

1 Peter 4:1-11 – Triumphant Living in a Hostile World

“Sin in the believer is a burden which afflicts him rather than a pleasure which delights him.” John Owen

Vs 1-2: Suffer with full assurance of triumph

Peter ties this with the previous section by “Therefore.” Peter's line of reasoning is that through the example of Jesus, the believer sees the entrance to glory comes via the path of suffering, so we are to arm ourselves with this truth.

Christ suffered in the flesh – simply means He died (ties back to 3:18).

Arm yourselves – This is a military term, and means “to equip with weapons” (form of word is used in **Ephesians 6:11** for armor). Why must we take up arms? Because we are in a fierce battle against against sin, evil, and the world (**2 Corinthians 10:3-6, 1 Peter 2:11**). And, most importantly, we must remember we fight for Christ's honor, not our own (**1 Peter 2:12, 3:15-16**). This prevents our causes from superseding the gospel and God's glory!

Oh, my brethren and sisters in Christ, it is not your business to fight your own battles, not even in defense of your own character. If you be maligned and slandered, let the slanderer alone. His malignity will but be increased by any attempt that you shall make to defend yourself. As a soldier of Christ you are to fight for your Master, not for yourself. You are not to carry on a private warfare for your own honor, but all your time and all your power is to be given to his defense and his war. . . Too often the anger rises against an adversary not because his words reflect dishonor upon the glorious Christ, but because they dishonor us. Oh! let us not be so little as to fight our own battles! Depend upon it, the noblest means of conquest for a Christian in the matter of calumny and falsehood, is to stand still and see the salvation of God. Sheathe thine own sword, put away all thine own weapons, when thou comest to fight thine own battle, and let God fight for thee, and thou shalt be more than conqueror. **Spurgeon, War! War! War!**

Same way of thinking – Suffer to the point of death if called to do so by God (**Matthew 10:38-39**), knowing that the ultimate weapon of the enemy (i.e., death) leads to our ultimate triumph – “*whoever has suffered in the flesh [died] has ceased from sin.*”

This perspective allows the believer to live “*no longer for human passions*” (resist the flesh, worldliness) but rather “*for the will of God*”. The Christian life is one of battling with the flesh (**Romans 6:5-7,11-13, 7:21-23**). Having been set free from sin, our lives should be characterized by a life of obedience (**1 Peter 1:2,14-16, Matthew 7:24-27**). We need to make the most of our time - finish well (**Ephesians 5:15-17, 2 Timothy 4:8**).

vs. 3-5: Reasons for avoiding sin

Peter is once again admonishing his readers to live 'differently' now that they are believers in the midst of a 'crooked and perverse generation' (**Philippians 2:14-16**). As such, I think he is providing his readers with 3 reasons for doing that here:

1. God had to sacrifice His only Son for us, in order to forgive our sins and bring us to Himself (**3:18**). The price of our redemption is high!

2. We must not forget how sin had enslaved us prior to our redemption. Sin had alienated us from God, had us under His wrath (**Ephesians 2:1-3**). Peter now lists 6 areas in which sin used to have a stranglehold on us:

a. *Sensuality* - from Greek *aselgeia*, meaning “multiple acts of unbridled lust and lawlessness.” It is a total disregard of any restraint. Contrast this with self-control as a fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:23**).

b. *Passions* (lusts) - evil desire, often relating to immorality.

c. *Drunkness* - overflowing with wine (excess).

d. Orgies (carousing) – wild party, social drinking party, that often included wild, drunk people swaying down the street in public – usually associated with the worship of the gods, such as Dionysus or Bacchus (wine and fertility god).

e. Drinking parties - opportunities for excess.

f. Lawless idolatry - hatred of God, manifest in an unholy and profane lifestyle. This is worshiping the creature rather than the Creator (**Romans 1:25**).

This old lifestyle (mindset) is in stark contrast to that of believers, who are strangers (**2:11**) to worldliness. Peter says enough of that old life – remember what it did to you, the destruction it brought. Interestingly enough, this myriad of sins (“**flood of debauchery**” - “burning passion in sin so that people are mindlessly pursuing their passion irresistibly, compulsively rushing into the cesspool in dissipation” **MacArthur**) came under the guise of 'religion' at that time. This was normal, expected activity to be regularly engaged in, yet for the believer, these are part of a distant, dark, unenlightened past (**Ephesians 5:6-12**).

