

Living In Hope: 1 Peter 4:12-19

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I. Don't Be Surprised (On Managing Expectations)

"Dear friends, [the ones I care deeply about... Dear friends] don't be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."

At one level, the whole book of 1 Peter is a commentary on the eighth beatitude, where Jesus says: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven..."

– Matthew 5:11-12a

Jesus promises that pressure will come for those who live the kingdom-way.

II. But rejoice in suffering that comes from your allegiance to Jesus

"But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

Perhaps it's not suffering *per se* we are averse to, but seemingly unnecessary suffering. Pointless suffering. We may be willing to suffer if we can understand what it's for. Peter helps with that.

1. For anyone facing persecution, this doesn't mean God doesn't love us – not at all! It's evidence that we have a share in the life of Jesus – "participate in the suffering of Christ" and will know the glory of the life to come.
2. God's presence rests on those who suffer. Look at the promise 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.*"

III. Not Ashamed to "Bear that Name"

"However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." (4:16)"

The word "Christian" only appears three times in the Bible. Here, and twice in Acts. It was a derogatory term used of Jesus' followers to mean something like "Christ-lackey's". It was used to shame people. Peter says, "Take what was meant as insult as a badge of honour. In fact, praise God for it. This is evidence that you are lined up with ultimate reality."

"If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler."

"Meddling describes an ineffective, bothersome approach to the world that sets the cause of Christ back even though it may advance a religious agenda.... Instead of blaming the world for being bad, Peter wants believers to impress the world with God's goodness."

– Douglas Webster

Peter knows this “suffering for the Name” from experience.

“Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

– Acts 5:40-41

IV. Judgment as Preparation for the New Creation

“For it is time for judgment to be with God’s household...” What do we do with *that*?

1. We need to look at the big picture. God is going to restore his good creation, but without evil, sin, injustice, or death. That begins with the good work of refining *in us*, his people.

“God will destroy all sin from his new creation; he has begun that work in us. The trials that we experience show us that God is already beginning his great work of renewal.”

– Edmond Clowney

2. The word for “judgment” in Greek – *krino* – it means “to decide”, “to evaluate”, “to distinguish”, not necessarily “to condemn.” And it certainly doesn’t mean ‘condemn’ as Peter uses it of God’s people here (See 1 Cor 3).
3. When is this? Peter says: “For it *is time*...” God is refining his people – doing his purifying work – right now, and he’s using these pressures to do it.
4. This would be ‘bad news’ except for the lavish mercy of God. We read that Jesus “bore our sins in his body on the cross” - 1 Peter 2:24; and that “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” – 1 Peter 3:18. For the Christian person, the “judgment” of God is not cause for insecurity but rather, it makes sense of the meaning of our trials.

V. Committed to our Creator and to Doing Good

“So then, those who suffer according to God’s Will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” (v.19)

The God who began it all – the “faithful Creator”, Peter tells us – can be trusted to bring about his New Creation. We can entrust ourselves to God’s sovereign, powerful, just, and good judgments, his plans. And from that place of deep confidence in God, we get on with continuing to do good, even under insult and threat.

VI. Implications

One of the major ways that Christians have been distinct in the ancient world, and in our late-modern West, it’s in the Christian view of sex and sexuality and our bodies.

1. Christians see the human body as the good creation of the good Creator God.
2. Christianity says that every single part of our lives has been touched in some way, bent in some way, vandalized and corrupted away from God’s design by the corrosive effects of human sin.

3. Christianity says that we who trust in Jesus will be raised from the dead.
4. The Christian view was incredibly liberating in the ancient world to women and others who lacked social or cultural power

Though the Christian view has had an incredibly positive impact on western societies, largely unrecognized I might add, some of those other aspects of sex and sexuality are not viewed favourably.

Here's a brief summary of the NAB statement on Marriage:

From the Bible we believe . . .

