
Suffering People in our Circle

1 Peter 3:8-4:19

1 Peter is a book about God's servants who are suffering in the midst of submission.

Peter focused this subject in three major areas of life:

In the nation, Christians citizens must submit to political leaders, even bad ones which may mean suffering.

At the job, Christian employees must submit to bosses (masters), even harsh ones which may mean suffering.

In the home, Christian wives must submit to husbands, even disobedient ones which may mean suffering.

We do so because Jesus left us an example of such servanthood, such submission, such suffering.

How then can we do well, how then can we help suffering people in our circle.

Our Practice in Relationships

(v.8-12)

To wrap this discussion up, Peter gives us commands which will cultivate and build our relationships and provide a context in which we can submit within our roles and support those whose submission is resulting in suffering.

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For

“Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

The Conduct Expected

(v.8-9a)

How many churches and homes would be very different if we just did these things. Reflect on what changes we all need to make in these areas. These core heart attitudes have a powerful effect on our leadership and on our submission. These attitudes cluster around being focused on others first. They are a reversal of self-focus and self-serving. All true, godly submission, whether in home, work or ministry, will be shaped and motivated by affirming these truths and valuing them.

Harmony	Our submission aims to promote and produce harmony. We are working toward one mindedness that makes submission a joy.
Sympathy	We submit with a heart identifying with the struggles and sufferings of those who are responsible for us. We try to know others well enough to care for their troubles.
Love	We submit with brotherly love. This is a single adjective used to describe our relationship with others. Always we are to have

hearts trusting and treasuring people as an expression of familial love.

Kind hearted

We submit with a tender heart. Callused, hard hearts will be unwilling to submit when it is hard to. We must have broken hearts before God so that we will have kind hearts toward those who lead us.

Humility

We submit with a lowly mindedness that looks like courtesy. The word here is an adjective that describes a way of thinking of oneself that causes us to be courteous.

Is this the way you think? Do you have these attitudes as the soil in which your submission will grow well?

When faced with difficulty with submitting to leadership, we must be careful in our responses. Peter warns us about how we are to respond when we are opposed or attacked. As brothers and sisters, when we are in conflict, particularly in the context submission, then this is how we must respond as following the example of Christ.

DO NOT REPAY IN KIND. When you are sinned against, do not respond by doing sin against them. Other people's sins do not excuse your responses. So, we are not allowed to respond sinfully *no matter what the provocation*.

DO NOT RETURN INSULTS. God's people have always had a bent to place verbal interaction in a different category. We tend to think that if a person attacks us verbally, we are allowed to attack them. If they revile us, we can revile in return. You insult me; I'm going to let you have it. Godly submission must put away all forms of ungodly talk about those who are leading us. This is true at home, at work and in ministry.

Rather, we are to respond positively. WE BLESS. This is a verb. In what we do and what we say, we aim for the good of the other. Even in the midst of their sinning against us, we point them through our actions and our words to the good God has promised and the glory He has purposed.

Why do we cultivate these attitudes and actions? So that we may inherit a blessing. The word here refers to a bequest upon death, an inheritance. So we will live together in a godly, humble way, with a heart for others and careful, measured response to opposition with the aim to be qualified to inherit the blessing. And it may well require a Christ-like sacrifice of self in submission to the will of God.

The Cause Explained

(v.9b-12)

This is what you were called to which will end in eternal blessing. He grounds his instruction in Psalm 34:12-16. The whole Psalm gives us the motivation for submission. We are free to submit when we understand the fear of God. We submit under all those God has put over us for His eye is on us. We submit as before the face of Go.

Our Purity in Suffering

(v.13-17)

Verses 8-12 set us up for suffering. We must respond with grace to evil and insults. How do we tend to respond when we are wronged, hurt or insulted? Sometimes, we think of the suffering here in terms of big issues which we may never face. What about doing good *in every facet* of lives and the suffering that might come from that as well.

Have you been misunderstood and suffered when you confronted someone about sin? Have you been attacked or slandered or misrepresented?

Have you experienced hardship when you refused to participate or condone sin? Been made fun of? Cut off in a job? Refused advancement or promotion?

How do we tend to respond? Do we strike back? Do wallow in self-pity? Do we rest in Christ with confidence and patience?

The Bible shapes our godly living even as suffering saints.

How are we to behave when we are suffering?

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Do Not Fear

(v.13-15)

This is a quote from Isaiah 8:12. To understand why Peter is using this verse now, we need to understand some of the context.

