

# FIRST PETER

## Chapter 4

*Stewards of God's Grace*

**Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 3 For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. 4 With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. 7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

**4:1** *Therefore.* Since 3:19–22 is parenthetical, 4:1 ties directly back to 3:18. The aspect of Christ's suffering that these passages stress is suffering unjustly because one has done good. Furthermore, it is physical suffering—"in his body." (CSB)

*suffered in the flesh* – Truly man (Jn 1:14), Christ suffered just as other humans do. Luther: "He [became] a man like us, so that it could be called God's dying, God's martyrdom, God's blood, and God's death. For God in his own nature cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is called God's death when the man dies who is one substance or one person with God" (AE 41:104). (TLSB)

*arm yourselves also with the same way thinking.* Believers are to be prepared also to suffer unjustly, and to face such abuse with Christ's attitude—with his willingness to suffer for doing good. (For a similar principle in Paul's writings see Php 2:5–11.) (CSB)

Be compassionate as Christ was, not repaying evil with evil (3:9). (TLSB)

*has suffered in the flesh.* Such suffering enables one to straighten out his priorities. Sinful desires and practices that once seemed important now seem insignificant when one's life is in jeopardy. Serious suffering for Christ advances the progress of sanctification. (Some see a parallel between this passage and Ro 6:1–14, but Peter is not referring to being dead to sin in Paul's sense.) (CSB)

One who is committed to the point of suffering, like Christ, has a new focus and is not occupied with personal pleasure. Though we continue to be sinners, we are also declared righteous and saints before God. When we are in Christ Jesus, we know we are forgiven and so can live with a new attitude. Luther: "We never become perfectly pure while we are living on earth, and everyone still finds evil lust in his body. To be sure, faith begins to slay sin and to bestow heaven; but it has not yet become perfect and really strong" (AE 30:118). Cf Rm 7. (TLSB)

**4:2** *human passions ... for the will of God.* Now that Christ's attitude prevails, God's will is the determining factor in life. (CSB)

Our lives now belong to God and to His service. (TLSB)

**4:3** *the time that is past.* The time before conversion. (CSB)

Gentiles. Along with the term "idolatry," this suggests that at least some of the readers were Gentiles who had been converted from a pagan life-style. (CSB)

Even if we never sinned again, we have committed more than enough sins. Forgiven in Christ, we should not seek new opportunities to follow the pattern of this world. (TLSB)

**4:4** *They are surprised...malign you.* One of the reasons for the suffering the readers were undergoing. (CSB)

*flood of* – Sin that overwhelms a person's life (cf v 3). (TLSB)

**4:5** *will give account.* See Ac 17:31; Ro 2:5, 16. (CSB)

Answer to God for their sins. (TLSB)

*him who is ready to judge.* In the NT both the Father and the Son are said to be judge on the great, final judgment day. The Father is the ultimate source of judgment, but he will delegate judgment to the Son (cf. Jn 5:27; Ac 17:31). (CSB)

Final judgment of all humanity. See SC, Second Article, p xxxvii. (TLSB)

*the living and the dead.* Those alive and those dead when the final judgment day dawns. (CSB)

**4:6** *For this is why.* The reason referred to is expressed in the latter part of the verse (in the "so that" clause), not in the preceding verse. (CSB)

*was preached even to those who are dead.* This preaching was a past event. The word "now" does not occur in the Greek, but it is necessary to make it clear that the preaching was done not after these people had died, but while they were still alive. (There will be no opportunity for people to be saved after death; see Heb 9:27.) (CSB)

Before the Gospel enlivened us with a saving faith in Christ, we were spiritually dead in our sins. (TLSB)

*though judged in the flesh.* The first reason that the gospel was preached to those now dead. Some say that this judgment is that to which all people must submit, either in this life (see Jn 5:24) or in the life to come (see v. 5). The gospel is preached to people in this life so that in Christ's death they may receive judgment now and avoid judgment to come. Others hold that these people are judged according to human standards by the pagan world, which does not understand why God's people no longer follow its sinful way of life (see vv. 2–4). So also the world misunderstood Christ (see Ac 2:22–24, 36; 3:13–15; 5:30–32; 7:51–53). (CSB)

*but live according to God in regard to the spirit.* The second reason that the gospel was preached to those now dead. Some believe this means that all gospel preaching has as its goal that the hearers may live as God lives—eternally—and that this life is given by the Holy Spirit. Others maintain that it means that the ultimate reason for the preaching of the gospel is that God’s people, even though the wicked world may abuse them and put them to death, will have eternal life, which the Holy Spirit imparts. (CSB)

**4:7** *The end ... is at hand.* Christians live in expectation of the return of Christ, which could be at any time. Whether by His return or by our death, we should always be prepared to meet Him. (TLSB)

*Therefore.* Anticipating the end times, particularly Christ’s return, should influence believers’ attitudes, actions and relationships (see 2Pe 3:11–14). (CSB)

*sober minded.* Christians are to be characterized by reason; are to make wise, mature decisions; and are to have a clearly defined, decisive purpose in life. (CSB)

*self-controlled.* See Gal 5:23.

