

Suffering – The Way of Christ

Hook – the Matrix movie

Expectation of Suffering	Suffering – The Way of Christ	Ends of Suffering
Effect of Suffering		

Book – 1 Peter 4:1-11

Look

Expectation of Suffering

V1 – Because Christ suffered for believers, Christians must prepare themselves to suffer for Him. The same mind (ἐννοία *ennoia*) suggests the same manner of thinking and feeling, the same understanding of reality.

In day to day life, this means that followers of Christ must:

1. Expect to suffer, not being surprised when suffering the inevitable hardship, and even suffering for the Faith, comes.
2. Consider that suffering, while we may not understand why, comes upon us because of the sinfulness of the fallen world and the sin of ourselves and others.
3. Remember that suffering is temporary and light compared to the glory that will be revealed to and in us (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).
4. Trust that God will use all of our suffering for His glory and for His greater purposes on earth. Our pain will ultimately become our gain. There is no such thing as meaningless suffering.

Peter provides one of the most important reasons to handle suffering with joy; because suffering, rightly viewed, is an antidote to sin. This stands to reason in many ways. Genuine pain puts the minor inconveniences we encounter into proper perspective. Dashed hopes in this temporal world force us to put our hope in the eternal world. Money, power, pleasure and fame are good things, as with all good things provided by God. However they tempt us to excess and misuse. Such temptations grow dim in the purifying fires of pain. Sin, not suffering and death, is the greatest enemy.

V2 – Continuing his argument, Peter admonished his readers to live the remainder of their mortal lives to accomplish the will of God, not to gratify the impulses of the flesh.

V3 – The churches to which the apostle wrote had many gentiles, and gentile culture in the first century was one of debauchery. Sex without restraints, economic prosperity, and the Pax Romana had produced a decadent people. Therefore Peter argued that they should have had their fill of lust in their prior days. Now was the time to leave them behind and move on toward righteousness, goodness and truth in the Lord.

Term	Greek	Notes
Sensuality	ἀσέλγεια <i>aselgeia</i>	Excess, shamelessness, insolence
Lusts	ἐπιθυμία <i>epithymia</i>	Desire, craving, longing for what is forbidden
Drunkenness	οἰνοφλυγία <i>oinophlygia</i>	
Carousals	κῶμος <i>kōmos</i>	Drunken, frolicsome feasts
Drinking parties	πότος <i>potos</i>	
Idolatries	εἰδωλολατρία <i>eidōlōlatría</i>	Worship of false gods, sacrificial feasts to them

V4 – Despite all of the modern Western chatter about diversity, people by nature have a strong tendency to dislike and distrust those who are different from them. While diversity in food, dress, language, and even thought and action can be appealing and exotic, they can also be destabilizing and threatening.

The tendency to dislike and distrust others is even truer in the realm of conduct. People constantly compare themselves to other people, and when they can reach three basic conclusions:

1. Their conduct and accomplishments are better than the other person's. This leads to pride.
2. Their conduct and accomplishments are worse than the other person's. This leads to envy.
3. Their conduct and accomplishments are equal to the other person's. This is unusual.

God has placed knowledge of Himself, known as the conscience, within each of us. As a result, most people have a niggling discomfort when they do something wrong, no matter how much they might try to rationalize and suppress it. We rationalize adultery by saying “my wife no longer meets my needs” and stealing by believing “it was just a little thing”. While these flimsy excuses may be enough to convince ourselves that our actions are justified, the presence of someone else encountering the same challenges and responding rightly makes us feel condemned. No one likes to feel condemned, and so we become angry at the person doing right.

This is what Peter is talking about. His readers had been the same as those around them, involved in all sorts of immoral behavior. When they met the Lord He had saved them from those sins. As a result the conduct of these Christians, which had previously supported the sin of their former friends, now opposed it. Those friends would have been bewildered and threatened by the change, and would malign the Christians.

Ends of Suffering

V5 - The Lord shall have the last word. The same salvation that came to Peter's Christian readers was also offered to their non-Christian friends. The former had accepted, and the latter had rejected this grace-offer from God. As a result, God would judge them for what they had done.

V6 - This verse is tied tightly to the preceding two. The gospel was preached and many people became Christians. Sinful people then not only maligned these followers of Christ but they judged them in the flesh, found them guilty, and killed some of them. Nonetheless these faithful believers remained alive in the spirit, waiting for the day in which they would be reunited to their bodies in eternal glory. The wicked people who killed them, currently alive in their physical bodies, will later find the roles reversed. In the last day, the day that Jesus Christ judges the world (2 Timothy 4:1), the Christians that they murdered will enjoy physical and spiritual life and the evil ones will suffer physical and spiritual death.

Effect of Suffering

V7 – Many have interpreted this verse as suggesting that Peter believed the second coming of Jesus Christ to be very soon. Since Peter wrote almost 2000 years ago, they reason, Christ did not return soon and therefore Peter, and by extension the Bible, must be wrong.

The Greek word used here is τέλος *telos*, which actually refers to the consummation of something or the end of a series of events. It does not refer to chronological time but the completion of an event or a stage of something. At hand (ἐγγίζω *eggizō* – very near) implies something that someone could reach out and touch. The resurrection of Jesus Christ completed God's redemptive work for mankind, and Peter's readers could grasp it at will.

This verse also suggests that the final consummation of all of God's work (πᾶς *pas* - all things, individually and collectively) on earth is imminent. Certainly it is imminent for each individual, who could perish at any time but at best only lives a few score years and then passes into eternity. It is equally imminent for the universe, which could end at any time but at best exists billions of years and then passes into eternity.

Because the end of all things was imminent, believers were to be of sound judgment and sober spirit. They were to be guided by the rock of reason, not the whirlpool of emotion, and to live with an eye to eternity, not focused solely on the vapor of this life. Doing so would enhance their communion with God, which is prayer.

V8 – Suffering alone is suffering amplified, while suffering together is suffering muted. As a result, believers must maintain a fervent love for one another in Christ. Sins, misunderstandings, jealousies and resentments are inevitable in our fallen world, even among Christians. But love for the brethren will wash away the hurt engendered by such points of friction, maintaining unity and allowing the church to thrive in the dark days of persecution.

V9 – Hospitality is a practical way of showing love for one another. However it must not be grudging or “tit for tat”. Jesus Christ gave and gave and gave, never complaining and never measuring how much He had given. His followers can do no less.

V10 – The hospitality to which Peter refers now was extended to other spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Christians are given such gifts by God to bless the body of Christ, the fellowship of all believers.

V11 – Those who spoke in the church were to speak the words of God, not their own opinions. Speaking including preaching, singing, teaching, and perhaps speaking in tongues. Those who served were to serve for the Lord’s purposes and in His power. Serving included all forms of service. The end of all of this speaking and serving was the glory of God.

This has tremendous practical consequences in the life of the local church. Everyone is a minister, not just the professionals who preach every Sunday or are otherwise paid by the congregation. No Christian is merely a church “consumer” – everyone produces.

Took

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Verdict – What do you want them to DO as a result of the truths they have just received?

Closing Prayer