

KEEP CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER – 1 PETER 4:8-11	48
“HANG IN THERE” EVEN WHEN THINGS GET ROUGH	
1 PETER 4:12-14	49
BE SURE OF THE SOURCE OF SUFFERING – 1 PETER 4:15	50
HOLD FIRM AND TRUST IN GOD – 1 PETER 4:16-19	50
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 1 PETER 5:1-14	51

Christians do not suffer accidentally or because of irresistible forces of blind fate; rather they suffer in accordance with God’s good and perfect will. They do what is right and trust God to see them through it.

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The theme of this section in 1 Peter sounds a note of urgency. It urges us to remain staunch in our commitment to the mission God has given to us, no matter what! Peter tells us that if we expect to accomplish this, we have to keep close to God and to one another.

KEEP CLOSE TO GOD THROUGH FERVENT PRAYER

1 PETER 4:7

Peter’s exhortation to prayer (verse 7) is preceded by a statement which gives special urgency to it. He reminds his readers that “the end of all things is at hand.” Peter wasn’t thinking here primarily of the cataclysmic end of the physical world. Rather, he had in mind the idea of the goal to which all of God’s drama of salvation was leading. All of the major events in God’s plan had taken place. All things are ready for Christ’s Second Coming and the ushering in of the final phase of God’s eternal rule. It could happen any time.

The imminent “end of all things” should be an encouragement for Christians to keep especially close to their Lord through prayer. Peter says that they should all “keep sane and sober” so that their prayers might be more meaningful and relevant to the circumstances of their lives. Peter might have had in mind his own failure in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:37-40, 66-72). Instead of praying, Peter slept. As a result, he was completely unprepared for the temptations which he soon faced. The reality of the Second Coming should be strong motivation for us to be “people of prayer.”

KEEP CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER

1 PETER 4:8-11

Peter's advice to them, in view of the coming "end of all things," is very clear. In addition to strengthening their bond with God, they should make a special effort to strengthen the bonds of fellowship with one another "above all, hold unfailing your love for one another." The translation "hold unfailing" falls far short of conveying the intensity of the Greek word "ektenee." Martin Luther translates it with the earthy word "brunstige" which is used of animals in heat. It suggest the idea that showing love to fellow-believers should be a "driving passion" for every disciple of Jesus.

Peter points them to something that can fuel their determination to practice this "agape" love, no matter what. He says that "...love covers a multitude of sins." This phrase echoes Proverbs 10:12. Some Bible students regard the Greek word used here (*kaluptei*) as a technical term which means "to atone for." They find support in the words of Jesus regarding the woman who anointed His feet in the home of Simon, "I tell you her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much" (Luke 7:47; James 5:20). In light of the fact that all of our sins are already forgiven "once for all" (1 Peter 3:18), we need to look elsewhere for the meaning of Peter's statement. It is in the remembrance that Christ has "covered" the multitude of our sins that we find good reason for covering the sins that others commit against us, no matter how great they may be.

This earnest love, Peter says, will show itself in hospitality towards brothers and sisters in the faith. The Greek word (*philoxenoi*) literally means "love to strangers." Peter is telling them to open their homes to fellow Christians who might need a meal or a place to stay for the night. In those days they didn't have hotels and motels as we do today. Keep in mind also that when they became

Christians, many of them had cut their ties with former friends and were no longer welcome in their homes.

Peter recognizes that following through on hospitality may not always be convenient for them. It might even be a hardship for some. So he encourages them to do this work "ungrudgingly" (literally "without murmuring"). Stated in a positive way, they should embrace this as a privilege and actually a form of service to Christ Himself (Matthew 25:40). In verse 10, Peter undergirds this injunction to demonstrate their love to fellow Christians, especially strangers. He reminds them that whatever they have is a gift of grace entrusted to them by God and to be used "for one another." This applies to us, too. Whatever resources we have, we are to think of them as gifts of God's grace which He put into our hands to manage for Him. We are His stewards.

In verse 11, Peter mentions several examples of "God's varied grace" which are apropos of their situation. He mentions two main types of ministry, which they might be called to participate in. The first one, "whoever speaks, as one who utters the oracles of God." This is advice for all of the Christians, not just pastors. It includes all forms of speech activity, such as singing, personal testimony, and informal theological discussions (such as might take place in Bible classes). While this interpretation assumes that the ideas spoken truly "square" with God's Word, the comparative "as" emphasizes the seriousness of purpose with which a person should speak — like they would if they were proclaiming the "very words of God."

