

Suffering and Obedience

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Date: 30 March 2014

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[0:00] Good morning. Well, as we've been studying 1 Peter these last few Sundays, we've been camping on some significant themes.

! So I thought maybe we'd just kind of refresh ourselves on what some of those themes were as we turn to 1 Peter. We've focused on the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the grounds for our living hope.

We've focused on how to live as Christians in a fallen world. We've also focused on how to live as suffering Christians in a fallen world. We've seen that the sufferings of Jesus spur us on and motivate us as we suffer as well.

We've also read repeatedly of our eternal inheritance that we have to look forward to. We've seen the blessing that God has promised to us, both in chapters 1 and chapter 3.

And so today, we'll be looking at one last passage in the letter of 1 Peter. And we'll be particularly keying in on the relationship between suffering and obedience.

[1:05] So last week, we saw that Christ's sufferings spur us on to suffer as well with the hope of receiving an eternal reward. This week, we'll see that Christ's sufferings spur us on to live in obedience to God.

So we'll see this suffering and obedience. And so the kind of main idea for this lesson is, based on the suffering of Christ for our sake, we ought to live in obedience to the will of God.

So based on the suffering of Christ for our sake, we ought to live in obedience to the will of God. So his suffering, it's our motivation. Because Jesus suffered, we obey.

Ultimately, that's what Peter's going to teach us today. Just as Jesus suffered, so too should we suffer. That's what we saw last week. As Jesus suffered, so too should we suffer. And as we suffer, we learn obedience.

He teaches us obedience. So turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 4. And we're going to be reading the first 11 verses.

[2:06] So 1 Peter chapter 4, beginning right there in verse 1. Since, therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.

For whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions, but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you. But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. The end of all things is at hand.

Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

[3:14] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks is one who speaks the oracles of God. Whoever serves is one who serves by the strength that God supplies.

In order that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. So we see in this passage that there are basically two contexts in which Peter calls us to obedience.

He calls us to obedience in our dealings with the world, and he calls us to obedience in our dealings with one another as believers. So our first point, covering verses 1 to 6, is this.

We are to live obediently to the will of God in the midst of the disobedience of the world. So verses 1 to 6, we see how we are to interact, how we are to behave in our interactions with the world.

Now, when we look even beginning in verse 1, we see that Peter calls our attention back to chapter 3, which we just studied last week. He says, Now this should naturally draw us back to chapter 3, where we saw Peter describe Jesus' sufferings and death in verse 18.

[4:34] Look with me back at that verse. It reads, So we see right here, verse 1 of chapter 4, it kind of continues the flow from chapter 3.

Peter says, Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, reminding us of his sufferings and also reminding us of our sufferings as well. And so we see that we're called to endure because we have this reward in heaven, this blessing of an eternal inheritance, and that we are to bless those who persecute us because we will receive a blessing.

And now in chapter 4, in verse 1, Peter calls us to another action in light of Christ's sufferings. He calls us to arm ourselves or to equip ourselves with the same thinking as that of Christ.

We're to actively take on the mind of Christ. Having the mind of Christ or thinking as Christ would think isn't something new just in Peter's letter. It's actually a theme in the New Testament.

Paul has that same way of speaking. He says in Philippians chapter 2 that we shouldn't look to just our own interests, but we should look to the interests of one another, that we should look to the interests of others.

[5:51] And then in verse 5, he gives us this command in Philippians chapter 2. He says, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. Or as the NIV translates, In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Even the New King James Version kind of gives light on this one. It says, Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. So this is very much a theme of the New Testament.

Think like Jesus thinks. Because our attitude, it affects our actions. Our attitude affects our actions. How we think affects how we behave. I'm sure you guys all know the acronym WWJD.

It was really popular like in the 90s. What would Jesus do? I think that it's also really important to think, what would Jesus think? Not only what would Jesus do, but what would Jesus think?

Because those two are very tied together in the New Testament. Not only just behaving as Jesus behaves, but also thinking as Jesus thinks. And Peter calls us to that here in verse 1 of chapter 4.

[6:54] He calls us to arm ourselves with the same way of thinking in our suffering. He also gives us a reason for having this mindset. He gives us a motivation for our suffering in chapter 4.

