

Lesson 10

1 Peter 4:12-19

I. Expect Suffering: Do Not Be Surprised (vv. 12-13)

One assumption people make is that becoming a Christian should make life easier. Some even go so far as to teach that God primarily wants believers to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable, and successful. Yet that is not the kind of Christian life Peter assumes. Throughout this letter, suffering is not presented as a strange interruption to the Christian life but as something believers should expect. This creates an important question for us: What expectations do we have about following Jesus? Are those expectations being shaped by Scripture, or by the culture around us? Peter wants believers to understand that suffering is not necessarily evidence that something has gone wrong. In many cases, suffering is evidence that we are faithfully following Christ.

The historical setting makes Peter's words even more striking. He is writing during the reign of Nero while persecution against Christians was beginning to increase. Within a roughly 2 years, believers would face severe persecution throughout the Roman Empire. The “fiery trial” that Peter assumably wrote figuratively would become quite literal with Nero burning many Christians alive. Christian suffering can range from ridicule and exclusion to financial loss, emotional hardship, physical persecution or even death. Peter's point is that whatever form it takes, believers should not be shocked by it. Suffering has always been part of following Christ.

II. Rejoice Because Suffering Identifies You with Christ (vv. 13-14)

He is not telling believers to enjoy pain or pretend suffering is pleasant. Rather, he is directing their attention to what suffering for Christ reveals. If a believer suffers because of their allegiance to Jesus, that suffering becomes evidence that they belong to Jesus.

The honor of suffering is not found in the pain itself. The honor is found in what it says about our relationship with Christ. When a believer remains faithful despite criticism, rejection, loss, or hardship, they are publicly declaring that Christ is worth more than whatever they stand to lose. They are saying that Christ is more valuable than popularity, comfort, approval, success, or even personal safety. This is why Peter tells believers to rejoice. The joy is not rooted in the suffering itself; the joy is rooted in Christ. Suffering for Christ reminds us that we belong to and identify with Him, and it gives us an opportunity to display His worth to the world. Suffering can deepen our fellowship with Christ because it allows us to identify with Christ more intimately and at a depth that we could have never done without it.

Peter also points believers toward the future. Throughout the letter he consistently connects present suffering with future glory. Those who share in Christ's sufferings now will one day

share in Christ's glory. Peter is not introducing a new concept here. Paul makes the same argument in [Romans 8:17](#), where he proclaims that believers are heirs with Christ and will share in His inheritance if they suffer with Him so that they may also be glorified with Him. The pattern throughout the New Testament is consistent. ([Romans 8:17](#); [Philippians 3:10-11](#); [1 Peter 5:10](#)).

This future hope allows believers to endure present hardship with joy because suffering is not the end of the story. Jesus taught this in [Matthew 5:10-12](#), telling His followers that those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed because their reward is in heaven. Likewise, in [John 15:18-20](#), Jesus reminded His disciples that the world hated Him before it hated them and that a servant is not greater than his master. If Christ suffered, His followers should expect suffering as well.

The apostles themselves embraced this perspective. In [Acts 5:40-41](#), after being beaten for preaching Christ, they left rejoicing because they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for His name. Peter is standing firmly within this same tradition. Suffering for Christ is honorable, not because suffering itself is good, but because it identifies us with Christ, demonstrates that we belong to Him, and shows that we treasure Him above comfort, popularity, approval, or safety ([John 15:18-20](#); [Acts 5:40-41](#); [Philippians 1:29](#)).

III. Suffer for Christ, Not for Sin (vv. 15-18)

At this point Peter makes an important distinction. Not all suffering is Christian suffering.

He tells believers not to suffer as murderers, thieves, evildoers, or meddlers. In other words, Christians should not confuse the consequences of sinful behavior with persecution. Sometimes people experience negative consequences because they have acted foolishly, selfishly, or sinfully. Peter wants believers to honestly examine the true cause of their suffering.

This is an area where self-reflection is important. If people are constantly frustrated with us, is it because we are faithfully representing Christ, or because we are being rude, arrogant, unkind, or difficult to be around? Peter's concern is very similar to what he has already written in [1 Peter 2:12](#) and [1 Peter 3:16](#), where believers are told to live honorably so that accusations against them will ultimately prove false. A faithful Christian should desire to live with such integrity that if opposition comes, it is clearly because of Christ and not because of personal sin.

