

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION

ON

PETER AND **THE FIRST EPISTLE** THAT BEARS HIS NAME

CONVERSATION STUDY PLAN #11 for Thursday –January 22, 2015
“Abstaining from Evil; and the Demands of Mutual Love”
1 Peter 4:1-11

AN OPENING PASTORAL PRAYER

THE MUTUAL SHARING OF PEACE BETWEEN GOD’S PEOPLE

OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THIS SESSION:

- To see the First Epistle of Peter as a *Manual for Happiness* and not as a *Manual for Suffering*;
- To understand Christ’s suffering as a basis for all human suffering;
- To honestly view the goals of human life from God’s perspective;
- To reflect on the Demands of Mutual Love.

FACILITATOR’S INITIAL COMMENTS ABOUT GAINING GREATER PERSPECTIVE ON 1ST PETER:

Our lengthy study of the First Epistle of Peter has focused on many themes. After last week’s presentation someone suggested to me that this is “*really*” a letter all about “*suffering*.” I had to agree with that person that the epistle does deal with the terrible things that happen in our life whether we like them or not. In the early chapters, Peter focused on “*external*” factors that cause suffering. But, he interspersed that with a message about the extreme goodness of God in Christ. In chapter 3, Peter focused on “*internal*” factors (*things going on within the body of Christ – the church; as opposed to suffering caused by non-believers*) that cause suffering, including conflicts between husbands/wives in marriage; masters/slaves, etc.

This week, as we enter chapter 4, there is a further “*internal*” factor to consider: ***Ourselves!*** This chapter is saying: “*Suffering in this lifetime is inevitable. Life has its good and bad days; there are tragic things that will happen to us. But this is the way a Christian should live especially during such difficult times!*” In that sense, the First Epistle of Peter could be described as **a manual on happiness!** Despite all the talk about suffering, Peter’s message, in the 1st century and the 21st century, simply put is: “*Look friends, you can be miserable, or you can understand why God is allowing this to happen. If you understand that God has a plan for your life and allows all of this for a reason, it will change your internal perspective about suffering and lighten the burden.*”

Understand that Chapter 4 is about having perspective during pain or whatever suffering we are facing or will face in the future. It is about dealing with fears; because fear can cause greater stress than the pain itself. If we can gain proper perspective about what can, or will, or might happen to us in this life, we can be much happier!

A COMPARISON OF TEXTUAL VERSIONS: 1 PETER 4:1-6 on *Abstaining from Evil*

(Common English Bible)

4 Therefore, since Christ suffered as a human, you should also arm yourselves with his way of thinking. This is because whoever suffers is finished with sin.² As a result, they don't live the rest of their human lives in ways determined by human desires but in ways determined by God's will.³ You have wasted enough time doing what unbelievers desire—living in their unrestrained immorality and lust, their drunkenness and excessive feasting and wild parties, and their forbidden worship of idols.⁴ They think it's strange that you don't join in these activities with the same flood of unrestrained wickedness. So they slander you.⁵ They will have to reckon with the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ Indeed, this is the reason the good news was also preached to the dead. This happened so that, although they were judged as humans according to human standards, they could live by the Spirit according to divine standards.

(NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION)

4 Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin),² so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God.³ You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry.⁴ They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme.⁵ But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.

(THE MESSAGE)

¹⁻² Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you'll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.³⁻⁵ You've already put in your time in that God-ignorant way of life, partying night after night, a drunken and profligate life. Now it's time to be done with it for good. Of course, your old friends don't understand why you don't join in with the old gang anymore. But you don't have to give an account to them. They're the ones who will be called on the carpet—and before God

himself. ⁶ Listen to the Message. It was preached to those believers who are now dead, and yet even though they died (just as all people must), they will still get in on the life that God has given in Jesus.

(THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE VERSION)

¹So, since Christ suffered in the flesh for us, for you, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose [patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God]. For whoever has suffered in the flesh [having the mind of Christ] is done with [intentional] sin [has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God], ² So that he can no longer spend the rest of his natural life living by [his] human appetites and desires, but [he lives] for what God wills. ³ For the time that is past already suffices for doing what the Gentiles like to do—living [as you have done] in shameless, insolent wantonness, in lustful desires, drunkenness, reveling, drinking bouts and abominable, lawless idolatries. ⁴ They are astonished and think it very queer that you do not now run hand in hand with them in the same excesses of dissipation, and they abuse [you]. ⁵ But they will have to give an account to Him Who is ready to judge and pass sentence on the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is why the good news (the Gospel) was preached [in their lifetime] even to the dead, that though judged in fleshly bodies as men are, they might live in the spirit as God does.