And he continues that thought in verse 1, saying, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. So we suffer because in suffering our sin, it's strangled.

Our sin is suffocated. In suffering, we're living in righteousness. So in suffering, there's no room for sin. As Peter said back in chapter 1, he said that in verse 7, he speaks of the tested genuineness of our faith, that in suffering our faith is shown to be true, it's shown to be pure.

And so I think in many ways our suffering results in that, that our suffering, it cleanses, it pushes sin out. We put off sin in our suffering. The Spirit is at work in us to refine us and to shape us, to mold us into the image of Christ.

When we suffer for the same reasons that Jesus suffered, we become more like our suffering servant. Now we also have to remember that this doesn't mean that we are no longer sinful.

[8:13] We still sin. 1 John speaks to that very clearly. Scripture makes it clear that when ceasing from sin does not mean that we no longer sin, but it means that we are progressively growing in obedience, that we're putting sin off, that we are learning obedience in that sense.

We could even echo the words of Paul, actually, in 2 Corinthians 7.1. I was looking through the memory packet and it happened to be the next verse and I think it actually applies very well.

He says at one point in 2 Corinthians 7.1 that we are perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. He says also earlier in his letter to the believers in Corinth in 2 Corinthians, he says that light and darkness can have no fellowship.

So we can have no fellowship with this world and as we cease to have fellowship with the world, we will suffer at their hands. And as we suffer at their hands, we are perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Simply put, as we suffer, we put off sin. As we suffer, we put off sin. As we suffer, we grow in righteousness. And that's not easy. It's hard.

[9:22] It's painful. It's difficult. And that's why Peter calls us to arm ourselves with the same thinking as Christ. because when we get down to it, when we boil down everything that Peter has to say here in chapter 4, we're left with this.

We must be more willing to suffer in order to be obedient than to sin in order to be accepted. We should be more willing to suffer in order to be obedient to God than to sin in order to be accepted by the world.

One commentator actually put it like this. Peter's readers face the choice of either taking the path of least resistance, going along with the values, norms, and practices acceptable and expected by their society, or being obedient to God and suffering the consequences of criticism and condemnation by unbelieving family and friends.

So our motivation to suffer for the sake of obedience, it's ultimately grounded in our desire to grow in godliness, to grow more and more into the image of Christ.

As we suffer for Christ, just as he suffered for us, we become more and more like him. As a result of this being done with sin, having ceased from sin, we see two outcomes here, and Peter gives them as we continue into verse 2.

[10:43] The first outcome is he gives in negative terms and the second outcome in positive terms. So the first outcome, negatively, we see that Peter says in verse 2, we live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions.

Now this phrase, it might be a bit confusing because we read the word flesh, and Peter uses the word flesh in his letter, and oftentimes when we think of flesh, I think about Paul and how Paul uses the word flesh, and flesh usually has these negative connotations behind it, this idea of our sinfulness and the sinful desires, the sinful nature.

But Peter uses flesh oftentimes in a less spiritual way and more in like a physical way. And so he says here, as we live for the rest of the time in the flesh, he's not speaking of as we live the rest of the time sinning, he's talking about as we live the rest of the time in our human bodies, as we live the rest of our earthly lives, I think is how the NIV translates it.

As we live the rest of our time on earth, we who have suffered like Christ are to no longer live for our human passions. Because the world lives for gratifying evil human desires, but that can't be us. That can't be us. As we suffer for the sake of Christ and live in obedience to God, we are no longer to desire to gratify our sinful cravings. We've been called to a higher way of living as Christ would live.

[12:11] But there's also a positive outcome to ceasing from sin. And this positive outcome is in the second half of verse 2, that we are to live for the will of God.

So the negative outcome is that we no longer live for the rest of our earthly lives for our human passions. And the positive outcome is that we now live for the rest of our earthly lives for the will of God.

Now when many people hear the term will of God, there's a range of things that come to mind. And I think it's because the will of God can be used in different ways in scripture. It can be used to talk about his sovereign plan and the ways in which he has caused us to walk in life, the ways in which he has directed our steps.

David speaks of this when he says of his mother's womb, your eyes, in Psalm 139, he says to God, your eyes saw my unformed substance and your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

So as that verse makes clear, God has this will of direction. But sometimes we read this verse in 1 Peter chapter 4 and when we think of God's will of direction, but it's speaking more towards his will of desire, which is a little different idea.

