

Review

Peter has been talking to us about suffering for doing right. He said that we are rejoicing over the salvation that will be revealed to us...

1Pet. 1:6 ...even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials

These trials often include being ignorantly slandered as evildoers (1Pet. 2:12, 15), and having unreasonable authorities over us (1Pet. 2:18). But Peter reassured us that...

1Pet. 2:20 ...if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

He told us that we...

1Pet. 2:21 ...have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps

Our response must be like Christ's response: not reviling in return, and while suffering, not uttering threats (1Pet. 2:23). We need to be...

1Pet. 3:9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

1Pet. 3:14-17 ...if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

Now, as we pick up with chapter four, Peter continues this train of thought.

4:1-2 Ceased From Sin

The way that "he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" reads, people often take it to mean that if you suffer enough, you can become sinless. They go beyond asceticism, which is to strictly deny self, and actually make themselves suffer physically. They afflict themselves through practices such as self-flagellation, trying to produce sinlessness.

But that is certainly not Peter's intention. He is saying that you are at the point of suffering for doing righteousness, you are finished with sin, you've been released from its hold as the most important thing to you. I think the New Living Translation communicates that point very well in this verse:

1Pet. 4:1(NLT) So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you are willing to suffer for Christ, you have decided to stop sinning.

If you are willing to suffer for Jesus, then sin is no longer your priority - it really doesn't have a hold of you anymore.

Live For The Will Of God

Peter is telling us, "Jesus lived so righteously, but suffered so greatly. That is the example we've been given. That's how we're supposed to be living."

Jesus denied Himself the pleasure of sin, and instead lived to do the will of God. He said,

John 15:15 "...all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

As a matter of fact, He so accurately did God's will that He was able to say to people,

John 8:19 ..."if you knew Me, you would know My Father also."

Now, we are exhorted to follow that example. Jesus told us,

Matt. 12:50 "For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

We're supposed to be living the rest of our lives not for sin, but for the will of God.

4:3 The Time Past Is Sufficient

We're supposed to be living to do the will of God, not living for our own satisfaction and self-indulgence. Peter is saying, "Hey Church! Enough already! Whatever time you had in the world was enough for you! The sex and drunkenness, the pursuit of pleasures... If you're a Christian, it's over with."

I know that I personally had plenty of time to pursue that lifestyle. I've been there, done that, and certainly don't miss it. Being burned out on drugs, wasting my life away, having no self-control, looking for the next high, spending all my money, afraid of the police, in danger of arrest, overdose, disease, pregnancy, fights... Who needs it? I'm done with it. I wish I'd never gone through it. One minute in pursuit of that stuff was more than enough time.

4:4-6 They Are Surprised

Maybe you've noticed that people who don't know Christ often don't deal well with Christians. When they encounter a born-again believer that doesn't get drunk, have sex outside of marriage, use profanity, take drugs, or engage in other immoral activities, they often get surprised, resentful, confrontational, stand-offish, or any number of other responses. Frequently they will malign the Christian - making fun of, or putting down, the believer.

Just this morning, I received a hateful e-mail from a man whom I knew years ago.

He wrote, "*...what do you expect from a religion who isolates themselves from the world? They do nothing to change the world, they just complain about it. Who only focus on the negative aspects of life and point their finger at anyone who seems to be enjoying themselves. You cause more problems by setting a lifestyle of your own and forcing people to live by your standards...*"

Obviously, he's bitter at Christians. He resents the fact that we don't indulge in the flesh, because seeing an example of righteousness makes him feel guilty. No one has pointed their finger at him and con-

demned him. It's just a guilty conscience lashing out in defense of itself.

It's tempting to try and show a person like this, "See, I'm the same as you... Let's have a beer. Let's go to the strip club. Let's watch this profane movie." But don't give in to this pressure. Remember: When the unrepentant reviler dies, they are going to stand before the judgment throne of God and give an account for every word, and for every action. As for the people who heard the gospel and believe, they may die from persecution or false accusation, but they will be welcomed into heaven, made alive in the spirit.