COMMENTARY ON THIS EXHORTATION TO ABSTAIN FROM EVIL (1 Peter 4:1-6)

Verse 1 – An understanding of Christ’s suffering as the basis for human suffering:

- a) Peter’s command is: (kai umei oplisasqe) ***“arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose”***
 - i) This is a remarkable reflection of the language found @ **Romans 6:13**, where Paul commands readers to stop presenting their members to sin as weapons of unrighteousness; rather he urges to present them as weapons of righteousness. – ***“Don’t offer parts of your body to sin, to be used as weapons to do wrong. Instead, present yourselves to God as people who have been brought back to life from the dead, and offer all the parts of your body to God to be used as weapons to do right.”***
 - ii) The word ***“weapons”*** in the **Book of Romans** (which can also be translated as ***“instruments”***) is the noun form (oplizw) of the verb translated ***“arm”*** here in **1st Peter**. The way one ***“arms”*** herself/himself is to possess the same intention that Jesus had.
 - iii) **Philippians 2:5-8** is an apt commentary on the intention of Jesus: ***“⁵Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: ⁶ Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. ⁷ But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. When he found himself in the form of a human, ⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

- b) Peter then notes that the one who *“suffers is finished with sin.”*
- i) Some have taken this statement or rule to apply everywhere – which led to a few strange interpretations and/or heresies – *in the early Christian Church there were those who concluded that martyrdom would save the martyr.*
 - ii) It is best to read this statement in proper context: **the person who has suffered in the flesh** is a reader who identifies with Christ and his suffering and so remains obedient under the pressure of real or potential persecution.
 - iii) In **Romans 6:2**, Paul teaches that identification with Christ means dying to sin: *“All of us died to sin. How can we still live in it?”*
 - iv) The verb translated *“stopped”* or *“ceased”* or *“finished”* was constructed in the Greek language to show an event with results that continue into the present.
 - v) **Union with Christ in baptism** brings death to sin. That blessed event has the on-going effect of no further relationship to sin.

Verse 2 – The result of such death to sin is that we *“don’t live the rest of their human lives in ways determined by human desires but in ways determined by God’s will.”*

- a) Early Christians understood that believers made the Will of God the basis of all life decisions; not comfort, or fulfillment, or human desire.
 - i) Paul provides an excellent commentary on this verse in **2 Corinthians 5:15** – *“He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised.”*
 - ii) Modern Christianity often seems to be ignorant of this principle. Your facilitator’s bias is that we have such a huge investment in the culture of our 21st century that some churches openly advertise the gospel as that which can help a person fulfill all earthly desires!

Verse 3 – Peter next lists several of the desires of the past, those in which unbelievers engage:

a) unrestrained immorality

- i) also frequently translated “debauchery”
- ii) the idea is that you do immoral things and can care less about the consequences

b) lust

- i) most people today think of “lust” only in sexual terms
- ii) as explained earlier in this bible study – “lust” as used here scripturally is an overall desire to possess what is not rightfully yours – a real violation of the 10th Commandment!

c) drunkenness and excessive feasting

- i) despite protests to the contrary the Bible never condemns drinking, per se;
- ii) however, it speaks volumes against drunkenness
- iii) see Paul in **1 Cor. 6:10** – **“thieves, the greedy, drunks, abusive people, and swindlers won’t inherit God’s kingdom”**

d) wild parties

- i) sometimes translated as **“orgies”**
- ii) modern college students might describe this as a party where everybody is free to engage in group sex
- iii) the term used here is much broader and all-encompassing, referring not just to a specific **“party”**, but to the kind of gathering that leads to promiscuous counters the idea of getting together so one can get drunk and do immoral things without being fully conscious

