

**Excerpts from Life-study of 1 Peter,
Message 26**

**THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND
ITS SUFFERINGS (8)**

Bible Verses

1 Pet. 4:1 Since Christ therefore has suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind (because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin).

2 No longer to live the rest of the time in the flesh in the lusts of men, but in the will of God.

In 1 Peter 4:1-6 Peter comes to the matter of the believers arming themselves with the mind of Christ for suffering. Verse 1 says, “Since Christ therefore has suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind (because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin).” The word “arm” indicates that the Christian life is a life of battle.

One main purpose of this book is to encourage and exhort the believers to follow the footsteps of Christ in their persecution (1:6-7; 2:18-25; 3:8-17; 4:12-19). They should have the same mind Christ had in His suffering (3:18-22). The main function of our mind is to understand and realize. To live a life that follows the footsteps of Christ, we need a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2) to understand and realize the way Christ lived to fulfill God's purpose.

In our practical daily life, the strongest part of our being is our mind. Whatever we do in our living is directed by our mind. It is not the will but the mind that directs our life. All our activities are under the direction of our mind.

Because the mind directs our living, the preaching of the Word must change a person's thoughts. One goal of preaching and teaching is to change people's mind. If we think in a certain way, we will be directed in that way. But if we change our mind and think in another way, our living will then have a different direction. What we think

governs what we do, say, and practice. For this reason Peter charges the believers in 4:1 to arm themselves with the mind of Christ.

To arm ourselves with the mind of Christ is to be armed with the thought and concept of Christ. This implies that we change our way of thinking. Many Christians think that as long as we love God and do His will, we will be under His blessing, and we will not suffer in any way. It is common for Christians to have the concept that those who love the Lord should not expect suffering. But consider the life of Christ. Did He not love God? Did He not do the will of God? Christ loved God to the uttermost, and He did God's will fully and absolutely. But what happened to Him in His living? It seems that throughout His life on earth, there was not any blessing but only suffering....At the beginning of His life, He was put into a manger, and at the end of His life, He was put on the cross. Where do we see God's blessing in the life of the Lord? He endured suffering upon suffering. He did not have a good name, and He

did not have a place to lay His head. This is the way the Lord Jesus lived when He was on earth. His life was a life of suffering.

What kind of mind is the mind of Christ? If we have the mind of Christ, we shall realize that we are living in a rebellious age and in a crooked, perverted generation. Because the age is rebellious and the generation is perverse, the more we love God and do His will, the more we shall suffer. We shall suffer because we cannot go along with the trend of this age. We care to do the will of God, but the will of God is absolutely contrary to the trend or tide of this age. We would love the Lord Jesus, but this is utterly against the trend of this corrupted world. Therefore, if we love the Lord and do God's will, we are bound to suffer. This will be our outlook if we have the mind of Christ.

In 4:1 Peter points out that those who have suffered in the flesh have ceased from sin. Pleasure heats up the lusts of our flesh (v. 2); suffering cools them down. The purpose of Christ's redemption is to deliver us from our inherited vain manner of life

(1:18-19). Suffering responds to Christ's redemption in this purpose, preserving us from the sinful manner of life, from the flood of dissipation (vv. 3-4). Such suffering, mostly from persecution, is God's discipline in His governmental dealing. To undergo such suffering is to be judged, dealt with, and disciplined by God in the flesh (v. 6). Hence, we should arm ourselves with a sober mind to endure such suffering.

In God's economy suffering accomplishes a good work for God's children. Suffering very much restricts our lusts. The more material enjoyment people have, the more they will exercise their lusts and indulge in them. But if we suffer poverty, persecution, or illness, this suffering will restrict the indulgence of lust.

We should not be afraid that our sufferings will be too great. The Lord knows how to assign sufferings to us. If He charges husbands to assign a certain portion of honor to their wives, surely He Himself knows how much suffering to assign to us. He will not assign either too little or too much.

His assignment will be in the right proportion; it will be exactly what we need.

In 4:3 Peter says, “For the time which has passed is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having gone on in licentiousness, lusts, debaucheries, carousings, drinking bouts, and lawless idolatries.” Literally, the Greek word rendered “desire” here is “purpose, will”; that is, intention, inclination; hence, desire. All the negative things listed in this verse are related to the vain manner of life (1:18).

