

Message 4

I Peter 4:1-5:11

In the final section of his letter, Peter returns to the **Theme of Conduct and Attitude**.

Peter mentioned the topic of “suffering” several times in this letter. See 2:19-23; 3:14, 17. In chapter 4 Peter developed this subject. Chapter 4 begins with the word “therefore.” This word is a clue that Peter is linking the new material to what he has previously written.

Back in chapter 2, verses 21-23, Peter emphasized that Christ suffered unjustly. He did not deserve the terrible treatment that was inflicted on Him because He was without sin and innocent of any wrongdoing. Believers can expect to be mistreated like Christ, and the sufferings which believers will endure will be unjust. Read Jesus’ words about this subject in John 15:18-25.

The first verse in the 4th chapter instructs believers to “arm themselves.” This is a term which means to “get prepared” for what will happen in the future. Many Scripture verses inform us that persecution and abuse are unavoidable, so we must prepare ourselves to be ready. We prepare ourselves in our “attitudes.”

Think about Peter. About 30 years before he wrote this letter Jesus had told him how he would die. See John 21:18-19. Peter had many years to anticipate the end of his life. He could have been afraid of the pain, could have tried to avoid the crucifixion, could have chosen to not be a witness for Christ, could have hidden himself in some remote place. But Peter didn’t do any of these things. He was a bold leader and witness for Christ. Peter was mentally prepared for the suffering he would face. (According to tradition, Peter was crucified upside down.) He is an example for us.

Christ is our most important model; He had the proper attitude about His coming to earth as a human, and about the death He was going to die. Philippians 2:4-8 explains the willingness of Jesus to die for the sake of others. Hebrews 12:2 states the enthusiasm of Jesus in dying for us. We must have the same attitude as Christ in our service to God.

What does suffering represent? For one thing, the willingness to endure suffering is proof of a person’s priorities. Do we have a cause or reason that is so important and so worthwhile that we should be willing to sacrifice ourselves to achieve it? If we appreciate what God has done for us, the answer should be “yes.” See what Paul wrote in II Corinthians 5:14-15. Because Christ laid down His life for us, we should be willing to lay down our lives for others. We need to have the same attitude as Jesus Christ. He was willing to leave the glories of heaven in order to be a human servant, and then He was willing as a man to humble Himself even more in order to die on the cross for the sake of sinners.

What else does suffering represent? Another part of the answer is at the end of 4:1 “the person who has suffered in his body is done with sin.” This means that sin no longer has its powerful influence over our lives. Suffering is proof of a sanctified life. What is the “sanctified life”? It is a life controlled by the Holy Spirit. Believers must seek to live lives that are pleasing to God. Their primary desire must be to become more and more like Jesus Christ in their attitudes and behavior. See Galatians 5:16-25. I Peter 4:2 summarizes this point. The highest priority for believers is not an earthly life following evil human desires, but rather fulfilling the “will of God.”

Verses 3-6 are parenthetical so we will skip to verse 7.

Read I Peter 4:7-11 Verse 7 mentions the “end of all things.” This verse is not a reference to the second coming of Christ. The phrase indicates that all the major events in God’s plan of redemption have occurred. Everything necessary for the salvation of mankind was accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross. Everything necessary for the believer has been provided by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Everything necessary for the work of the Church has been provided through the gifts and empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture indicates that we are living in the last days. It is unclear how long these “last days” will continue, but it is clear how we are to live in these days and what we are to do in these days. Peter gives some commands about our Attitudes and Conduct.

We are to be “**clear minded.**” This means that we are to understand the times and the will of God. We are to be spiritually mature and wise. (Remember, Scripture indicates that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”) We must understand who we are in Christ and what God expects of us.

We must be “**self controlled.**” We are to be disciplined in behavior. A self-controlled believer will not do the things mentioned in verse 3. A disciplined person has a well defined, specific purpose in life.

Understanding and discipline are connected with prayer. I John 5:14-15 explains this connection. The assurance of answered prayer is limited by a conditional clause, “If we ask according to his will.” In order to ask according to God’s will, we need to know what God wants and we need to put our desires and wishes under His authority and to fit them into His purposes. When we pray with understanding and with disciplined purpose, we can be assured that God will hear and answer. In our prayers, we must acknowledge the infinite wisdom of God’s will and subordinate our desires to it.

Here is something else to keep in mind: Prayer is not trying to bend God’s will toward us. Rather, the purpose of prayer is to turn us toward Him. God wants us to be at the level of spiritual maturity where we understand what He wants, and where we want what He wants. Only then will we have the confidence that we will receive what we request.

Next, Peter commands believers to **“love each other deeply.”** See Colossians 3:12-14. Love is the virtue which binds all other godly virtues together in perfect unity. Love is the basic virtue which shapes and influences all the other good things we do. This is why Peter wrote “above all,” meaning that this is the most important quality of all. Without love, believers will be suspicious of each other, uncaring, critical. The second part of verse 8 is a quotation from the Old Testament (from Proverbs 10:12) “Love covers over a multitude of sins.” Love is the garment that must be worn over everything else.

Believers are to **“offer hospitality** to one another without grumbling.” Hospitality is a practical expression of love. Peter lived in a culture where some believers could suddenly find themselves without employment and homeless because of their faith. The members of the family of God had a responsibility to look after such unfortunate believers. The words “without grumbling” indicates the difficulty of offering hospitality. Taking care of someone else involves time and inconvenience and expense. Continual grumbling and complaining takes the joy out of life and are ultimately against God.

