

## **Sin or Suffering: Which will it be?**

I Peter 4:1-6

“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

The major theme of I Peter is the Christian and suffering. So far we have been taught about how to respond Biblically to unjust suffering that comes upon us from the world. Peter has illustrated for us, from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, how we should respond to unjust suffering from the world. From our text this morning, we are going to examine another facet of Christian suffering: the mortification of the sin. Not suffering that comes upon us from the outside, but suffering we heap upon our carnal flesh by denying sin.

In the previous verses we have seen Christ's victory and the glory He received in and through His suffering. If we are baptized into Christ, if we identify with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection like we studied from I Peter 3:21, then we must also identify with Him in suffering. Not only the suffering that comes to us from the world, but suffering that we choose so that we might be like Him. We can either appease our carnal nature and sin, or we can deny our carnal nature and suffer in the flesh. This passage teaches us that we must choose suffering and deny sin. This text leads us to ask, "Sin or suffering: which will it be?"

## **I. The Introduction**

Christ has suffered for us in the flesh. I Peter 4:1 begins by saying, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh." This refers back to I Peter 3:18, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." Christ died in the flesh, but He was raised again to life by the Holy Spirit. Death was not the final blow for Christ. In death, Christ won His greatest victory: victory over sin.

To the shameful cross they nailed Him,

And that cross became His throne:

In the tomb they laid and sealed Him;  
Lo, the Godhead bursts the stone,  
And, ascending,  
Claims all (creation) as His own.<sup>1</sup>

Hold on to that thought. In death, Christ won His greatest victory: victory over sin. Hold on to that, and look again at our text, I Peter 4:1, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.”

Verse 1 goes on and says, “Arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.” The instruction to “arm yourselves” alludes to a battle that must be fought. You do not arm yourself to rest. A soldier doesn’t put on his armor to lay down for a nap. If someone were to walk into your home, armed to the teeth, you wouldn’t think, “Oh, this guy probably just needs somewhere to sit down and rest for a while.” You don’t arm yourself to rest.

You arm yourself to fight. Far too often we live as if there are no spiritual battles to fight. As if it doesn’t matter if we live holy lives. As if it doesn’t matter if we win the victory over sin. God wants us to fight spiritual battles. He has given us the tools to win. He commands us, “Arm yourselves.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Pilgrims Here on Earth and Strangers*, by Henry F. Lyte. <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/p/i//pilgrims.htm>

We are to arm ourselves “likewise.” I hope you can relate to this illustration from my childhood. Maybe you have had a similar experience. I can remember times as a boy playing outside with friends, wrestling and carrying on. Someone would totally change the nature of the game by picking up a stick.

When you are a young child, a stick is a far more effective then wrestling. Whoever has the stick is king. No one wants to get hit with the stick. The words of Joshua 23:10 come to mind, “One . . . of you shall chase a thousand.”

Even as children, my friends and I had a solution to this problem. We didn’t seek disarmament. We didn’t ban sticks. We all just found sticks of our own. Now everyone had a stick, and the game changed once again. We saw how effective the stick could be, and we armed ourselves likewise.

Peter points us to the suffering of Jesus Christ, shows us the incredibly victory Christ won through His suffering, then tells us, “arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.” As we consider the victory of Jesus Christ and the glory He received through His suffering, we need to arm ourselves with the same mind, the same attitude, the same intention to persevere through suffering.

Godly suffering bears holy fruit. Look at the last part of verse 1, “For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased form sin.” We must connect this verse to the baptism Peter wrote about in I Peter 3:21. Not the ordinance of water baptism, but being spiritually baptized into Christ; identifying with Christ. As we identify with Christ, we must by necessity deny the flesh. By the grace of God in our hearts, we

now say no to sin and yes to holiness. We have “ceased from sin.” This doesn’t mean we will never commit acts of sin. It means that the power of sin in our lives has been broken.

Matthew Henry made this comment, “As Christ suffered in his human nature, do you, according to your baptismal vow and profession, make your corrupt nature suffer, by putting to death the body of sin by self-denial and mortification; for, if you . . . thus suffer, you will be conformable to Christ in his death and resurrection, and will cease *from sin*.”<sup>2</sup>

The choice for the Christian is between sin and suffering. We can indulge the flesh and sin, or we can deny the flesh and suffer.

James Guthrie was a Scottish presbyterian minister in the 1600’s who was executed as a traitor for taking a Biblical stand against some ungodly government policies. Right before he was executed he said, “Dear friends, pledge this cup of suffering as I have done, before you sin, for sin and suffering have been presented to me, and I have chose the suffering part.”

