

1 Peter 4:7-19, The Church in a Hostile World

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In 1 Peter 4:1-4, the Apostle wrote that Christ suffered when He was here in the flesh, but He overcame the suffering because He knew it would have a positive result. The suffering of Christ functions as an example or model for us to follow. We need to have the same mindset by accepting suffering as the will of God to achieve a positive result. By accepting it as Christ did, we will begin to live for God now instead of ourselves. Therefore our choices and lifestyle are no longer determined by the desires of our flesh like greed, sexual lust, and self gratification, but by the will of God. When you live for God you cease to sin. In order to empower us to live for the Lord by serving His people, God has gifted each one of us with spiritual gifts along with our natural talents and abilities. Spiritual gifts are different in that they are given by the Holy Spirit at the point in time that we receive Jesus as our Savior. We each are uniquely gifted according to God's will. We may want to decide what our role in the church should be, but actually God has determined what our gift and role is in serving the body of Christ. The good news is that God doesn't care about how great the gift is, but He cares about the faithfulness of the servant.

I read about a young boy named Antonio back in the seventeenth century who wanted to be a great singer in the church choir, but his voice was squeaky and hard to listen to. Next, he decided he would be a great violinist, and he took lessons, and practiced diligently. He drove the neighbors crazy with the noise he was making, and his parents made him give that up. The only talent he showed in doing anything was whittling and wood carving. When he was older, he became an apprentice to a violin maker. It turned out he had a gift making violins. He had always wanted to make great music in the church, and now it turned out that Antonio Stradivarius made the best violins ever made. Now 300 years later there are about 1500 Stradivarius violins still in use, and they are the most coveted violins in the world. They typically sell for over \$100,000 each. The guy didn't have the gift of singing, playing, or preaching, but his violins are still making beautiful music for the Lord. In the same way, each believer in Christ has a gift to share with the church that will meet the needs of the body of Christ—the Church. Therefore we must be willing to take and use what God has given us to edify the church. I remember the preaching course I took in Seminary school. We had to each preach three sermons during the semester, and hopefully we would improve during that time. One fellow had a terrible time with his first sermon, so the Professor said maybe his gift wasn't preaching. The guy disagreed saying, "My grandfather was a preacher, my father was a preacher, and I will be a preacher!" His second sermon was terrible, and his third sermon was the worst. The Professor again said "you don't have the gift of preaching, so you should think about administration." The guy adamantly insisted he did, so the Professor said, "Then I guess we don't have the gift of listening!"

Love One Another by Serving, 1 Peter 4:7-19

An incentive for serving and loving was that "The end of all things is at hand". This adds an urgency to our work for the Lord. Keep in mind that Peter wrote this about 2,000 years ago, so it may seem that he was mistaken, but upon further review he meant that the Church Age that we are living in is the last era before Jesus comes back to end this evil world and set up the Kingdom as Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, "God will give relief to you who are afflicted...when Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire dealing out retribution...when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day and to be marveled at among all who believe". Don't forget that the endings to all the previous eras were predicted—Noah and the antediluvian world, Sodom's destruction, slavery in Egypt, Israel's captivity, Jeremiah predicted the end of the Old Covenant, Jesus predicted the end of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the New Testament authors predict the end of the last era, the Church Age. Therefore the time to get busy and please the Lord is now, because we don't know if Jesus is coming back tomorrow or 1,000 years from tomorrow.

Instructions for Our Duty to the Church, 1 Peter 4:7-10

Peter gives four instructions to govern our lives now before Christ comes back: be sound and sober minded, have fervent love for each other, show hospitality, and serve one another with your gifts. This will require self denial and being under the control of the Holy Spirit because self denial is not a normal human thing. Why have alertness and be sober minded? Why the need for constant prayer? The deceptive world we live in is constantly lying to you and distracting you. Just think of all the worldly things we have all bought into—the pursuit of pleasure, self indulgence, win at all cost, the ends justify the means, etc. All these things are natural to the human race, and we must not fall victim to them. Instead we need to love one another by putting the interests of others ahead of our own. God helps us here by giving us all spiritual gifts in order to meet the needs of others. Loving and serving is very hard because people may be unlovable and unworthy, therefore God has given us the

ability to overlook insults or disagreements, but instead forgive as God forgave us. It is volitional love when we choose to love unlovable people. Because believers are still sinners, the only thing that will preserve the church's unity is love.

