

A PEOPLE WHO LIVE FOR GOD

1 Peter 4:1-6

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One thing that is often neglected in contemporary evangelism is the cost of discipleship, particularly as it relates to suffering. A theology of Christian suffering is not a chapter found in most systematic theologies. Worse, many pulpits in this land preach a prosperity gospel, if not explicitly, often, and more dangerously, it is subtly implied in a gospel that caters to the betterment of self rather than the glory of God. While it is true that God loves His children and desires what is best for them, the person in many a pew often has a twisted understanding of both God's "love" and God's "best." We all have a tendency to define these things from our limited, secular perspective rather than looking at things from God's perspective, remembering that God's thoughts and God's ways are not like mans. So many today live their lives in pursuit of God deceived, thinking that suffering on this earth and God's love and God's best can't exist at the same time in the same sphere. In other words, suffering and God are contradictions.

Conversely, and much less common today, the other extreme is the thought that if you are not suffering then something must be wrong with your faith. Again, as we will see in a moment, while it is true that there should be suffering just in our daily battles with sin, many are led to believe that they must go looking for suffering. They are not content until they have found something or someone as a means to satisfy this purpose. However, this too misses God's purposes in suffering. Suffering for doing good, suffering for the sake of righteousness, comes at the hands of God. He sends it; we don't have to go looking for it.

When is the last time you had to suffer for Christ? Not a suffering you deserve, but suffering *because* of Christ; a time when you physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually, inwardly, outwardly, or both, faced opposition simply because of your desire to live for God. Peter has reminded us over the past few weeks that suffering for good, suffering for what is right, is better than comfort in doing wrong (3:17). God has promised to bless our sufferings for Christ, not our pursuit of creaturely comforts or feeble attempts at self-produced spirituality (3:14). Having given Christ as the supreme example of suffering, Peter now returns to the suffering that his readers in Asia Minor had encountered, were encountering, and would encounter in their pursuit of holy living, of living **"for the will of God" (v. 2)**. His goal is both to prepare them and encourage them for the difficult times that come when one seeks to live by faith and not by sight in a world that loves darkness rather than light.

I. A determination of living for God (4:1-2)

Peter opens this section with a conclusion marked by the word **"Therefore."** He reminds his readers that Christ's suffering **"in the flesh"** had an intended result attached to it in the life of the believer. With the backdrop of Christ's suffering for good, with the reminder of His innocent sufferings at the hands of godless men, Peter says, **"Therefore... arm yourselves also with the same purpose."** This is the only command in the entire section and serves as the main point of interpreting Peter's message. **"Arm yourselves"** has military overtones. It provides a picture of a soldier who is prepared for battle. The apostle Paul often compared the life of the believer to one of a soldier:

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 – ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, ⁴ for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

Ephesians 6:10-12 – ¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

In our text, Peter, like Paul, exhorts his readers to be prepared for battle. But he specifies that they are to be armed **“with the same purpose.”** This **“purpose”** is related to suffering. The word can be translated “attitude,” “intention,” “mind” or “thought.” It carries the idea of having knowledge or insight about something that leads to a set purpose or intent. So what Peter suggests is that just as a soldier is determined to prepare himself for battle, so the believer is to be determined to prepare themselves for suffering.

The difficulty in translation comes with the words that follow, **“Because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”** Here Peter gives the reason why believers should prepare themselves for suffering. However, there is debate as to what reason is supplied. The difficulty begins with the Greek word *hoti*, which can be translated **“because”** as it is NAU or “so that” or “for” as it is in the ESV. There is a difference. **“Because”** offers an explanation, in this case explaining **“purpose.”** **“For”** is different, giving the purpose or cause that flows from the phrase, **“arm yourselves also with the same purpose.”** So is *hoti* meant to explain the phrase or give the result or cause of the phrase?

Then comes the difficulty of who **“because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin”** refers to. There are three possible interpretations.

1. Jesus Christ?

2. Union with Christ in baptism? (Rom. 6:4-8)

Romans 6:4-11 – ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, ⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, *in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;* ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ *Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

3. Suffering or sin? (1 Pet. 3:10-11)

EX: Peter’s own life in the courtyard

The commitment to suffer provides evidence that there has been a break with sin.