As in the ministry of sharing the Word, so in the ministry of service, having the right attitude is of great personal importance. The spirit of service should grow out of the personal understanding and belief that our capacity to help is truly a gift to us from God's treasury of "varied grace."

We become people who “render service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies.” Properly understood, this means that we are constantly aware that if we are able to share what we have for the common good, it is because God has given us the resources and the energy! With this understanding, we will not use our time, talent or treasure to bring honor and glory to ourselves. Rather, we will see to it that “in everything God may be glorified.” J.S. Bach made it a practice to write the initials “I.N.J.” (In the Name of Jesus) at the beginning of each composition. At the end, he put “Soli Deo Gloria!” (To God Alone Be the Glory!) What a nice way for us to dedicate ourselves — to live each day in Jesus’ Name and at the end of the day give God the glory for whatever good we have done!

“HANG IN THERE” EVEN WHEN THINGS GET ROUGH

1 PETER 4:12-14

Peter begins this section with the very personal and intimate “beloved” (agapeetoi). He wanted his readers to know that he could identify with them. Peter knew from personal experience what they were going to go through.

What Peter has to say to them was a scenario that most of them probably would never have dreamed of. He mentioned this in the beginning of his letter (1:6-7 and again 3:13-17). Now as he winds up his letter, he again talks about suffering for the faith. This might strike them as something which contradicted the promised blessing of the Gospel. They needed to get this straight in their minds now, so that when suffering hit them, it wouldn’t catch them off guard and cause them to deny the faith. Peter felt obligated to tell them that they shouldn’t “be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you, as though something strange were happening to you” (v.12). For Christians the very real possibility of suffering for the faith “comes with the territory.”

Peter refers to the “fiery trial” as something that has the capacity to bring about something profitable for them. It is not a wasteful thing. It “comes upon you to prove you.” This is the language of the goldsmith, who uses fire to purify and make even more precious the gold ore. (See Lesson 2). Peter suggests that if we will look at suffering from this viewpoint we will see how God can take something that is essentially a horrible experience and give it value.

But that isn’t all! Peter tells us that if we will take this view of suffering, which comes our way because of our relationship to Christ, we will be able to stand fast. In verse 13 he tells us that we will even find reason to be happy about it “...rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s suffering.” When you suffer because of your faith in Christ, you can think of it as a personal experience shared with Christ who suffered so much to make you His. And you can also anticipate the overwhelming joy that you will share with Him one day. So, instead of being thrown off balance by the trials that come your way, actually welcome them.

Peter (v.14) looks at it from still another angle. “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” It is Peter’s version of the beatitude: “Blessed are you when men shall revile you...for my sake” (Matthew 5:11). In verse 13, the reward for remaining steadfast was future bliss in heaven. Here, it is for the present. Very likely Peter was thinking about the word “glory” as it was used in the Old Testament. God’s glory was manifest as the “Skekinah” — the pillar of light which dwelt in the “Holy of Holies.” It was the visible sign of God’s presence. It was initially fulfilled in the person of Jesus — Immanuel — “God with us.” So His people who bear His reproach and suffer for His Name are owned as His by a special anointing or manifestation of the Spirit of God. What an honor! What an incentive!

BE SURE OF THE SOURCE OF SUFFERING

1 PETER 4:15

We're not sure what led Peter to insert this word of cautioned clarification found in verse 15, where he tells them that they should be sure that their suffering is definitely caused by their relationship to Christ. Not all suffering carries with it the promise of spiritual blessing. He mentions several examples which may or may not have been true for them. It is pretty obvious to them that the person who suffered because he was a "murderer or a thief or a wrong-doer" brought this upon himself. This kind of suffering has no particular merit or blessing.

Then Peter mentions something else. In the Greek text the word "as" (oos) occurs before "murderer," but not in front of "thief" or "wrong-doer." Yet it is placed again before the word for "mischief-maker" [meddler]. This seems to put this term in a class by itself. The first three crimes are such that any of the non-Christians might be guilty. The last one would have been an activity that was peculiar to Christians and something that brought suffering to them. The Greek word for "mischief-maker" (*allotriepiskopos*) is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Some scholars think that it may have been "coined" by Peter himself. Literally, it means to be involved in the business of others. The NIV translates it "meddlers." Dr. Thayer's Greek Lexicon has this note: "The writer seems to refer to those, who with holy but intemperate zeal, meddle with the affairs of the Gentiles — whether public or private — in order to make them conform to the Christians' standards." You could see how such activity would be obnoxious to many and bring social disfavor upon them. People like this would consider themselves as martyrs and seek to claim the blessings Peter refers to. Peter says, "No way!"

