

## XII. Christian Suffering

February 15/17/18, 2021

1 Peter 4:12-19

**Aim:** To be mindful that suffering for the sake of Christ is to be expected, and to use the opportunity to rejoice, glorify God, trust Him, and do good until Jesus returns.

*Gardner:* Peter now begins to look more closely at a Christian approach to suffering. As we have noted before, although it does not seem that great and violent persecution was happening in the churches to which Peter wrote, it was on the agenda. Some churches may already have been experiencing more of it than others. Without doubt, Peter knew that some Christians were already suffering painfully for their faith and that persecution lay in the near future for others.

*McKnight:* Peter has sketched the glories and implications of salvation (1:3-2:10) and spelled out how Christians are to live honorably within the context of a hostile society (2:11-4:11); he now turns to his final concerns. The major theme of 4:12-5:11 revolves around exhortations based on the life *within* the church. Peter speaks here again about how to cope with suffering, but this time adds a note of urgency. He then addresses the leaders of the churches (5:1-9) and concludes with a doxology (5:10-11).

*Dorani:* The themes of alienation, suffering, and persecution never seem far away in 1 Peter. Each section contributes something to the apostle's teaching on suffering and injustice. First 2:18-23 tells disciples to bear mistreatment patiently and to entrust themselves to God the Judge. We must never return evil for evil. If we must suffer we should suffer for doing right. But 1 Peter 3 begins a more sustained and challenging discussion of the topic as the apostle warns his people to prepare to 'suffer for what is right' and to 'suffer for doing good' (3:14, 17)... Ordinarily, Peter says, no one will harm you 'if you are eager to do good.' Nonetheless, he implies, it could happen, and believers should be prepared. Perhaps Peter meant to ease his churches into the hard truth, or perhaps, as some scholars speculate, Peter received bad news even as he wrote. Whatever the reason, Peter's tone shifts in chapter 4. Suffering was a possibility; now he urges his readers to expect trouble. (Commentators speculate that the situation changed for the worse even as Peter wrote, so that his warnings grew more urgent. But there is no external evidence of such a change. It is possible that Peter chose to ease his readers into a difficult discussion.). In 1 Peter 3:13-17, Peter tells us that persecution will possibly happen and that disciples must be prepared if it does. In 4:12 he says, 'Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering.'

*Helm:* Peter wants his readers to know that *trials* of some size and stripe are inevitable. We must go through the waters of woe if we are to arrive at our rightful inheritance wandering and woe are the earthly log of any who desire to enter into an eternal rest characterized by joy.

### A. Suffering for Christ's Name (1 Peter 4:12-16)

#### 1. Suffer with the Right Attitude (4:12-13)

##### a) *Don't Be Surprised (4:12)*

<sup>12</sup>*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.*

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### (1) Beloved (4:12a)

*Gardner:* Peter's compassionate heart is clear as he turns to this sad subject. *Dear friends* translates the Greek 'beloved.' Peter loves these people. When a Christian brother or sister suffers, then the family suffers (see 1 Cor. 12:326).

*MacArthur:* *Beloved* (*agapētos*; cp. 2:11) is a common pastoral word conveying tenderness, compassion, affection, and care (cp. 1 Cor. 4:14; 1 Th. 2:8). Such love provides a sweet pillow of believers' weary souls to rest on in the midst of trials and persecutions.

*McKnight:* As at 2:11, Peter makes the beginning of a major section with 'Dear friends.'

### (2) Surprise (4:12b, d)

*Gardner:* *Do not be surprised.* Unbelievers may be 'surprised' (v. 4, where the same word is used in Greek) at the life of Christians, but believers should not be surprised at all by *the painful trial they are suffering* (literally 'by the burning that comes upon you for testing'). This is what happens in this age when unbelievers pour abuse on the followers of Christ.... The main reason there should be no surprise is that Christ has suffered (v. 13). If this happened to the Lord it should not appear to be *something strange* that this would also happen to us. However, there is also another reason why Christians should not be taken by surprise, and that is because both Jesus and the apostles prophesied that such suffering would come (e.g., Mt. 24:9; Jn. 15:18-21; 1 Jn. 3:13).

*MacArthur:* The phrase *do not be surprised* informs believers to expect that the gospel of Christ will be offensive to many and will produce persecution. The original Greek is *zenizō*, meaning 'to be surprised or astonished' by the novelty of something. Believers should never be shocked by persecution. Later in the verse, Peter uses the related noun *zenos*, translated *some strange thing*, but that could also be rendered 'a surprising thing,' which gives a double emphasis to Peter's point to expect persecution. As saints are obedient to God's Word and effective in proclaiming the gospel, animosity from unbelievers is inevitable.... The verb translated *were happening* (*sumbainontos*) may mean 'to fall by chance' and calls for Christians to understand that experiences of unjust suffering for Christ are not accidental, but inevitable because the message of sin, salvation, and judgment offends.

*McKnight:* [He] exhorts his readers to avoid being surprised by the *painful trial* you are suffering. (Peter had previously said that their pagan friends were 'surprised' when the Christians changed their moral behavior, 4:4). Presumably the early Christians were not generally surprised by opposition to the gospel (cp. 1 Jn. 3:13), but the actual turn of events among Peter's audience may have caught them off guard or shocked them.

