

How To Face Suffering

1 Peter 4:1-6

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Peter says in 1 Peter 4:1, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves,” that’s the key theme tonight, “arm yourselves.” We’re going to look at five ways we should arm ourselves to be able to stand against suffering as Christ did as well. He says, “. . . likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; 2 That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. 3 For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: 4 Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: 5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead”—or the living and the dead. Peter says, “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead,”—that literally is ‘them that are now dead’—“that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

Go back with me to verse 1. Peter calls on the persecuted saints that are suffering from the opposition of the world to “arm yourselves.” That phrase “arm yourselves” is a military term that refers to a soldier taking up weapons in preparation for battle. Peter knows these believers are in a battle, and he wants them to be armed and ready and equipped.

It’s been said, and I believe it’s true, the Christian life is not a playground, it’s a battleground. I have people come to me all the time, “It seems like I read the Bible, I pray, and I go to church, and every time I seek the Lord, things go wrong in my life and people oppose me and opposition comes against me and trials come against me.” My response is always, “You think it’s going to be easy following Jesus Christ in a world that has rejected Him?” You know that we as believers have three basic enemies. I know you’ve heard it before, but let me go over it: the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world and the flesh wouldn’t be too big of a deal, if it weren’t for the devil; but we have the world, the flesh, and the devil.

What is the world? The world is the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The word “world” there is a Greek word *kósmos*. It means the world apart from God, the evil world system, the sinful way of the world’s ways. The Bible tells us that Satan is “. . . the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” This world is actually his domain, so we are strangers and pilgrims. If you’re a Christian, this world is not your home. This world is not favorable to you or conducive for your walk with the Lord. You’re going to have to oppose the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

What is the flesh? The flesh, of course, is your sinful Adamic nature. When you were born again, you received a new nature, a new power and ability to live a life pleasing to God, but you still have the sinful nature that wants to dominate or control. If we didn’t have that, we wouldn’t sin as believers, but we do still wrestle with sin. Paul said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of [sin]?” Even though we have the Holy Spirit, which brings the

new nature, we still now have an old nature that we fight and war against. Paul said, “The things that I want to do, I don’t do; the things I don’t want to do, I do.” In Galatians, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.”

Thirdly, we face the devil. The devil, of course, is a fallen angel whose name was Lucifer, created by God, rebelled against God through pride, and fell from heaven, now becomes the archenemy of God, and there really is a devil. When you become a Christian, the reason why it’s a challenge to live in this world is you have the world, you have your sinful flesh, and you have the devil—they’re all warring against us. Paul is writing to these believers that were fighting in these areas. The particular area that they were fighting was that the unbelieving world were persecuting them for their faith in Jesus Christ. They were taking a stand and they needed to put on the armor of God. They needed to arm themselves.

Peter tells them, and tells us here, what the armor is that we need to take up if we’re going to stand triumphantly, like Jesus, in the face of suffering and persecution from the world. The Bible says, “. . . all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” We need to arm ourselves.

What do we need to arm ourselves with in order to stand? Let me give you the five things Peter tells us we need to arm ourselves with to face suffering and persecution. (I believe the points will appear on the screen as well.) I want you to see them in your Bibles. The first is the right attitude. If we’re going to be victorious against the world, the flesh, the devil, and the persecution that comes our way, we have to face the world with the right attitude. Go back with me to verse 1. “Forasmuch then,”—that ties it in with what we finished in 1 Peter 3 where we saw Christ triumphantly, from verses 18-22, in His crucifixion, in His proclamation, in His resurrection, in His ascension, and in His exaltation.

Christ suffered, yet He rose from the dead, He is in heaven reigning victoriously, so we’re going to follow in His train. We’re going to follow in His victory. As Jesus was persecuted and crucified, we don’t die for the sins of the world, but we may be persecuted like Christ because of our commitment to follow Him. We need to, like Christ, “as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh.” It’s referring to His death by crucifixion, which ended in His resurrection, ascension, and glorification. Now, what he says, “. . . arm yourselves,”—equip yourselves—“likewise”—and here’s the point—“with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.”

That phrase, “with the same mind,” that word “mind” is speaking of the attitude or outlook that Jesus had. It doesn’t mean that I have the same mind as Christ, it means I have the same attitude or outlook that Jesus had. The same concept is used in Philippians 2 where Paul says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought”—equality with God not something to hold on to but emptied Himself—“and took upon him the form of a servant,” again, the idea of “mind” there is the idea of attitude or outlook. We need to have that same attitude and outlook. That attitude and outlook that Jesus had was to

do the will of the Father. When Jesus came from heaven to earth, He came to do the Father's will—and we need to have that same mindset, that same attitude or outlook—and to finish the work the Father gave Him to do, so should we want to finish the work the Father's called us to do.

