

Rejoice To Participate in the Sufferings of Christ

1 Peter 4:1-19

Key Verse: 4:13

“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

In chapter 3, Peter reminded us that Christ died for our sins, rose again, and ascended into heaven. Now he sits at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. As his disciples, we are called to follow his example of suffering and glory. In chapter 4, Peter helps us to participate in Christ's sufferings. In verses 1-6, he teaches us a right attitude toward suffering. In verses 7-11, he exhorts us to love one another and bring glory to God, for the end is near. Finally, in verses 12-19, he encourages us to rejoice as we participate in the sufferings of Christ.

I. A right attitude toward suffering for Christ (1-6)

As human beings, we do not like to suffer and we don't want to die. Sometimes, even to hear the word "suffering" makes us shiver. However, everyone who follows Christ will suffer, though we really don't want to. Peter deeply understood this problem. Once when Jesus foretold his own suffering and death, Peter rebuked him. Then Jesus rebuked Peter in a way that he did not forget (Mk 8:31-33). Since then Peter learned the secret to overcoming sufferings, and he passed it on to us: We must accept suffering with a right attitude. That means we must arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ, and we must decide to die to sin and obey the will of God.

First, arm yourselves with the same attitude (1-2). Look at verse 1. "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin." As we study the gospels we can see how Christ suffered in his body, especially during the time of his passion. Christ was beaten so severely that Isaiah describes him as "marred beyond human likeness" (Isa 52:14). Christ was flogged with a whip of leather strands embedded with metal spurs that ripped his flesh. Christ was fastened to a cross, having long iron nails driven through his hands and feet. His physical suffering was immense; his suffering of soul was even greater. Finally he died on the cross. What was his attitude? Let's recap some of his words. When arrested, Jesus was in command. As he said, "I am he," his arrestors drew back and fell to the ground (Jn 18:6). When condemned to death, he boldly declared that he was going to the right hand of God and would come on the clouds of heaven (Mk 14:62). On the cross, he

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prayed for sinners, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). When he died, he said in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). A hardened Roman centurion was so impressed that he fell to his knees and said, "Surely, this man was the Son of God" (Mk 15:39). Jesus revealed the hope of glory with his Father, assurance of God's final victory, and forgiving love.

How could Jesus have such an attitude? According to the gospels, one reason was his Gethsemane prayer. In his flesh, Jesus did not want to face this ordeal. But he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). Jesus prayed this way until his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus prayed this way until he was fully prepared to take his cup of suffering and death. We can arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ through prayer. When we confront suffering the first thing we must do is pray. Many of us know this, but we do not always practice it. Instead, our first reaction is to sleep a little more, or try to think our way out of the problem, or enlist the help of others. Victory in suffering comes through prayer. So let's learn to pray first, like Jesus.

The last part of verse 1 says, "...he who has suffered in his body is done with sin." This does not mean that if we experience one week of back pain for Jesus we emerge totally sanctified. Then what does it mean? In a word, as we prayerfully endure sufferings, our sanctification accelerates. When Christ died for our sins, he died once for all, and made complete atonement for our sins. The moment we believe in Jesus we are justified as children of God, who gives us victory over sin (Ro 6:5-7). However, the process of appropriating this victory may take time, largely because we are slow to renounce our sins. The more we die to our sinful nature and allow Christ to live in us, the more tangled our victory over sin becomes. This process is accelerated through suffering because pain causes us to focus on what is most important, which is freedom from sinful desires.

Look at verse 2. "As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God." Sinful desires die and holy desires grow in our hearts. Consider St. Augustine. Before conversion he was a careless pleasure-seeker, who fathered an illegitimate child. Christ changed him. He abhorred his sinful life and renounced it. He devoted himself to rigorous divine discipline, through which he grew as a great shepherd for early Christians; he developed much of our Christian theology. Sufferings produce godly character (Ro 5:3-5). So let's embrace them positively.

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Second, we must decide to do the will of God (3-6). Look at verse 3. "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." We have sinned enough! We must overcome deception that sentimentalizes our past sinful lives. Sometimes we are like the Israelites in the wilderness. They had been liberated from terrible slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt. However, when facing hardship, they actually longed to return to slavery. They fantasized about sitting around pots of meat (Ex 16:3). They had been slaves, not aristocrats! It was irrational sentimentality. Likewise, one young man indulged in drunkenness. As a result, he behaved foolishly and vomited. The next day he had a splitting headache and was useless. He fell behind in his classwork. Instead of repenting, he persuaded himself that it had been fun. This is irrational sentimentality. People live this way because they are under the power of death. They say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." However, we Christians admit that living in sin brings misery and pain. We hate sin, realizing that Christ died to save us from it. We must pursue union with Christ in his death, and live a holy life, seeking to do the will of God.

