



SUFFERING



HOLINESS



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TRIALS

# 1 PETER 4 ENDURE HARDSHIP

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*A ReVision Resource*

*Endure Hardship: 1 Peter 4*

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## 1 Peter 4: Introduction

The sufferings we must endure for the name of Christ do not exempt us either from the pursuit of holiness or of works of service to others.

Christians should “arm themselves” with a mind ready to bear up under hardship and, at the same time, to persevere in their callings as servants, gifted to glorify God in their lives.

We cannot worry about those who wish us ill. Our calling is to press on in loving others and bearing witness to the Gospel. We can glorify God even in the midst of hardship, but only if we fix our eyes on Christ and set our minds to live – and, if need be, suffer – as He did.

Thus Peter calls His readers not to allow anything to deter them or cause them to leave the path of discipleship. His exhortation is an important message for believers in every age.

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1 and 2 Peter can encourage, embolden, and instruct us, if we’re willing to take the Apostle’s words to heart. My prayer is that all who take up this study will do just that. Thank you for joining us.

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## **1 Arm Yourself for Suffering**

*1 Peter 4.1, 2*

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, <sup>2</sup> that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*

**The Story:** Paul wrote that suffering has been given to believers in Christ right along with faith (Phil. 1.29). Not all the suffering Christians can expect to know is related to persecution, although that's the context of Peter's words here. Christians suffer because they struggle against the desires of the flesh and must learn to set aside former ways of living in the world in order to take up those ways more characteristic of life in the Kingdom of God (cf. Eph. 4.17-24; Rom. 6). But Peter's main point here is that we must not fear to take a bold and uncompromising stand for Jesus before the people who know us. If they hurl insults at us, talk behind our backs, or worse, well, this is what Jesus experienced, and we should arm ourselves in our minds to expect the same. The suffering we experience at the hands of the world bears witness to our redemption, for, as Jesus said, those who are lost in the darkness of unbelief despise the light which exposes their sin (Jn. 3.19, 20; Jn. 15.18-25).

**The Structure:** The idea that the Christian life should be one of uninterrupted happiness and prosperity has no grounding in Scripture. In the midst of trials Christians must rejoice and be glad, as we know (Jms. 1.2-4). Yet trials are trials, and they are not pleasant, especially when they come in the form of persecution. We need to be more honest about what to expect as Christians if we're going to be able to prepare ourselves mentally and spiritually to rejoice in the midst of our sufferings.

*Why do you think Christians in America and the West experience so little in the way of persecution?*

## 2 Time's Up!

*1 Peter 4.3-5*

<sup>3</sup> For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles — when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. <sup>4</sup> In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you; <sup>5</sup> They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

**The Story:** Can a person profess faith in Christ without experiencing, over time, a change of life? The witness of the New Testament is that those who have truly been justified by grace through faith will bring forth the fruit of righteousness unto Christlikeness. Peter concurs. When it comes to our old sinful behaviors, Peter says, “Time’s up!” We need to move on to walk with Jesus (1 Jn. 2.1-6) and not with our unbelieving friends. Does that mean we can have no association with sinners? Certainly not. It simply means our association with them must be based on the new life we have in Christ, even though that may surprise some of them, or provoke them to persecute us in one way or another. A day of judgment is coming for all of us; our works will be assessed at that time, although not as the means of our salvation (1 Cor. 3.10-15). Let’s make sure we’re pursuing the good works for which we have been redeemed (Eph. 2.10), so that the Lord may be honored when He judges our lives.

**The Structure:** Augustine explained that, in this world, the City of God and the city of man are intermingled and co-existing. That does not mean, however, that they are indistinguishable. Christians are called to “stand out” as lights against the darkness of sin and unbelief (Eph. 5.7-13). Sometimes that may mean breaking off old relationships, if, that is, those relationships require or lead us to compromise our convictions in sinful practices. The new relationships we forge within the Body of Christ should more than compensate for any sinful relationships we decline for the honor of the Lord.