*Dorani:* The Greek verb (*xenixesthe*) is a present imperative, which suggests that they *are* surprised by this development and should not be... 'Do not be surprised,' Peter says, because trials are not strange. Peter predicts them. Jesus also told His disciples to expect them: 'In this world you will have trouble' (Jn. 16:33b). Happily, Jesus also encourages: 'Take heart! I have overcome the world' (16:33c).... This world is full of tribulation of many kinds, and it strikes for many reasons. First, we suffer because we live in a fallen world.... Second, we suffer because we are united to evil men.... Third, we suffer because of our own sins.... First Peter 4 addresses the worst evil: deliberate malice. A few try to harm Christians because they are hostile to the faith. Others seize the opportunity to rob or crush the weak, and if Christians happen to be weak, predators will attack the same way they would attack any other defenseless minority. Whether

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we suffer true persecution or for another reason, everyone needs Peter’s message about suffering. Therefore, as long as we live in this fallen world, this magnificent ruin, we should be expected to suffer. It is neither strange nor surprising. The more we expect trouble, the better we will be prepared for it.

*Sproul:* Peter says that we are not to think it *strange*. The word he uses here is the one from which we get the term *xenophobia*, which is a phobia or fear of strangers, people who do not fit into our mold.

### (3) Fiery Test/Trial (4:12c)

*Gardner:* Following what he wrote in 1:7 about the proving of genuine faith ‘refined by fire,’ Peter again wants his readers to understand that this great ordeal will test or prove the Christian, resulting in a deepening of faith.

*MacArthur:* While the term rendered *fiery ordeal* (*purōsis*) portrays figuratively a painful experience of persecution, it is also used of a furnace melting down metal to purge it of impurities (cp. Ps. 66:10; Pr. 17:3; see also 1:6-7)... It may be that Peter is here drawing on his familiarity with Malachi’s prophecy. [Mal. 3:1-3] speaks of a purifying fire, in contrast to the consuming fire in 4:1... Evidence that Peter was thinking of Malachi’s words is strengthened by the apostle’s reference to ‘the household of God’ (v. 17), where such purifying judgment must come. Peter is saying that the persecution is the Lord refining His temple—His people.

*MacArthur:* Such mistreatment *which comes upon* believers is also for their *testing*, proving the genuineness of their faith (cp. Job 23:10; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 1:10; 2 Tim. 3:11; James 1:3-12). Suffering for righteousness’ sake not only refines, but, even before that, reveals whether people are truly believers.

*McKnight:* They were encountering a *painful trial* (lit., ‘the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you,’ NSRV). *Trial* denotes an experience that is either positive (God is testing you; cp. 1:6-7) or negative (it is a painful experience or an occasion for temptation). While the latter may be true, the primary sense is surely to be found in the former. (The clearest use of the two sense of *peirasmos* as either ‘test’ or ‘temptation’ can be seen in James 1:12-14).

*Dorani:* Further, in God’s economy, the *result* of trials is positive. When we endure persecution, it demonstrates that we belong to God, our king (cp. Mt. 5:10-12)... If Jesus suffers hostility, we should expect to follow our Master’s path (Mt. 10:24-25)... The phrase *fiery trial* is from Proverbs 27:21 (LXX), which reads, ‘A man is tested [or *judged*] by his praise.’ This can mean either the praise we receive—our reputation—or the praise we give, what we choose to praise. Both make sense in context. If we endure trials, we should be praised. And if we praise God during the trial of unjust suffering, then we have surely passed a test of character.

*Sproul:* He wants his readers to understand that our trials are not without purpose. The God who has redeemed us counts our souls more valuable than gold, and as gold is refined in the fire, so are we refined. Though we suffer for a moment, the goal of God in our suffering is our redemption, not our destruction.

### b) Do Be Joyful (4:13)

<sup>13</sup>*But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

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### (1) Rejoice in the Present (4:13a)

<sup>13</sup>*But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings...*

*Gardner:* It is one of the strangest of Christian teachings that, in the midst of great suffering, *rejoicing* should even be contemplated. But, in common with other Scriptures, Peter urges Christians to *rejoice*. Certainly it is a difficult concept to grasp, but it is not a false or stoic form of piety that Peter has in mind. Suffering, he writes, first should lead to rejoicing because it shows that believers really are united with Christ. It becomes evidence and confirmation to all His people that truly they belong to Christ... Peter makes no false promises here that rejoicing in suffering means that a Christian suddenly no longer *feels* the pain or hurt. Nor is Peter implying that suffering brings some sort of mystical union with God. This is about a deeper truth, for this suffering is about sharing something profound with Christ Himself. It is about being *like* Him. His obedience led to His suffering. As God's people worship and give Him the glory, so they too, in their obedience, discover they suffer like Christ. They can therefore be greatly encouraged since the suffering proves to them that they are indeed being obedient and being Christ-like.

*MacArthur:* *To the degree* is a generous way to translate *katho* ('as,' 'according to which') and thus to show that Christians' eternal reward is proportionate to their earthly suffering (cp. Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Heb. 11:26; 2 Jn. 8; Rev. 2:10). That is a reasonable relationship since suffering reveals faithfulness to their Lord Jesus Christ.... Peter further enriches the endurance of those who are persecuted by saying that they *share the sufferings of Christ*. That is not in any redemptive sense, neither does it refer only to spiritual union with Him, as Paul describes in Romans 6. But it refers to believers experiencing the same kind of sufferings He endured—suffering for what is right.... To the degree that believers suffer unjustly, they should, as their Lord did, *keep on rejoicing*, a sentiment completely unacceptable to those who have no hope of heavenly reward, but affirmed by the Lord (Mt. 5:10-12).

