

Suffering & Glory in 1 Peter

Johnny Felker

Text: 1 Peter 1:1-5:13

Introduction:

- I. One cannot read 1 Peter without being impressed by the dominance and pervasiveness of **the theme of suffering**. It is the dark background upon which Peter portrays the glorious lifestyle of the believer and the glorious hope he has in Christ.
- II. In this lecture we'll deal with **the origin and nature of the sufferings** described in Peter's letter and how Christians were encouraged to deal with them.

Body:

- I. **The origin of the disciples' suffering**
 - A. The suffering Peter describes was **not the general suffering** that came to disciples because of their humanity (*i.e.* that in which all people participated) but rather it was the suffering that they experienced because of their faith in Jesus.
 1. They suffered **"for the sake of conscience toward God"** (1 Pet. 2:19).
 2. They suffered **"in doing what is right"** (1 Pet. 2:20; 3:17).
 3. They suffered **"for the sake of righteousness"** (1 Pet. 3:14).
 4. They shared the **"sufferings of Christ"** (1 Pet. 2:21; 3:13).
 5. They suffered **"for the name of Christ"** (1 Pet. 3:14).
 6. They suffered **"as a Christian"** (1 Pet. 4:16).
 7. They suffered **"according to the will of God"** (1 Pet. 4:19).
 8. They suffered **"if necessary"** (1 Pet. 1:6).
 9. They were the sufferings being **"accomplished by your brethren in the world"** (1 Pet. 5:9).
 10. This is not to say that the principles of 1 Peter cannot be helpful to people suffering the general suffering of human existence (they can!); it is to say that Peter's letter should be interpreted in light of the persecutions that Christians were enduring because of faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. Elliot states, "The focus of this letter is the innocent suffering of Christian believers and the dilemma this presented concerning the believers' relation to and behavior among hostile outsiders...The continued existence and growth of the community as a whole depended on maintaining those elements of their communal life, which suffering and continued hostility threatened to undermine: namely, a common sense of their unique, divinely-conferred identity and purpose, a sustaining social cohesion, and fervent commitment to mission nurtured by a unifying faith and hope involving steadfast loyalty to God, Jesus Christ, and the brotherhood. It is precisely this constellation of factors that the letter was designed to promote."⁽¹⁰⁵⁾
 - b. Simply put, Peter's letter is about how Christians should conduct themselves as God's people in the midst of a hostile unbelieving world where they face

innocent suffering for the sake of their faith in Jesus Christ. Each section of the book contributes to this overarching theme.

- c. But what is the origin of this hostility with its resultant persecution and suffering?
- B. Peter finds the origin of the disciples' suffering in the "*ignorance of foolish men*" (1 Pet. 2:15).
1. The slander mentioned in 2:12 is the outward expression of Gentile ignorance. Does Peter mean to say that the Gentiles were ignorant of what Christians believed and did? Or does he mean to say that they were ignorant of the true God and His ways? Or were they ignorant of both?
 2. The Gentiles were surely ignorant in the sense that they did not possess the light of God's true revelation.
 - a. This ignorance is commonly attributed to Gentiles in the NT (Cf. Rom. 1:21-23; Eph. 4:17-19).
 - b. Peter had already alluded to the "former lusts which were yours in ignorance" (1 Pet. 1:14).
 - c. Consequently the whole world view of the Gentiles was altered by this ignorance; and it affected the way they perceived Christians.
 - 1) Gentile and Christian concepts of God and religion could not be more diametrically opposed. In the Roman culture which dominates the first century world, it was axiomatic that proper worship of the gods assured the success of Rome (Beard, North and Price, ix).
 - 2) Consequently Suetonius could only describe the beliefs of the Christians in these terms: "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition. (*Lives of the Twelve Caesars* 6)
 - 3) What Christians called fact, Gentiles called a "contagious" and "an absurd and extravagant superstition." What Christians might have expressed as faith, Gentiles deemed "contumacious and inflexible obstinacy." (Pliny, *Letter to Trajan*, 97)
 - 4) What Christians embraced with great love, Gentiles detested. What Christians abhorred, Gentiles loved. Thus Gentile ignorance of the true God and His ways would become fertile soil for hostility toward Christians.
 3. Gentiles may also have been ignorant in the sense that they did not have accurate information about the intentions and activities of Christians.
 - a. Justin alludes to shameful deeds pagans charged against Christians: "And whether they perpetrate those fabulous and shameful deeds—the upsetting of the lamp, and promiscuous intercourse, and eating human flesh—we know not; but we do know that they are neither persecuted nor put to death by you, at least on account of their opinions." (1 *Apology* 26).
 - b. Tertullian describes a similar phenomenon in his day, "You love to be ignorant of what other men rejoice to have discovered; you would rather not know it, because you now cherish your hatred as if you were aware that, (with the knowledge,) your hatred would certainly come to an end." (Nations 1.7)
 4. However one perceives the nature of this ignorance, it is not excusable (cf. Rom. 1:20) but reflects a mind-set of active hostility against God and His people.

