

Final Commands for Suffering

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[0 : 00] All right. 1 Peter chapter 4, 12 through 19. We'll finish up chapter 4 today and jump into chapter 5 next week.

! It's a good passage and things shift and change here for Peter and so hopefully you'll see that. Let's read together verses 12 through 19. Hear the word of the Lord.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rest upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

[1 : 13] And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous are scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. We know that apart from you and your spirit, not only can we not really grasp the import, the message, we cannot believe nor act and live out what this tells us. So we pray for your help. We pray for your help in giving us understanding, but also that by your grace, you would fill us with your spirit that we might live out the truths that are here. And we pray this in Christ's name.

Amen. So Peter's tone changes. I don't know if you see that, but he sits there and he calls them beloved, term of endearment, term of closeness, love.

[2 : 22] His tone shifts, but his content does not. He is still running after the same thing. And I think that he starts with this term of endearment because as he's coming to the end of the letter, he's about to get extremely blunt.

He's just going to lay it out there. And much of what we have in these few verses have been things that he has said throughout the chapter. And so I want us to look at what this final command is. When he gets to chapter 5, he's sort of shifting his audience just a little bit to the elders of the church instead of the people of the church. And so there's a bit of a shift there, but this is kind of like his last command, last word to them.

And so I want us to look at this under three questions. I want us to go back and revisit the concept and the idea of what is suffering. Then I want us to look at the commands that are here because there's five of them.

And then I want us to look at what is the point to all of these and see if we can draw some application for ourselves today. So let's think about these questions. First of all, let's think about what is suffering.

[3 : 35] Now there's a lot of different ways we could answer that question, and the Bible does give us various kinds of suffering that do exist in the world.

But Peter's been writing about the kind of suffering that comes about because of persecution. The kind of suffering that when someone who, for whatever reason, and we're going to get into that more specifically in a second, they sin against me and I'm harmed because of my Christian faith. And there's two ditches I think we have to avoid. There are some who would say that Christians in America, we're persecuted for our faith. And we go through all kinds of trouble and struggles in America and the United States because we're Christians and we're trying to stand up for what's right.

Then there's another ditch that says Christians in America have no concept and idea of what persecution even is. We've never been persecuted. We're not being persecuted. And I think that both of those are a little bit of a ditch and both have a little bit of truth. And so let's see if we can define what we're talking about here. Because if we look at it biblically and we look at it historically, the persecution that the church has gone through has never been the kind of persecution where somebody comes along and looks at you and says, reject Jesus now or die. [5 : 03] It has always been the kind of persecution where because Christians are united with Christ, because they're trying to live and obey Christ, their actions differ with that of the world around them.

And the people around them don't like those different actions. Let me give you one example from the early church. In Rome, it was required of you to go to some place. I don't know exactly where they would go and give a pinch of incense to the emperor, to the Caesar, saying that Caesar is Lord. And you would have to burn this incense. And they encouraged Christians to go do that because they said, it doesn't really mean anything. Your heart doesn't have to be in it. Just go offer the pinch of incense. But as you can hopefully understand, Christians refuse to call Caesar Lord and give a pinch of incense because to them, Jesus is Lord. [6 : 07] And so because they would not go along with the flow of the culture, their behavior became something that the culture around them began to not like.

And so they sinned against them. They sinned against these Christians. They did things against these Christians that then harmed them. And so what I'm saying to you is that we by no means have experienced the intensity of harm in America when it comes to persecution as those in the early church, as those of our brothers and sisters around the world. There are Christians today who are experiencing an intensity of harm and hurt that we could just only barely imagine. We've not reached that intensity. But I will tell you, I do believe that because we make a stand for certain things, and particularly in the culture we're in now, we make a stand on morality, saying that no, a man is a man and a woman is a woman.

And we say things like a marriage is between one man and one woman. When we say things like that, and we say, no, I'm not going to use your preferred pronouns. When we stand upon things like that and are contrary to the public, you can do that in an obnoxious way and be a jerk.

[7 : 32] And then you're out on your own. Or you can have principled ideas that say, no, I'm going to live the way Christ has called me to live. And it may bring me into conflict with somebody.

And it may be somebody that you know, somebody that you love. And they sin against you because you refuse to bow the knee. And in that sin against you, it brings you harm.

That is the kind of suffering that Peter's talking about. And so I want us to say, what should we do? What should we do?

And I want you to listen to these five commands from Peter. Now, I just want you to, I just want to pause. You know, typically when I preach, I have three points. You notice I took five points and made them three.

That's just for those of you that keep track of that kind of thing. But there are, there's five commands in verses 12 through 19 that I think are important for us to get. I don't think they're difficult to understand.

