

THE GODLY SUFFERING OF THE BELIEVER

Summary and Historical Background

The preceding chapter dealt with the submission of Christians in the home and the suffering of Christians for godliness. Chapter four continues the theme of Christians facing persecution and suffering. Recalling chapters 2 and 3, Christians were given the example of Jesus Christ (2:21ff; 3:18) and were exhorted to follow it, not suffering for any trespass, but rather enduring persecution in innocence.

Peter penned this chapter to tell Christians about God's grace for suffering. He no longer is speaking about local trials and troubles of daily life, but is speaking about the impending persecutions of the Roman government. A fiery trial was coming (4:12), and with that in mind, the believers were exhorted to faithfully perform their Christian duties, and wait with confidence for their deliverance. They were given ten significant exhortations: one, arm themselves with the mind of Christ (4:1); two, be sober and alert in prayer (4:7); three, have fervent love among themselves (4:8); four, be hospitable to one another (4:9); five, minister their gifts to one another as unto God (4:10-11); six, do not be surprised by fiery trials, but expect them (4:12); seven, rejoice in sharing the sufferings of Christ (4:13-14); eight, do not be ashamed to suffer as a Christian (4:15-16); nine, glorify God in suffering (4:16); ten, commit the keeping of their souls to a faithful Creator (4:19).

Study Notes

Three conditions in a Christian's life will help him to live according to the will of God.

I. Be Pure — 4:1-6

A. Find the Will of God — 4:1-2

4:1 — "Forasmuch then as Christ" - "Since Christ"; refers back to 3:18.

"Christ has suffered" — When Christ suffered, He actually died. It could be no less than His death to save our souls.

"For us" — Christ died on our behalf.

"In the flesh" — Christ suffered (yes, died) in His physical body.

"Arm yourselves" — This imperative speaks of a heavily armed foot soldier (Eph 6:11-17; 1 Thes. 5:8). The Christian must be well armed for his spiritual battle.

"Same mind" — Same attitude as Christ had (cf. 2:21-24; Phil 2:5-8). He was humble.

"Has suffered in the flesh" — The believer has suffered in the flesh when he spiritually died with Christ at the time of his conversion.

"Has ceased from sin" — Since the believer's old sinful nature died with Christ, now he is to count himself dead to the lusts of sin on a moment-by-moment basis (Rom 6:6-12; Gal 2:20; Col 3:1-3). When he is attacked he will not retaliate, but will endure persecution as Christ did (2:21-24).

4:2 — "In the flesh" - This refers to the physical body of the believer and its natural desires.

"The lusts of men" — The natural desires of the body can lead believers into sin (James 1:13-14). Believers should not yield to the sinful desires of their bodies as unbelievers do.

"The will of God" — Instead of yielding to their sinful desires, they should yield to the will of God. This will lead them to a pure life (Rom 12:1-2). Christians should seek to live holy lives as God is holy (1 Pet 1:15-16).

B. Forsake the Life of Sin — 4:3-6

4:3 — "The time past of our life" - Reference to the believers' lives before conversion, "Wrought" — It could be translated "to have worked out," or, "to have done."

"Will of the Gentiles" — This is in contrast to the "will of God" (4:2).

"When we walked in lasciviousness" — Before salvation these believers lived in sensuality.

"Lusts" — These are the inward desires of a sinful heart that produce outward acts of the body.

"Excess of wine" — "Excess" is to bubble up with wine which turns into drunkenness.

"Revellings" — Wild, undisciplined activities (Gal 5:21; Rom 13:13).

"Banquetings" — These were drinking parties; drinking bouts.

"Abominable idolatries" — A reference to the detestable worship of idols - wine, sex, anything that turns one from the one and true God. Believers are to abstain from all appearance and participation in evil (1 Thes 5:22).

4:4 — "Run" - Pure believers will not join with unbelievers in sinful activities. They no longer run with the heathen in their sinful pleasures like they did before they became Christians.

"Speaking evil" — Literally, "blaspheming." Pagans often curse those who become separated Christians. They hate the light (Jn 3:19-21). Nevertheless, Christians are commanded to live like Christ and be separated from the sins of the world (2 Cor 6:17-18).

4:5 — "Who shall give account" - The unbelievers will someday be required to answer for their treatment of Christians. This will be done before Jesus Christ, the Judge, at His great white throne (Rev 20:11-15).

"To judge the quick and the dead" — All people, both alive and dead, will be judged by Jesus Christ, but for different reasons (2 Tim 4:1; Rom 2:16). Believers will be judged to determine where and how they will serve in His millennial Kingdom (2 Cor 5:10; Lk 19:11-19). Unbelievers will be judged for their unbelief and sins to be punished in Hell and finally in the Lake of Fire (Lk 19:20-27; Rev 21:8).

4:6 — "The gospel (was) preached also to them that are dead" — This is a difficult statement. It cannot mean unbelievers are given another offer of salvation after they have died. However, some say it was the good news to believers who had died and were living with Abraham to hear that Christ had come to take them to heaven, i.e., Christ "led captivity captive" (Eph. 4:8). However, this does not fit the context of Peter's message. Others say this refers to those who were spiritually dead, but were judged by God "according to men in the flesh" by hearing the Gospel and receiving Christ, so that they might "live according to God in the spirit." This has a problem with the word, "dead." Peter referred to the "quick and the dead" in the previous verse which meant the physically dead, not the spiritually dead. So the answer that fits the context best seems to refer to believers who were physically dead when Peter wrote, who had been wrongfully judged by unbelievers ("according to men in the flesh") when they lived on earth, but now they rightfully live in Heaven by God ("according to God in the spirit").