The words Peter uses in verse 3 portray the corruption in society at the time of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was defeated not only by foreign armies; it was defeated because of its own inward corruption. Knowing the history of the Roman Empire, we are concerned about our country today. This country is powerful militarily, but there is much inward corruption. Consider the activities of many worldly people on the weekends. The first day of the week was arranged by God to be a free day so that we may worship Him and

learn the things of God. But worldly people use this day to indulge in licentiousness, lust, debaucheries, carousings, and drinking bouts. This is a description of the manner of life of the Gentiles. In verse 3 Peter tells us that the time which has passed is sufficient for us to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles. No longer should we live that way.

In verse 4 Peter continues, “In which they think it strange that you are not running together with them into the same flood of dissipation, blaspheming.”... To live in the flesh in the lusts of men (v. 2) is common to unbelieving Gentiles, who are running together into the flood of dissipation. But to live a holy life in the will of God, not running together in the indulgence of lusts, is strange to them. It is a foreign thing, alien to them. They are surprised and astonished at it.

Your colleagues at work may think it strange that you do not use the weekend to indulge in worldly entertainment. Toward the end of the afternoon on Friday, some of them may ask about

your plans for the weekend. They may boast of what they intend to do in the way of indulging themselves in their lusts, and they may eagerly press you to tell them what your plans are. Then you may explain that over the weekend you will be involved with the meetings of the church. Perhaps on a particular weekend you will be going out of town to attend a conference. Your colleagues may think it strange that you would do such things on the weekend. Some may even say to you, “Where did you come from? Are you from another planet? You are a stranger to us. You are an alien.”

The way of this corrupted world, the way of this crooked, perverted generation, is to follow the trend of indulgence and dissipation. But we would not run together with them according to this trend.

The word “dissipation” in verse 4 also indicates indulgence to excess. We all need to eat, but we should not eat in excess. We all need to drink, but we should not drink too much.... As believers, we should not have any kind of dissipation. In our eating, drinking, shopping, and spending of

money, we should have a limitation, a restriction. In none of these things should there be any dissipation. The worldly people follow the flood of dissipation to indulge in their lusts, but we do not go that way. They are following the current of this age, but we are moving against the current.

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Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the [audio message](#) in addition to reading the [life-study message](#) for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.

[Commentary]:

Introduction

[MM]: First Peter chapter 4, verses 1 and 2 say, "Since Christ therefore has suffered in the flesh, you also arm yourselves with the same mind (because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin), no longer to live the rest of the time in the flesh in the lusts of men, but in the will of God." This is Matt Miller and Jon Pestors, join me. Welcome back to the radio program, John.

[JP]: It's good to be here, Matt.

[MM]: John, a common misunderstanding among Christians today is related to the matter of blessing and suffering. And that's what our program is talking about today. Many think that if we're suffering, then something's wrong. But the Apostle Peter here in his first epistle in chapter 4, he tells us that Christ suffered in the flesh, and we should arm ourselves with the same mind. Please give our listeners a little foretaste of what we're in for today in this program.

[JP]: Well, I really appreciate this program, and I really appreciate this message that Peter brings to us, because it is central to our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Many Christians have this thought that the Christian life is a life of blessing. We receive the Lord, and then the Lord begins to pour out abundant blessings. And most often these blessings in the minds of Christians are material blessings. And so when suffering comes, any kind of suffering, but especially deep suffering, when those kinds of sufferings come, many Christians believe that something's wrong with them, and ultimately they think something's wrong with God. They question God, and eventually they even question the existence of God if that suffering continues. But Peter had a completely different, renewed, mature understanding of what the role of sufferings and blessings in the Christian life. And it's completely different from this notion that if we believe in the Lord, if we name it, we can claim it, this kind of prosperity gospel that has infiltrated today's Christianity. It is completely different. Peter is absolutely 100 percent focused on the will of God, pursuing the will of God, having his whole life and being directed in pursuit of the will of God. And he realized if this is the way we are as Christians, we will suffer. And he armed himself with that mind. He prepared himself for battle. And as Christians, we need to have this same mind. We need to have the mind of Christ when it comes to suffering and realize that the sufferings that we experience are related to our fulfillment of the will of God. If this is our goal, if this is our heart, you should expect and you will receive sufferings.

[MM]: Well, we saw that in the life of Christ when He lived on the earth, and we also saw it in Peter's life. Historically, we know He suffered a terrible death.

[JP]: Right. This is not just the mind of Christ, a mind to suffer and to be prepared for suffering. This was the experience of Christ. So if this is the mind and the experience of Christ, Christians should have this realization that they cannot be exempted from this as well.

