

“Suffering For Christ”

1 Peter 4:1-6 – Living Hope Series – Isaac Hydoski – July 25, 2010

Main Idea: Christ’s suffering empowers us to be armed with a readiness to suffer for Christ.

Jesus made his followers this promise: “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Suffering for Jesus is part of our inheritance as believers. As we imitate Christ, Scripture tells us, we must “arm” ourselves to suffer as he did.

A readiness to suffer for Christ demonstrates a definitive break from sin (verse 1).

1. What does Peter mean by saying, “whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin”? It cannot mean that we will stop sinning, because we see elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., 1 John 1:8) that none of us will ever fully stop sinning in this life.
2. Rather, the phrase “has ceased from sin” describes the Christian’s decisive break with his sinful way of life upon conversion. Through his union with the risen Christ, the new believer is freed from slavery to sin and liberated to serve and follow God. As Simon Kistemaker writes, “The follower of Christ has abandoned a life of sin, because the ruling power of sin has been broken.”
3. No longer does life focus on avoiding pain and seeking our own way. Sin’s grip is no longer as strong ... its allurements are no longer as attractive. When it beckons us to come and sample its pleasures, the Christian says, “No! I’m done with you! I’m following Christ now, and I am prepared to do that even if it means suffering.”
4. The phrase “has ceased from sin” also reminds us of the coming day when our battle on earth is done and we stand looking into the eyes of our risen Savior. Jesus suffered on earth and is now glorified in heaven. We suffer on earth ... and will one day share in his heavenly glory. Fullness of joy awaits those who suffer faithfully in this lifetime. Let that hope motivate us to persevere—we are another day closer to that day when sin will finally cease!

A readiness to suffer for Christ to please the Lord (verses 2-3).

1. Peter now specifies one area of suffering to which all believers are called: obeying “the will of God” rather than our “human passions.” In simple terms, we are called to seek God’s will above our own. Pleasing God—not pleasing self—is the Christian’s driving concern, even if that involves suffering.
2. Verse 3 lists the kinds of behavior that characterized our past before we followed Jesus. That season of life is over. It’s done. Our remaining years belong to Christ! And our commitment to keep following Christ must be just as decisive as the day we first trusted in him.
3. Exhortations for three groups of people:

- a. **Those saved as adults:** All of us imported old patterns of sin into our new life with Christ. But because we are united with Christ, gospel power is at work in us to make a clean break with sin! We are no longer enslaved. We don't have to keep indulging those same lusts, yielding to those same temptations. There is a new governing principle at work in our lives. We must live for the will of God!
 - b. **Those saved as children:** If Christ mercifully rescued you from the misery of enslavement to sin in your youth, don't waste your life looking back over your shoulder wondering if you missed out on anything. You didn't. Sin destroys; it doesn't satisfy. Sin brings death, not happiness. Sin is not worthy of our devotion, affections, or commitment. Only Jesus is. Spend the rest of your time on this earth dedicated to making much of Christ. Live for him, not yourself.
 - c. **Those not yet saved:** What is your governing principle in life? Are you living for career? Pleasure? Financial security? Your family? None of these will satisfy you. Only Jesus is our living hope. Look to him today!
4. Suffering tests our commitment to live for God's will above our own. Though our sufferings will vary in type and intensity, each of us will suffer. We must arm ourselves with a readiness to suffer as Christ did.
 5. Several years ago I participated in the baptism of some new believers from a Hindu fishing village in India. The whole village gathered to watch. Each one prayed the same prayer while going down into the water: "Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I will die for you." For some of these believers, suffering for Jesus would involve being beaten ... being thrown out of their homes ... being forced away from spouses and children ... even losing their lives.
 6. As these Indian believers knew, Jesus is worthy of our obedience, no matter how great the cost.

A readiness to suffer for Christ to be a witness for Christ (verses 4-6)

1. When we make a decisive change in priorities that affects our lifestyle, people notice. They don't understand why we no longer join in the fun. They view this as strange, confusing, and mildly threatening. They feel condemned by your refusal to join in their sinful pleasures—getting drunk on the weekends, indulging in the pornographic video clip circulating through the office, etc.
2. Sometimes they respond with hostility, as Peter describes in verse 4. They may call you self-righteous because you don't laugh at their lewd jokes; accuse you of not caring for women because you are not pro-abortion; judge you because you can't approve of your family member who abandoned his wife for another woman; mock you as old-fashioned because you are still a virgin; ridicule you as a narrow-minded simpleton because you believe Jesus really was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross as your substitute, and then rose from the dead for your justification.

3. We must arm ourselves with a readiness to suffer this kind of abuse from unbelievers and consider it a mark of honor that our lives are distinct enough for others to see a difference. Rather than “blend in,” we should embrace these opportunities to stand out as salt and light in a wicked world. These are ideal opportunities to be witnesses for Christ.
4. We will suffer if we faithfully follow Christ—but our suffering is temporary. The day is coming when the Judge of heaven and earth will eternally reward those who have trusted in Christ ... and will eternally punish those who have rejected Christ. For believers, this is both a comfort and a stimulus to keep telling everyone—even those who cause our suffering—about the hope we have found in Jesus.
5. A quick explanation of verse 6: Though the wording may seem to imply that God offers a “second chance” of salvation to those who have already died, the context of the passage does not support this perspective.

Conclusion:

1. Are you suffering? Persevere in hope! Your suffering serves to break the bonds of sin, strengthen your obedience, and make much of Jesus. Empowered by the gospel, arm yourself with a readiness to exalt the Lord by suffering for his sake!

Fellowship Starters

1. Read 1 Peter 4:1-6. Whose example does Peter call us to imitate?
2. A willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ demonstrates a decisive break with sin. Can you think of times in your Christian life where you have made a painful or difficult decision to say “No” to sin’s pleasures and “Yes” to the Lord’s commands?
3. Isaac told about helping to baptize some new believers in India who faced the stark reality of serious persecution. As they went down into the water, they each prayed, “Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I will die for you.” How does their example affect you?
4. Have unbelievers slandered or mocked you because of your Christian faith or practice? What has that been like? How have you responded? Have you been tempted to “fit in” rather than be a bold witness for Christ? How does this passage of Scripture encourage you ... convict you ... motivate you?
5. Motivated by Christ’s example and empowered by our union with him, one way we are called to suffer is by renouncing sinful habits and living for “the will of God” (v. 2). Do you sense the Holy Spirit pointing out any specific habits you need to renounce? How can we help you with this?
6. Read 1 Peter 4:13. Why can we rejoice when we share in Christ’s sufferings?