*What are some ways that you might expect Christians to “stand out” as lights in your community?*

### **3 Preaching to the Dead?**

*1 Peter 4.6*

*<sup>6</sup> For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.*

**The Story:** In this time of redemption and restoration Christians are called to preach the Gospel by their lives and their words, even though the people to whom they must preach are dead in their trespasses and sins, as, indeed, we also were at one time (Eph. 2.1-3). We preach to the dead because the Gospel gives life, as we have come to know, and we desire dead sinners to live in the newness of life we enjoy in Jesus Christ. The “also” in this verse suggests that the Gospel ought to be preached to those who are alive in Christ as well. We all need to hear the Gospel, over and over and over, so that we relish the grace of the Lord more and more, and nurture hearts of gratitude, praise, and service in His Name. Preaching the Gospel – Paul would say, speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4.15) – is thus to be a characteristic activity of believers during these days when the true light is increasing and the darkness of sin is being exposed and replaced by the Kingdom light of Christ (1 Jn. 2.8, 15-17).

**The Structure:** This is one of the primary reasons the Spirit of God was given to the Church – that we might be witnesses for Jesus Christ (Acts 1.8). When we are filled with the Spirit, Paul writes, we bear witness to one another by our lives and words (Eph. 5.18-21). Also, as the Lord gives opportunity, we bear witness to those around us who are not yet alive in Christ, calling them to repentance and faith so that they might escape the bonds of sin and know the true freedom of the sons and daughters of God. So why is so little of this kind of preaching happening in the Church today? Paul’s warning not to quench the Spirit should be heeded (1 Thess. 5.19), for it would seem that this is precisely what we are doing when our lives do not mesh with His agenda.

*In what ways is the Spirit bearing witness through your life?*

## 4 Comin' Right Up

*1 Peter 4.7-9*

*<sup>7</sup> But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. <sup>8</sup> And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." <sup>9</sup> Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.*

**The Story:** The most characteristic Christian virtue is love (Jn. 13.35; 1 Cor. 13). The return of our Lord is at all times imminent, and it should be our primary concern, in the light of that, to be found loving as Jesus did when Jesus comes to take us to Himself. Sin will hinder us from loving, for it encourages us to indulge our own interests and fancies rather than to look out for the needs of others. We must control our sinful tendencies and be ever mindful of the dangers that lie on the far side of temptation (cf. Ps. 73.16-19). Love covers sins in others, but it smothers them in us as well. It's hard to sin against others when we're actively seeking to serve them in love. Hospitality is a convenient way of showing love, and it does not require that we own a home. We can extend an attitude of grace, welcome, and rest to people in any situation and at every opportunity.

**The Structure:** The ability to love others is also a work of the Spirit of God – indeed, the first component of His fruit (Gal. 5.22, 23). In order to love, therefore, we must call on the Spirit and be filled with Him, setting aside our own interests, as Jesus did, for the sake of serving others (Phil. 2.5-11). When we do love, then, let us bear in mind that this is a work of the Spirit, and, rather than think ourselves to be anything, let us think soberly, and give praise and thanks to God who is at work within us to will and do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2.13).

*What are some "everyday activities" you might do in order to show the love of Jesus to the people in your life?*

## 5 Gifted to Serve

*1 Peter 4.10, 11*

*<sup>10</sup>As each has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God <sup>11</sup>If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone serves, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

**The Story:** Like Paul (1 Cor. 12.7-11), Peter insists that the Spirit of God has gifted all believers with whatever they need in order to fulfill the requirement of love in serving one another. We are all gifted to serve. Thus, a stewardship has been laid upon us – to recognize, develop, and employ the gifts of the Spirit in loving others in a diligent and responsible manner. All gifts come to expression in the form of love; all are but the strength of God working in and through us; and all achieve their final objective when God is glorified. God gifts His people in order that through them He might get glory. We fulfill our calling in life, therefore, when we are dutiful and obedient in serving others with the gifts of God.