[13:27] His will of direction has to do more with his unchanging plans, God's sovereign decrees that he carries out. But God's will of desire has more to do with living in obedience to him.

His will of direction, it can't be changed. We can't do anything about it. But his will of desire, he's given us the ability to live in righteousness or also to live in sin.

And so God desires one thing when we see this in 1 Peter chapter 4. He desires that we submit to his commands. He desires that we live righteously, but we can also be disobedient.

And so that's why here in verse 2 of chapter 4, Peter calls us to no longer live for human passions, but for the will of God. We're to no longer live to gratify our human passions.

We're to ultimately, if we desire to live for God's will, we must put on that which is good and obedient. We must put off sin. We must cease from sin and seek to live in God's will.

[14:29] We must submit to God's commands. We must submit to his righteous instructions. Rather than living in an unrighteous manner, we're to live in a righteous manner. Rather than living for human passions, we're to live for the will of God.

As we choose to suffer rather than sin, we demonstrate that we genuinely desire the will of God over the passions of man. Peter expands on these passions of man here in verse 3.

And we can read some of these as we look at this verse. Peter says, for the time that has passed suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

And Peter's telling us that these are all traits that once characterized us. When we lived for our human passions, this is what characterized us. And they're all tied together by this common theme of lack of self-control.

We had no self-control. But now there's a contrast. Because remember, as Peter talked about in chapter 1, we've been born again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[15:38] And so there's a contrast between the desires of our former life and the newfound desires that we have in Christ to do that which pleases God, to do the will of God.

So now Peter calls us to no longer live and to no longer do what unbelievers would do. That's the old self. It's been crucified with Christ. Christ. The new self that's been raised with Christ, it desires to obey the will of God.

And so we're reminded of the main point here in these verses that we're to live obediently to the will of God in the midst of the disobedience of the world. Yet as we saw last week, our countercultural manner of living, it's not going to win us favor with unbelievers.

It's not going to win us favor with man. And look here at verse 4 and see just how unbelievers react when we fail to join them in their sinful living. Peter says that, he says a couple things here and the first thing we want to actually see is the context.

There's some historical context behind this. Remember that Peter, he's writing to believers during the first century when they were living in a land under the rule of the Roman Empire.

[16:50] And worship of the Roman gods was a key aspect of this society. Everything revolved around worshiping the gods. So we actually could see here two potential reasons for why unbelievers would have been surprised that Peter's readers were not joining them in their sinful living.

First, they would have been surprised that the believers would abandon those carnal pleasures of society for the sake of Christ. Sin is easy, it's enjoyable, and obedience to God, living for God's will is difficult, and it requires great effort.

And so, it's natural that unbelievers, they'd be surprised that the recipients of Peter's letter would give up what's easy and enjoyable for something that's not as easy. It's something that they would look at and they'd be confused by, that Peter's readers wouldn't join in their sin.

But also, considering the pagan idol worship of the day, believers would have had to have abandoned this entire aspect of their culture. They would have been turning against the gods, and so, in the minds of the unbelievers of their day, they would have thought, well, in turning from the gods, they might incur the wrath of these gods.

These gods will be angry with them. This is foolishness for them to turn from what we do in worshiping idols to this god that they claim has saved them because they're going to now incur the wrath of our gods.

[18:11] And so, they look at that and they're surprised. They're confused by that. But we also see that they're not just surprised, but they're also hostile.

We see here in verse 4, he says, and they heap abuse on you. So, there are two responses here from unbelieving society to the virtuous conduct of believers. First, there's surprise, and then there's malice.

And this is where we return to the notion of suffering. One commentator had this to say, Pagans are surprised that believers do not participate in what they consider to be normal cultural activities.

In response, they criticize, defame, and revile believers, and thereby also the God they worship. When we refuse to live as unbelievers, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, we should expect persecution.

The recipients of Peter's letter, they were shamed, maligned, they were ostracized, all for desiring to live obediently to the will of God. And the same should be true of us. The same, we should expect nothing less.

[19 : 19] We should be prepared for that. Now, in the midst of all, this would be very easy for us as believers to become discouraged and downtrodden. Yet, Peter offers a word of encouragement and comfort here in verse 5.