As we go through this passage tonight, you're going to see that basically it's a call to discipleship. It's a call to say, "I want to live for the Lord, and I want to fulfill His plan and purpose for me." If you have become a Christian, and you've given your heart to Jesus Christ, you've been born again and you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you, you know what your desire should be? To do the will of God, to be right smack dab in the center of God's will—not your will, not your plans, not your ambitions, not your goals, but God's. "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body . . . which are God's." The natural response of a true child of God should be, "Here am I, Lord, use me. Here am I, Lord, have Your way with me. Here am I, Lord, help me to please You, obey You, and do Your will," even to the point of being willing to die as Christ did and suffered.

The reason for this attitude is important, verse 1, notice it says, " . . . for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." Whenever you see that little word "for," especially at the beginning of a text, or the middle of a text sometimes, it's indicating the rationale or the reason or the motivation or the purpose behind that. Why should I have the mind of Christ? Why should I have the attitude and outlook of Christ? Why should I want to do the Father's will and to serve Him for His glory? It says that because we, in suffering like Christ, that we suffer like Him, we have " . . . ceased from sin."

I want you to understand this phrase. This is what makes this section of Peter, as much as other sections as well, challenging. What does he mean "ceased from sin"? Is he trying to say that if I commit my life totally to following Jesus Christ and say, "I'm here to do Your will, and, if need be, suffer for Your glory," that I won't sin anymore? Obviously not. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Don't ever let anyone tell you that you, in your mortal body this side of heaven, are going to reach a state of sinless perfection. There are some Christians I think that are wrong in their interpreting of Scripture that believe that they can reach a state of being sinlessly perfect.

I had a woman in my former church for years that was of that persuasion, and she would argue with me until she got red in the face, "I don't sin. I don't sin. I don't sin." She was getting angry at me and yelling at me telling me that she doesn't sin, but she was sinning in our conversation. I always felt like saying, "Well, let me talk to your husband and find out if you sin or not. Let me talk to your kids."

It doesn't mean that we willfully, deliberately, continually, habitually practice sin, that's not going to characterize a child of God, and you won't be sinless, but you will sin less and less and less as you grow in what we call "sanctification." That's being made in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

But suffering—listen carefully, this is an amazing truth in this text—and being persecuted for

Christ's sake should produce holiness in our lives. When he says you've " . . . ceased from sin," what he means is you will no longer be living habitually in sin. It doesn't mean you altogether vanish sin from your life, but it means that you don't follow sin as the dominant thing of your life.

Remember before you were saved, what did you do? Sin, sin, sin, sin, sin. Right? Nobody says anything. "Amen, preacher, I sin!" Do you know what Paul said? He said, "I was the chief of sinners. I was like the big chief of sinners! O wretched man that I am." But we know that when we become believers, we no longer practice—habitually, willingly—sin. It has a sanctifying affect on our life. One of the ways that God sanctifies the Christian is through suffering, and if God would do that, He can use persecution and opposition to sanctify us. This is why I need to arm myself with the same attitude.

As Christians, we're often facing two possibilities in this world. We face the possibility of sin, which is ever present, and/or suffering. When we suffer, we can make a choice to allow it to work for us, not against us. That's an important key. I see Christians going through suffering that come out better rather than bitter. They come out more Christlike rather than falling away from Christ, and it all hinges upon your attitude or your outlook that you are willing to do whatever God wants you to do to be in the will of God, even if it means suffering and opposition, and that you want God's purpose and plan for your life.

Peter says that we should " . . . arm yourselves . . . for he that hath suffered"—and again, the context of persecution—"in the flesh hath ceased from sin"—or is no longer practicing or living in habitual sin. It's so very, very important.

Jesus said in John 15:20, "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." We must be armed with the attitude that we will take up our cross and follow Jesus. We used to sing, Though none go with me, still I will follow. Even if I have to walk a lonely road with Jesus, I'd rather do that than be without Him in the crowd. Amen? It's just making an outlook or an attitude of your heart that, "I'm not going to be afraid of persecution or opposition, I'm going to arm myself with the same attitude that Christ did." Our attitudes are weapons—wrong attitudes will lead to defeat, but right attitudes will lead to victory.