*McKnight:* Instead of being shocked by these events and turning inward to wonder and doubt, Peter's readers are to *rejoice*. Their lives will be tied into the patterns of Jesus' life (2:18-25; 3:15-16; 4:1; cp. Mk. 8:34-38), which should shape their *fundamental* attitude as they encounter persecution. Though they may now be somewhat surprised at the intensity of the heat they have stirred up by following Jesus, that very heat is an opportunity to *participate* in the sufferings of Christ. (The Greek term is *koinoneite* and is usually translated 'fellowship with' – see also 5:1). As Paul taught his own sufferings completed the sufferings of Jesus (Col. 1:24), so Peter sees the sufferings of ordinary believers as a special bond with their Lord.

*Dorani:* Suffering is a product of our union with Christ.... Indeed, we should rejoice, not in suffering per se, but in the pain that demonstrates our participation in His suffering. So we rejoice if (and only if) we suffer innocently, as He did.

*Sproul:* Rejoice, Peter says, that our sufferings come as a result of our participation and identification with the suffering and humiliation of Jesus. We suffer because He suffered, and He asked us to join Him in that. His suffering is redemptive; ours is not, but in our suffering we bear witness to the glory of His (Col. 1:24).

### (2) Rejoice in the Future (4:13b)

*...that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

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*Gardner:* But secondly, it is worth rejoicing now because this suffering becomes a guarantee of the future. When Christ comes, *when His glory is revealed*, the rejoicing will be even more amazing. More literally Peter says, ‘rejoice...so that at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice upon rejoicing.’ Glory awaited Christ following His suffering and death. This is what also awaits God’s people.... One day we shall be like Him fully and we shall share in His glory, and the joy will turn to rejoicing upon rejoicing. If we rejoice in suffering because Christ suffered and we have shared in that with Him, how much grater will be the rejoicing when Christ’s glory is revealed, and again we shall find we are like Him, but this time sharing in glory! ... Interestingly, in Acts 5:41 we get a glimpse of this theology in practice as the disciples themselves were persecuted. ‘The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.’

*MacArthur:* The *revelation of His glory* will come in ‘the day that the Son of Man is revealed’ (Lk. 17:30), which refers to Christ’s return. The Lord resumed the full exercise of *His glory* after He ascended to heaven, but He has not yet revealed it on earth for everyone to see (cp. Mt. 24:30; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 19:11-16).... Peter’s second use of *rejoice* (*chairō*) in verse 13 is qualified by *exultation* (*agalliaō*), a reference to rapturous joy. When Christ returns, believers will *rejoice with exultation*, and do so in proportion to their share in His sufferings in this life.

*McKnight:* But this attitude is only a preparation. Being able to rejoice now in the midst of suffering prepares one for being *overjoyed when His glory is revealed*. What seems presently unjust and difficult to face can be turned into a celebration of joy when one understands that Jesus endured the same, but even that celebration of joy is nothing compared with the abundant joy that will be experienced when the glory of Christ (cp. 1:5, 7, 13; 3:18-22) is revealed to vindicate God’s people and usher them into His pure joy, peace, and love (cp. Rom. 8:18-21).

*Doriani:* Then we will rejoice when Jesus returns, in glory, appearing to all flesh, to judge and renew creation, beginning with this world.

### 2. Suffer for the Right Reasons (4:14-16)

*Gardner:* As Peter continues his line of thinking about sharing in Christ’s suffering, he offers further encouragement before returning to a strong challenge.

*McKnight:* Having lifted his readers spirits, Peter now reminds them of one important condition for enjoying that final, inexhaustible glory. They must remain faithful in doing good and not incur suffering because they deserve it. The first comment (4:14) is reiterated by the third comment (4:16), that is, being blessed if you suffer in the name of Christ is essentially the same as not being ashamed for suffering as a Christian. These two comments surround another one, about not suffering because they are evildoers (4:15).

#### a) *Suffering for Blessing (4:14)*

<sup>14</sup>*If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

#### (1) God’s Blessing (4:14a)

<sup>14</sup>*If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed...*

*Gardner:* Surely Peter is recalling the solemn teaching that he had heard from the mouth of Jesus many years before. In Matthew 5:10-11 Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Blessed are you when

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people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.’ Peter’s allusion to the Lord’s own teaching is designed to give real encouragement to those who suffer for Jesus in the present. He has just written that suffering points to the believer to the *future* blessing of glory, but now he turns to the experience of blessing in the *present*.

*MacArthur*: The *name of Christ* is the cause of evil hatred directed toward believers (Mt. 10:22; 24:9)... It is not the *name* of ‘Christ’ that offends the ungodly; but rather who He is and what He said and did that causes hostility from them. That animosity is summed up in the word *reviled* (*oneidizō*), meaning ‘to denounce,’ or ‘to heap insults upon.’ ... However, all the hatred and violence of the world against Christians does not diminish their blessedness. Actually they are more *blessed* for such suffering, not only for the eternal reward they will receive but for the present blessing, *because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on them*.