[8 : 31] There's a couple of them that need a little bit more explanation than others. So we're just going to go through the commands one by one. It begins in verse 12. And the first command he gives them about that kind of persecution is don't be surprised.

Right? Don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you. This should have been what you expected.

This should have been exactly what you expected. God has promised this kind of suffering to you. And he's promised this kind of suffering to you in order to test you, to purify you.

You can go back to chapter one where it speaks about the idea of our faith being tested like gold. Right? Gold not being tested in the sense of pass or fail, but being put into the fire so that the impurities rise to the top and can be scraped off.

I love the verse we sang a while ago in how firm a foundation. He's doing that to scrape off the dross, to get rid of the impurities. He's testing us to purify us. And so we ought not be surprised.

[9 : 41] We ought not to be shocked at such persecution at the hands of sinners against us. That's the first command. The second command is in verses 13 and 14.

And it's the command to rejoice in the suffering. Don't be surprised by it, but rejoice in it. Instead of being surprised, rejoice in the suffering that brings you harm.

Now just let that sit. This is a kind of suffering, he says.

Rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's sufferings. What he means by that is that the Christian life is a life in which we are united to Christ.

He died, we died. He rose, we rose. He suffered, we suffer. In other words, because we're united to Christ, that's why we suffer.

[10 : 59] And he's saying that when you suffer because of your unity with Christ, because of your oneness with Christ, when you suffer in that way, then please, by all means, don't be shocked by that, but instead rejoice in that.

Perhaps you'll remember a few years ago, there was a big hubbub about using the public address system to pray at football games in Texas. And while I think the vast majority of Christians probably handled that pretty well, I was in a place in which Christians were belligerent and yelling and screaming at the public address system there in the stadium while they couldn't do that.

And I thought to myself, you are on your own when you act the fool. When you're obnoxious and you're a jerk, that is not a time for rejoicing because you're suffering insofar as you're suffering with the sufferings of Christ.

Because when Christ was arrested, how did he act? He didn't open his mouth or defend himself. So the point is, is that we're to rejoice because we are one with Christ.

And he goes on to talk about that this union with Christ, one of the things that's going to happen is that because we're united with Christ and we rejoice in the sufferings that come because we belong to him, one day when he comes back, one day when he comes back, all that is there under the surface about the splendor and the glory and the majesty of God there on the pages of Scripture is going to come true.

[12 : 33] And he's going to burst open into the world with his splendid majesty and be seen for who he is. And in that moment, I won't just rejoice in the suffering I have because I'm united with him, but I will have a joy that's unspeakable and full of glory because I will see him as he is.

But here's the thing. This is where it starts is knowing that one day when he comes back, my joy will explode beyond all imagination. Brings me to the place of today.

I can rejoice insofar as I'm united with Christ in his sufferings. In other words, if we're united with Christ and we're suffering for the sake of Christ's name, then your joy in that moment is wrought by the power of recognizing that when he comes back, that joy will explode with as much majesty as he brings.

So we should rejoice in our sufferings. But the third command, kind of interesting, do not suffer deservedly.

There we go. I said it right. Do not suffer deservedly. Verse 15, let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a meddler.

[13 : 57] And we know what a murderer is, somebody who takes somebody else's life. Of course, if we keep the scripture the way we should, we also know that a murderer is somebody who is unjustly angry with somebody else, right?

They have anger in their heart. Jesus says, if you're angry in your heart, you've broken this commandment. Can you imagine a Christian who gets angry?

Some of you are going like, it's called look in the mirror. I mean, sometimes our anger gets the best of us.

Sometimes our thieving and our craving and our covetousness for somebody else's things gets the best of us. And we do things we ought not do. And sometimes when we do that, we suffer.

That is not a place for rejoicing. You know, if you have anger, you do something towards someone, you get caught and you get disciplined for it. You don't get to rejoice in your discipline and say, look, I'm doing this thing and bearing my burden.

[15 : 02] That is not what he's talking about here. You should never suffer as a murderer, a thief, or an evildoer. That's the most broad way you could say, somebody who doesn't obey God.

And a meddler? A meddler? What's a meddler? It's a busybody. Somebody who will not stay out of other people's business. We're not to suffer for those kinds of things.

That's not what this is talking about. Yet, how many people I know who when they're having to go through difficulty because of the decisions and choices that they've made that violate God's law are kind of going like, well, I'm going to get through it one day.

It's like, well, that's not something to be proud of. Instead of saying, I'm going to get through it, you ought to be saying, I'm going to repent. Well, the fourth commandment is to not be ashamed of Christ.

To not be ashamed of Christ. In verse 16, he says, yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, if anyone suffers as a Christian, now, the word Christian was used as an insult by many people in the biblical times.