Here's the second thing we need to arm ourselves with as we stand and face opposition and persecution, arm yourselves with the right ambitions. I love this, verse 2, right ambitions. "That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." That is, again, the purpose or the reason or the end result, "That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh."

At the end of verse 1, he says, " . . . for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin," he's actually restating the same thought and same idea in a different way saying, what this produces, "That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh," and that's the negative. Suffering can have a good sanctifying affect upon our life. We should never freak out when people oppose us as living righteously because it has a sanctifying affect upon our lives.

Notice the second half of verse 2. It says there, “That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but”—here’s the positive—“to the will of God.” Again, he’s encouraging us to have an ambition that we don’t live after the lusts of men. He’s saying, “You don’t live according to your selfish, fleshly ambitions.” Again, that’s not what should characterize a Christian, but to live, “. . . to the will of God.” You have two options: the lust of men, and the will of God, verse 2. The negative, “. . . to the lusts of men,” which we’re going to see was our BC days, before Christ; or positive, “but to the will of God.” We have to walk according to the will of God.

Another hymn that I used to love singing as a boy growing up in church was that song, I wish we could revive it and sing it here at our church, Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way! Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still. What a beautiful song. Have Your way, Lord, in me. You are the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still. When we suffer, we should just see ourselves as clay and He the potter and that He’s molding and making and shaping us according to His will. What a beautiful prayer that is to say.

What is your ambition? Arm yourselves with an ambition to do God’s will. Even if you’ve been walking with the Lord for forty years, for fifty years, for sixty years, even if you’ve been serving the Lord for many, many years, we should always be reconsecrating ourselves to God and just saying, “Lord, have Your way in me. Have Your way in my life.” When was the last time you got alone with God and just said, “Lord, I’ll go where You want me to go. I’ll do what You want me to do. I’ll be what You want me to be. I’ll say what You want me to say,” consecrating your life to God. What a beautiful thing that is as God leads us and guides us.

The first is the right attitude; secondly, is the right ambition to do the will of God, verse 2; and thirdly, arm yourself with the right activities. Be doing what is right. All this text in Peter is about suffering as a Christian, suffering for righteousness’ sake; not suffering for sin, but suffering for doing what is right. Verse 3 tells us to arm ourselves with the right activities. Look at verse 3, “For the time past”—this is our BC days before we came to Christ—“of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles,”—basically, he’s saying that in the days before we were saved and born again, we were living like the Gentiles lived. The Bible uses that expression quite often, not just for the people who were Gentiles as opposed to Jewish, but it became a synonym for a sinful life because the Jews had the law of God, they had the light of God’s Word, and they had moral standards, they had the Ten Commandments; but the Gentiles were pagan. They were a really sinful culture, so he says, “You’re living as the Gentiles did, “. . . when we walked in,”—he’s talking about our sinful past.

Notice the six sins that he describes they were engaged in before they were saved as they lived as the Gentiles, “. . . lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable”—or detestable—“idolatries.” This is one of the classic list of sins in the Bible that when you are living the Christian life should never be a part of your life or named as believers. It’s sad to know that sometimes Christians have fallen into these sinful ways, and that shouldn’t be.

Let me go back over them quickly. “Lasciviousness” is a reference to just lewdness in general—unrestrained indulgence primarily in the area of sexual immorality. I’m not going to go into any details by any means, but every one of these sins has a connection to sexual immorality. The Gentiles lived very sexually immoral lives and, of course, many Gentiles today that are saved have that as their sinful past.

He mentions the word “lusts,” so you don’t want to be living in your lust. This is the gratification of unlawful appetites of any kind, here probably referring to sexual sins or sexual immorality.

Then, “excess of wine,” that phrase is a reference to drunkenness. It often leads to weakening one’s willpower and the yielding to immorality. This is something that we should not be involved in.

“Revellings,” is a reference to, believe it or not, orgies. Drunkenness and then ties in with...the word literally could be translated “orgies.”

The fifth, “banquetings.” You say, “Gee, I go to banquets all the time. What’s the big deal? Why is that in that list?” The Greek word translated “banquetings” in our English Bible would be better rendered carousals or “revellings.” It’s wild drinking parties that lead to sinful and wild behavior that have a connotation of doing it in public and doing it in the open. It’s almost like we’re describing a college campus today or something, right? It’s just the party scene.

The sixth, “abominable idolatries.” This isn’t just worshiping statues or idols, this is the sexual immorality that accompanied their actual worship with these idols. It’s the worship of idols with all the associated sexual and drunken behavior. So, note, sinful man has not changed. How contemporary is this list. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. We live in the same kind of world that Paul the apostle did, that Peter did, the early Christian church was born into. People still worship false gods of Bacchus or wine. People just about worship wine today, and it’s a dangerous thing. The goddess of Aphrodite, the god of sexual love; the god of mammon, money or possessions. Jesus said, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” We need to arm ourselves with the worship of the true and living God, who is holy.

