying us as part of his family. However, the question is asked, ‘What about those who do not pass the test now?’ That is, those who reject the gospel, those who reject its way of life, where will they stand when God appears? The ungodly, those who have rejected the

Saviour will come under dreadful judgement from almighty God. Their end will be terrible as the wrath of God falls upon them, never to be relieved.

5. Trust God in it all, 1 Peter 4 v 19

“So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”

Do not be afraid but commit all into the hands of God. Note how Peter begins v19, *“So then,”* that is, because of these things do not be afraid, but commit everything into the hands of God. He is the faithful creator, he made us, he has created that new life within us. Let us show that commitment to him by living the Christian life faithfully, by continuing to do good even when the good we do is rejected by men. Remember God is faithful and our perseverance proves to him and demonstrates to this world that we really do trust him and are his faithful servants.

6. The need for God’s help

Peter has certainly given us some valuable help and encouragement to respond to suffering in the right way. It is very clear though, that in order to be able to do this the believer in Christ will of necessity need to be given to much prayer for the Lord’s strength and grace. It is also true that the Lord never asks us to do anything that he is unable to help us with, so praying to him, and doing so diligently, consistently and fervently is the means he has given whereby we receive his support. To help us in this

we have many promises in Scripture that God will answer our prayers, and we end this chapter with one of these found in James 4:16, *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”* May the Lord help us all to pray like that.

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