The will of God is good, pleasing and perfect (Ro 12:2). Obedience to the will of God produces good fruit and true accomplishment. It gives a deep and abiding joy that has no regrets, and it leads to eternal life (1 Jn 2:17). There is a young couple who plan to marry this year. As we have studied the word of God, the Spirit revealed God's good will for them. This has brought deep joy, superior to any cheap thrill of the world. When we obey the will of God, we have real joy and true life. People of the world do not understand. Rather, convicted of sin, they become abusive. They may seem powerful. But more powerful is Almighty God, who is ready to judge the living and the dead (5). Those who live for sinful pleasures are facing judgment and eternal condemnation. But those who accept the gospel live forever with God (6). So let's decide to die to our sin and to do the will of God.

II. The end is near: Love one another and glorify God (7-11)

In this part Peter gives a further reason why we should have a right attitude toward suffering, and he tells us practically how we can obey the will of God. Look at verse 7a. "The end of all things is near." If we think we have plenty of time, we easily become complacent. We become like lazy students at the beginning of a semester: they relax and have fun, planning to study later. But by the time they actually begin to study they are too far behind to catch up. This is why many drop out and fail to fulfill their dreams. Peter said, "The end of all things is near." Peter saw the living God who judges the world day by day. Peter saw the coming of

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Christ which will bring a sudden and unexpected end to this present age. Several years ago, Missionary Barnabas Baek of Sri Lanka confessed that living in a Buddhist culture had unconsciously influenced him to think there was no end, but that everything goes on in an eternal cycle. He repented and decided to live in the truth that there is an end. We can learn from him. Many of us live as though everything will just keep going on forever. However, the Bible clearly teaches that there will be an end. Peter was sure of this and he declared that the end was near. We must believe this.

How then should we live? Look at verse 7b. "Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." A clear mind is one that works properly. It is not clouded by sinful thoughts or stormy with grudges, but it is clear like a bright sunny day. A clear mind can produce healthy and truthful thought that is necessary to make right decisions and take right actions. To be self-controlled is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:23). It means that our selves not controlled by our sinful nature or by evil spirits, but are free to love and serve God under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We must be clear minded and self-controlled so that we can pray. How can we be so? We must believe that the end of all things is near. Then we can pray.

Prayer may be the most important thing we can do when we want to obey the will of God. Through prayer, we can know the will of God. Through prayer, we can find the strength to do the will of God. Through prayer, we can stay spiritually awakened. I believe that UBF people are generally praying people. We pray two by two after meetings. Many pray in the early morning after eating Daily Bread, some visibly and some invisibly. We pray before and after having one-to-one Bible study. We have special prayer meetings for conferences. We pray before meals. Parents pray for their children and children pray before bedtime. We pray personally and sometimes offer emergency prayer. However, I believe our prayer will be even more fervent when we truly believe the end of all things is near. Prayer is the power source by which everything else Peter mentions must be done.

Verse 8 says, "Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins." This love is like that of close-knit families. It binds us together in affectionate and godly concern for one another. But it is more. It is redemptive love that values another's soul and seeks his or her best good. It is love that rejoices in the truth; it does not compromise with sin, and yet it embraces others with the forgiving grace of Jesus. This love springs up in those who know how much the Lord has forgiven them (Lk 7:47). In an atmosphere of love, confession of sin is possible, and many sins are covered by the blood of Jesus as Christians love and serve one another. Peter knew that Christ died for his sin, and even his terrible

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denial. So Peter was ready to embrace those who had made mistakes--like John Mark, who abandoned the first mission journey with Paul. Peter embraced Mark with the forgiving love of Jesus, and Mark became a gospel writer. Love is most important.

Verse 9 says, "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." This means that our homes should be open to one another. When someone comes unexpectedly, we should welcome them with open arms and an open refrigerator, and if necessary, a place to sleep and to shower. Mother Barry has shown us a good example. Verse 10 says, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." God gives gifts to his children. We don't deserve them, that is why they are called "gifts." They are not meant for showing off, but for serving others. In love, we must discover what needs to be done, and then do it with the gifts God has given us. We must use our gifts faithfully to share God's grace with the body of Christ. We must not be like the man in Jesus' parable who hid his talent in the ground (Lk 19:20 ff.). Instead we must be like those who do their best with their talent in order to give a profit to their Master. We must be alert for opportunities, and eager to bless others with the gifts God has given us. These gifts are generally put into two categories by Peter. Look at verse 11. "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."