Isaiah was called to minister to a rebellious people who would not respond. The people responded by disobeying Isaiah (and Ezekiel & Jeremiah) in fighting against Assyria. Then Isaiah is exhorted not to respond to these circumstances like the Israelites around him (v.12). If he is not to fear as the Israelites do, then he must fear the Lord Almighty (v.13-14). He must understand the ultimate end of those who disobey (v.15).

So Isaiah is obeying God in what he is to do. Suffering is coming on the nation and on him personally. He must not fear, but rather must fear God. Here is a clear call to not be driven by the phobias and fears of the culture around us even in the potential for suffering.

Be Prepared to Explain

(v.15)

Note how this is a contrast. Rather than fearing what those around us fear, we must constantly think and make choices under the supremacy and Lordship of Jesus. Setting apart Jesus as Lord is the equivalent of "regarding the Lord Almighty as holy and dreadful and a sanctuary." (Isaiah 8:13f). There is an inward act of the heart that elevates Jesus as being supreme in all my attitudes and actions. The verb is an aorist imperative pointing to a commitment decision or covenant.

Having made this decisive commitment, we are always prepared to give a reasoned out answer (apologia) for our hope. Can you explain why your life, even in the midst of

painful suffering, is embracing Christ in His promises? I suppose for many, the question is: do we still have hope? Are we actually believing God's promises for future grace and glory?

Sometimes, when we explain our hope, we are tempted in two areas.

We are tempted to harshness and arrogance. In our desire to be strong, we sound strident. We do not reflect the gentleness of our Lord as He responded to those who abused and assailed Him.

We are tempted to timidity and a lack of clear conviction. Our courage withers in the heat of opposition. In our desire to avoid conflict we become hesitant. We do not reflect the courageous faith of Lord as He responded to those attacked and assaulted Him.

The Lord is supreme in our lives so we will treat people with gentleness and respect (better word than reverence). This is generally how Jesus treated people who genuinely inquired as to why He was doing what He did.

Keep Your Conscience Clear

(v.16)

Finally, we must always be keeping or holding a clear conscience. Our actions and words should represent to others the meekness and humbleness of Christ. When we violate this, then we seek to correct it. We do not allow lapses and failures in either what we say (our reasoned explanation) and how we say it (our gentleness) to go on unchecked or uncorrected.

Understand Your Purpose

(v.16-17)

When we give a Biblical response in a godly way we may put to shame those who maliciously misrepresent how we live. This is actually given as a motivation for the difficult commitment required to do this.

Our Pattern for Suffering

(v.18-22)

The next paragraph is both clear in its main point and very difficult at the detail level. This may well be one of the top ten most debated texts in the New Testament. Our danger is that becoming immersed in the details will take us away from the flow of Peter's argument. Let us approach this text with careful diligence and with real humility. Peter's point here is how the totality of Christ's work is a massive argument for victorious suffering.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Death of Christ

(v.18)

This summary statement of the gospel ought to be memorized by everyone. Each phrase is a treasure chest of truth concerning the death of Christ and how it impacts us as suffering saints.

Sin bearing – His death was to deal with the problem of all the transgressions and sins we have committed.

Sufficient – It is a final, once for all time, sufficient work. There can be no repetition nor addition to it.

Substitutionary – Jesus took the place of the elect on the cross. He is our substitute. There is a great exchange (Luther) that took place. Our sin on Him; His righteousness to us.

Specific – It is designed to actually bring us to God. So the wrath of God against the elect is actually satisfied. The elect are actually reconciled. They are actually brought to Christ. There is no sense here of mere potentiality.

Spiritual – Though Jesus died in His physical body, He was brought to life in or by the Spirit. Paul makes a similar point in Romans 1:1-4.

Proclamation by Christ

(v.19-20)

What is being highlighted here is the proclamation (better word than preaching-preaching makes it sound as though there is an opportunity for repentance being given) Jesus made while experiencing the suffering of death and the victory of resurrection. If Jesus announces that the cross and resurrection are victories not defeats, then we can announce to the world around us that suffering is not a defeat, it is the path to victory. If we suffer outwardly, we are being sustained inwardly as a parallel to Jesus' suffering death in the body and resurrection by the Spirit.

In my opinion, this text tells us that Jesus, either by the Holy Spirit or in the realm of the spirit, made a proclamation to the imprisoned spirits who disobeyed (1 Peter 2:8; 3:1; 4:17) God during the days of Noah.

The spirits are probably fallen angels, not humans. Peter and most of the New Testament, refers to dead humans as *souls*.

They are imprisoned during that era even up to now. Compare this reference with 2 Peter 2:4-5 where Peter makes another allusion to the sinning and imprisoning of fallen angels.

