

1 Peter 4

A Bible Study on 1 Peter 4

Study Bible Studies Christ Church, Noida

1 Peter 4:1-19

Matthew 5:16

Matthew 5:11

Hebrews 12:7

Introduction

From the beginning of this chapter to its last verse, Peter continues to speak of the general principles of God's government. He exhorts the Christian to act on these principles, which are based on the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, and assures us that such a way of living will cause us to avoid the walk condemned by the standards of God. Christ, glorified — as we saw at the close of the previous chapter — is ready to judge; and those who oppose Christians, and who are led by their own passions without caring for the coming judgement, will have to give account to that Judge whom they refused to own as their Saviour.

This chapter has three main sections. In verses 1 to 6, Peter speaks of purity and holiness through Christ's sufferings. He then moves on to the approaching end of the age as a reason for soberness, watchfulness, and prayer, in verses 7 to 11. And from verse 12 to the end of the chapter, believers are encouraged to rejoice and glory in reproaches and sufferings for Christ's sake, and to commit themselves to the care of a faithful God.

Suffering Helps Us to Be Like Christ (verses 1 and 2)

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God" (1 Peter 4:1-2).

Suffering helps us to be like Christ, yet people will do almost anything to avoid it. Followers of Christ should be willing, and prepared, to do God's will and endure suffering for His sake. We overcome sin when we focus on Christ and on what His will is for us. Our willingness to endure pain and danger, and how we carry ourselves through trials for the sake of our faith, will reveal our true values. Anyone who suffers for doing good, and who faithfully obeys the standards Jesus has set, in spite of suffering, has made a clean break with sin.

Therefore, in the light of the triumphant suffering and death of Christ, Peter urges his readers that they too should be willing to suffer in the flesh, knowing that it may produce the greatest triumph. If the

Christian is armed with the goal of being delivered from sin, and that goal is achieved even through his own death, then the threat and experience of death become, in a sense, precious (compare Romans 7:5, 18; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 15:42, 49). Moreover, the greatest weapon the enemy holds against the Christian — the threat of death — becomes utterly ineffective.

Believers May Be Scorned (verses 3 and 4)

"For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:3-4).

Those whose lives change radically at conversion may find themselves treated with contempt by their old friends — not only because they refuse to take part in certain activities, but because their whole direction in life has changed, and their new priorities silently reproach their former companions' sinful ways. Those old friends are surprised, offended, and resentful at the Christian's new lack of interest in ungodly pleasures. Peter's picture here is of a great crowd running headlong together in a wild, unrestrained race — a rush into excess. Mature Christians ought, therefore, to help new believers withstand such pressure and opposition, surrounding them with new friendship and encouraging them towards habits and activities that are not merely enjoyable, but genuinely good for their spiritual growth.

The Basis of Salvation Is Our Belief in Jesus (verses 5 and 6)

"Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (1 Peter 4:5-6).

The basis of our salvation is our belief in Jesus (compare Acts 16:31), but the basis of judgement is how we have lived. All people will be judged: believers for the reward they will receive, unbelievers for punishment. Those who persecute Christians are marked for a reckoning when they stand before Christ; all will give account to Him, and so we must be ready. This ought to give us a fresh perspective on our own activities today. The question before us is: are we prepared to give our own account to Jesus?

Many in the early Church had concerns about life after death. At Thessalonica, Christians worried that loved ones who had died before Christ's return might never see Him (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Peter reminds them that the dead — both the faithful and their oppressors —

will be judged, and that this judgement will be perfectly fair, since even the dead heard the gospel during their earthly lives. The good news was first proclaimed when Jesus Christ preached upon the earth, but it has been at work since before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and it touches all people, the dead as well as the living.