*McKnight*: The first comment speaks of being *insulted*. Because the first-century Mediterranean society was an honor-shame culture, an ‘insult’ was much more than a form of criticism. Criticism can be deflected; being shamed, however, irreparably damages one’s social standing... Rather than taking these insults personally, Peter’s readers must take these insults as occasion to see that they are blessed, for Jesus taught that way (Mt. 5:10, 11-12; cp. 10:24-25).

*Doriani*: In a hostile, pagan environment, a reproach can be proof that God’s Spirit shapes us so completely that our life disturbs the pagan, who responds by reviling. Opposition might therefore be proof that God is so differentiating us from the culture that we cannot be ignored... Like Jesus, we neither *seek* persecution nor *retreat* from it. We accept it if it comes, and when it does come, it proves that we have allied ourselves with the suffering Christ. Paul states, ‘I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering’ (Phil. 3:10-11).

### (2) God’s Spirit (4:14b)

*...because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

*Gardner*: The Holy Spirit...*rests on you* reminds us of a number of biblical promises that speak of God’s presence with His people. This presence means they will be protected and watched over and strengthened for the battles of this current age by God Himself. The *Spirit of glory* recalls for the reader the pillar of fire by night and cloud by day as the presence of the glory of the Lord traveled with the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex. 40:34-38). As He was with God’s people in their suffering in the wilderness, so He is with them today, says Peter, and this is a true *blessing*. Peter may also have in mind Isaiah 11:2, where the prophet foretold the coming of Christ... Just as Jesus knew and was blessed by the presence of the Spirit as He suffered, so His people receive the same blessing. But Jesus Himself had also promised His disciples that the Spirit would be with them as they faced difficult times and persecution even giving them the words to speak (Mk. 13:11; Lk. 12:12). What encouragement this should be for Christians! Just as the Spirit rested upon and remained with the Messiah, so He rests and remains with the Messiah’s people.

*MacArthur*: It is not merely because of suffering that the Holy Spirit will rest on believers, as when He came on and departed from an Old Testament prophet, but rather that He, already being in believers permanently (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 12:13), gives them supernatural relief in the midst of their suffering. Because the Spirit is God, divine *glory* defines His nature (cp. Ps. 93:1;

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104:1; 138:5). *Glory* recalls the *Shekinah*, which in the Old Testament symbolized God's earthly presence (x. 24:16-17; 34:5-8; 40:34-38; Hab. 3:3-4)... As the brilliant cloud of the *Shekinah* rested in the tabernacle and the temple, so the Holy Spirit lives in and ministers to believers today. *Rests* (from the present tense of *anapauō*) means 'to give relief, refreshment, intermission from toil' (cp. Mt. 11:28-29; Mk. 6:31), and describes one of His ministries. 'Refreshment' comes on those believers who suffer for the sake of the Savior and the gospel. The Spirit gives them grace by imparting endurance, understanding, and all the fruit that comes in the panoply of His goodness (cp. Gal. 5:22-23).

*McKnight*: The reason they are to assume this stance against persecution is because *the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you*. That is, they are blessed by God and are to glory Him because of the presence of His Spirit on them. This resting of the Spirit may refer to an occasional presence of the Spirit (as in Mt. 10:20), but it more likely means the constant indwelling of the Spirit in the community of saints, for the same Spirit rested on Jesus (Is. 11:2; Mt. 3:13-17). This Spirit, especially when the saints are in stress, reveals the power, patience, and goodness of God to those who witness such events (cp. 2:12; 3:1, 16; Acts 7:55).

### b) *Suffering for Righteousness (4:15)*

<sup>15</sup>*But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.*

[DSB Note: This verse is a negative – don't suffer because of wickedness; ergo, if you suffer, you should suffer for righteousness.]

*Gardner*: In verse 15 he...takes us back to the earlier challenge of 3:17-18.... Peter's meaning is obvious, as he insists that Christians must not suffer for the wrong reasons, for example, as a *murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal*. If a person suffers at the hands of the authorities for these things, then it will be part of a just judgment. The idea of a *meddler* gives everyone reason to pause. This has to do with a person interfering with things that are none of his or her business. Even Roman writers hated those who interfered in the affairs of others, and it may be that Peter is warning Christians about how they deal with and what they say about the pagans who surround them. All too often, instead of presenting the love and grace of the gospel, Christians are simply critical of their unbelieving neighbors and begin to meddle in their behavior and their lives. There is a huge difference between presenting Christ, both as judge and loving Savior, and presenting an arrogant, interfering, and meddling 'holier than thou' face to those around. Again, if people suffer insults for this, they deserve it, for they have behaved in a deeply un-Christian and sinful manner.

