

2. E_____ the test. (4:12)

We've been warned by the Lord Jesus and His apostles many times in the NT. We who follow Him should a_____. We should expect to suffer for His sake. 1 John 3:13 tells us we shouldn't wonder when the world hates us.

And we know why. There's been an "exchanging of belongings." There's been a switching of sides. We're still in the world, but we're now out of step with the world. We (should) think, value, talk, and live in a way that is different from and opposed to the way that not-yet Christian people think, value, talk, and live.

The message is clear. Don't see suffering as a s_____ in your Christian life. Don't be startled by suffering.

Don't think that suffering doesn't belong in your life as a follower of Christ.

If we never get b_____, we should be c_____. If we never feel the pain of exclusion, insults, slander, or some other kind of persecution, then we should be surprised and wonder why.

3. R_____ to the extent that you share in Christ's sufferings. (4:13)

Rejoice now that you that you may rejoice later. Great suffering, great joy, and great glory are all a part of Jesus' story. And those three things, in some measure, are also a part of our story if we trust in Him. There is so much suffering now, but there is so much joy and glory to come. See 1:6-8 and Revelation 19:6-8.

4. Count yourself b_____ because upon you God's Spirit rests. (4:14)

Stephen's enemies (who were also God's/Jesus' enemies) did not just speak evil of him, they threw stones at him. He was violently murdered. But the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) did something in his life that He can do in our lives, as well. See Acts 6:8-7:60, especially 6:8-15 and 7:54-60.

5. Don't let your own sinful actions or reactions be the cause of your suffering, and don't be ashamed if you suffer for the name. (4:15-16)

We should be b_____ people as God's people. No one should be able to make an accusation against us that "s_____." Accusations may be made. Insults may fly. Rumors may spread. But we shouldn't be guilty of the sin we are accused of. See 2:12.

Sin done by us against others should not be the reason we suffer.

The list in 4:15 starts with "murderer" and ends with "meddler." The exact meaning of "meddler" isn't completely clear, partly because it's a word that Peter may have made up. It's possible, in this context, that it means "troublemaker." It's also possible that it means someone who sticks his nose in other people's business. A meddler may be someone who is "looking over the fence," spying on the neighbors, and stirring up trouble. (This does not mean, of course, that we never ask questions, voice concerns, talk about sin, or even rebuke.)

Striking back verbally, seeking personal vengeance, physical attacks, vigilantism, robinhoodism, etc. are not acceptable responses for those who follow Christ.

If they insult us, we don't insult them.

If they murder us, we don't murder them.

If they steal from us, we don't steal from them.

We don't repay evil for evil.

Persecution does not give us permission to stop living by faith.

It's fair to assume that Simon Peter never forgot the night that he denied that he knew Jesus. In a way, in 4:16, we hear Peter say, "Don't do what I did."

6. F_____ our Father. His judgment starts with us. (4:17-18)

See 1:17. The purpose of God's judgment of His own people (including Peter himself—notice he says, "it begins with us") is to **p_____** us, not **p_____** us. Jesus was fully punished in our place at the cross. All of God's righteous demands were satisfied by Jesus when He suffered there as our substitute. There is nothing left of God's wrath against us if we belong to Jesus. See 3:18.

So, when we suffer at God's hand, it is not His wrath we are feeling. It is the discipline of the Father who loves us. The goal of that pain is purity, not punishment. See 1:6-7. See also 1 Corinthians 11:32.

7. As you suffer, keep doing what Jesus did. (4:19)

See 2:21-23. When we suffer, we are called to keep doing what Jesus did as He was insulted and robbed and mistreated and murdered (Luke 23:46), just as Stephen did (Acts 7:59).

Our Creator is good and faithful. He is steadfast in His commitment to us as His people. He loves us, and He is loyal to us. He deserves our trust.

We follow Jesus in this. He is our example all the way.

"As a Christian"

1 Peter 4:12-19

Peter has said a lot about suffering thus far in this letter. God used this apostle to care for the original recipients of this message who needed their souls reinforced as they faced hostility due to their genuine faith in and love for Jesus.

And hostility against Christ and those who follow Him has continued throughout most all of Church history. Whether it's a furious mob burning church buildings in Pakistan or much less severe forms of opposition here in the U.S., the hostility is a reality. From mild pushback to all-out persecution, all people who trust in and love Jesus Christ will experience some kind of suffering for His sake.

It's the norm. It's expected. If we don't, something's wrong. If we don't suffer somehow because we're Christians, then maybe we really aren't Christians. Some people don't because they really aren't, but the first people who received this letter certainly did because they certainly were.

The message the apostle sent to them here in 4:12-19 is instructive and encouraging for us, as well. Yes, these wise commands in these verses are also God's kind gift to us. May we take to heart what God has said regarding suffering as a Christian.

1. K_____ you are loved. (4:12)

We are known, and we are loved. We are not alone or unloved.