Look with me at that verse. God says that the unbelievers who persecute us as believers will ultimately give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

So this verse here, it actually speaks to the fact that unbelievers will be held accountable for their actions. At the final judgment, they will have to stand before a holy God and testify to their deeds. So not only is this a warning to unbelievers of coming condemnation, but it's also a verse of comfort to believers.

For we will be rewarded by God for our steadfastness in the face of persecution. Now, as we come to verse 6, we're confronted again with a difficult verse in 1 Peter.

We saw that last week in chapter 3 when we were looking at verses, it's around 19 to 22. Last week, we saw that some people have used those verses in chapter 3 and they've actually also used this verse in chapter 4 to support the idea that Jesus actually gave unrepentant sinners a second chance at salvation.

[20 : 32] Yet, as we saw last week, Scripture makes it clear that man has no second chance after he dies. Man dies once and then comes judgment. That's from Hebrews 11, verse 27.

And now here in 1 Peter, we read of this idea of judgment once again. Peter speaks here in verse 6 of believers who have died. The gospel has been preached to them and it's implied that they've responded in saving faith.

For Peter says that these people to whom the gospel was preached were judged in the flesh the way people are. They're judged in the body by suffering physically, but that they live in the spirit the way God does.

So we immediately see a contrast between two forms of judgment, the judgment of man and the judgment of God. For believers to have been judged according to human standards in regard to the body, that speaks of the physical persecution that Peter's been addressing throughout his letter.

And yet, to be judged according to God in regard to the spirit speaks of our vindication, the vindication of believers. Though society may judge us or deem us worthy of persecution, God has deemed us worthy of his blessing because of the righteousness of Christ.

[21 : 48] So therefore, this verse here in verse 6, this verse, it ought to give us comfort, it ought to provide us comfort, knowing that the gospel, it remains effective even for those who have died.

For our salvation, it doesn't end in death, but it carries over. And even after we've died, we can have confidence and know that we're covered by the righteousness of Christ, that we will be found righteous by God after death.

And so for this reason, we ought to remain obedient to the will of God in the midst of the disobedience of the world. So let's recap kind of what we've seen thus far.

We've looked at the first six verses. And in these first six verses, we've seen that we're to live obediently to the will of God in the midst of the disobedience of the world. And now as we move into verses 7 to 11, we'll see that we are to live obediently to the will of God in the midst of the body of Christ.

So we've already looked at how we're to live with those in the world, and now we're to see how we're to live with those in the church, in the body of Christ. So in these next five verses, we should really take note of how many times Peter uses the phrase one another or each other or others because he's speaking so much in the context of our relationships with one another.

[23 : 10] And I think that these phrases help us to see that our obedience to God is played out in this context of the church. So verse 7, let's look at that one first.

The end of all things is at hand. Therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. So beginning here in verse 7, Peter lays out the first of four exhortations.

And this first one is that we're to prayerfully prepare for Christ's return. Verse 7 connects back to Peter's thought in verse 6, and it kind of serves as a tie from the last section into this next section. And Peter reminds us that the judgment of all people is near, so we ought to be alert and sober-minded so that we might pray. One commentator said this, The realization that God is bringing history to a close should provoke believers to depend on Him, and this dependence is manifested in prayer.

For in prayer, believers recognize that any good that occurs in the world is due to God's grace. Amen. Now let's look at verse 8, and this is the second exhortation that we will see.

[24 : 20] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. So we're called to love one another in the church. Now when Peter says that this love, that it covers a multitude of sins, he doesn't mean that by loving one another we can just look over and ignore all sin, that we can just say, well, we're all Christians here, so when we sin against each other, that's just okay.

We're just going to look over it. That's not what he means by covering a multitude of sins. He's speaking more so of bearing with one another as we sin against each other, meaning that we're to be patient with one another when we sin against each other, that we're to be quick to forgive as Christ has forgiven us.

Because there's no place for taking sin lightly, but there's also no place for destroying our relationships with one another when we sin against each other. We should be quick to forgive. There's no place for just disregarding when a fellow believer sins against us, but there's also no place for holding it against one another. To love someone when he or she sins against us, that means that we must confront one another when we sin, but we must confront in patience and gentleness.