[MM]: It's a really important word in the program today, John. I hope our listeners will stay with us. We prayed beforehand that the Lord would really have mercy on us as we release this word, because the listeners really need to get it. I was talking to someone recently, a believer who was explaining to me some deep suffering. You just

mentioned this word, deep suffering. He went through years of deep suffering in a family situation, and now he's through it. And he looked back on that situation and it nearly tore his life apart. Yet in the midst of that, he gained the Lord like he never could have gained the Lord without that suffering.

[JP]: And I bet also he would testify that he was saved from many, many negative things.

[MM]: He does. That was a real salvation for him. And he even referred to the false concept that many have of blessing. What is a real blessing? And looking back on that experience, you can truly say that he wouldn't sell that experience for a million dollars, but he wouldn't buy it back again for a nickel.

[JP]: That's the proper mind.

[MM]: Well, John, let's go to Witness Lee for Life-study number 26 of 1st Peter, which was originally spoken in December, 1982.

Part 1

[MM]: Okay, John, there's a lot to say here, but I'm just going to ask you what Witness Lee just asked. How about this?

[JP]: What a wonderful word. What a balancing word. Here is the God of the universe, the source of all blessing in the universe, living a human life of suffering on the earth. He begins His life in a manger. There's no room for Him in the end. He doesn't have the luxury suite, the presidential suite. He has a manger, and at the end of His life, He's unjustly put to death on the cross. His life begins in suffering, and it ends in suffering. But here was a Man who was under the full blessing of God. This is a Man when He was baptized, the voice from heaven said, "This is My Son in whom I am well pleased." God was well pleased with this God-man as He lived this life of suffering on the earth He had nothing. The foxes had holes, the birds had roosts, but the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head, and we should expect nothing different. We really have to have a renewed understanding, not only of suffering, but of blessing, because we are so materialistic now. We associate blessing purely with the material things, but the blessing is to be under the ruling and guiding and in the pursuit of the will of God, and this is what Christ experienced. And if we have this understanding, then the sufferings that come to us, we will receive, we will accept, and ultimately, we will even appreciate.

[MM]: You know, I was thinking, John, of the Lord's life on earth and how even at the height of His ministry, when He was going into Jerusalem and they were laying out the palm branches before Him, He didn't ride in on a white stallion as a great leader, He rode in on a little donkey. Even His choice of steed, He didn't choose the top beast of burden, He chose a little donkey. And I remember Witness Lee commenting one time that even about this, the Lord didn't choose a big Cadillac, He chose a baby Toyota. Even the kind of transportation He used was even, in a sense, a suffering.

[JP]: Right. You know, the blessings that come to us from God are spiritual blessings, and we should have, as Christians, we should have the realization of the thought that God owes us nothing. We've already received the highest benefit by receiving Christ. He is the source of all spiritual blessings. We've received Him, He lives in us, He's part of us, we can be armed with His mind, we can follow in His footsteps, we really have no need of anything else. And so if we would shift our understanding of blessings and be thankful for what we have already received from the Lord, we would have a real way to go on and we would have a real way to be armed with this same mind.

[MM]: Well, John, there's a lot more to say. In fact, I will say a little bit more before we go on, that how would people respond to this who focus their whole life in ministry on blessing? They spend their whole ministry talking about material blessing. They may say, well, that was Christ's suffering, but so that we could be blessed, He suffered for our blessing. Yet Peter is here saying, "...arm yourself with the same mind," and Peter suffered, Paul

suffered. The whole pattern in the New Testament is a pattern of those suffering with the same mind that Christ had.

[JP]: Because he was absolutely focused in and locked in on the will of God. He knew, he said, he told his disciples, don't you realize that the Son of Man must go to Jerusalem to suffer. He knew what was coming ahead of him because he was pursuing the will of God. And we should have this same mind. We should have the same thought. We shouldn't have the thought that if we follow God, then we're going to get the Cadillac. We're going to get the big house.

Frankly, that is so beneath God and the pursuit of His will that it's shameful. It's a shameful testimony that a person would either claim credibility for their ministry based upon any kind of outward material blessings or denigrate a ministry based on the lack of these things. This should not happen. We should be people that are fully pursuing the will of God and prepared to suffer because of that.

[MM]: Well, it's an important concept. And as Witness Lee said, "it's your mind that takes the lead." If this thought is in you, it's going to affect the way you talk. It's going to affect your actions. So, we hope that a new thought is entering into many of you right now as we cover these points that Peter covered in 1 Peter 4. Let's go on to another very important section here with Witness Lee.