It seems that Peter is drawing his information from Genesis 6:1-4. The sons of God here could possibly be angels who co-habited with women producing the crossbred Nephilim. This led to such massive and pervasive wickedness that God destroyed the world that then was and imprisoned those fallen angels so perverted. (Note: the Nephilim occur once again in Numbers 13:32-33).

Peter says here that the flood is a type of baptism. He clarifies right away that it is not the water that concerns him, but the ark. The flood itself did not save Noah and his family, just as baptism cannot either. The ark carried them over and above and upon the outpoured judgment of God. The ark is a pledge or outward seal that Noah had a clean conscience before God. So is baptism. It cannot remove the dirt of sin, but it gives us a

clear conscience before God. A person coming to believe in Christ will be baptized as an outward profession of an inward reality. This gives them a clear conscience towards God.

Resurrection of Christ

(v.21)

The resurrection of Jesus is how we are saved. It is God's pledge and announcement that He was totally satisfied with Jesus and that Jesus was the Messiah, the sin-bearing savior.

Ascension of Christ

(v.22)

Finally, Jesus is not only our savior, but also our sovereign. He died, was raised and is now ascended in heaven. There on the throne, angels, authorities and powers bow to Him in submission. He makes this point for two reasons:

Having given the heart of the gospel, this is what we ought to do: bow to Him as our sovereign. This is what we pray comes from our reasoned explanation of our hope in the midst of suffering.

It also shows that all of the cosmos and all of the heavenly beings, those who are imprisoned as a result of their sin and disobedience and those who are unfallen, bow to Christ.

In the difficulty of this text, keep Christ supreme and central.

Our Purpose for Suffering

(4:1-6)

Therefore, in the light of the pattern of victorious suffering Jesus did, prepare yourself for spiritual battle against sin (arm yourself) with God's purpose for suffering.

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

Power of Suffering

(v.1-2)

In the example of Jesus who suffered in flesh as we do. This is a suffering that is related to living holy lives that continually resist sin. There is no suffering like standing long and pure against powerful temptations.

In a mentality that says that my sufferings are designed to deliver me from sin and to set me free to live all my days to please God. I will not be driven by my lusts, but by God's will. I will desire God so much that I will not be shaped by sinful desires. Suffering has the power to wean us away from sin and to set our minds on Christ. There is a wonderfully focusing power in suffering. But if it is not going to embitter us, we must arm ourselves with the purpose of Jesus.

Past of Sin

(v.3-4)

There is a sort of tongue in cheek statement here. "You had fully enough time to pursue all the sinful pleasure you wanted. You lived a lifestyle marked by all these sins."

Now, is your life different now? Are the people you used to run with surprised by the fact that you don't run with them? Have they seen a difference in your life? Some of you have even experienced the scorn and derision of your former friends and possibly, your family.

Prospect for Sinners

(v.5-6)

There is a reckoning day for all. Sinners, those alive and those already dead will stand before the God of all the universe and account for whether or not they have glorified Him in every thought, motivation and deed.

This is why we preach the gospel to the living. Those who are dead have heard it but it is too late. The gospel will bring to life (regenerate) those who are alive according to God's will. The point here is not that the gospel is preached to those who are in the state of being dead. The argument is simply this: God gives spiritual life to those who are alive physically. So we must preach the gospel to them now, because it is only now that they can come to Christ and have their sins judged and dealt with by the cross.

Our Practice in Suffering

(v.7-11)

The suffering we are experiencing is continually placed in an eschatological perspective. That is, all Christians are to see themselves as living in the last days and therefore suffering is expected. But escapism and apathy and inaction are not. God's grace will enable us to carry on even in the escalating persecution that will come as the end of the age comes upon us.

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Our Actions

(v.7-11)

What are Christians to focus on in their life as a church? Many texts underline different aspects of our life together to emphasize.

Serious in Prayer

(v.7)

Prayer must be the visible engine of all that we do. We must have a clear mind and a serious attitude when it comes to prayer. It must be an important part of how we actually do ministry in the midst of suffering. All the evidence from church history points to the fact that this is so. What were you thinking about while we were praying earlier?

Fervent in Love

(v.8)

Our love for one another must be *fervent*—eager, enthusiastic, earnest—because it covers sin. So what he is saying here is to be a motivation to love one another. Because of what love does in relation to sins, then we must be sure to love one another deeply.