Synonyms indicating personal control of one’s actions. We should avoid willful sin. (TLSB)

*prayers.* Cf. 3:7; Lk 18:1; 1Co 7:5; Eph 6:18; 1Th 5:17; 1Jn 5:14–15. (CSB)

Sin hinders prayer by turning our attention from God to ourselves. Cf v 3. (TLSB)

**4:8** *keep loving lone another.* See 1Th 4:9–10; 2Pe 1:7; 1Jn 4:7–11. (CSB)

*love covers a multitude of sins.* Love forgives again and again (see Mt 18:21–22; 1Co 13:5; Eph 4:32). (CSB)

In Christ, we love others and freely forgive them. Of itself, our love has no power to forgive. “No apostle would have imagined (a) our love overcomes sin and death, (b) love satisfies God’s wrath and reconciles us to God, while excluding Christ as Mediator, and (c) love in and of itself is righteousness before God without Christ as Mediator” (Ap V 117). “Let everyone use his tongue and make it serve for the best of everyone else, to cover up his neighbor’s sins and infirmities [1 Peter 4:8], excuse them, conceal and garnish them with his own reputation” (LC I 285). (TLSB)

**4:9** *show hospitality.* See Ro 12:13; 1Ti 3:2; 5:10; Tit 1:8; 3Jn 5–8. (CSB)

Lit, “love of a stranger.” Welcome all people, not just fellow believers. (TLSB)

**4:10-11** The Spirit gives different gifts to Christians to be used in service to others. *grace.* Refers to all of these gifts. (TLSB)

**4:10** *use it to serve one another.* See Ro 12:4–8; 1Co 12:7–11. (CSB)

God’s gifts are not personal possessions but are meant to be used according to His will. (TLSB)

**4:11** *whoever speaks...oracles of God.* The Greek for this phrase is used to refer to the Scriptures or to words God has spoken (see Ac 7:38; Ro 3:2). (CSB)

Or, “words of God”; uplifting speech governed by Scripture. (TLSB)

*God may be glorified.* See 1Co 1:26–31; Jude 24–25. (CSB)

Words and deeds glorify God. Peter is not simply talking about glorifying God; he is actually worshiping Him. (TLSB)

**4:1–11** Christ suffered in the flesh and became sin (2Co 5:21) in our stead. He now calls us to live the new life He has given us as stewards of His gifts. Everything we have, even our lives, are used to benefit the Church and our neighbor. Through our words and actions, we bring Christ to a world that is dead in sin so that some may come alive in Christ, even as we have been made alive. • Lord Jesus, as You have had compassion on us by Your Word, instill in us compassion for the lost and those in the peril of unbelief. Amen. (TLSB)

*Suffering as a Christian*

**12 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. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 17 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? 18 And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.**

**4:12 beloved.** Or “Loved ones” (see 2:11). (CSB)

In one sense Peter is acting like a coach at half-time knowing that victory is in the team’s grasp but spending every minute encouraging and exhorting his players. (LL)

*do not be surprised at the fiery trial.* See 1:6–7; 2:20–21. (CSB)

Cf 1:6–7; 2:20–21. Great suffering afflicts some Christians, who may bear such crosses as God strengthens them through affliction. Luther: “God lays a cross on all believers in order that they may taste and prove the power of God—the power which they have taken hold of through faith” (AE 30:127). (TLSB)

Sooner or later, in every generation, painful trials come to each and every Christian. – The first persecutions against Christians were done by Jew who saw Christ as a major threat to their religious beliefs and way of life. The same Sanhedrin that had put Jesus to death saw to it that the deacon Stephen became the first martyr. After that murder, the floodgates of hatred and persecution were opened and most of the Christians were driven from Jerusalem. They took their faith with them, however, and planted new congregations wherever they went. Another sad blow came when King Herod Agrippa I casually had the apostle James beheaded in order to curry favor with his Jewish subjects. Paul frequently encountered bitter Jewish hostility on his missionary journeys. The Roman government at first ignored Christianity, thinking that it was just a weird offshoot of Judaism, which had official permission to exist. By the time Peter was writing this letter, however, the split between Christianity and Judaism was apparent to all, and Christianity