This distinction is also found in Jesus' teaching. In [Matthew 5:10](#), the blessing is specifically for those who are persecuted **for righteousness' sake**, not simply for anyone who experiences hardship. Peter wants believers to understand that there is no honor in suffering because of sinful choices. The honor comes when a person suffers while faithfully obeying Christ.

Peter then reminds his readers that judgment begins with the household of God. He is not speaking about condemnation but about God's refining work among His people. Earlier in the letter Peter compared trials to a refining fire that purifies gold ([1 Peter 1:6-7](#)). Throughout Scripture, God uses hardship to mature and strengthen His people ([Hebrews 12:5-11](#); [James 1:2-4](#)). If God's people experience this refining process now, Peter argues, how much more serious will the final judgment be for those who reject the gospel?

This perspective helps believers understand that trials are not evidence of God's absence. Often they are evidence of His ongoing work in our lives ([Hebrews 12:6](#); [James 1:3-4](#)).

IV. Trust God and Continue Doing Good (v. 19)

Peter concludes the section with a remarkably practical command: entrust yourself to God while continuing to do good.

Notice what Peter does not say. He does not tell believers to figure out every reason for their suffering. He does not tell them to wait until life makes sense before obeying God. Instead, he calls them to trust God and continue living faithfully.

The reason believers can do this is because God is a faithful Creator. Peter's description of God is intentional. The God who created us is also the God who sustains us, guides us, and keeps His promises. Throughout Scripture God's faithfulness is presented as the foundation for enduring difficult circumstances ([Lamentations 3:21-23](#); [1 Corinthians 10:13](#); [2 Timothy 2:13](#)).

This call to trust God while suffering reflects the example of Christ Himself. Earlier in the letter Peter reminded believers that Jesus suffered unjustly and continued entrusting Himself to the One who judges justly ([1 Peter 2:21-23](#)). Peter's point is that Christians are to respond to suffering the same way Christ did.

Because God is faithful, believers can continue doing good even when suffering is costly. Our confidence does not rest in our ability to understand everything God is doing. Our confidence rests in His character. This is why Paul can say in [Romans 8:18](#) that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.

This ending captures one of the major themes of the entire letter. Christians are not promised freedom from suffering. They are called to remain faithful through suffering while trusting the God who holds their future. Just as Christ suffered and was later glorified ([Luke 24:26](#); [1 Peter 1:11](#)), believers can trust that present suffering is not the final chapter. Future glory still awaits ([Romans 8:17-18](#); [2 Corinthians 4:17](#)).

Big Idea

Because believers belong to Christ, they should not be surprised by suffering, should rejoice when suffering identifies them with Christ, should make sure they are suffering for righteousness rather than sin, and should continue trusting God while faithfully doing good.

Application Questions

1. What are some forms of suffering or opposition Christians commonly face today?
2. Have you ever experienced criticism or exclusion because of your faith?
3. When suffering comes into your life, what is usually your first response?
4. How can you tell the difference between suffering because of your faith and suffering because of poor choices?
5. What would it look like to continue doing good when someone treats you unfairly?
6. What area of your life is most difficult to trust God with right now?
7. How does remembering future glory help believers endure present hardship?
8. If following Christ became significantly more costly tomorrow, what would be hardest for you to give up?
9. Is there any area of your life where you are avoiding obedience because you are afraid of what others might think?
10. What does your response to hardship reveal about what you trust most?
11. How do you typically react when God allows circumstances you do not understand?
12. Do you believe suffering is always evidence that something is wrong, or can it sometimes be evidence of faithfulness? Why?
13. If Christ and earthly comfort were placed on opposite sides of a scale, which side does your daily life suggest you value more?
14. When hardship comes, do you run toward Christ or toward distractions?
15. Are you more concerned with being accepted by people or being faithful to God?
16. What trial in your life has taught you the most about God's character?
17. If someone observed your life during difficult seasons, would they see evidence that Christ is worth more to you than comfort?