

FOR TO THIS YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED

Christlikeness and suffering, *1 Peter 2:18-21*

Advertisements populate almost every space in our lives. Those ads often try to convince viewers to buy whatever goods or services they market by outlining how they will improve their lives. I have yet to see an advertisement that – in a non-humorous nor non-ironic way – sells its product by highlighting the persecution and suffering it will bring into peoples' lives. However, that is the tactic Peter used to address the suffering experienced by his audience. We will consider Peter's message in 1 Peter and its connection to our effort to become increasingly Christlike people.

“Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings”¹

Peter began his letter by reminding his readers that their conversion gave them an “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” inheritance guaranteed and safeguarded by God in heaven (*1 Peter 1:3-5*). He offered them that reminder because they were being “grieved by various trials” (*1 Peter 1:6-7*). Even though he does not specify the persecutions his audience experienced, Peter's mention of their “fiery trial” (*1 Peter 4:12*) echoes records of the hostilities Christians encountered in the first century.

Consider, then, Peter's message to his suffering audience:

- Peter followed his reminder of what God had done for his audience with a description of the responsibility attending those blessings – they had an obligation to represent God in the world as His new temple and royal priesthood (*1 Peter 1:13-2:10*).
- However, Peter noted the “builders rejected” Jesus, the cornerstone upon whom God built His new temple (*1 Peter 2:4-8*). His mention of the builders' rejection introduced the theme of Jesus' suffering, which forms the center of Peter's message to his suffering audience. For example, he wrote:

“For to this you have been called, because **Christ also suffered** for you leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (*1 Peter 2:21*).

“Since therefore **Christ suffered in the flesh**, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking” (*1 Peter 4:1*).

“Rejoice insofar as you share **Christ's sufferings**” (*1 Peter 4:13*).

- Peter did not respond to his audience's suffering in a way common in either his world or ours. Good reasons motivated his uncommon and challenging message. Consider:

¹ 1 Peter 4:13. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- Jesus suffered because he rejected the world's passions to instead live "for the will of God" (1 Peter 4:1-4).
- Christ suffered for the benefit of evil people (1 Peter 3:18).
- Suffering, therefore, offers a way of honoring Jesus (1 Peter 3:13-17).
- Peter did not merely tell his audience to follow Jesus' example of suffering; he also gave them specific and practical examples of how they could follow Jesus.
 - He directed his readers to keep their "conduct among the gentiles honorable" even when they were being mistreated (1 Peter 2:12). Honorable conduct, Peter wrote, focuses on practicing submission (1 Peter 2:13-3:7).
 - He wrote that his audience should honor and submit to the government, even though it was likely behind some of their suffering (1 Peter 2:13-17).
 - He instructed servants to "be subject to [their] masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust" (1 Peter 2:18).
 - Peter told wives to practice submission to their husbands as an expression of their new, God-given identities (1 Peter 3:1-6).
 - He instructed husbands to "likewise" practice submission to their wives through compassionate behavior that honors them (1 Peter 3:7).
 - He wrote that his audience should respond to evil by blessing those who mistreated them (1 Peter 3:9).
 - He told his readers they should respond gently and respectfully to those who accused and slandered them (1 Peter 3:8-16).

Applications

- We must be clear – ***suffering (in its many forms) inseparably connects to following Jesus.***
- However, ***suffering comes from the Devil's predatory actions in the world*** rather than some fault with Jesus' example (1 Peter 5:8-10).
- Honorable, submissive behavior is the only response to persecution prescribed in the New Testament.
- The New Testament does not address every scenario in which we might find ourselves. Instead, God expects us to 'work it out' in ways appropriate to our situations and faithful to Jesus' example (cf. *Philippians 2:12*).
- Finally, recognize that our culture markets the myth of peace and safety; do not elevate such things above the suffering of Jesus.

May God give us wisdom and strength as we learn how to follow the example of Jesus more faithfully.