The preaching of the gospel offers not only a rich life, an escape from sin, and a clear conscience, but also an escape from final judgement. Peter had in mind believers who had heard and accepted the gospel of Christ while they were still alive, but who had since died — some of them, perhaps, martyred for their faith. Though dead in body, they were victoriously alive in spirit (compare Hebrews 12:23). Their judgement had already been settled while they lived in this world, "in the flesh," and so they will live for ever in Christ's presence.

We Should Live in Anticipation of the Second Coming (verses 7 to 9)

"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Peter 4:7-9).

We should live expectantly, because Christ is coming for final judgement. Getting ready to meet Him means continually growing in love for God and for others (compare our Lord's own summary of the law, Matthew 22:37-40). It is important to pray regularly, and equally important to reach out to those in need. Our possessions and our power will mean nothing in Christ's kingdom, but we shall spend eternity with other people; let us, therefore, invest our time and our talents where they will make an eternal difference.

In verse 9, Peter writes, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Christian hospitality differs from social entertaining. Entertaining focuses on the host — the home must be spotless, the food must be plentiful and well prepared, the host must appear relaxed, good-natured, and in good humour. Christian hospitality, by contrast, focuses on the guest: their need, whether for a place to stay, nourishing food, a listening ear, or simple acceptance, is the primary concern. Hospitality can happen in a modest home; it can happen around a table where all that is served is dal and roti; it can even happen while host and guest are working side by side. Let us not hesitate to offer hospitality merely because we are too busy, too tired, or not wealthy enough to entertain.

Use Our Abilities and Skills to Serve Others (verses 10 and 11)

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to

another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Our abilities should be faithfully used in serving others, not reserved for our own exclusive enjoyment. Some, aware of their gifts, believe they have the right to use them purely as they please; others feel they have no special talent at all. Peter addresses both. Everyone has been given some gift; we need to find ours and use it. Peter mentions speaking and serving; Paul lists further such gifts in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, and Ephesians 4:11. As we seek to discover our own gifts, and where we see a need in the Church, let us seek to meet it — we may find gifts in areas we should never have guessed.

God is praised when we use our abilities as He directs, to help others; they will then see Jesus in us, and praise the Father for the help they have received. Peter may well have had in mind Jesus' own words: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Blessed Are You When People Insult You (verses 14 to 16)

"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:14-16).

Peter again brings to mind the words of Jesus: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:11). Christ will send His Spirit to strengthen those persecuted for their faith. Peter offers no illusions: God's plan for our lives may include pain and hardship, and when trouble comes, we should not be surprised.

This does not mean that all suffering is the result of good Christian conduct. Peter takes care to distinguish between suffering for being a believer and suffering for doing wrong. A Christian may believe he is being singled out for his faith when it is plain to everyone else that his own unworthy conduct is the true cause of his troubles; it may take careful thought, or the counsel of others, to discover the real cause of our suffering. We may be assured, however, that whenever we suffer because of our loyalty to Christ, He will be with us all the way.

It is no shame to suffer as a Christian. When Peter and John were

persecuted for preaching the good news, they rejoiced, because such persecution was itself a mark of God's approval upon their work (Acts 5:41). Yet we should neither go looking for suffering, nor labour to avoid it at all costs; rather, we should keep on doing what is right, regardless of what it might cost us.

God's Refining Discipline (verses 17 and 18)

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:17-18).

Here Peter is not speaking of the final judgement, but of God's refining discipline. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:7). It may seem that God allows believers to sin and then to suffer the consequences; He does this, we may suppose, for several reasons — to show us our own capacity for sin; to turn us from sin and towards greater dependence on Him; to prepare us to meet still stronger temptation in future; and to help us remain faithful and continue trusting Him. If believers receive earthly discipline, or judgement, from God, how much more will unbelievers receive it? The question stands: if it is hard even for the righteous to be saved, what chance have those who reject Christ altogether?

Commit Fully to Jesus (verse 19)

"Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19).

