

Armed for Suffering

1 Peter 4:1-6

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INTRODUCTION

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” (Matt. 5:29-30)

Suffering forces us to either retreat in fear or persevere in love. Our fear of suffering will either cast out our love for Christ or our love for Christ will cast out our fear of suffering.

The English Puritan pastor, Thomas Wilcox wrote: **“Untested faith is uncertain faith.”** *Honey Out of the Rock*

Suffering is the place where our loyalty and love is put to the test. And, by God’s grace, where it is purified and strengthened.

1 Peter 4:1-6

¹Since 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, ²so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶For 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.

MAIN IDEA: Out of loyalty to Christ we must arm ourselves with His attitude toward suffering.

→ a word about “loyalty.”

What was Christ’s attitude towards suffering?

Christ welcomed suffering as God’s gift graciously given in order to fulfill His glorious purpose and plan. Suffering didn’t

“[Christ] learned obedience through what He suffered” (Heb 5:8)

“for the joy that was set before Him” He *“endured the cross”* (Heb 12:2).

How do we arm ourselves with this attitude?

Peter calls us to cultivate a military mindset toward suffering – “arm yourselves”

Five truths to arm ourselves with:

1. “... Christ suffered in the flesh ...” v. 1

The problems posed by pain and suffering find their answer in the cross of Christ. He is our first and most important weapon if we are to arm ourselves with the right attitude toward suffering.

Never forget the Saviour in your suffering

2. It is better to suffer than sin

vv. 1b-2 *“... for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.”*

William Secker wrote: **“By affliction, the Lord separates the sin that he hates from the soul that he loves.”**

Suffering sobers us up and sharpens our senses. It shines the stark light of reality on all our trivial, selfish, empty, superficial pleasures that keep us in the dark about our sinful hearts. It drives us to the Cross of Christ and keeps us there – where we belong!

Peter is not telling us that suffering leads to sinless perfection.

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8)

He is saying that suffering drives us to our deepest sources of help and hope. And for the Christian these are found in Christ. Suffering keeps us near Him and dependant upon Him.

What does this say about our perspective on sin?

Is our view of sin the same as Ralph Venning who wrote: **“Any sin is worse than any suffering, one sin than all suffering, and the least sin than the greatest suffering.”** *The Sinfulness of Sin*

Do we see our sin as an assault on God’s character? Do we see our sin as infinitely offensive to God? Christ’s cross is the measure of our sin in the eyes of God.

3. Our sinful past is behind us

v. 3 *“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.”*

The time past is enough for us to have had anything to do with sin. That’s enough of that! We are to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ.

Fight against nostalgic notions of your former life

The Israelites foolishly looked back to their slavery in Egypt with fondness.

4. Sin will be judged

vv. 4-5 *“With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”*

Ralph Venning wrote: **“One may suffer and not sin, but it is impossible to sin and not suffer. Those who avoid suffering by sinning, sin themselves into worse suffering.”** *The Sinfulness of Sin*

Dwell upon the justice of God –

5. God is our reward

This is a somewhat difficult verse, but I think it’s meaning emerges when we look a little more closely and consider the context.

I think Peter is speaking about Christians who have died. In **v. 5**, he spoke about having to **“give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”**

In **v. 6** Peter goes on to say: **“For this is why [because of the coming judgment] the gospel was preached to those who are [now] dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are they might live in the spirit the way God does.**

Peter is saying that although Christians die like everyone else, they do not face the same judgment others do. Those who have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and committed their lives to Him **live in the spirit the way God does** after they die.

It would seem that opponents of the gospel used the death of Christians to mock their message. **“You speak of resurrection and eternal life and salvation and the power of God; you must be kidding! You die just like the rest of us! I thought your Saviour conquered sin and death? Why don’t you come and party with us, we all end up dead anyway.”**

In **vv. 5 & 6** Peter is pulling back the veil of death for us a bit.

Appearances can be deceiving! Don’t be fooled by death. Look beyond the grave – and see God!

1 Peter 3:18 “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God . . .”

The good news of the gospel is that God Himself is the believer’s reward. To **live in the spirit the way God does** is to bask in the eternal radiance of God’s glorious presence. This is the greatest good a person can come into. This is the

reality that makes all the suffering and affliction of this life seem “*slight and momentary*” in comparison to the “*eternal weight of glory*” God will reveal when we see Him (2 Cor. 4:17).

Let me conclude with what John Piper has written about God being our reward:

“The ultimate good of the gospel is seeing and savoring the beauty and value of God. God’s wrath and our sin obstruct that vision and that pleasure. You can’t see and savor God as supremely satisfying while you are full of rebellion against him and he is full of wrath against you. The removal of his wrath and this rebellion is what the gospel is for. The ultimate aim of the gospel is the display of God’s glory and the removal of every obstacle to our seeing it and savoring it as our highest treasure. ‘Behold your God!’ is the most gracious command and best gift of the gospel. If we do not see him and savor him as our greatest fortune, we have not obeyed or believed the gospel.” *God is the Gospel*

Is God the greatest good and goal of your life? Is He worth more to us than a life of selfishness and sin? Is beholding the greatness and glory of God enough to motivate us to take up our cross and learn to die daily?