We have been reminded of Christ’s victory through suffering. We have been told to arm ourselves with this same mind. As we identify with Jesus Christ, there will be a profound change in our lives. We will choose to make our carnal nature suffer that we might be like Christ. When presented with the choice to sin or suffer,

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.ccel.org/study/1\\_Peter\\_4](http://www.ccel.org/study/1_Peter_4)

we will choose to suffer. We are now going to contrast sin and suffering from our text.

## **II. Sin and Suffering Contrasted**

Sin conforms us to man; suffering conforms us to Jesus Christ. The root of sin is not external influences and temptations, but internal lusts. I Peter 4:2 says, “That he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men.” This verse is telling us that we should no longer live the way we lived before we were Christians.

How did we live apart from Christ? This verse tells us: “In the flesh to the lusts of men.” The word “lusts” just means a strong desire, but only very rarely is it used in a positive sense. Almost always when the Bible talks about “lusts” it is in a negative sense, as it is used here. The “lusts of men” is a strong desire to do that which is forbidden by God and goes against His holy character.

The Bible is the best commentary on itself and gives more depth to this teaching. Listen to what James 1:14-15 says, “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Let any temptation be what it may, it would ultimately fail were it not for the lust that is within your heart.

Sin is nothing less than a perfect expression of man's sinful nature. Do you realize that you are the most you can be in your carnal flesh when you are wallowing in sin? Self-help books that tell you to be "the best you can be" set a very low goal indeed. They are really telling you to set your sights on living out total depravity. Sin is the perfect expression of our true nature. Sin conforms you to man.

Suffering conforms you to Jesus Christ. Christ has been lifted up to us as the perfect example of triumph and victory in suffering. Again, verse 1 says, "Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." Jesus did not fulfill the lusts of men. Jesus did the will of the Father. He rejected sin and chose suffering. When we reject sin and choose suffering, we are conformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. Sin conforms us to man, suffering conformed us to Jesus Christ.

Sin is accepted by men; suffering is accepted by God. Sin is accepted by men. Verse 3 gives a list of sin, "For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries."

Verse 4 then tells us how men will react when, by the grace of God, we deny these sins. I Peter 4:4, "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you." This verse doesn't say you will be

rejected by men if you commit these sins. This verse says you will be rejected by men if you *don't* commit these sins.

Look again at the list of sins in verse 3. The first sin mentioned is “lasciviousness.” This is talking about living in sensuality. Fulfilling sexual desires outside of the God-ordained institution of marriage.

Next in the list is “lusts.” We have already defined “lust” as a strong desire to do that which is forbidden by God and goes against His holy character.

Next, “excess of wine.” This isn't the normal word used to speak of drunkenness in the Bible. The word used in this verse is only used this one time in the Bible. It isn't talking about getting roaring drunk. It's talking about just a slight excess of wine.

Next is “revelings.” A reveling is a loud, drunk party. Some other translations use the word “orgy” here and tie this in with the sexual sins spoken of earlier.

Next, “banquetings.” This is another reference to a drinking party. “Banqueting” may not be not as wild as a “reveling,” but it is along those same lines. This may also tie in another lust of the flesh, our appetite for food which without moderation is gluttony.

Finally, “abominable idolatries.” This is unlawful worship. Worshipping things that are not God.

The world sees nothing innately wrong with these sins. What does the world say? “Eat, drink, be merry; for tomorrow we die.” They live as gods unto themselves, trying to draw whatever pleasure they can out of their lusts. They don’t think it strange when people do these things. They think it strange when people don’t do these things.

Not only do they think it strange, but we are told in verse 4 that they will, “Speak evil of you.” In John 3:19 Jesus told Nicodemus that men love darkness because their deeds are evil. If you live in such a way that the light of Jesus Christ shines through your life, men will hate you, but if you live in the dark as they are in the dark, men will accept you. Sin is accepted by men.

Suffering is accepted by God. Verse 2 says, “That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” It is the will of God that we deny the lusts of men. When faced with temptation, the choice for the Christian is between obedience and sin. If we sin, we fulfill the lusts of the flesh. If we obey, we deny the lusts of the flesh. In obedience to God, our carnal flesh suffers. We must choose to suffer in the flesh. This is acceptable to God.

We have lived like the world long enough. Verse 3 begins by saying, “The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles.” The time you spent in sin before you were saved is enough! Before you were saved you lived as a slave to the lusts of men, now as a Christian live as a slave to God.

There was a pastor who would preach sometimes at college. I once heard him say, “I was a wicked sinner. My life was full of every form of ungodliness. And then God gloriously saved me at the age of four.” That’s kind of humorous. We think, “What kind of debauchery could he possibly have been involved in at four years old? How much understanding does a four year old really have about sin?”