Regardless of whether 2 or 3, there is evidence that one has made a determination to live for God, to make a break with the old life of sin with a resolve to live in the new life of the spirit. V. 2, **“to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.”** There is a purposeful intent to live not according to the flesh and what it desires, but according to the Spirit. This allows for the verb tense of **“has ceased”** in the Greek, a perfect tense, which indicates a completed action whose effects are felt in the present.

So the purpose that emerges in these verses is one of determination: the believer is determined to no longer be for the lusts of the flesh, but to live a life for the will of God, a life which at times might include suffering, for which they are prepared.

II. Motives for living for God (4:3-6)

1. Past lifestyle (v. 3)

In v. 3 Peter reminds them of their past. He says, “You have spent enough time in sin, doing the will of the Gentiles, living according to your desires and not doing the will of God.” He then gives a list of vices that evidence one who has never made a break from sin. This list, as with Paul’s similar lists, is not exhaustive. But it does incorporate many of the areas that, if not checked, still are resident in the sin nature. **“Sensuality”** and **“lusts”** refer to sexual sins. The next three refer to sins of drunkenness and carousing, which in the Roman world, much like today, are often part of drunken orgies. **“Detestable”** or **“abominable idolatry”** completes the list and points to unlawful worship. While they were not illegal in pagan society, they were contrary to God’s truth and man’s innate sense of right.¹

Of course, we have a picture how pagans so live at present:

Example: Mardi Gras (literally *Fat Tuesday* / Feb. 24th) Day before *Ash Wednesday* / Feb. 25th [first day of Lent – forty days before Easter – season of spiritual preparation leading up to Easter]

Peter says, “That’s the way you used to be. You used to desire what the pagans desired. You used to waste time doing the things that they did. Now, you have a new purpose, a new desire, a new allegiance, and that is to do the will of God and not satisfy the old life, which is dead in Christ.” That’s the motivation that Peter seems to be putting forward here. Because you are no longer what you once were, devote yourselves now to a life that is lived in holy abandonment to Almighty God and don’t waste your time in sensuality and lust and drunkenness and carousels and drinking parties and abominable idolatries.² It is the same thing that Paul exhorts in Romans 6:12-14. Yes, we are dead to sin, our sins have been buried with Christ so that they no longer are master, but:

¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

¹ D. Edmund Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 261.

² Derek Thomas, http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Derek%27s_SERMONS/1%20Peter/05b1peter.htm, accessed 02/14/2009.

Be killing sin or it will be killing you. That is the battle that Paul sets forth in Romans 6 and 7. And it is a battle that Peter reminds these readers that they can expect, but when they are armed for the battle, they can overcome. It is the idea that part of the suffering we endure in this life comes from this spiritual battle that exists within us, the battle to serve the lusts of the flesh rather than the will of God.

2. Present opposition (v. 4)

Given this mindset, being armed with this purpose, also has present consequences socially or outwardly. The one who is set on suffering rather than sinning, to do the will of God no matter the cost, will certainly be misunderstood by the wicked. Peter says “**they are surprised,**” they think it strange that the believer has parted ways with that old lifestyle. They do not understand why you no longer want to run with the crowd, to be part of their company, to hang out with them in their worldly pursuits. They don’t understand why you don’t show up at their parties anymore.

Of course, while this misunderstanding might be overlooked for a time, perhaps because they think it is just a phase one is going through, as time goes on those who you used to call friends become hardened towards your new life in Christ. Their perplexity turns to hostility. They begin to antagonize, to “**malign,**” to heap abuse upon you, to revile you just as they reviled Christ. They now have a purpose to ruin your reputation, to defame you.

Are you facing opposition from the world? If not, WHY NOT? (American mentality)

3. Future judgment (vv. 5-6)

a. Over unbelievers (judgment) (v. 5)

b. Over death (v. 6)

Conclusion

1. Are you struggling with sin?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer – The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are all sinners!³

2. Is the world surprised by your actions?

3. Are you living in light of His judgment? Preaching and living the gospel to the lost Preaching the gospel to yourself

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112; quoted by Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*, 94.