-
- a. Achtemeier suggests that the Greek term *agnosia* in 1 Pet. 2:15 implies not so much a lack of information (as does the word *agnoia* in 1:14) as culpable ignorance (1 Peter, 185, n. 81).
 - b. Likewise the term “foolish” (Gr. *aphron*) is commonly used in the LXX, especially in the Psalms, of those who set themselves against God and hence against the truth (Ps. 13:1; 52:1; 73:18; 91:7). (1 Peter, 186, n. 83).
5. Therefore the suffering of the disciples was rooted in a mind-set opposed to God that refrained from knowing the truth about God and a hostility to His people that kept them from ascertaining the truth about them.
 6. But this hostility was not merely the result of some intellectual disagreement about gods and temples. It was also very personal!
- C. Furthermore Peter finds the origin of the disciples’ suffering in **the Gentiles’ “surprise”** that Christians would not run with them into the same excess of dissipation (1 Pet. 4:3-5).
1. Clearly the Christians’ break with the practices of the unbelieving world had its effect in the thinking of the Gentile populace among their former associates.
 2. The Greek verb $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\alpha\iota$ (I’ll use the lexical form throughout the outline instead of the word appearing in the Greek text) might be translated “to surprise” (NASV) or “to think it strange” (KJV).
 - a. If we remember that the Greek word for the stranger who is the object of hospitality is $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\alpha\iota$ one might find justification for Achtemeier’s conclusion that the corresponding verb might mean “to estrange” or be “offended” or “put off”; however Achtemeier could cite no such usage in the literature of the ancient world. (1 Peter, 283)
 - b. The same verb will be used urging the Christian not to be “surprised” at the sufferings they are experiencing (1 Pet. 4:12).
 3. Peter acknowledges a number of areas where there had been in the past, participation with Gentiles in sinful activity that had now been ended to their “surprise”.
 - a. Sensuality and lusts
 - 1) “Sensuality” translates $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\alpha\iota$. It suggests wantonness or immoderate conduct and is often associated with other sexual sins such as fornication and uncleanness (cf. Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19).
 - 2) “Lusts” translates $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\alpha\iota$ and may be used of a desire or longing for either something good or evil. (BADG) Peter has used the word in a general sense to refer to evil desires without qualification (1:14; 2:11; 4:2). It is possible that contextually he is thinking of evil sexual desires in connection with the previous term.
 - b. Drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties
 - 1) The first term $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\alpha\iota$ is found only here in the NT and denotes excessive indulgence in wine. (Elliott, 723)
 - 2) The second term $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\alpha\iota$ denotes excessive feasting, carousing, or revelry. (BADG)
 - 3) The third term $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\mu\beta\alpha\iota$ denotes drinking, especially a drinking party. (BADG)