II. Be Productive — 4:7-11**A. Foster Christian Behavior — 4:7-10**

4:7 — "End of all things is at hand" - It could refer to the Rapture of the Church or to the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation to rule all nations. Since Peter is writing to Church-age believers, it seems best that he was referring to the Rapture.

"Therefore" — Since the Rapture can happen at any time, believers need to make spiritual preparation. And since Jesus Christ is the Judge of all men (4:5), there is a sense of urgency for this preparation.

"Be ... sober" — The Christians are to have clear minds so they can make good decisions.

"Watch unto prayer" — They were to be alert in their prayers, looking for the Lord's return (Tit 2:13). Peter learned from a bad experience that he needed to watch and pray; he fell victim to temptation and denied the Lord three times (Mk 14:38-72).

4:8 — "Have fervent love" - Intense love among Christians is necessary to prepare a believer for persecution. Christians need to give generously from a heart of love to fellow believers that have had their goods taken from them. They must not be easily offended by those who sin under severe persecution. Love "shall cover the multitude of sins." Love will compel believers to confess their sins. Love will enable offended believers to fully forgive. Then full restoration of fellowship can be made.

4:9 — "Use hospitality one to another" - It is necessary for believers to have a generous spirit, especially in times of persecution. Some believers will have their homes taken from them and will need a temporary place to stay. Hospitality was and still is a vital service for believers to practice, if it is done with a good spirit, "without grudging." It is an opportunity for Christians to show love to one another (4:8) and will unite them together.

4:10 — "Every man has received the gift" - Every Christian has been given a gift, a special expression of God's grace, which can be used to serve Him.

"Minister the same one to another" — The purpose of the gift is to serve God by ministering to fellow believers. Hospitality as shown above is one way to serve other Christians. Other ways to minister is to bear the burdens of another with meals, money or a helping hand. They can visit and pray with those in prison, those with sickness or those in trouble.

"As good stewards" — Stewards are "house managers." Christian stewards are to keep the affairs of God's family running smoothly by using their God-given gifts wisely.

"Manifold grace of God" — There are a variety of gifts from God. A Christian should not be surprised if he has a gift that is unique. He must not be timid about it, but use it faithfully.

B. Fulfill Christian Purpose — 4:11

4:11 — The gifts of God are classified under two categories: speaking gifts and ministering gifts.

"As the oracles of God" — These are the words of God. The believers who have the gifts of preaching or teaching must refer to the very words of God. Their preaching or teaching should be filled with God-centered and God-honoring words.

"As of the ability which God gives" — The believers who have the gift of serving others must not depend on their own strength to do it, but rather on the strength which God supplies. This dependence will keep them humble and yet make them successful.

"God . . . glorified through Jesus Christ" — This is the purpose of the gifts given to believers. It was through the work of Christ that sinners are saved and then prepared to receive God's gifts. Therefore, God is glorified through Christ by those believers who wisely use their gifts.

"To Whom be praise and dominion" — This could be translated, "To Whom is glory and might." God's glory and might are shared with believers through Christ, and then are given back to Him by their good works.

III. Be Prepared — 4:12-19

A. Face Fiery Trials with Joy — 4:12-14

4:12 — "Think it not strange" - The trials that some Christians experience for their faith in Christ should not be a surprise. Jesus already forewarned them about it (John 15:18).

"The fiery trial" — "Fiery" is a burning used for refining metals (cf. 1:7). The "fiery trial" which believers experience is not designed to destroy them, but to purify them.

4:13 — "Rejoice" - Christians are commanded to keep on rejoicing, even when they are going through fiery trials (cf. Phil 4:4).

"Partakers of Christ's sufferings" — The reason for their rejoicing is the privilege they have in sharing Christ's sufferings. When they share His sufferings, they will also share His glory. His glory will bring them great joy (Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10). The apostles in Jerusalem, and Paul and Silas in Philippi are examples of those who rejoiced in their trials (Acts 5:41; 16:22-25).

4:14 — "Happy are you" - Those who are reproached for Christ's name are "blessed" by God (cf. Mt 5:11, 12).

"Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" — The glory of God rests on those who suffer for Him like the Shekinah cloud of glory that rested on the tabernacle and on the temple in the Old Testament. This is illustrated by the life of Stephen (Acts 6:15; 7:55).

B. Follow the Plan of God — 4:15-19

4:15 — "Murderer . . . thief . . . evildoer" - Believers who suffer for their sins will not be blessed by God.

"Busybody" — A believer who meddles in other people's affairs is asking for trouble.

4:16 — "Suffer as a Christian" - There is no need to be ashamed if a person suffers as a Christian. Instead this is an opportunity to bring glory to God.

"On this behalf" — Some manuscripts have "in this name," that is, in the name of "Christian" they are to bring glory to God.

4:17 — "Judgment must begin at the house of God" - God brings judgment upon His own people first in order to purify them (cf. 1:7; Zech 13:7-9; Mal 3:1-5; Heb 12:5-11).

"Them that obey not" — God brings judgment upon the unbelievers to punish them (Rev 21:8). This judgment comes at the "end," after God has judged His own people (Rev 20:11, 15; 2 Thes 1:5-10).

4:19 — "Suffer according to the will of God" - One of God's purposes for allowing His children to suffer is to conform them to the likeness of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:28-29).

"Commit the keeping" — The believer is to entrust himself to God for safe-keeping.

"In well doing" — A sign of true faith is seen in the practice of good works when one is under attack for his faith.

"A faithful Creator" — This designation of God calls attention to His trustworthiness and His power. It is good for suffering Christians to remember these two characteristics about God.