Because Peter's readers no longer participated in these activities, their neighbors are *surprised* (“astonished at the novelty or strangeness of a thing”) that believers have forsaken their former lifestyle.

“In this verse we are reminded in what sense Christians are sojourners and exiles. **They do not share the values and aspirations of the surrounding society**, not fitting into the social fabric” (**Schreiner**, p. 203).

This 'surprise' leads to slander and hatred of the Christians (**John 15:18-19**, also **Proverbs 1:10-15**).

“There is plenty of evidence from pagan as well as Christian sources that it was precisely the reluctance of Christians to participate in the routine of contemporary life, particularly conventionally accepted amusements, civic ceremonies, and any function involving contact with idolatry, or what they consider immorality that caused them to be hated, despised, and themselves suspected of illicit practices.” **William Kelly**

3. All will give an account to God. It is a comfort to Christians that God will bring to justice all (whether living or dead – **2 Thessalonians 1:5-8**, **2 Timothy 4:1**) those who malign Christians for *being* Christ-like (**Revelation 6:9-11**).

vs. 6: The gospel was preached to believers who have since died. The pagans viewed Christians' death as the final statement of their vanity and failure (no benefit to being a so-called Christian); nevertheless, the preached gospel promises eternal life to those who believe. So, Peter has taken us back to the thought introduced in **vs. 1** – that death only leads to triumph for the believer. Just as Jesus died, rose and ascended in triumph, so also the believer will triumph. As such, the believer should gladly accept suffering and persecution, knowing that in Jesus, the penalty, power, and permanent effects of sin have been utterly defeated. **The believer's hope is centered on Jesus Christ!**

Peter now turns to instruct his readers again in how they are to live godly lives in a pagan, hostile society. He addresses 3 areas: Our personal godly living, our love for our brothers, and service for the glory of God.

Vs 7: Godly living (when godly desires intersect with godly discipline)

The end of all things is at hand – Refers to the return of Jesus. There is nothing left on the prophetic agenda except for the return of Christ (i.e., His imminent return), and this should be a strong incentive for the believer to be obedient (**Matthew 24:36 – 25:30**, **Philippians 4:4-9**, **James 5:8-9**).

“Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour, before I should hear the last trump.” Jonathan Edwards

Be self-controlled – from 2 words which mean, “safe,” and “what regulates life.” The idea is to do what is necessary to safe-guard the mind, to keep focused on things above (**Joshua 1:8, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:1-2**).

Be sober-minded – literally, to not be drunk. This is to be “free from the intoxicating influences of sin.” We want our thoughts to be clear and influenced by godly wisdom, to see things from an eternal perspective -- not relying on the wisdom of man (**Proverbs 14:12, Colossians 2:8, 18-23**).

For the sake of your prayers – Jesus promises prayers in His name will be answered (**John 15:16**). In order for our prayers to be aligned with the will of God, our minds must be focused on things of eternal value, free from worldliness (**Matthew 26:39,42, Acts 4:24-30**).

“In those vacant hours which are spared from business, pleasure, company, and sleep, and which are spent in solitude, at home or abroad; unprofitable, proud, covetous, sensual, envious, or malicious imaginations, occupy the minds of ungodly men, and often infect their very dreams. These are not only sinful in themselves, indicating the state of their hearts, and as such will be brought into the account at the day of judgment; but they excite the dormant corruptions, and lead to more open and gross violations of the holy law. The carnal mind welcomes and delights to dwell upon these congenial imaginations, and to solace itself by ideal indulgences, when opportunity of other gratification is not presented, or when a man dares not commit the actual transgression. But the spiritual mind recoils at them; such thoughts will intrude from time to time, but they are unwelcome and distressing, and are immediately thrust out; while other subjects, from the word of God, are stored up in readiness to occupy the mind more profitably and pleasantly during the hours of leisure and retirement. There is no better test of our true character, than the habitual effect of 'vain thoughts' upon our minds—whether we love and indulge them, or abhor, and watch and pray against them.” **Thomas Scott** (successor of John Newton)

vs. 8-9: Love one another!