- That God's intention for marriage is established throughout the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
- That God ordained marriage as a voluntary union for life of one man and one woman
- That sexual intimacy is legitimate only within the bounds of marriage
- That marriage is more than a contract between two persons: It is a covenant before God
- That in Christian marriage, the Church acts as an agent of God's blessing, as a primary witness and as a supportive community
- That a healthy marriage is the best foundation for families and the raising of children

Therefore, we conclude...

That the Bible teaches that marriage is between one man and one woman only, and to recognize other unions as legitimate marriages would be contrary to our understanding of scripture within the North American Baptist Conference.

(Find the full version here: https://nabconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2.-NAB-Statement-of-Beliefs-and-Affirmation-of-Marriage-ADOPTED-by-Triennial-Delegates-July-5-2012_0-1.pdf)

How do we respond to the variety of other views on sexuality and the body that are present in our world? To live as 'distinct from the world, for the sake of the world?'

- By lifting our eyes, together, to Jesus and recognizing how he loves us, then passing that on to others.
- By listening to what Jesus, and the rest of the scriptures say, about sexuality, and trusting that his ways are the best – are the path to human flourishing.
- By doing good – which includes both welcoming everyone and being honest that God's design for sexuality has boundaries, and that these are clear and good for humanity.
- By recognizing the image of God in others, even when we differ on this question, and let that honour for them show through gracious words and actions.

Ask yourself:

1. Am I willing to identify with Jesus, even when that means identifying with an element of our faith that is deeply unpopular?
2. What opportunities to "do good" is God providing for me right now? Even – maybe especially – toward those who you feel have been opposing me because of my Christian faith? How can I befriend, and create space for relating with grace and kindness toward people who differ in their views on sexuality?

3. Will we as a community be committed to creating a safe place where those who, even with the directions of their attraction, or sense of dysphoria, can see the church as their true family through faith in Jesus?

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

In what ways have you experienced “unmet expectations”? Were the expectations you had warranted, or did you have “high-hopes” that you maybe should not have? What was that like?

In our text, Peter assures believers that when we face trials, especially as related to our commitment to Jesus, we should not be surprised. He helps us manage our expectations of life with God.

Dig In: Read 1 Peter 4:12-19

1. What are some ways that Christians might face insult and suffering for the name of Jesus in our current setting? How have you come across this?
2. Why is it important that Peter define what kinds of suffering are not within the ‘blessing’ of God? (See vv.14-15). What examples of this can you think of today? What kind of discernment can we use to avoid being a ‘meddler’?
3. Peter speaks of judgment beginning now, and with God’s own people. In the message, we saw that this has a refining, preparing for life with God function. In what ways have you experienced this? How does this text help you see your suffering for the name of Jesus?
4. Peter has consistently instructed the Christian community, even under insult and threat, to be those who continue to be working for the good of their neighbours (v.19). This is key to the missional endeavor of God’s people. Why might this be difficult? How might the instructions of Peter in this section address those challenges?
5. Read v.18-19 again: This is the only time that God is spoken of simply with the word “Creator” in the New Testament (other texts, of course, suggest it but this is explicit). Read the quote from Douglas Webster and the hymn that he quotes:

“Peter reminds believers everywhere that they have the home-field advantage. They may not feel at home in this world, but this is their Father’s world and the key to human flourishing belongs to their faithful Creator,” and then he quotes the hymn:

“This is my Father’s world, O let me not forget, that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet. This is my Father’s world: the battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and heav’n be one.”

How does this idea of having the “home-field advantage” give you courage to keep following Jesus, even when it’s costly?

Prayer: Pray for those in your group, that we would all see our suffering as part of the purifying work that God is doing in us. Pray for Christians around the globe, including some from our own congregation, who are facing legitimate, serious persecution for their faith. Pray for God's protection, and that God's name would be honoured.

Additional Resources:

For more information from a thoughtful scholar on the topic of sexuality, gender, and a Biblical viewpoint, see Preston Sprinkle's series of "Pastoral Papers". There are 14 different papers that address various important topics such as Transgendered Identities.

https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources?field_product_category_tid=1