1 Peter 4:10-11, Spiritual Gifts

Each believer in Christ has been gifted by God so that we can meet each others needs. Peter wrote here that "each one has received a special gift", and they must employ it in serving one another. God has gifted us, and we are stewards who are expected by God to use those gifts to reveal the grace of God. Spiritual gifts are a common topic in the New Testament. In Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, he wrote "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor.12:4-31). Every Christian has received a special gift from God, which is a divine enablement for ministry in the church. If everyone used those gifts and were obedient to the stewardship entrusted to them, then the church would operate as a well oiled machine meeting the needs of all the members of the church. Paul used the human body as an analogy of what God intended. Our human body has many members such as hands, feet, fingers, eyes, mouth, nose, etc. Each member does its part in the coordinated activity of the human body. Perhaps people think the eye is more important than the feet, but each member is important in God's economy. Each member has a different function, but all the members have the same purpose. Each part is important and necessary to the proper function of the whole. In Ephesians 4:7-12, we read that God has gifted some as apostles, some as evangelists, some as teachers, some as servers, and some as pastors, but God has done so "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to build up the body of Christ (the church)". In Romans 12:4-8, we read that we are all given diverse gifts as members of "one body of Christ". Since we all have gifts that are different according to what God has given us, we are all expected to use them to serve the church. As examples of the different gifts, he lists service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, encouragement, and mercy. These are not meant to be an exhaustive list, but just obvious examples. In 1 Peter 4:11, the author uses two broad categories—speaking gifts and serving gifts. The speaking gifts are gifts like preaching, teaching, evangelism. The serving gifts are administration, helps, prayer, giving, encouragement, and giving. The speaking gifts are to be employed as speaking and teaching the Word of God, and therefore not just opinions, not social issues, not politics, etc. In 1 Peter 4:11b, Peter gives us a very important purpose statement laying out the goal and the purpose of using our gifts. God strengthens us to use our gifts "so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever". If you have ever wondered what the purpose of life is, now we know it is to glorify God. 1 Cor.10:31 says "do all to the glory of God, and Colossians 3:17, "whatever you do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God", and Ephesians 1:12 "we are to be to the praise of God's glory", and Romans 11:36 "For from Him and through Him and to Him be the glory forever", and Revelation 5:13 "every created thing which is in heaven and on earth I heard saying 'To Him who sits on the throne (in heaven) be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever".

Why is it so important to Serve and Love One Another?

In 1 Peter 4:12-19, Peter pivots to why it is so important to each of us and the church as a whole to serve and love as God intends for us to do. About the time Peter wrote this letter in 64 A.D., a huge fire raged in Rome. It burned for 6 days and then seemed to be extinguished, but mysteriously reignited and burned for 3 days more. Two thirds of Rome was destroyed. The great Roman historian of the time, Tacitus wrote that Nero blamed Christians for the fire thus initiating the great persecution of Rome against Christians that lasted about 250 years. Nero wasted no time in rolling out plans and the rebuilding of Rome according to his favorite architecture and design. Historians assume that Nero himself started the fire since it was no secret that he desired an excuse to rebuild Rome. He needed a scapegoat so he diverted attention away from himself and toward the Christians who were a mistrusted minority at the time. How could Peter's audience prepare themselves for such severe persecution? Expect persecution, and don't be surprised by it just as Jesus predicted in John 16:33, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world". God allows it for the testing of our faith. Secondly, we are to even rejoice in our suffering, because eventually you will be blessed. God rewards righteous or innocent suffering. The suffering of God's people refines them. Therefore we are to live by faith entrusting our souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right in spite of all the trouble in the world which comes our way. Nineteenth century theologian George Matheson explained his suffering like this, "The day of my trial was the dawn of my triumph. Ask Abraham and he will point to Mount Moriah. Ask Joseph and he will direct you to the dungeon. Ask Moses and he will date his fortune from his danger at the Nile. Ask Job and he will remind you that God answered him out of the whirlwind. Ask John and he will give you the path to Patmos. Ask Paul and he will attribute his inspiration to the light that struck him blind. Then ask one more!---the Son of God. Ask Him from where has come His rule over the world, and He will answer from the cold ground on which I was lying---the Gethsemane ground---I received my scepter there."

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