Above all – Our love for each other should be the first thing that flows out of heavenly focused, clear-thinking prayer (this is our supreme duty to our fellow believers). Love will grow cold as the end draws near (**Matthew 24:10-12**). The fact that Peter basically repeats what he said in chapter 1 underscores the importance of love.

Earnestly – Same word as in **1:22**, meaning, “to be fully stretched out, completely taught.” We are to love as Jesus loved us – sacrificially -- stretching ourselves to the limit (**John 15:13, 2 Corinthians 8:1-5**).

Love covers a multitude of sins (Proverbs 10:12) - Love does not broadcast sin, but understands the depth of grace we have received from God Himself (**Ephesians 4:32**). I cannot help but think Peter was remembering his question to Jesus many years before (**Matthew 18:21-35**). True love breeds unity (**Philippians 2:2**).

Show hospitality (love strangers) to one another without grumbling - Hospitality is a self-sacrificing outpouring of love towards strangers, and should be expressed cheerfully (**Hebrews 13:1-2**). The “without grumbling” is added to encourage those who constantly open up their homes not to grow weary or begrudge their charity to others. This was especially necessary in Peter's day as churches met in houses, and traveling preachers would need a place to stay. But we are to show hospitality not to just our friends, but to all. To be hospitable means we take a genuine interest in others and make them feel welcome and at ease.

Vs 10-11: Service to the glory of God

Each member of the Christian community has received a gift from God (**I Corinthians 12:7,11**). These gifts must be used for the common good of the church – not exercising our gift is not an option (**I Corinthians 12:2**). Not exercising our gift will have an adverse effect on the church.

We are stewards of these gifts, and will be judged on how we utilized them (**Matthew 25:14-30**). Notice that these gifts flow out of God's “*varied*” (multicolored) grace.

Peter seems to divide the gifts into 2 major types – speaking and serving.

1. *Whoever speaks, as one who speaks the oracles of God* - Those who have a gift in the arena of speaking **MUST** use that gift to speak the words (oracles) of God (**Acts 7:38, Romans 3:2, Hebrews 5:12**, the term is rooted in the Old Testament), not our own invention (**1 Corinthians 4:1-2, 2 Corinthians 4:1-5, 2 Timothy 4:1-5**). Peter leaves no room for human invention and opinion, and so serious is this admonition that James warns those who would teach (**James 3:1**).

“The true preacher, the man whom God has commissioned, delivers his message with awe and trembling because, 'The mouth of the Lord has spoken it.' He bears the burden of the Lord and bows under it. Ours is no trifling theme but one which moves our whole soul. They called George Fox a Quaker, because when he spoke he would quake exceedingly through the force of the Truth of God which he so thoroughly apprehended. Perhaps if you and I had a clearer sight and a closer grip of God's Word, and felt more of its majesty, we should quake also. Martin Luther, who never feared the face of man, yet declared that when he stood up to preach he often felt his knees knock together under a sense of his great responsibility. Woe unto us if we dare to speak the Word of the Lord with less than our whole heart and soul and strength! Woe unto us if we handle the Word as if it were an occasion for display! If it were our own word, we might be studious of the graces of oratory. But if it is God's Word, we cannot afford to think of ourselves—we are bound to speak it, 'not with wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of no effect.' If we reverence the Word, it will not occur to us that we can improve upon it by our own skill in language. Oh, it were far better to break stones on the road than to be a preacher, unless one had God's Holy Spirit to sustain him—our charge is solemn and our burden is heavy.” **Spurgeon, The Infallibility of Scripture**

Whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies - We need to serve (wait on tables, particularly of a slave who waits on guests) in the power of God. The one who speaks, God's words, and the one who serves, in God's strength, does so by the power of God so that arrogance and self-exaltation are removed. God gives us the strength we need to accomplish His purposes (**2 Corinthians 9:8-15**).

In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ (**Romans 16:27, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Philippians 4:20, Colossians 3:17, 1 Timothy 6:16, Jude 25, Revelation 1:6, 5:13**).

“Faith is a living well-founded confidence in the grace of God, so perfectly certain that it would die a thousand times rather than surrender its conviction. Such confidence and personal knowledge of divine grace makes its possessor joyful, bold, full of warm affection toward God and all created things, all of which the Holy Spirit works in faith. Hence, such a man becomes without constraint willing and eager to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer all manner of ills in order to please and glorify God who has shown toward him such grace.” **Martin Luther**