

# A CALL TO ENDURE CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

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For the past three weeks we have been looking at 1 Peter and have covered three aspects to holy living as Christians. In this last week we want to look at the context of Peters' challenges.

*I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. (1 Peter 1:1, NLT)*

It is not clear how the churches started, but visitors from these places were mentioned in Acts 2. Peter was distant from them but clearly identified with the Christians there and called them temporary residents and they would have been a mix of Jews and Gentiles. Peter emphasizes the believer's new birth and that they are different to the gentiles/pagans. (1 Peter 1:3-4)

Peter knew that the churches there were suffering persecution. The Jewish believers would have understood suffering for their beliefs but this would be a new experience for the Gentile converts. Peter's concern was they should know how to live under such persecution avoiding joining with pagan practises. As they live Godly blameless lives under persecution the believers would bring glory to God and would truly reflect Christ to those around them.

## Key Scripture

*If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! (1 Peter 4:14-16, NLT)*

## Suffering Persecution

Did Peter ever say "once you are a Christian, your problems are over. It's a comfortable life from now on"?

Did Peter say "You are suffering because of sin in your life"?

Peter is not referring to self-inflicted suffering. He is referring to suffering because we are Christians.

## Do Christians Suffer Today?

*Today more than 360 million Christians experience high and extreme levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. In 1993 when the Open Doors World Watch List started, Christians faced high, very high or extreme levels of faith in only 40 countries; 30 years on that number has nearly doubled to 76 countries. That means that worldwide 1 in 7 Christians now experience at least 'high' levels of persecution and discrimination. (opendoorsuk.org)*

Open Doors categorise the causes of persecution as; religious oppression and nationalism, dictatorial paranoia, communist oppression, and organised criminals and corruption

Examples of how this persecution manifests itself are through violence (physical and sexual), forced marriages, false imprisonment and executions, unable to find work, murder, kidnapping, denial of assembly and even digital persecution.

## Do We Suffer Persecution In The Western World?

*Persecution of Christians stopped when Christianity became acceptable – became allied with the state. Leading to moral standards dropping. (Peter H. Davids)*

## How Did Peter Encourage Them To Endure Suffering?

(Or how should we live our lives when we are under persecution?)

Was there a call to revolt?

Was Peter saying "Suck it up, that's life"?

## We Endure Persecution

With a foundation of truth.

*You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart. (1 Peter 1:22, NLT)*

With an eternal perspective.

*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. (1 Peter 1:3-4, NLT)*

With the understanding that it will refine us.

*So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honour on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (1 Peter 1:6-7, NLT)*

With faith and hope.

*Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory. (1 Peter 1:21, NLT)*

With resolve.

*So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin. (1 Peter 4:1, NLT)*

With the goal of seeing God glorified.

*Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through*

*Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen. (1 Peter 4:11, NLT)*

With humility.

*In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honour. (1 Peter 5:5-6, NLT)*

With God's grace.

*God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace. (1 Peter 1:2, NLT)*

With God's protection.

*And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. (1 Peter 1:5, NLT)*

With God's strength. (1 Peter 4:11)

Being blameless in practise means accepting Peter's

- Call to holiness
- Call to good works
- Call to brotherly love

## Conclusion

The last thing we can say about suffering is it identifies us with Christ, His persecution and example. (1 Peter 2:21-25)

We are living in interesting times; Christians are beginning to feel a level of persecution which could well increase in intensity. We may have to make a stand particularly in terms of moral standards and this may cost us. Are you ready to do good?