

Suffering Saints and the Crucified Life – 1 Peter 4:1-6

Suffering Saints. Peter continues to direct his readers to Jesus; they were to consider their own present suffering in light of the sufferings of Christ, “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh.”

Most American Christians have little understanding of the “theology of suffering” or a good understanding of a Biblical response to suffering. We are conditioned by our American prosperity and false teachings, a view that when you come to Jesus your life will be “smooth and easy”. A life free from suffering, sorrow, trials, tribulations, pain and heart ache.

Peter is equipping his readers with a good Biblical understanding of suffering.

1 Peter 2:19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

1 Peter 2:21, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

1 Peter 2:23, “When he (Jesus) was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

1 Peter 4:1 Since 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,

Pe_4:16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

1Pe_5:9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

It is not a strange or unusual thing! 1 Peter 4:12-14, “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. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

Suffering is one of God’s most effective tools to bring about our sanctification and progress toward holiness, yet few of us ever truly embrace our pain and suffering. Seldom do we recognize the blessing that pain can be in our life when sent to us by our heavenly Father.

Biblical Theology of suffering: What Is Theology of suffering? Theology of suffering is the study of what the Bible says about suffering while considering who God is and the current state of humanity. Only Christianity deals realistically with pain and suffering, It does not deny its existence, it seeks to make sense of it in light of all we know about God!

People often wonder if God is a loving God, why would He allow anyone to suffer? If God is a sovereign God, why doesn't He rid the world of suffering? The false conclusion denies either the sovereignty of God or the goodness of God!

Without knowing who God truly is, you will be frustrated and angry at the events that are happening in your life and all around the world.

- God is all-powerful and He is good. Too wise to make a mistake, too powerful to overcome and too good to be cruel.
- Therefore, God must surely have some greater purpose for even our suffering!
- Suffering is therefore not outside of God's will, but a part of God's will for us.
- Suffering, and the Christian's response to suffering is for the glory of God!
- Suffering and pain are for our good, as well. It drives us to God, it cleanses us from many forms of vice and sin, it directs our attention away from the present world and cause us to long for heaven and eternity!

Note: Any foolish notion of a prosperity gospel would not have taken hold in the first century filled with persecution and martyrdom.

The Crucified Life. Peter urges his readers to "arm yourselves," (a military term indicating an impending struggle) with the same purpose or mind (the mind of Christ). The call of Christ is a call to take up your cross and follow Him! It is a call to die! We are crucified with Christ, and yet we live!

Jesus' call for discipleship: Luke 9:22-24, "saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

Luke 14:25-27, "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

Gal 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Gal. 5:24, "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Paul's personal experience: 2 Tim 3:10-13 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."

Peter speaks to the saints in this exhortation as to soldiers who had many enemies to engage with, and therefore, should put on their armor and be in a readiness to meet any attack upon them. Perhaps many of them would become martyrs; they would need the mind of Christ as they experienced such suffering and persecution.

While we may not become martyrs, we too are called to live the crucified life. We must make war against the indwelling sin within us.

Joel Beeke, “We need to suffer in order to purge away our sins and grow in his likeness? Sin clings to our souls more stubbornly than stains to our clothes, but God will get it out.

William Gurnall says: “God would not rub so hard if it were not to fetch out the dirt that is ingrained in our natures. God loves purity so well that he had rather see a hole than a spot in his child’s garments.

- **It involves a lifelong pursuit. (4:2)** The contrast is clear; will it be a life lived for the lusts of men or a life lived for the will of God? How long should we strive to live in accord with the will of God? “The rest of the time in the flesh.”

“to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). The Father calls us to holiness (Eph. 1:4). Christ died to make his church holy (Eph. 5:25–27). God will stop at nothing to make his people holy, after the image of his Son.

- **It involves making a break with the past. (4:3)** The crucified life looks nothing like the carnal life. We have had more than enough time living life our way, in accord with the lust of the flesh. Peter refers to it as the “desire of the Gentiles.”
- **It involves living differently than your peers. (4:4)** It is a false notion that Christians are to win the world by acting like the world. We are not to live as we formerly lived. We are called to holiness and purity. Peter says, “They are surprised that you do not run with them.”
- **It involves living life in light of eternity. (4:5-6)** The Christian lives his or her life with an eternal perspective and in light of coming judgment. To live **only** for the “here and now” is unbiblical. We live according to the will of God, even if it brings persecution and martyrdom.

Note: Some erroneous teaching is founded upon connecting 1 Peter 3:19 with 4:6. Together they are misapplied to teach a post-mortem salvation. This is not in line with the rest of Holy Scripture!

Application:

Are you making war against the indwelling sin in your life?

Are you living a life that is radically different from the world or unbelievers?

Are you in Christ, and therefore, able to stand in the day of judgment?