III. Rejoice to participate in the sufferings of Christ (12-19)

In this part Peter again drives home the point that we must have a right attitude toward sufferings. He explains this in two ways: We must realize that there is a mysterious joy inherent in suffering for Christ, and that suffering for Christ is much better than suffering for sin.

First, rejoice in suffering for Christ (12-14). When we suffer for Christ, it is a painful trial. Our first response to such trials may be, "Why me?" "What did I do to deserve this?" or "Why am only I suffering?" (12) In truth, these kinds of reactions come because we don't want to suffer. But there is no one in the world who does not suffer. Even two year old children suffer every day in many ways. Our question should not be "Why?" Our question should be "for Whom?" If we are suffering for Christ, there is good news for us. Look at verse 13. "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." Peter boldly tells us to rejoice that we participate in the

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sufferings of Christ. This tells us that not only is it possible to rejoice in suffering for Christ, but it is commanded. It is our right response to suffering for Christ. How can we do that? We can rejoice in suffering for Christ when we think of Christ in the midst of our sufferings. Suffering for Christ has a mysterious power to draw us to Christ and to deeper fellowship with Christ. As a result, we do not focus our attention on the suffering, but on Christ. In Christ we rejoice.

After Jesus' ascension, Peter and the other apostles preached the gospel in the temple courts according to an angel's command. Then the Sanhedrin members were furious. They condemned and flogged the apostles. Surely it was painful. However, as the apostles left the Sanhedrin, they were not crying. They were rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for Christ (Ac 5:41). In the time of suffering their identity in Christ was strengthened and their fellowship with Christ was deepened, to such a degree that they rejoiced greatly.

The Apostle John, as a very old man, was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the gospel of Christ boldly. His life was one of hard labor and pain in his old age. Yet one Lord's day, when he was in the Spirit, the Risen Christ appeared to him and gave him the most vivid revelation of his glory and his final victory, and of the splendor of heaven. This revelation has inspired Christians with heavenly vision ever since then. To those who share his suffering, Jesus promises that we will share his glory as well. His glory is so great in comparison that our suffering pales to insignificance. The Apostle Paul, who suffered much, knew this secret very well. So he said, "I want to know Christ...and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings..." (Php 3:10). He also said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Ro 8:18). Therefore, when we participate in the sufferings of Christ, and are sure of it, we have reason to rejoice greatly, for we can be sure that we will share in his glory.

Suffering for Christ is a "win-win" situation. We can rejoice now, and we will be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (13b). This refers to the time of Christ's coming in power and great glory as King and Judge. Yet again, in some sense, we experience this now. When we see the fruit of gospel work, we rejoice, forgetting the pains we experienced. Two years ago, our IIT coworkers began independent ministry on campus. We felt pain to send them away. However, last Friday we saw the fruit of their growing ministry. As they reported, God's stock is going up year by year in the IIT ministry, and for this we rejoiced. Last year, new UIC ministry began in the midst of the pain of broken hearts, as the new West Loop chapter was formed and many close coworkers separated. However, on Friday, we saw the fruit

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of new disciple raising at UIC, and we rejoiced over this. Last year, the Loop fellowship coworkers agonized over Amber because of her difficult situation and her wavering faith. Many prayed for her with tears. Now we see that she is growing as a woman of God. These are just small tastes of the glory that awaits us in the future. Yet this tells us that all of our sufferings for Christ turn to glory, now and in the future, in a way that we can only imagine. Peter said in verse 14, "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." We should see sufferings for Christ as the evidence of God's glory with us.

Second, suffering for Christ is much better than suffering for sin (15-19). Look at verse 15. "If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler." When Cain killed his brother Abel, he thought it was the solution to his jealousy problem. However, Cain began to suffer unbearably from fear. He thought that everyone who saw him wanted to kill him. He became a restless wanderer on the earth (Gen 4:14). This suffering is terrible; it has no redemptive value. It is nothing but pure misery. All suffering for sin is like this. However, suffering as a Christian has deep meaning and gives us real reason to rejoice. So we must not be ashamed but praise God when we suffer as Christians (16). We must remember that God's judgment of all people is certain. God uses our suffering with Christ to purify us and prepare us for heavenly glory. But those who suffer in sin have eternal condemnation waiting (17-18).

Though we have so many reasons to be positive about suffering for Christ, sometimes we become tired of suffering. Sometimes we wonder if it might not be better to take a break from suffering and enjoy an easier life for a while. But there is no easier life. If we try to avoid suffering, we suffer more with guilt and fear. We must solve this problem with commitment to God. Look at verse 19. "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." God knows our suffering. God uses our suffering for good. In God's time it will end and we will receive everlasting glory. God has promised this, and he is faithful. So let's commit ourselves to him, and continue to do good.