Yet, the biblical reality is that a four year old is just as fully immersed in sin as anyone. Praise God that at 4 years old he was convicted of his sin and cried out to God for salvation. Maybe you have a similar testimony of being saved at a very young age. You might think, “Well, I’ve never experienced a life full of the sins verse 3 talks about.”

If that’s your testimony, praise God. The first part of verse 3 is still true. The time you spent living like the world, not matter how long or short that time was, it is enough. Live like the world no longer! Deny sin! Choose suffering for your carnal flesh. What a tragedy to waste life on the lusts of men.

I believe it was D. L. Moody who was once asked about the number of conversions at a revival meeting. Moody said, “One and a half men were saved.”

The next question is obvious, “How can half a man be saved?”

Moody said, “A boy and an old man were saved. The boy still has his whole life to live for the Lord, but the old man does not have much life left to serve God with.”

The time you have spent in sin is sufficient. Spend no more time there. Sin is enemy territory: the realm of the world. Sin is accepted by men, but suffering is accepted by God.

Sin brings temporary relief; suffering brings eternal victory. Sin brings temporary relief in two areas. First, sin brings relief for our carnal flesh. How many of you enjoy intense temptation? How many of you would say, “I love it when I face a terrible temptation.” The struggle between our new nature in Christ Jesus and our carnal flesh is not a pleasant struggle.

But there is a way to find relief: Sin. It will be instant relief, but it will only be temporary. The temptation will come again. And again and again and again. The relief sin brings is only temporary. Sin brings temporary relief for our carnal flesh.

Second, sin brings relief from persecution. Verse 4 tells us that if we do not do the wicked deeds spoken of in verse 3, then men will speak evil of us. No one likes to be evil spoken of, but there is more bad news. In the middle of verse 6 there is this phrase which says, “judged according to men in the flesh.”

Verse 6 seems to be speaking of individuals who were saved by the grace of God, made a firm stand for righteousness, and were so hated by the world that they were persecuted unto death. If the world hates you for righteousness sake, how can you stop the persecution? With sin.

If you compromise and allow sin in, you will find relief from persecutors. Sin brings temporary relief from persecution, but heed the warning of Jesus Christ

from Matthew 10:28, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Sin brings temporary relief.

Suffering brings eternal victory. Look again at verse 6, “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” Again, verse 6 seems to be speaking of individuals who were saved by the grace of God, made a firm stand for righteousness, and were so hated by the world that they were persecuted unto death: “judged according to men in the flesh.”

But verse 6 goes on and says, “But (they) live according to God in the spirit.” These saints may have suffered unto death, but their reward is not of this earth. Suffering in the flesh brings the reward of eternal victory: life with God forever.

Our text this morning begins by reminding us of Christ’s victory through suffering and then tells us to arm ourselves with the same mind. As we identify with Jesus Christ, there will be a profound change in our lives. We will choose to make our carnal nature suffer that we might be like Christ. When presented with the choice to sin or suffer, we will choose to suffer.

We then contrasted sin and suffering from this text. Sin conforms us to man, suffering conforms us to Jesus Christ. Sin is accepted by men, suffering is accepted

by God. Sin brings temporary relief, suffering brings eternal victory. We see that the way of suffering for the carnal flesh is the way of spiritual blessing.

Listen to the words from this poem written by Charles Wesley:

Come, O my soul, the call obey,  
Take up the burden of thy Lord!  
His practice is thy living way,  
Thy guide His pure unerring Word;  
The lovely perfect pattern read,  
And haste in all His steps to tread.

What did my Lord from sinners bear?  
His patience is the rule for me;  
Walking in Him I cannot err:  
And lo! the Man of Grievs I see  
Whose life one scene of sufferings was,  
Quite from the manger to the cross.

Here then my calling I discern,  
'Tis written in affliction's book,  
My first, and latest lesson learn,

For nothing here but sufferings look,

I bow me to the will divine,

To suffer with my Lord be mine.

To suffer as my Lord I come:

How did the Lamb His wrongs endure?

Clamorous and warm? or meek, and dumb?

Did He by force His life secure?

His injured innocence defend;

Or bear His burden to the end?

Did He evade the pain, and shame,

Impatient of unjust disgrace?

Did He throw off the imputed blame?

Did He from spitting hide His face?

Did He to man for succor fly?

Or offer up Himself, and die?

. . .

O that I might like Him withstand,  
Like Him mine innocency clear,  
Like Him resist the ruffian band,  
Like Him refuse the cross to bear,  
Like Him the persecutor fly,  
Like Him submit to live, and die?<sup>3</sup>

Our text leads us to the question: “Sin or suffer: which will it be?” May we, by the grace of God, obey the command of Christ and deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. Follow Him in His example of suffering.

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<sup>3</sup>*Come, O My Soul, The Call Obey*, by Charles Wesley. <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/c/o/m/e/o/comeomso.htm>