was viewed as a dangerous and subversive movement. The emperor Nero (54-68), a violent and immoral man, in July of the year 64 chose to blame the Christians in Rome for a terrible fire that that and destroyed part of the city. Hundreds of Christians were arrested, convicted for antisocial beliefs, cover in the skins of wild animals, and torn to death by dogs, others were crucified, coated with pitch, and set on fire, so when darkness fell, they burned like torches in the night. Peter was killed by Nero. The emperor Domitian (81-96) demanded that all his subjects recognize him as “Lord and God.” Obviously this emperor worship would be repulsive to Christians. It was during this time that the apostle John, supervisor of the congregations in the province of Asia, was exiled from Ephesus to the island of Patmos. Under the emperor Trajan (98-117), regional governors knew that they had full authority to arrest, punish, and even kill Christians just for bearing the Christian name. Persecution continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In her book *In the Lion’s Deb*, Christian writer Nina Shea asserts that more Christians have died in the 20<sup>th</sup> century simply for being Christians than in the past 19 centuries combined. For example, in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of thousands of Christian Armenians were slaughtered by Muslim Turks. When the Bolshevik revolution prevailed in Russia, the communist government of Lenin made hostility to Christianity a central feature of Soviet life; atheism was the official state philosophy. All of the Russian Orthodox Church’s property and assets were immediately seized by the state. In 1929 Stalin began a decade of terror for the church, intending to destroy it. Ninety-two per cent of the church buildings were closed and with destroyed or converted into museums, warehouses, or factories. All but one of the seminaries was closed. The number of priests was reduced by 95 percent. The triumph of Mao and his Communists in 1949 ushered in a terrible era for Christians in China. There were 8,325 Protestant missionaries in 1936 and fewer than 20 by 1952. Nina Shea has documented the abduction and death of more than one million Sudanese, mostly Christians and non-Muslims, at the hand of the country’s Islamic government in recent years. (PBC)

*fiery trial* – *purosei peirasmon* – Trial by fire. This may be linked to Proverbs 27:21, “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold” There were ten persecutions during the first three centuries of the NT church’s history. Statistics vary as to how many persons have seen martyrdom in our own time. The “trial” is not a tragedy; in God’s world “chance” does not exist for the elect (Rom 8:28). The focus is not on the intensity of heat but on the refining power of the fire. (Concordia Pulpit Resources Volume 9, Part 2)

**4:13** *but* – *alla* which means “quite to the contrary.” He is going to say the very opposite of our fears and fleshly thoughts.

*rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings*. Peter once rebelled against the idea that Christ would suffer (see Mt 16:21–23). (CSB)

Suffering for the sake of the Gospel, while unpleasant, is an honor for Christians, who know that their Savior suffered to save them. (TLSB)

This is not to assist in the atoning for our sins. The persecuted will find comfort in the realization that a righteous, innocent Christ also suffered. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources Volume 9, Part 2)

*also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed* – When the Gospel’s effects are seen in your life and witness. (TLSB)

**4:14** *insulted for the name of Christ*. See Mt 5:11–12; Jn 15:18–20; Ac 5:41; 14:22; Ro 8:17; 2Co 1:5; Php 3:10; 2Ti 3:12. (CSB)

Christ transforms the world's taunts into His blessing (cf Ac 5:41). (TLSB)

Matthew 5:11: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

Acts 4:15: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."

All who would show loyalty to Him, and share in ministry to His redeemed people, are always liable to have to share in this approach.

*Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you* – We do not face insults and persecution alone; God is with us to empower and to bless us. (TLSB)

**4:15** Suffering the effects of our own sin is not bearing the cross. (TLSB)

*meddler* – One who wants to supervise the affairs of others. (TLSB)

**4:16** *glorify God* – By confessing Christ, even if it means death or adversity. (TLSB)

*that name* – Christian. (TLSB)

**4:17** *judgment to begin with the household of God*. The persecutions that believers were undergoing were divinely sent judgment intended to purify God's people. – As a rule these troubles are punishments for sin. In the godly they have another and better purpose, that is, to exercise them so that in their temptations they may learn to seek God's help and acknowledge the lack of unbelief in their hearts. (Ap XII, 151) (CSB)

Some will see the effects of their own sin (v 15). God allows us to face such consequences that we might repent. (TLSB)

*the outcome ... for those who do not obey the gospel*. If God brings judgment on his own people, how much more serious will the judgment be that he will bring on unbelievers! (CSB)

Or refuse to believe. Without faith in Christ, there is no hope. Luther: "The time of judgment, foretold by the prophets, is at hand [Jer 25:29; Ezk 9:6]. When the Gospel is preached, God begins to punish sin, in order that He may kill and make alive" (AE 30:130). (TLSB)

**4:18** This proverb teaches that believers may suffer the effect of their sins. Unlike unbelievers, they face such suffering in faith, trusting in God's deliverance. (TLSB)

**4:19** *according to God's will* – Not for their sins but for the sake of the Gospel. Luther: "[Peter] teaches us to subdue the flesh with sobriety, watchfulness, temperance, prayer, and to find comfort and strength through the sufferings of Christ" (AE 35:391). (TLSB)

*entrust their souls* – Trusting that God will preserve them. (TLSB)

*faithful Creator* – Our Maker will continue to care for us graciously. (TLSB)

**4:12–19** God permits suffering in our lives for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it comes as a direct result of our own sin in order to discipline us. Other times it is an effect of being God's

child in a world that wants to crush His Church. Although we do not know God's hidden will, we trust He has only the best in mind for us. He will strengthen, uphold, and bless us in the midst of persecution. He will use any afflictions we face for our good or for blessing others. With our eyes on the cross, we can endure. Our God will preserve us, and He has prepared an eternal home for us in heaven for the sake of Christ. • Lord God, in the midst of trials and persecution, keep our hearts and minds stayed on You, our only refuge. Amen. (TLSB)