*MacArthur*: Not all suffering brings Holy Spirit relief. Trouble stemming from lawless actions obviously does not constitute suffering for righteousness. If any believer is a *murderer, or thief* (capital crimes in the ancient world), he or she has no right to complain about being punished, nor any right to expect the Spirit's graces. The same applies if any should suffer as an *evildoer* (*kakopoios*), a more general term that encompasses all crimes without exception (cp. 2:14; 3 Jn. 11). The surprising inclusion of the term rendered *troublesome meddler* (*allogotriepiskopos*) used only here in the New Testament, and at first seemingly minor in comparison to Peter's previous terms, shows that all sins, not just crimes, forfeit the Holy Spirit's comfort and rest. The word literally means, 'one who meddles in things alien to his calling,' 'an agitator,' or 'troublemaker.' Paul's exhortations to the Thessalonians illustrate the word's meaning (cp. 1 Th. 4:11; 2 Th. 3:11-12)... Christians are never to be troublemakers or agitators in society or in their places of work.... That Peter here includes *allogotriepiskopos* on his list of sins may mean that some

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disciples, in their zeal for the truth and resentment of paganism, were causing trouble in society for reasons beyond a sincere and legitimate concern for the gospel.

*McKnight*: No matter what happens, however, Peter offers a warning.... Suffering for the name of Christ or for being a Christian is acceptable; suffering for doing bad things is unacceptable and undeserving.

*Doriani*: Peter requires that we avoid criminal acts meriting punishment. He assumes that we will shun the foolishness that earns us displeasure. Refraining from murder also means no displays of anger, no resentment. No harsh judgment—scorning, scoffing, despising, or belittling. Refraining from theft also means no envy or greed, no manipulation or abuse of funds, no unpaid debts, and no waste of wealth or creation. It is obvious that disciples should avoid criminal activity, but the ban on meddling is a subtle notion. The term translated ‘meddler’ (*allogotriepiskopos*) is a rare compound word that means ‘an overseer of another’s affairs.’ Meddlers interfere, usurping roles not properly theirs. They might even scheme to gain influence outside their sphere. They nose into matters that are not their proper concern and offer unwanted opinions. They speak when protocol calls for silence. No one gladly listens to a meddler; most are irritated.... The Lord disapproves when we violate reasonable social standards. He does not bless tactlessness or folly, even if they are somehow connected to the faith.... When we receive harsh treatment, we should ask, ‘What have I done to deserve this?’ rather than “Why do they persecute me?”

### c) *Suffering with Honor (4:16)*

<sup>16</sup>*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*

#### (1) Do Not Be Ashamed (4:16a)

<sup>16</sup>*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed...*

*Gardner*: The world may also see the suffering that Christians go through for their commitment to Christ (*because of the name of Christ*) as shameful because the world despises the Christian’s faith. But Peter is adamant, *do not be ashamed*. Christians must have confidence in Christ and a preparedness to face antagonism without embarrassment and without shame because, as he said in 2:6 (quoting Isaiah 28:16), ‘the one who trust in Him will never be put to shame.’ God will vindicate His own name and His people for He is ‘their faithful Creator’ (v. 19).

*MacArthur*: *If anyone suffers as a Christian* his suffering qualifies for Holy Spirit blessing. He should not feel *ashamed* (*aischunō*, ‘dishonored’), but rather because of this benediction of supernatural comfort he is *to glorify God in this name* (‘Christian’). First-century believers referred to one another such as ‘brethren’ (Acts 1:15-16; 6:3; 9:30; 12:17; 15:13), ‘saint’ (Act 9:13; Rom. 8:27; 15:25; 1 Cor. 16:1), and those of ‘the Way’ (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Ironically, however, *Christians* was not a name first assumed by believers themselves; instead, because it was originally a derisive designation given them by the world, it was associated with hatred and persecution (cp. Acts 11:26; 26:28). It has become, and should remain, the dominant and beloved name by which believers are known—those who belong to Christ.

*McKnight*: Criticism can be deflected; being shamed, however, irreparably damages one’s social standing. This is why in 4:16, Peter writes, ‘Do not be *ashamed*.’ What these Christians must

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learn to cope with is the loss of social standing involved with conversion and consistent Christian living.

*Doriani:* It seems that the term *Christian* was a slur, an insult, much as certain Englishmen coined the term *Puritan* to mock English believers who had a zeal for purity. In each case, believers eventually decided to take the slur as a positive name.

*Helm:* Don't be afraid to identify with Jesus. Don't be afraid to walk the road that Jesus trod. It would be a pity to meet Him and not be able to say that we are suffering with Him.

### (2) Do Glorify God (4:16b)

*...but let him glorify God in that name.*

*Gardner:* Instead of being ashamed, Peter offers a second exhortation, *but praise God that you bear that name*. Again, as in verse 11, it is better to translate 'praise' as 'glorify.' Bearing the *name* means being committed to Jesus as Lord. To stand for the Lord and to be prepared to give an answer to all who ask about the faith, and to be kind, respectful, and gentle towards those who may be malicious toward Christians (3:15-16), will bring glory to God. Ultimately, no matter how severe the abuse and ridicule and even outright physical persecution, it is an incredible privilege to be called to bear the name of Christ and to be His child. There is no place for shame. Perhaps as Peter wrote, he was reminded of an earlier time when he had failed to glorify God and had been so deeply ashamed of bearing the name of Jesus that he had denied even knowing the Lord (Mk. 14:66-72). Peter's plea is that we not be like that, but stand before the world glorifying God as we point to Jesus, acknowledging Him, and insisting that we belong to Him, whatever is thrown at us.

*MacArthur:* *To glorify God* in this context means to praise Him for the privilege and honor of suffering for *this name*, because of all He has done, is doing, and will forever do for His saints. Not only does this kind of suffering produce joy over heavenly reward and the blessing of God, it also purifies the church.