Part 2

[MM]: Well, John, we need it. We need this assignment of suffering, and it really is a preservation to all of us, whether we're rich or poor.

[JP]: Peter says very clearly that the sufferings that a Christian will experience in his pursuit of God and pursuit of the will of God are, let me see if I can read this quote. It says, "Because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Many Christians believe that their sufferings are related to sins that they have committed in the past. And to a certain extent, that is very correct. But Peter's talking about a different category of sin. He's talking about the category of sin that we may become involved in in the future. And so the Lord, if you're pursuing the will of God, the Lord will assign sufferings to us so that we will cease from sins that may come to us in the future. Because what suffering does is it tamps down the indulgence of the lust of our flesh. There's lust in all of our flesh. It's a question of whether we will indulge in that lust and allow that lust to rule us and guide us and be the source of our activities. But Peter says that the sufferings that God assigns to a person who is pursuing the will of God are a kind of protection that will cause him to cease from sins that may come his way. And so in that respect, we have to be thankful to the Lord that when maybe you're sick or maybe you're suffering in an emotional kind of way, those kinds of sufferings, they keep our flesh from being indulged in. And that is a real source of salvation to us. And we need to have this kind of mind. We need to have this kind of renewed mind that realizes that in this suffering, the Lord is actually preserving me and protecting me and keeping me in such a way that I can continue to actively and 100 percent pursue the will of God.

[MM]: Pretty clear word, John. I think for the sake of time, I'm going to limit my follow-up comments and encourage the listeners to get the printed life studies. We're going to give the phone number at the end. There's a lot more in the printed message that we can't cover in this short radio program. But let's go on to verses 3 and 4 of chapter 4, "For the time which has passed is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having gone on in licentiousness, lusts, debaucheries, carousings, drinking bouts, and lawless idolatries. In this, they think it's strange that you are not running together with them into the same flood of dissoluteness, slandering you." Here's Witness Lee for the conclusion of today's Life-study.

Part 3

[MM]: John, Peter spoke these words about 2,000 years ago, but they apply so well today. I like this phrase. He said, "they think it is strange that you are not running together with them into the same flood of dissoluteness, slandering you." There really is a flood of dissoluteness today, isn't there?

[JP]: The whole world is on a downward trend. It has been on a downward trend from the beginning of the fall. It just keeps going deeper and deeper. The whole world, especially the United States, there is just a mass of inward corruption based upon the lust of the flesh, the pride of life. As a Christian, we should not be in that flood. When people see us stepping out of that flood, stepping out of that tide, they think it is strange because the whole world is going this way. This seems to be normal to be in debaucheries, but that is not what is normal for a Christian. A Christian, it is normal to be outside of that tide, outside of that flood. When a person steps outside and everyone that is in the flood sees them stepping outside, they think it is strange and they blaspheme. We should have this realization that that kind of criticism, that kind of blasphemy really is a glory to God. It indicates that we are a person that stepped out of that flood and that we are persons that are in pursuit of the will of God and not these kinds of gross, sinful, debaucheries and unmentionable and unspeakable things.

[MM]: You know, he mentioned the Roman Empire collapse because of the inward corruption in it. There is some concern that maybe America would have the same kind of collapse in the future, but that is not our message. Our message is we hope the listeners would step out of the flood and stand with the Lord.

[JP]: The situation with the Roman Empire, the strongest nation in the world, had the mightiest military, yet it crumbled from within, which shows the power of the lust of the flesh. It shows the power of this tide that if you give into it, then you open the door for a collapse, not only personally, nationally. It is a serious matter. I just appreciated Peter's words. It says, the time which has passed is sufficient. The things that we did in the past, it is sufficient. We do not need to be involved in those anymore. Whether you were a gross sinner or just a small sinner, whatever sins we were involved in in the past, that is sufficient. We do not have to be involved. We should completely put that aside. I appreciate the cross-reference to that word sufficient in the recovery version to Ezekiel 44.6. It says that this is the Lord speaking to Israel. It says, "And you shall say to the rebellious, to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord Jehovah, *enough*, O house of Israel, of all your abominations." It is not only sufficient for us, the things that we have done in the past are sufficient for God. It is time to say "enough". Let us be people that put aside the indulgence of our flesh. Let us be people that arm ourselves with the mind to suffer. Let us be people that step outside of this flood. Let us be people that are fully actively engaged in pursuing the will of God.

[MM:] John, that is a very clear word. I think it is a good word to stop with. Thanks for coming into the studio. I appreciate it.

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