Verses 10-11 “Each believer should **use whatever gift he has received** to serve others.” Scripture indicates that every believer has been given a special gift by the Holy Spirit. These gifts are abilities and skills and talents which are empowered by the Holy Spirit for use in ministry. These gifts are supposed to function cooperatively, in harmony, so that the body of believers will be strong and healthy. The important words in verse 10 are “to serve others.” These gifts are not to be used for personal selfish reasons, but are to be used for the common good of everyone. Peter states that each gift is to be used faithfully to administer God’s grace.

I Peter 4:12-19 are like a summary of the points we have been talking about. Believers may suffer, and the suffering may be unjust, but if suffering is because of Christ, it is reason for rejoicing. If we are insulted because of the name of Christ, we are blessed. If we suffer as believers, we do not need to be ashamed. Those who suffer according to God’s will should **“commit themselves”** to God and **“continue to do good.”** The word “commit” means to “entrust” or “give yourself to” or “place yourself in the hands of.” When believers are facing difficult times, they are to continue to yield themselves to God in a determined way. They are not to change their habits of doing good. They are not to waver in their confidence because of circumstances.

Now chapter 5. This chapter is still talking about Attitudes and Behaviors. The early verses focus specifically on “elders” and “young men” (v1-5a). The concluding verses (5b-11) are general instructions for “everyone.”

Purity and maturity in the “family of God” (the Church) is important. Good leadership is necessary to maintain the spiritual health of the Church. Strong leadership in the local churches is especially important and necessary in times of persecution and suffering.

Elders are the leaders of the Church. Peter gives three titles for leaders. They are “Elders,” “Shepherds,” and “Overseers.” There are a number of characteristics that these men should have:

- They are responsible for the well-being of God’s flock.
- They are expected to be willing and eager servants
- They are not to be materialistic and authoritarian like worldly leaders.
- They are to be examples to believers.

Young Men, the word used in verse 5, can refer to believers who were young in the faith. Also, in the Greek language, the masculine plural form was sometimes used for a mixed group of young men and women. Peter instructed these young believers to be submissive to believers who were older. Notice the phrase, “in the same way be submissive.” It is possible that Peter was linking “young men” back to the section which included slaves, wives, and husbands. New believers must be taught and disciplined by more mature believers.

All of You This final section (verses 5b through 11) is for everyone. In these verses Peter emphasizes four main behaviors:

Believers must be clothed with **humility**. The phrase “clothe yourselves” is a reference to the special clothing that workmen would put on before beginning their tasks, such as an apron. Earlier we thought of love as the garment which went over all the good character traits that believers should have. There is a relationship between love and humility. I Peter 5:5 means that believers must be ready for action for the sake of others. The most important characteristic for Christians is humility. It is the willingness to serve others, to put the concerns for others ahead of personal concerns. Christ is the greatest example of humility. See Philippians 2:4-8. Matthew 20:28 informs us that Christ came to serve, not to be served.

Believers are to place themselves under the “mighty hand of God.” The “mighty hand of God” represents His authority, discipline, and deliverance. It refers to the incredible abilities of the Lord. God uses His “mighty hand to “lift up His people” and to “put down” His enemies. When we place ourselves under the hand of God, it means that we are submitting to Him and allowing Him to show His power in and through us.

Believers are to maintain **peace of mind and heart**. We are to “hand over” all our anxieties to God. We are not to be unduly concerned about the circumstances of this life. We are to entrust ourselves to God. We are to be dependent on Him for our needs and security.

Believers are to **be self controlled and alert** — This statement has the meaning of “Don’t do anything foolish or careless.” Believers must understand the dangers of temptations. They must be aware that they are the targets of the devil. Believers must constantly stay under the protection of God or they will fall into temptation and do something foolish and sinful. If they walk in the Spirit they will not succumb to the attractions of the devil.

The final instruction in the letter is **stand firm in the faith**. Believers can resist the devil. Satan tries to intimidate us — tries to get us sidetracked from the path that God wants us to walk on. We are to resist the pressures. The power of the devil has been broken and we don't have to yield to his influence. We must live in the victory that has already been made available to us.

Believers who are under pressure and enduring suffering often feel isolated and despairing. In verse 9 Peter reminded his readers that believers all over the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering. We belong to a fellowship of sufferers. Our Lord suffered for us. God wants us to be willing to suffer for the sake of others.

I Peter 5:10-11 is the benediction of the letter. In these two verses Peter emphasizes the two themes of encouragement which have run through this letter. God, in His grace, has called His people to His eternal glory and, in spite of their suffering here on earth, has extended hope and encouragement to them.

We based this study on I Peter 5:12. This is the verse in which Peter explained the purpose of the letter. He wrote this letter to encourage his readers and to testify about (explain) the grace of God. Peter used the word "grace" only four times in the letter (1:2; 1:13; 4:9; 5:10). Based on the fact that "grace" was mentioned so few times, we might think that he did not do a good job of writing. However, if we connect the subject of "grace" to our "calling to eternal glory" (verse 10), then we can understand Peter's style of writing.

This letter is actually filled with information about our "calling." "Calling" refers to the expectations that God has for us. We are called to be the people of God, and to practice a godly lifestyle, and to serve in a Christlike way, and to be faithful in spite of adverse circumstances.

God's calling of us is all of grace. He has called us to share in His eternal glory in Christ. He will "restore" us and "make us strong, firm and steadfast" throughout our earthly lives and bring us into His glory. According to Peter, our confidence in the grace of God should provide more than enough hope and encouragement to sustain us through whatever suffering we may undergo in this life. This will be our experience if we "stand fast" in the grace of God.