*McKnight:* Peter therefore exhorts them to glorify God for their being identified with the name of Jesus; they are to wear His name proudly.

*Doriani:* Translators debate whether the phrase *glorify God in that name* means that we praise God that we bear the name of Christ (NIV), or that we praise God in the name of Christ (NASB). A common interpretation takes Peter to say, 'Even if the name "Christian" is hurled at you in derision, wear the name proudly, for you do belong to Christ.' ... If that happens Peter says, praise God in it. Don't be ashamed; take your eyes off yourself.

## B. Suffering for God's Will (1 Peter 4:17-19)

### 1. Judgment (4:17-18)

#### a) Principle (4:17)

*<sup>17</sup>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?*

#### (1) Of the Household of God (4:17a)

*<sup>17</sup>For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God...*

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*Gardner:* The age in which we live is the time when God's own people face this suffering abuse, hurt, and pain, and it is all a part of God's will. It is *His* judgment. It begins, as the Greek indicates, with the *house of God* and then it goes outward to cover the whole world. Peter is probably recalling passages in the Old Testament where the prophets speak of judgment beginning among God's own people, even right at the gate of the temple itself before spreading out to the world (cp. Jer. 25:29; Ez. 9:6; Amos 3:2).... This is Peter's idea here. These Christians, who are suffering but know they have followed the Lord, are a marked and protected people. They are caught up in the judgment, but theirs is a refining judgment and a sifting process that separates them out from those who are not the Lord's. The reaction of God's people to their suffering will be one of total dependence upon the Lord and full trust in Him. It will be a reaction that leads to a deepening of their faith (cp. 1 Cor. 11:32).

*MacArthur:* The Lord will purge His temple, His people. It is *time (kairos)*, designating a decisive, crucial moment—in this context, the season—*for judgment to begin*. The Greek for judgment is *krima* and refers to a judicial process that renders a decision on someone's sin. The word identifies a matter for adjudication (cp. 1 Cor. 6:7) and is used especially for divine judgment (cp. Rom. 2:5; 5:16; 11:33). Divine judgment on believers is the decision God renders on their sin, which includes chastening and leads to cleansing (cp. 3:9-10) of *the household of God*, but not eternal condemnation..... *Household* is Peter's reference to the church.

*McKnight:* Peter now gives the foundation for both exhortations. *They will someday have to answer to God for their behavior*. He begins with the statement: *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God*. Judgment is an important motif in 1 Peter and, as observed in 4:7, serves as the foundation for motivating early Christians to live faithfully before God (cp. 1:17; 2:23; 4:5). That God's judgment begins with the people of God is familiar to any reader, whether ancient Jewish or modern Westerner, of the Old Testament (e.g., Amos 3:2).... A similar threat of judgment of all is found throughout the New Testament (cp. Mt. 25:31-46; 1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 5:10), and it is clear that the early church saw persecution as the first stage of the coming judgment (cp. Phil. 2:28-30; 1 Th. 3:3-4; 2 Th. 1:4; Revelation). This threat of judgment formed the basis for exhorting Christians to live faithfully. It is not enough for us to say simply that the final judgment will begin with the family of God; rather we must understand that such *persecution is the beginning* of that judgment. In other words, the persecution these Christians are experiencing is the act of God whereby He purges His people to prepare them for His final display of salvation, insofar as He makes them fit for that judgment through suffering (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:32).... Suffering purges sin from one's Christian living. What Peter is saying here, therefore is as much related to persecution and suffering as it is to the final judgment, though the two are closely related. Those who are purged through suffering are the ones who inherit final judgment.

*Dorani:* Peter has already mentioned judgment several times (1:17; 2:23; 4:5-6). The original says that 'it is the time for *the* judgment,' which can only mean the final judgment. The Old Testament prophets said that this judgment must begin with God's people (Jer. 25:15-33, noting 25:29; cp. Ez. 9; Mal. 3).... But this judgment should not alarm us..... We will not be condemned. This is not according to works. Our works do count, but they count because they *follow our heart commitments*.... The believer's sins and failings will be forgiven, yet—what a gift—our noble words and deeds will attest our heart commitment to the Lord on judgment day.... Therefore, we should examine ourselves and ask what our words and deeds reveal. Do they show that Jesus is our King and that His grace and reign have transformed us? Peter directs

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us to expect that day and prepare for it, living according to our identity as members of *the family of God*—the Father’s sons and daughters.

### (2) Of Those Who Do Not Obey the Gospel of God (4:17b)

*and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

*Gardner:* As in the Old Testament, Peter sees this judgment now as moving out from the church. It is serious enough and hard enough for Christians. They will find themselves being disciplined and being refined in their faith, and they will discover truly the Spirit of God resting upon them.... Christians, thus prepared and refined and secure in their salvation will not have to face what *those who do not obey the gospel of God* will have to face. The unbeliever will face the full judgment of God.

*MacArthur:* Peter poses the comparative question, *if [judgment] begins with [believers] first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* The answer is plain: judgment concludes with Christ’s final condemnation of the ungodly at the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15; cp. Mt. 7:21-23; 25:44-46). Though God chastens His own people now, His future judgment of the lost will be infinitely more devastating.

*McKnight:* If the judgment is so severe that it deals a harsh blow for those associated with the family of God, then surely the pagans, who have no connection whatsoever with God’s people or salvation, will be cut off entirely (cp. 2:7-8).