[16:15] Peter is using it as a badge of honor here. So if you suffer as a Christian, the idea of a Christian as being a little Christ, it's the idea that you're Jesus with skin on, that people can see.

It's the idea that you're living the way he's called us to live. You're trying to do things in obedience to him. It's the kind of thing that people around you who don't like that kind of thing will look at you and say, well, you're just being a goody two-shoes.

Well, okay. If you want to call it that, then we'll take that name instead of Christian. If being a Christian means that I'm being a Mr. Goody Two-Shoes because all I'm trying to do is obey what Christ has said, then the new name for Christians is Mr. Goody Two-Shoes.

Well, now I can't even say it. You understand what I'm saying though, right? But how many of us have been the kind of person who's actually looked at a Christian and said, you're just being a Mr. Goody Two-Shoes? The fact of the matter is, is that we suffer for being a Christian.

Don't be ashamed of Christ. I can't tell you the number of times I feel like that I and other people that I know, we seek to try to obey what it is that God has said and we find ourselves being challenged by somebody else going like, do you really believe that?

[17:33] And you kind of go like, well, okay, yeah, I mean, yeah. And we get a little ashamed of it. Don't be ashamed of it. But glorify God in that name. We're to glorify God in the name of being little Christ, of being a Christian, which is all going to be about how we act and react to the things that are going on around us.

When someone sins against us and persecutes us, your actions, your reactions, your desire for retaliation is going to either show that you're ashamed of the name of Christ or that you're going to glorify the name of Christ.

Christians aren't supposed to get even or get revenge, but they're to glorify God under unjust suffering and persecution.

Well, the final commandment is to entrust yourself to God. To entrust yourself to God.

This is verse 17 through 19. Let's read it again to remind ourselves of what it said. It says, For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God. And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

[19:00] And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

Now, the command is found all the way down in verse 19. That's where the command is. Entrust your soul to God. And there's a few things we need to go through in order to get to that command. First is that there is a judgment upon Christians happening right now in time and space, according to Peter. And that judgment happening on Christians right now in time and space is a judgment of a fiery trial.

In other words, the suffering and the persecution that God has said and promised would be for us is a purifying for God's people.

We go back to that image of the gold and the dross being burnt off. So he's saying that Christians who love God, they are going through a judgment, a purification, because they obey Christ.

[20:08] Okay? That's the first step. Second step is, well, if this is the way that God treats those who obey him and those who love him and those who claim to be his, what will happen to those who hate him and reject him and do not obey the gospel of God?

If you look at your life and you see persecution, you ask yourself, well, God, I love you and I follow you. Why am I going through this? He would say to you, because I promised it and you need to be purified and this is me seeking your good.

Well, what would happen to somebody who doesn't love God? It would be a purification from which they would never come back.

It would be a judgment that would not end because it would never finally purify them because they have an infinite evil in them that needs infinite purging and they would be under the judgment of fire forever.

And I just want you to think about that for a second because I don't know what the state of your heart is, but you need to understand that one of the things that's very real, one of the things that scripture teaches very clearly is that there is coming a day of judgment and I don't want that for anyone.

[21 : 40] And the only escape from judgment is that Jesus Christ, sent by the Father, lived a perfect life and died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin.

He died under punishment judgment for us. And the person who would sit and say, no, no, I'm not going to go that direction at all, they get their just desserts because they have broken God's law and they don't want, they don't want the substitute to help them.

I beg you, if you are not in Christ, don't let this day pass until you have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you from the judgment to come by what he has done upon the cross and his resurrection.

So, Christians, getting back to this, we're suffering according to God's will. It is God's will that we suffer the persecution and the harm that we suffer.

And therefore, you must entrust yourself to God. To entrust yourself to God is to know that he has your good in mind and as that suffering comes, we don't flinch.

[23 : 13] when our middle daughter was really young, we had to take her to the ER for croup. It was a scary situation.

I had to scoop her up in my arms and run into the ER in Glen Rose and the doctor saw me and didn't, I mean, there was nothing going on. He immediately pointed me to the trauma room and I run into the trauma room, set her down and they're working on her and as she begins to kind of wake up a little bit from what they're doing, they're starting to try to draw blood and do things like that.

Things are scary, right? And she's sitting there just crying going like, what am I going to do? And I just say, baby, listen, I know it hurts. I know it's bad. This is to make you better.

This is good for you. I know it doesn't feel like it's good for you and it's okay to cry because it hurts. Just don't flinch. God is going to take us through suffering according to his will and it's not pleasant and it's okay to cry but don't flinch from trusting that the Lord is there and the Lord is good.

Entrust your soul to your faithful creator, your faithful creator. Now those are the commands and I think that they're just rich and beautiful.