e) worship of idols

- i) also translated as **“detestable idolatry”**
 - ii) we think of idolatry as bowing down to some man-made statue
 - iii) idea in this passage is serving some other **“god”** than the true God
 - iv) where people spend their free time...their spare income...is where you will most often find their god!
 - v) for the readers of 1st Peter, many of the activities mentioned in this occurred in the process of civic and national celebrations; to avoid such events left Christian believers open to the charge of treason or sedition
 - vi) Peter reminds his readers, however, that they are not citizens of this earth, but are **“resident aliens”** and true citizens of heaven; as such they can resist the pressure of their neighbors.
- f) The point of the entire verse is: **“What are you living for?”** If you live for pleasure you will ultimately end up **“serving”** pleasure. None of these things ever truly satisfies which is why people go back for more of the same.

Verses 4-6 – Peter addresses, in these few verses, the criticism heaped upon Christians.

- a) **“So they slander (abuse) you” (blasphemew)** - Christians were compelled to stand aloof from all the social pleasures of the world; Gentiles bitterly resented their **“puritanism,”** regarding these early believers as the enemies of all joy, and of the human race.

- b) Peter goes on to point out what the saints must expect from the men of the world, by living a different life; and he chooses to mention it, to prevent discouragements, and that they might not be uneasy and distressed when they observed it; as that they would wonder at the change in their conversations, and look on it as something unusual, new, and unheard of, and treat them as strangers, even as enemies, on account of it.
- c) **“For this is why the good news (the Gospel) was preached [in their lifetime] even to the dead”**. - (kai nekroi). Does Peter here mean preached to men after they are dead or to men once alive but dead now or when the judgment comes?
- d) Martin Luther took "dead" here in the spiritual sense (*dead in trespasses and sins*); other biblical scholars interpret it to mean that men who did not hear the gospel message in this life will hear it in the next before the final judgment.
- e) Peter’s point is that we are not saved by our own actions (being a Christian means that one accepts that *“Christ, alone, is Savior”*), but our faith causes us to act accordingly!
- f) Life, therefore, is like a double-sided coin: if we believe, we must *change* our everyday actions accordingly!
- g) There is some similarity in Peter’s thinking, here, to the words of David in **Psalm 73:3-4** – **“³ For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ For they have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek.”** Part of our suffering comes from envy – how come others are living a happy life and don’t have to deal with the pain that a Christian does; it’s not fair! Agreed, it’s not fair from a human perspective; it’s only fair if you understand the eternal perspective of life!

A COMPARISON OF TEXTUAL VERSIONS: 1 PETER 4:7-11 on Demands of Mutual Love

(Common English Bible)

⁷ The end of everything has come. Therefore, be self-controlled and clearheaded so you can pray. ⁸ Above all, show sincere love to each other, because love brings about the forgiveness of many sins. ⁹ Open your homes to each other without complaining. ¹⁰ And serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God’s diverse gifts. ¹¹ Whoever speaks should do so as those who speak God’s word. Whoever serves should do so from the strength that God furnishes. Do this so that in everything God may be honored through Jesus Christ. To him be honor and power forever and always. Amen.

(New Revised Standard Version)

7 The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. 11 Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

(The Message)

7-11 Everything in the world is about to be wrapped up, so take nothing for granted. Stay wide-awake in prayer. Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless—cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it: if words, let it be God's words; if help, let it be God's hearty help. That way, God's bright presence will be evident in everything through Jesus, and he'll get all the credit as the One mighty in everything—encores to the end of time. Oh, yes!

(Amplified Bible Version)

7: But the end and culmination of all things has now come near; keep sound minded and self-restrained and alert therefore for [the practice of] prayer. 8: Above all things have intense and unflinching love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins [forgives and disregards the offenses of others]. 9: Practice hospitality to one another (those of the household of faith). [Be hospitable, be a lover of strangers, with brotherly affection for the unknown guests, the foreigners, the poor, and all others who come your way who are of Christ's body.] And [in each instance] do it ungrudgingly (cordially and graciously, without complaining but as representing Him). 10: As each of you has received a gift (a particular spiritual talent, a gracious divine endowment), employ it for one another as [befits] good trustees of God's many-sided grace [faithful stewards of the extremely diverse powers and gifts granted to Christians by unmerited favor]. 11: Whoever speaks, [let him do it as one who utters] oracles of God; whoever renders service, [let him do it] as with the strength which God furnishes abundantly, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ (the Messiah). To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever (through endless ages). Amen (so be it).