*Doriani:* If someone does not love and obey God, it will be clear, and it will lead to judgment. Again, this is not judgment according to works in a narrow sense. Rather, the corrupt heart also proves itself in actions (cp. Jer. 17:9-10).... The priority of the heart’s direction a person’s faith or the lack of it, is clear in the question that closes out 1 Peter 4:17.... When the phrase *obey the gospel* it is clear that to *obey* the gospel means to *believe* the gospel of Jesus (Rom. 10:14-16; 2 Th. 1:8-10). Peter is therefore speaking of those who hear and reject the gospel and persecute Christians for the faith (2:8; 3:14-17).

### b) Proverb (4:18)

<sup>18</sup>*And “If the righteous is scarcely saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*

*Gardner:* To establish what he is saying Peter quotes Proverbs 11:31 (LXX).... Peter does not provide any detailed description of what happens to those who are judged to hell. It is enough to remind his readers that the end of the disobedient is fearful indeed. If it is hard for the believer to find that the path to salvation leads through a refining fire of judgment, what lies ahead for the unbeliever is almost inconceivable.

*MacArthur:* It is infinitely better for people to endure suffering with joy now as believers being purified for effective testimony and eternal glory than to later bear eternal torment as unbelievers (cp. Lk. 16:19-31). Peter reinforced that point for his readers with a quotation from the Septuagint rendering of Proverbs 11:31.... *With difficulty* is the adverb *molis* (related to *molos*, ‘toil’), which means ‘hardly’ or ‘scarcely’ (see uses in Acts 14:18; 27:7, 8, 16), and reveals the difficulty with which believers are brought to final salvation through the fires of unjust suffering, divine purging, and God-ordained discipline.

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*McKnight:* The apostle then reiterates this rhetorical question in 4:18 with another question, this time, a question from Proverbs 11:31: *If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*

*Doriani:* If the believer must be so careful to persevere and stay ready to meet the Judge, even in our union with Christ, what will come to the person who has spurned Christ, oppressed the weak, and lived for himself? We should then be sober-minded and give thanks that we face the judgment vindicated by the good deeds that come from faith.

### 2. Response (4:19)

<sup>19</sup>*Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.*

*Gardner:* So, in the light of this discussion about judgment, both of the painful refining sort and of the final judgment of the wicked, there is once conclusion for Christians (v. 19)... *So those who suffer according to God's will*, that is the Christians who find themselves suffering at the hands of unbelievers, should carry on with life, fully committed to the *faithful Creator*. They must understand that this is *God's will*. God has control over all that happens to His people, so they should *continue to do good*. Sometimes it may seem that they do good and get nothing in return and that their suffering continues unabated, but now Peter has shown them the context. This is how it is until Christ's glory is revealed, and it is all according to God's will. Therefore, they must go on with life obeying the Lord and suffering when trials come their way. Through all of this, even if He disciplines and refines His people, God remains completely *faithful* to them. Therefore, Christians can and must *commit themselves* (or 'commit their souls') to Him (cp. Lk. 23:46)... This commitment is to the one whose will is being worked out in our lives to His glory. It is a commitment to One who is in full control and who loves us, and it is to the One who on the last day will vindicate His abused, persecuted, and maligned people by giving them a share in the glory of Christ Himself.

*MacArthur:* *Therefore* draws the reader into the obvious duty he has in his suffering. *Those who suffer according to the will of God* receive this encouragement concerning the difficulty of their righteous pain—it is *the will of God* (cp. 3:7; 5:10). Knowing that fact, believers rest *their souls* in God's care and purpose. *Entrust (paratithemi)* is a banker's term referring to a deposit for safe keeping. One would be properly concerned about the character and ability of the person given such a trust. Jesus used the same word on the cross when He committed His Spirit to His Father (Lk. 23:46)... Believers are encouraged further to recall that the One to whom they give their souls is the *faithful Creator*. Only here in the New Testament is God called *Creator*. That is because it was generally understood that the Author of everything, the Designer of all that is, the One who sustains not only His material creation but achieves His purpose for it all, will bring to pass what He wills—only He is completely able and trustworthy *in doing what is right*. Who could be better than the trustworthy Creator who always acts righteously?

*McKnight:* Because of the severity of God's penetrating judgment, Peter exhorts these Christians to submit themselves to God by living a good life (4:19). If it is God's will for some to suffer, then those same people must, like Jesus (2:23), surrender themselves to the faithful Creator. Peter's construction makes it clear that the trust of these suffering Christians is to be exhibited by means of, or in the context of, doing good works. That is, they are to live honorably within their cultural context (2:11-12; 2:13-3:12) in such a way that there is no room for accusing them of sinfulness and rebellion.

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*Doriani:* Peter also tells us how to endure suffering. Curiously, he does not command us to be faithful; he reminds us that God is faithful. So we should continually commit or entrust ourselves to the faithful Creator. The word translated ‘commit’ means ‘to entrust or to hand over something to the care of another.’ (The Greek is *paratithēmi*. The verb is a present imperative, signifying an ongoing disposition.) The ‘thing’ that we commit to God is our very life, and we do so because we believe He is faithful.... The command is in the present tense, which means that we continue to commit ourselves to God, knowing that He is faithful. And while we suffer and trust, we do good, as He defines it in Scripture.