HOLD FIRM AND TRUST IN GOD

1 PETER 4:16-19

The suffering because they are Christians, on the other hand, is a suffering that qualifies for God's blessing. The title "Christian" was just coming into

use when Peter wrote. They didn't pick the name for themselves, but when it was hurled at them in derision, they willingly accepted it, indicating that they were honored to be associated with Christ.

Verse 17 gives another perspective on the suffering they may be called upon to endure. The suffering was to be looked upon as a judgment of God. It was to be a judgment of refining, to test their faith, and to make them strong. It is quite likely that the judgment scene of Ezekiel 9 was in Peter's mind when he wrote this, indicating that God's judgment will begin with God's house, which is now the New Testament Church, and then spread outward to destroy all unbelievers. A similar thought is spoken of in Malachi 3, which predicts that the Lord Himself "will suddenly come to His temple" as the messenger of the covenant who is "like a refiner's fire."

The "reading" his readers should take on the trials they endured is that this is a sign that the Lord Himself was in their midst and they should rejoice in His presence. The "flip" side of this truth is that His judgment upon those "who do not obey the Gospel of God (v.17)" will be their utter ruin. Verse 18 is an echo of verse 17, taken from Proverbs 11:31. In plain English it says that if the people of God make it through the judgment of God "by the skin of their teeth," what chance do the unbelievers have? The word "therefore" (Grk.ooste) which begins verse 18 introduces what follows as a summary statement of all that Peter was attempting to teach them with this section; yes, with the entire epistle. Christians do not suffer accidentally or because of irresistible forces of blind fate; rather they suffer in accordance with God's good and perfect will. They do what is right and trust God to see them through it.

Remembering this will help us to put the question of temporary suffering in proper perspective and not allow it to keep us from doing what is right in the eyes of God. Now, can you put this thought into your own words and make it a part of your "Personal Mission Statement?"

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1 PETER 5:1-14

Help me Lord, to accept the reality of evil forces around me and to recognize that Satan is behind them hoping to rob me of the blessing of salvation as well as the blessings You want to give me during my sojourn on earth. Give me wisdom and strength of faith to resist him and stay true to You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Review Question

1. In Lesson 7 (and again in Lesson 8) Peter tells us that Christians should expect to experience hostility in one form or another from the unbelieving world around them. Please relate any personal hostility you have experienced.

Why does God allow it (4:12)?

1 Peter 5:1-5

2. What three things (v.1) does Peter refer to as credentials which should get the elders (pastors) to "listen up?"

Why do you suppose he did not refer to his authority as an apostle? (Verse 3 might give you a hint)

What do you think he had in mind with the phrase "partaker in the glory that is to be revealed"?

3. To what occupation does Peter compare (v. 2) the role of pastors?

To emphasize the tremendous responsibility they have, how does he refer to the "sheep" in their care?

From Psalm 23, put together a shepherd's "Mission Statement."

In relationship to his ministry, what should be the faithful pastor's:
Attitude

Style

Motive

What incentive (v.4) does Peter give?

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4. Why do you think that Peter (v. 5) singles out “younger” people for special counsel?

Put into your own words what you think he was recommending to them:

Why is humility or submissiveness so important if a fellowship of believers is going to be all that God intends it to be? (Think in terms of your own congregation)

1 Peter 5:6–11

5. Before whom also is it important to be submissive (v.6)?

What is Peter probably referring to with the term “the mighty hand of God”? (See 4:19)

How were they to regard their trials and tribulations?

What should they (and we) confidently do with any and all anxieties (v. 7)?

Why?

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6. Even though we do not need to be anxious, what does Peter tell us (v.8) we still need to do?

Why?

Do you think that Satan is still “roaring” in our civilized society today? If you don’t hear him, does that mean he’s not around? Explain.

7. Did Peter tell the Christians of Asia Minor to run and try to hide from Satan? What (v.9) was his advice?

What did James (4:7) add to this?

How did Jesus (Matthew 4) drive Satan away?

Did this work for the early Christians? (Revelation 12:10–12)

Of what else does Peter remind them? (v.9)

How might this help them in their struggles?

8. What other assurances does Peter give them in verse 10?

9. How can they be sure about all of this? (v.11)

What is the significance of the Amen?

1 Peter 5:12–14

10. How does Peter (v.12) summarize in just a few words the two goals he had in mind when he wrote this letter?

How does his instruction in verse 14 fit in with what Peter wrote in 3:8 and 4:8?

To what does Peter link his farewell: “Peace” (Shalom)?