[24 : 39] I just want to draw a couple of application points from this. Three, as a matter of fact. I think that all of this demands that we need to do three things.

Number one, we must understand the origin of suffering. Particularly this kind of suffering, there is the origin of suffering and they're the perpetrators of suffering.

The perpetrators of suffering are always going to be evil and sinners and that kind of a thing but the origin or the purposing of suffering comes from the hand of God. God is a sovereign king throughout the universe and there's not one rogue molecule in all the universe.

Everything does as he bids it to do. And when we encounter suffering, sometimes we're tempted to think that maybe this is God punishing us or maybe this is the devil messing with us or maybe this is just senseless and without any kind of purpose whatsoever but you need to understand that the sovereign king of the universe has ordained all things that come to pass.

and that's a hard truth but the options of what else you could believe besides that are terrible because you either have to believe that God's not powerful enough to stop suffering or you have to believe that God's not loving enough to stop the suffering or you have to believe that God didn't know that the suffering was going to happen at all.

[26 : 19] And I can't buy any of those three. So, we understand from scripture that he ordains all things that come to pass.

Peter says, let those who suffer according to God's will. You've got to understand that it comes by God's purposing for you.

Otherwise, it has no reason to exist. But that leads me to the very second thing that you need to do when these go together because it's not enough just to know that the suffering comes by God's plan

and God's ordination and God's purposing.

You have to also believe that God is after your good. You've got to understand that God is good. And as he brings the suffering into your life, in his mind is for your good.

Now, this is where we have a problem because we like to define what that good is before we listen to God say what that good is, right? Romans 8, 28, 29 defines the good.

[27 : 32] It says that we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined, and here it is, to be conformed to the image of his son. To be conformed to the image of his son.

The good that he wants. He's doing all things together for good and so the foreknowing and the predestining is to be conformed to the image of the son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

In other words, in order that he might get the acclaim, that he might get the praise. So he brings the suffering in our lives for the son to be praised and the son gets praised because that suffering chisels away in me the things that ought not be there.

God uses his word to help our minds and our hearts but he uses suffering to chisel away the things in our lives that ought not be there. Whether it's a sin or an attitude or a trust or a love that ought not be there, he uses suffering to conform us to the image of his son.

[28 : 54] That's what Peter said back in chapter 1, right? In this you rejoice, though now for a little while if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith more precious than gold that perishes though tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

He wants to see Jesus Christ praised and so he wants you to look like Jesus Christ so he plans and purposes the suffering in your life to shape you like Jesus.

That may not bring you much comfort but it brings me great comfort knowing that when that thing comes into my life that hurts it's hurting for my good and I just need to not flinch but entrust myself to the Lord.

The third final thing that I want to say because those are big lofty thoughts those are huge big lofty thoughts and I don't know if you're like me but I find myself okay yes I'm going to go through this suffering but Lord how do I do this?

And so here's the third thing you have to recognize the power that God offers to you so you can suffer so you can suffer.

[30 : 25] The passage says in verse 14 if you are insulted for the name of Christ you are blessed why? Because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you you're blessed because the spirit of God rests upon you in that suffering he doesn't just say okay I've planned some suffering for you so as you go through your life when you experience that suffering believe the right thing about it act the right way with it react the right way towards people to sin against you and we'll meet at the end of your life and see how well you did.

No no no he says I've planned it for you I've purposed it for you and I'm going to put my spirit of glory and of God and rest it upon you so that he might empower you the whole way.

You need to react the right way under suffering the spirit gives us the power to do that. You need to be able to think the right way about suffering the spirit empowers you to do that and here's the thing the spirit does so because when Christ died upon the cross he purchased with his blood the promises of the new covenant and one of the promises of the new covenant is this that he would put his spirit in you that you might walk in all of his ways.

In other words what I'm saying is that this idea that he's going to be with you in the suffering empower you in the suffering that you might live the right way in the suffering. Jesus banks on that so much that he bled and died for it.

And the father was so pleased with that that he raised the son from the dead. That's how we can do things like what James says counted all joy my brothers and my sisters.

[32 : 18] when you meet trials of various kinds. You can't count it joy out of your own power that comes by the power of the spirit purchased by the blood of Christ.

And so for you today Christian to tap into that power it is ready it is there you just need to take the grace of God.

And how does the grace of God come to us? Are you ready? If we're saved surrender to the spirit grace comes to us by the preaching of the word the reading of the word prayer Lord's Supper and baptism fellowship with believers.

It's pretty ordinary isn't it? That's how God brings grace to us. So that we might stay right where we need to be connected to the spirit of the Lord empowered to suffer so that he gets the glory. May God bless us. Let's pray together.