COMMENTARY ON THE DEMANDS OF MUTUAL LOVE (1 Peter 4:7-11)

Verse 7 – *“the end and culmination of all things has now come near...”*

- a) Talk about judgment was not an abstract idea that would never happen for Peter
 - i) ...he was convinced that it was near; that Christ would return soon
 - ii) ...he gives no dates, but there is a sense of expectation
 - iii) ...however, the point here is not how soon, but how to act since the second coming would be soon
 - iv) ...logically, if the commands Peter provides are met, the need for mutual love among believers will be realized
 - v) ...the first command is to be serious; this is not a prohibition against laughter, but a call to sanity and sober mindedness
 - vi) ...a Christian should never be frivolous
 - vii) ...the discipline of prayer should be practiced; not lighthearted prayer for it will not adequately communicate with God!

Verse 8 – maintains that Christians *“above all things have intense and unfailing love for one another.”*

- a) Here Peter reflects on the common teaching of the New Testament that Love is the supreme virtue.
 - i) Colossians 3:14 – *“And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”*
- b) The reason Peter gives is that *“love covers a multitude of sins.”*
 - i) These words are a paraphrase from Proverbs 10:12 – *“Hate stirs up conflict, but love covers all offenses.”*
 - ii) ...they also appear in James 5:20 – *“recognize that whoever brings a sinner back from the wrong path will save them from death and will bring about the forgiveness of many sins.”*
 - iii) ...it is not clear from the original text whether the saying refers to the sins of the one who loves, or the one who is loved

Verse 9 – commands the practice of hospitality

- a) This was a widespread and common concern in early Christianity:
 - i) Romans 12:13 - *Contribute to the needs of God’s people, and welcome strangers into your home.*
 - ii) 1 Timothy 3:2 - *So the church’s supervisor must be without fault. They should be faithful to their spouse, sober, modest, and honest. They should show hospitality and be skilled at teaching.*
 - iii) Hebrews 13:2 - *Don’t neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it.*

- iv) 3 John 5-8 - ***Dear friend, you act faithfully in whatever you do for our brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers.*** ⁶ ***They spoke highly of your love in front of the church. You all would do well to provide for their journey in a way that honors God,*** ⁷ ***because they left on their journey for the sake of Jesus Christ without accepting any support from the Gentiles.*** ⁸ ***Therefore, we ought to help people like this so that we can be coworkers with the truth.***
- b) Notice that the commands also includes ***“do it ungrudgingly”***
 - i) Hospitality can be expensive and tiring; as well as dangerous in times of persecution!
 - ii) The **Didache** (*an early Christian writing*) makes the point that some people took unfair advantage of early Christian hospitality.

Verse 10 – the series of commands continues here in the context of spiritual gifts

- a) Peter assumes that every believer has received a gift.
- b) The purpose of that gift is ***“to serve one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”***
- c) Whatever the gift may be it is to be used in service to others in the body of Christ.
 - i) Service is a simple matter of stewardship
 - ii) God has given the gift to be used for the building up of the body.
 - iii) Christians are to work as a team effort; with each teammate using whatever personal talents to support that team!
 - iv) To use that gift for oneself, or to fail to use it altogether, short-circuits the Will of God

Verse 11 – Peter concludes this section on what is necessary for fellowship by mentioning two gifts in particular. The gifts of ***speaking*** and ***servicing*** are singled out as carrying special responsibility to accurately reflect the Will and Nature of God as these gifts are exercised. The result should be that God is glorified!

FOR GENERAL DISCUSSION or REFLECTION @ HOME:

1. Identify one or two new insights that you gained from study of these passages. Why were the significant?
2. Select a spiritual truth that has special application to your own life. Describe how that truth applies to you.
3. Compose a brief prayer asking God to help you personally identify your gifts and to show you some new ways that they can be used for His glory.
4. What happens when the people of God earnestly pray and practice service to one another?

CONCLUDING PRAYER and DISMISSAL

NEXT WEEK: Thursday, January 29, 2015 (a final look) 1 Peter 4:12 – 5:14

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