The number one chief attribute that God reveals of Himself in the Bible is that He is a holy God, and He says to us, “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” If a Christian is to be anything, he’s to be like God in holiness. Now, we will never be absolutely holy until we get to heaven and see Jesus face to face and we no longer have our bodies with our sinful flesh or we’re no longer in this world and we no longer contend with the devil, but we are to be living more holy all the time. This section of Peter deals with those that are being persecuted, that if they respond properly, they can grow in holiness in the will of God and bring honor and glory to God.

A holy life is a powerful weapon in the hands of God, and a sinful life is a powerful weapon in the hands of the devil. Our life influences others, so we need to have the right attitude, verse 1; the right ambitions, verse 2; and the right activities, live in holiness to God. By the way, all six of these sins that are mentioned in verse 3 are in the plural form of the Greek. That means that

they are just continually taking place in your life before you were born again and became a believer.

Here's the fourth, verse 4, Peter says that we should arm ourselves with the right associations. Look at verse 4, "Wherein they,"—the 'they' there are those who are living like the Gentiles, walking in their sinful behavior—"think it strange that ye"—the believer, the Christian—"run not with them to the same"—here again is the description of their former life—"excess of riot,"—and what they do is—"speaking evil of you." So, you become a Christian, and you're not sinning with them the way you used to do, and what do they think? "You're crazy. What's wrong with you? Why don't you party anymore? Why don't you get drunk anymore? Why don't you sleep around anymore? Why don't you cuss like you used to? Why don't you do what you used to do? You used to be fun, now all you do is read your Bible and go to church and pray and talk about Jesus." It's so crazy to me that, "... they think it strange."

Look as we break down this text, verse 4, "Wherein they think it strange." The word "strange" means they're astonished. The unbeliever is struck with astonishment. They don't understand. The word could also be translated "perplexity." The unsaved person doesn't understand you. "You're what? You're a Christian? You don't want to get drunk anymore? What's wrong with you? You don't want to get wasted on drugs anymore? What's wrong with you?" Isn't it crazy? They're taking drugs, drinking alcohol, partying, sleeping around. You get saved. You know God. You have joy; you have peace. You're living in holiness, and they think you're the one that's messed up. Their brains aren't even working properly.

I remember in the drug days people called it "getting wasted." "Let's get wasted." How smart is that? "Wow, wasn't that fun?" "I don't know. I don't remember anything we did last night. I was so wasted. Oh, man, I got so wasted." How stupid is that? Ruining what little brains you have, yet they think it's strange that you don't do what you used to do. You don't run with them in the riots you used to run in. I'll never forget when I got saved. I was hanging out with guys that were doing a lot of things that weren't very Christian-like. I began to realize very soon, I can't hang around these guys. I don't want to hear their conversations. I don't want to do what they're doing. I don't want to be brought down by them. I had to find new friends, and the reason why I liked that statement, "I'd rather walk a lonely road with Jesus than be without Him in the crowd," is because for a while I walked alone with Jesus. I gave up all my sinful friends, and I used to just find a place on a mountain by myself, all alone, and just pray and read my Bible—just me and Jesus.

Then, God started bringing Christians into my life, brothers and sisters in Christ, and I had a new family, a new association. That's why we need to make sure we're careful who we associate with. Don't run with them. You are a child of God now. You have a new family, you have brothers and sisters in Christ. It doesn't mean you don't make contact with unbelievers. If you go to a restaurant to eat dinner, you don't say, "Can we have a sanctified section? Can we have a Spirit-filled waitress full of the Holy Ghost?" No. You do connect with them, but you don't run with them. You don't associate with them. They can bring you down.

Read Psalm 1 when you get a chance, “Blessed is the man”—or how happy is the man or the woman—“that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” Do you know the progression there? Walk, stand, sit. You’re walking in the way of the ungodly, sitting in the seat of the scornful, standing in the way of the unrighteous.

I think of Peter, who was following far off and was by the enemy's fire. He ended up denying the Lord. Be careful who you associate with. You want to be built up? You want to be strong? Iron sharpens iron. Be around Christians. Not only be around Christians, be around real Christians that love God, read His Word, and serve the Lord. You should not only be around Christians, but be selective. I can't tell you how many times I've seen “partners in crime” in the church—both believers, but they're both feeding on their flesh and causing each other to sin. Break that off. Get away from that. Don't let them drag you down. Find believers that love God, love His Word, that are serving the Lord. Let them sharpen your life as you live together for the glory of God. Read Romans 12 where it says, “And be not conformed to this world: but ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Be careful about your associations.