So what does it mean that "love covers over a multitude of sins?" Take a look at how this word is used in the New Testament: Matthew 10:26; Luke 8:16; 2Corinthians 4:1-3; James 5:20. From this, there is no squirming out from under the word *cover*. It means what it says. Love, in some way, covers, conceals, shades, hides, or veils a great number of sins.

Maybe we just need to love one another more deeply and see what happens!

Uncomplaining in Hospitality

(v.9)

There is a sense in which this verse should strike us as being odd. It really is an oxymoron. How do you have complaining hospitality? Well, you have it when people go through the outward motions of fellowship without the inward affection of love and concern. Then we have expressions that come from peer pressure or following rules, not those that come from authentic love.

What is hospitality? Hospitality in the Bible is a willingness to invest my resources in your life, particularly, my home, food and clothing. All Christians should have an open door to one another.

What kind of complaining is in view here? Here is a complaining that comes when we are grasping at the things we feel compelled to give or share or invest.

I am beginning to see an unfolding—a progression here...

Faithful in Ministry

(v.10-11a)

Suffering and end time persecution requires faithfulness in ministry. Loved ones, if we do not build a habit of faithful ministry now, we will never have it when the times are difficult.

Our philosophy of ministry (v.10) must operate on these four principles.

Gift based - Each believer has been given an ability by the Holy Spirit for ministry in the church. Every one in the church should be ministering in the areas of their gifts. Every one.

Serving oriented - Your ability is to be totally at God's and the church's disposal. This is what serving means.

Stewardship required - You must be careful to use your ability. You must stir it up, train it, exercise it and develop it.

Grace enabled - The use of your ability in serving the church will show that God's strengthening grace is making it possible. Ministry must never become merely a matter of technique.

Our practice of ministry (v.11a) is implemented in these two realms. The key here is on how you go about the ministry God has given you. Peter gives us two broad categories for all ministry in the church.

Speaking gifts - Anyone using a speaking gift is to communicate the Word of God in an authoritative, declarative way. You speak truth because God has given us the truth.

Serving Gifts - Anyone exercising a serving gift is to serve with the strength God gives. You work hard because God is working in you.

If you are not sure what ability you might have, here is the place to start. Am I more motivated and strengthened by God's Spirit to speak or to serve? Then present yourself for what God is enabling you.

Our Aim

(v.11b)

All that we do in our exercise of our gifts is for Jesus' praise. He must be the one who is honored and recognized. I fear for us when we do so much in self-promotion in ministry. Let us always speak and serve so that God is praised through Christ.

Peter broadens his purpose in the last part of this verse. The aim of all of our life and existence is to give God glory and recognize God's power. We can say our life has a *doxological* purpose or aim.

Our Perspective in Suffering

(v.12-19)

We must not think that a life that glorifies God excludes suffering. The closing paragraphs of this section are designed to give us a Biblical perspective on suffering.

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evil-doer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Sharing in Christ's Sufferings

(v.12-13)

Suffering should not surprise us as though it were something odd for Christians. Suffering should fuel joy. The overwhelming sense of inner joy comes when we identify our sufferings with Jesus'. Our present joy while suffering increases our capacity for future joy when glorified.

Glorifying God in Sufferings

(v.14-16)

What is at stake in these sufferings is the name of Jesus. The suffering that glorifies God comes when we declare and bear the Name of Christ. It is a blessed thing when God's people suffer because they are committed to the reputation and fame of Jesus.

Trusting God during Sufferings

(v.17-19)

Do we trust God when we suffer for what we believe? The judgment that God brings begins with the church so that she will be pure. If we think that is difficult, what will judgment on the lost be like?

Trust and obey is the heartbeat of suffering saints.

Reflect and Respond

We respond to people when we are hurting in harmony, sympathy, compassion, not retaliating because God sees us and hears us.

To wisely and sweetly respond in suffering we must set apart Christ as Lord, acknowledge Him as our master so that we have thought out reasons from the Scripture for why we have a future hope. Then, we can respond with gentleness and respect in a clear conscience.

In what way does baptism save us? In no way. The water of Noah's flood was the agent of destruction. It was the ark that saved. So, it is not baptism that saves us, it is Jesus.

How can love cover a multitude of sins? By acting as a reconciler to help people deal with their sins.

A Biblical philosophy of ministry according to Peter is gift based, serving oriented, stewardship required, grace enabled functioning as speaking gifts and serving gifts.

All of life and ministry is to have as its aim to praise and glorify God. What will that look like in your life at home, at work and here at church?

What perspective must we have in suffering? We must see ourselves as sharing in Christ's sufferings, serving to glorify God while resting and trusting in God.