**The Structure:** Although Peter is not as explicit as Paul, he would say the same: such ministry depends on the work of God’s Spirit, distributing gifts, inclining our hearts, and empowering believers to serve one another in love. God shows His “manifold grace” to His people in the way He distributes gifts for ministry and the way His people use those gifts for mutual love and edification. Those who fail to put their gifts to good use are not trusting the Lord and cannot prove their love for one another. Seek spiritual gifts, and seek them earnestly in the context of love (1 Cor. 14.1).

*What do you consider to be your gifts for ministry? How are you using them to the glory of God?*

## 6 Fiery Trials

*1 Peter 4.12-15*

*<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; <sup>13</sup> but rejoice to the extent you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory is revealed you also may be glad with exceeding joy. <sup>14</sup> If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.*

**The Story:** Suffering in the name of Jesus comes because of the life in the Spirit believers lead. In the Spirit they are being sanctified to turn from worldly ways. In the Spirit they bear witness also by their words that Jesus is Christ and King (Acts 1.8). In the Spirit and with His gifts they serve one another in love. And in the Spirit they become the target of persecution on the part of those who resent having their sins exposed. This is reason for rejoicing, Peter says, because, when we suffer with Jesus' sufferings, we can be sure that the Spirit is at work within us and we are the children of God (the best Greek texts omit the last sentence in v. 14). But we must be careful not to bring suffering or hardship on ourselves because of disobedience. Only that suffering which mirrors the sufferings of Christ will lead to increased hope and power for Christian living.

**The Structure:** As the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by the devil, so He leads us in our own wilderness to endure hardship and trial at the hands of those who desire to rule their own lives apart from the Lord. This should not surprise or upset us; it's as natural for us to undergo these tests as it was for Jesus, and it serves to prove our relationship with Him. Suffer, then, when you must suffer, with rejoicing and hope.

*How do you prepare yourself each day for the possibility of suffering and persecution?*

## 7 Suffer, and Do Good

*1 Peter 4.16-19*

*<sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. <sup>17</sup> For the time has come for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

*<sup>18</sup> Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"*

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.*

**The Story:** Persecution and suffering are not grounds for going underground, as it were. We have been redeemed for good works (Eph. 2.10); not even suffering must be allowed to deter us from this course of life. If, when suffering of any kind begins, we can glorify God, rejoicing in Him and giving thanks, then we can keep from feeling sorry for ourselves or becoming afraid. God may be using this suffering as a trial to bring us to greater heights of righteousness (Heb. 12.7-11). So let us persevere in doing good, as Jesus did, even though doing so may only bring more persecution upon us, if only in the form of insults.

**The Structure:** Peter's overall message to these suffering Christians is abundantly clear: Do not allow suffering to confuse, dismay, or defeat you. Press on! Let the Spirit live through you, unto the glory of God! See your persecutions as works of God to strengthen your faith and advance His Kingdom through you! Trust in Him and persevere, come what may.

*What can keep us from having this kind of attitude toward suffering?*

*Endure Hardship: 1 Peter 4*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What kinds of hardships should Christians expect to endure during their lives in this world? How can we “set our minds” to prepare for these, so that we grow them, rather than have them crush us?
2. Peter says the time has long since past for us to be laying aside the works, wants, and worries of the flesh. So how’s that going for you? Where do you still struggle to leave the old self behind?
3. What are some ways that Christians might help one another improve in the practice of love toward one another? What about to non-believers in the community?
4. What are spiritual gifts? How does one identify which gifts he or she possesses? How can we grow in the use of our spiritual gifts?
5. What does it mean to “partake of Christ’s sufferings”?
6. What’s this about “judgment” coming to “the house of God”? What does this mean? What does it look like? How can we recognize it, and what should we do when we do?

*Prayer:*

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