For next time: Read 1 Peter 5:1-11.

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### Lesson Summary

#### XII. Christian Suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19)

**Aim:** To be mindful that suffering for the sake of Christ is to be expected, and to use the opportunity to rejoice, glorify God, trust Him, and do good until Jesus returns.

##### A. Suffering for Christ's Name (4:12-16)

Peter continues to focus on Christian suffering, which is to be expected in this life. The sense of urgency in this passage is greater than earlier in Peter's letter. His exhortations are meant to encourage believers who are struggling with their circumstances.

###### 1. Suffer with the Right Attitude (4:12-13)

- *Beloved (agapētos)*; Peter's pastoral care shines through
- *Do not be surprised* at trials; they are not *something strange*; they are part of the Christian life (cp. Jn. 16:33)
- A *fiery trial (purōsis)* can be very painful, but is for our purification (cp. Mal. 3:1-3)
- They are God's *test (peirasmos)* to make us more like Christ (cp. James 1:3-12)
- Rather, *rejoice (chairō)* that you have the opportunity in the present to share (*koinoneite*) a part of Christ's sufferings (cp. Acts 5:41)
- We will have even greater reason to rejoice greatly at the revelation of Christ's glory in the future

###### 2. Suffer for the Right Reasons (4:14-16)

- Suffering insult for the name of Christ or as a Christian (cp. Mt. 5:10-11) are the proper reasons for suffering and will be rewarded
- You will be *blessed* both in the present and in the future, *because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*; like the *Shekinah* glory of God on the tabernacle
- You should not feel *ashamed*, but glorify God in the name of Christ/Christian
- However, suffering for crimes (e.g., murderer, thief, evildoer) or other sins (e.g., meddler [*allotriepiskopos*]) are deserved and bring no glory to Christ or reward from God

##### B. Suffering for God's Will (4:17-19)

Peter puts our suffering into perspective. Judgment comes upon all. For the Christian it is corrective discipline, a process of purification, to prepare us for heaven according to God's will. However, judgment upon the unbeliever is infinitely worse; it is punitive and eternal. Therefore, we should entrust ourselves to God who will deliver us through this present suffering and safely into eternity.

###### 1. Principle (4:17-18)

- The basic biblical principle is that judgment begins in *the household of God*, i.e., among His people, the church (cp. Jer. 25:29; Ez. 9:6; Amos 3:2)
- The ultimate judgment of God is His final judgment, to which Peter has referred several times (1:17; 2:23; 4:5-6)
- It is *time (kairos)*, the right moment – part of God's perfect will; suffering is a prelude to final judgment, but we will be covered by the blood of Christ
- *If it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*; the fate of the ungodly will be eternal damnation
- Peter quotes Pr. 11:31 to emphasize his point: *If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*
- Christian suffering is hard, but the alternative is infinitely worse

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### 2. Response (4:19)

- We should recognize that Christian suffering is *according to God's will*
- Therefore, we should *entrust (paratithemi)* [our] *souls to a faithful Creator*, just like Jesus (cp. 2:23; Lk. 23:46)
- We should also continue *doing good*, i.e., living the ‘good life,’ the ‘beautiful life’

1 Peter 4:12-19 summarizes and concludes Peter’s teaching on Christian suffering, which is a pervasive theme that runs throughout his first epistle. He first alluded to suffering as various trials for the testing of faith in 1:6-7. In 2:11-12, which is the foundation for the bulk of Peter’s teaching on how to live the Christian life, he introduces the concept of verbal abuse from unbelievers, which is a form of suffering. In 2:19, he speaks about servants suffering abuse from unjust masters, and uses that as a springboard to describe the sufferings of Jesus Christ in 2:21-25. Peter ramps up his discussion on Christian suffering in 3:13-17, but there, suffering is presented as more of a remote possibility rather than a present reality (*even if you should suffer for righteousness sake...*). When we come to 4:12-19, suffering is now seen as an inevitable, present reality.

Christians should not be surprised when they endure suffering for righteousness’ sake, because it is not something strange, but a part of God’s will. Indeed, God does send fiery trials/tests into our lives to purify us and make us more like Christ. Instead of being surprised, we should be joyful that we have an opportunity to partake in (have fellowship with) the sufferings of Christ. In fact, our joy at our present sufferings is merely a prelude for the overwhelming joy we will have at the revelation of Christ’s glory at His second coming. Suffering for the name of Christ or as a Christian results in blessing from God, because His Spirit of glory rests on you, like the *Shekinah* glory of God on the tabernacle. Therefore, we should take the opportunity to glorify God in return. Peter contrasts Christian suffering, which results in God’s blessing, with carnal suffering, which is what happens when we commit crimes or other sins.

A motivation for enduring Christian suffering is a realization that God’s judgment falls on all, but it starts in the household of God. Suffering in this life is a prelude to judgment. Christians need not fear the final judgment of God, because our sins are covered by the blood of Christ. However, if our suffering in this life, which is corrective discipline to prepare us for heaven, is difficult to bear, how much more unbearable will be the final judgment of eternal condemnation upon the ungodly, upon the one who does not obey the gospel? In light of God’s will that we suffer in this life prior to glory, let us entrust ourselves to God who will deliver us through this present suffering and safely into eternity.