We must confront one another with a spirit of forgiveness, remembering how sinful we are and yet how merciful God has been towards us. So now we come to verse 9 and we see this third exhortation in the passage.

[25 : 47] Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. So like the previous verse, Peter continues to address how believers ought to live in community with one another. He continues to address how we should relate and interact with one another.

And this is significant because as one commentator says, the church is to be that alternate society where Christians find a place when shunned by unbelievers who live by different values. And we kind of touched on this even last week about how when we live in the world we should expect all kinds of evils done against us.

And so when we come together as the church, that's the last thing that we should be seeing. We should be building one another up and being encouraged and edified because we have much that we're going to endure in this world.

We shouldn't be enduring it even among one another. And so this alternate society, this church, we should be welcoming to one another. Now sometimes when we think about hospitality, we think purely of welcoming one another into our homes.

When we hear the word hospitable, we just think homes. But hospitality, it has even more so to do with welcoming one another into our lives. It's about welcoming each other into our lives and it often manifests itself in our homes.

[26 : 58] But if we've truly expressed the oppression and the rejection and the alienation and persecution of our unbelieving society, then we should naturally find comfort and solidarity and the welcoming of other believers into our lives.

So therefore, we should strengthen our bond with other believers. And as we do that, we live in obedience to God's will of desire when we are hospitable towards one another. And he also mentions without grumbling.

grumbling. So we should do it in thanksgiving and gratitude for what we have. We are blessed to have one another in the body of Christ. And so we should do it without grumbling. And finally, we come to verse 10, which is the fourth and final exhortation in this passage.

And Peter says, So Peter continues the communal element of his charges.

He continues the theme of community in urging us to use our gifts to serve the rest of the body. Our gifts have not been given to us in order that we might be able to congratulate ourselves on our abilities, but they've been given to us that we might serve one another.

[28:11] If we desire to be obedient to the will of God, as we remember the obedience of Christ to suffer for our sake, then we have to serve one another through the use of our gifts. We come to verse 11, where Peter says, Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies.

So we see that Peter highlights two gifts there, teaching and service. But more importantly, as we read on, we should notice that Peter draws us back to God as the source of our giftedness. He says, In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. And so we see here that God, he's the conduit, he's the source through which we are able to use our giftedness.

And it's ultimately for his glory, not for our own glory, not for building ourselves up, but for seeing God glorified. For the more that we recognize our dependency upon God, the ways in which that he upholds us and sustains us and enables us to serve, the more that we will turn and praise him and give him the glory that's due to him.

The higher our view of God, the more that we will be humbled in recognition for all that he's done for us. The more that we recognize God to be the sovereign, mighty, all-powerful ruler of all things, the more we will praise him for how he's intervened in our lives and uniquely equipped us to live our lives in obedience to his will.

[29:49] The more that we see the ways in which he's equipped us to have dealings with the world and with one another. And I think the note of praise here in verse 11 is a good conclusion for our study of 1 Peter, for it draws us back to chapter 1.

And if we remember back to chapter 1, Peter says this, Blessed be, or praise be, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And so, just to kind of wrap up our study of 1 Peter, we've looked at all those themes that we mentioned in the beginning.

We've seen all of these themes, and yet all of them can be drawn together in praise to God. All of them can be wrapped up in worship towards God. And so I hope that we've been comforted.

I hope that we've been encouraged, and I hope that we've been charged to go and to live lives worthy of the gospel. But I hope that in all of that, through our study of 1 Peter, we've come to praise God all the more.

[30:58] Let's end with a word of prayer. Father, Heavenly Father, God, we praise you. We praise you for who you are and for what you've done in saving us from our sins.

We praise you that you are conforming us to the image of Christ, that you are transforming us more and more into the image of your Son. God, we look forward to and we eagerly anticipate the day in which we will see you face to face, the day in which our faith will be made sight.

But God, until that day, we ask that you would strengthen us and that you would encourage us, that you would continue to build us up as a body, that we might be that alternate society that we have read so much about in 1 Peter.

God, help us to love each other in such ways that unbelievers look on and wonder and ultimately come to glorify you. God, we thank you for all the ways in which you are working here even at Grace Fellowship and we ask that you would continue to do so in your faithfulness towards us. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.