Here's the last one, the fifth, verses 5-6, arm yourselves with the right assurance. We have right attitude, verse 1; right ambitions, verse 2; right activities, verse 3; right associations, verse 4; and the right assurances, verses 5-6. “Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick”—this is old English in my King James Bible, the word means alive, those who are living—“and the dead. 6 For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead,”—literally, now dead—“that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

I believe that you can have absolute assurance that there is a day of judgment coming for the unbeliever, for those who persecute you and oppose you. If you're a Christian, you pass from death to life, you're not going to be judged for your sins, you'll be judged for your works. But if someone persecutes you, comes against you, and opposes you, they'll stand before God some day, and they will be judged. This is a pretty amazing couple of verses. Verse 5, he says, “Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.” This is a reference to those in verse 4 who are persecuting you and “. . . think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: 5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the [living] and the dead.” Guess who that is? Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ will come back in His Second Coming and He will judge the living and the dead.

Read Matthew 25, that chapter of the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus comes and He separates the sheep from the goats. He says to the sheep, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” And He says to the goats, “Depart from me, ye [workers of iniquity,] into everlasting fire,” and judgment. There's going to be a great separation.

So there will be, verse 5, the judgment. That's what that verse is saying, judgment is coming,

when He will “. . . judge the quick and the dead.”

Notice in verse 6, “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead.” This is where it gets a little challenging to interpret, and I’ll just give you what I believe is going on here. I could be wrong, I don’t know. There are other views, but I believe that those “. . . that are dead,” is literally those who are now dead, so when the gospel was preached to them, they were alive. This is not talking about Jesus in hell, preaching to those that are dead, like the earlier verse in Peter. He’s talking about those who had the gospel preached to them when they were alive. They believed in Jesus Christ, they were born again and saved, they were persecuted, possibly suffered death or martyrdom, and now they are alive in the Spirit in heaven.

Let me go back over that, verse 6, “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are”—now—“dead,”—they had died physically—“that they might be judged according to men in the flesh.” What that means is that they suffered physical death. Remember the context again is persecution. When it says in verse 6, “. . . but live according to God in the spirit,” these are believers who were suffering martyrdom for their faith in Jesus Christ. They had the gospel preached to them. They believed, they were saved, they were persecuted, they died, and they went to heaven.

Now, there’s coming a Judgment Day. The gospel needs to be preached to unbelievers so that people will come to Christ, be saved, and be able to go to heaven when they die. So, we can, rest assured, judgment is coming. The Lord will right all wrongs. We need to understand that as believers we can have assurance that if someone kills the body that we go to heaven.

This passage, by the way tonight, is so parallel to what we’re going to cover this coming Sunday morning where Jesus says, “And fear not them which kill the body,” but after that there’s no more they can do. “. . . but rather fear [God] which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell,” fear God. It’s a whole section where he explains that teaching on fearing God, not fearing people who can kill the body, that we should reverence God and stand for God and confess God before men. If we fear God, we don’t need to fear any man. If we fear God, we don’t need to fear any opposition or persecution.

What Peter is saying in this passage is that ultimate victory—heaven—is our lot as believers, so we will have the assurance of eternal life, that we need not fear, that death for the Christian is a coronation.

You know the worst that can happen to you in the world is to be killed, right? That’s why it’s kind of funny when you read Jesus saying, “Don’t be afraid of those who kill the body, after that no more they can do.” It’s kind of like, “All they could do is kill you. Why are you freaking out?” Yeah, no biggie, Lord, they just can kill me. Guess what happens if they kill you? “. . . to be absent from the body,”—is to be—“present with the Lord.”

Where did Stephen go when he died? Immediately into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's his coronation. He was wearing a martyr's crown. Now, I'm not saying, "Go out and court persecution and say, 'Kill me. I want to see Jesus.'" What he's saying is we have the victory. We don't have to be afraid, that if we have the right attitudes, ambitions, and outlook on life, we respond to suffering and persecution, that we'll live holy lives, godly lives, we'll be sanctified, we'll be made more like Jesus Christ. What a glorious truth and glorious passage this is that we can " . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace . . . and find grace to help in time of need," when we're persecuted. It'll have a sanctifying affect upon our lives. Let's pray.