Everywhere the Bible counsels us to trust God, in good times and in bad, under sunny skies and under thunderclouds, whether our pockets are full or empty. Let us see how trust works for the Christian. Trust overcomes fear: genuine trust in God should lead us to say, "Whatever mess I find myself in, my heavenly Father will lead me." Trust overcomes despair: however overwhelming the situation, or however low it makes us feel, God can draw us back to the light. And trust overcomes hatred: when careless or cruel people wound us, sometimes irreparably, we may nurse that hatred for ever, or we may trust God — but we cannot do both. God is there to steady us through even the worst of circumstances, always with a promise, always with hope. Let us commit our lives to Jesus for safekeeping, and rely on Him when we face our darkest circumstances.

A Brief Summary

1. Suffering helps us to be like Christ.

2. When we turn over a new leaf, we may find ourselves scorned by those who continue in sin.
3. Since most seek after unworthy lives, mature Christians must support new believers in resisting such temptation.
4. The only basis of our salvation is our belief in Jesus.
5. Are we prepared to give account of ourselves to Jesus?
6. We are to live in great expectation of Christ's second coming.
7. Hospitality to others need not mean an outpouring of riches; it may be shown even in the humblest circumstances.
8. We should use our abilities and skills to serve others.
9. God's discipline, though it may feel harsh, is meant to refine us.
10. In all circumstances, we should remain committed to Jesus Christ.

Let Us Summarise

The fourth chapter of 1 Peter brings out two basic doctrines. Peter emphasises the fact that the present order of things will soon come to an end, and that it is now time for us to turn a leaf in our lives; he then expounds, in no uncertain terms, the doctrine of suffering. Let me try to draw the chapter together under these two heads.

First, we have here a solemn position, and an inference drawn from it. The position is that the end of all things is at hand — the destruction, or completion, of all things foretold by our Saviour draws near. Critics may wish to argue against this position, but can anyone say, with real conviction, when that end will come, or that it will not come at all? Besides, we have no certainty even of our own lives on this earth; this leaves us little, or perhaps no, predictable time in which to mend our ways and turn to Christ. We often hear people say, "Today let me be as I am, but tomorrow — or next week, or next month, or when such-and-such is done — I will mend my ways." The question that stares us in the face is simply this: do we have a tomorrow? The urgency of putting matters right with Christ ought, therefore, to be given the very highest priority by every believer. Today, at this very moment, let us turn to Him. Let us resolve to live a Christ-like life, whatever the length of our own existence here, and to become truly His.

Second, the work of a Christian is twofold: doing the will of God, and suffering for His glory. This chapter directs us in both. Believers are exhorted to occupy themselves in putting sin to death, in living unto Jesus, in sobriety, prayer, charity, hospitality, and the fullest use of their talents. This line of teaching must have arisen from Peter's own conviction that believers had grown careless in their sin, with the end of all things fast approaching. His direction to suffering believers is that they should not be taken by surprise when suffering for the sake of their faith and their Lord overtakes them, but should rather rejoice in it; at

the same time, he cautions them against suffering for their own wrongdoing. He then offers a single remedy to preserve believers against both physical and spiritual ruin: that Christians should commit themselves unconditionally to Christ, and walk with Him for the remainder of their earthly lives.

Finally, such exhortations are by no means unique to Peter's teaching; we find them throughout every part of the Bible. The reason they are stated again and again is simply that Christ knows us only too well. He is aware that we know His will for us, for we have learned it from the Scriptures, and He also knows that we live constantly exposed to a world system energised by Satan and his demons. We commit ourselves to Jesus again and again, yet very quickly slip and fall. Constant reminders are, therefore, the best help any of us can have.

Let us pray: Merciful Master, Jesus Christ, we commit each one of us present here, our families, our extended families, our friends, and our colleagues into Your care. Though we have fallen short of Your grace, through our sinful nature, through Your abundant compassion accept each one of us as Your own. Grant us the wisdom, courage, and determination to turn away from sin, to live our lives worthy of the blood You shed for us, and to endure suffering gladly for Your glory. Amen.