-
- 4) All three terms pertain to the dissolute carousing typical of Gentile occasions of feasting and drinking. (Elliott, 723-724)
 - c. Abominable idolatries
 - 1) This term for idolatry is the common one; but to it is added the word $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\beta\epsilon\tau\alpha$ conveying something unlawful or lawless (cf. Ac. 10:28).
 - 2) Elliott suggests this reference to idolatry may grow out of the previous terms suggesting the possibility of libations to Dionysus/Bacchus in the context of a dinner (724).
 - d. These sins are summarily described by Peter as “excess of dissipation” (NASB).
 - 1) Excess translates $\alpha\gamma\kappa\alpha\lambda\alpha$ here used figuratively of something that overflows. Thus Elliot translates this phrase with “torrent of dissipation.” (726)
 - 2) Dissipation refers to debauchery or profligacy. The adverbial form is used in describing the conduct of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:14).
 - e. Both the Greek symposium and the Roman convivium in similar style provided ample occasion for drunkenness as well as sexual immorality and even idolatry.
 - f. Before conversion Peter’s readers may well have also participated in the array of collegia—associations and clubs that existed in the Roman world which might also sponsor these kinds of activities.
 - g. Thus the Christian’s withdrawal from idolatrous temples, drunken banquet tables, and immoral beds had a stinging impact upon those who continued these practices. It made them lash out against these “haters of mankind” for their refusal to no longer “run” with them.
- D. Therefore we may summarize that the sufferings Peter described in his letter found their origin in **the greater conflict of God and Satan**, good and evil, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light.
1. It was the inevitable byproduct of the conflict between pagan ignorance and Christian knowledge, Gentile moral turpitude and Christian sanctification.

II. The nature of the disciples’ suffering (the external evidence)

- A. Certainly there was **an official Roman persecution** in the first century that might have served as a possible background for Peter’s letter—the one occurring during the reign of Nero. (I’m assuming that Peter was the author and was martyred during Nero’s reign)
 1. Church historian Eusebius includes a fragment from Melito of Sardis, who wrote Marcus Aurelius about the persecution of Christians during his time (c. 172 AD). Melito affirmed that “Nero and Domitian, alone, persuaded by certain calumniators, have wished to slander our doctrine, and from them it has come to pass that the falsehood has been handed down, in consequence of an unreasonable practice which prevails of bringing slanderous accusations against the Christians. (*Ecclesiastical History*, 4.26.9)
 2. Roman historian Tacitus documents the well-known persecution of Christians by Nero after the fire in Rome (AD 64):

“Such indeed were the precautions of human wisdom. The next thing was to seek

means of propitiating the gods, and recourse was had to the Sibylline books, by the direction of which prayers were offered to Vulcanus, Ceres, and Proserpina. Juno, too, was entreated by the matrons, first, in the Capitol, then on the nearest part of the coast, whence water was procured to sprinkle the fane and image of the goddess. And there were sacred banquets and nightly vigils celebrated by married women. But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.” (*Annals* 15)

- B. Some commentators have inferred that these persecutions would have resulted in **similar actions in the provinces**.
1. A.T. Robertson observes, “The most natural thing in the world was for the five Roman provinces named in 1 Peter 1:1 to imitate the example of Rome and persecute Christians to curry favor with Nero and Rome. The roman provincial rulers quickly caught on to the fashion of Rome.” (270)
 2. Later Robertson would affirm, in stating the epistle’s purpose, that it was written “to strengthen and sustain the Christians in the five regions named in verse one of chapter one (Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia) who were undergoing fiery trials (1 Pet. 1:7) and persecutions so that it was now a crime to be known as a Christian (1 Pet. 3:16). (273). And again, “It was nothing new for persecution to arise in these regions, only it was now on a large scale as a definite and general propaganda to exterminate Christianity. Nero had set the fashion in Rome and provinces quickly followed suit.” (273)
- C. Other commentators however are more reluctant to extrapolate from the persecution at Rome **an empire-wide official persecution** by the Roman authorities in the 60’s AD.
1. Achtemeier warns, “The person investigating the way Roman policy worked itself out, particularly in the provinces, like those located in Asia Minor, must be careful to avoid the assumption that once a policy was enunciated, or a practice followed, whether in Rome or some province, that thenceforth that policy was always and everywhere and equally applied throughout the Roman Empire. That is simply not the case.” (1 Peter, 24)
 2. Elliott reaches a similar conclusion, “In sum, the manner in which Christian suffering is mentioned, described, and addressed in this letter points not to organized Roman

persecution as its cause but to local social tensions deriving from the social, cultural, and religious differences demarcating believers from their neighbors.” (103)

- D. It does not appear that there were **official Roman persecutions of Christians outside Rome** (*i.e.* in the provinces mentioned in Peter’s letter) during the reign of Nero.
1. Tertullian seems to have believed that Nero’s persecution was limited to Rome:
 - a. “Consult your histories; you will there find that Nero was the first who assailed with the imperial sword the Christian sect, making profess then especially at Rome.” (*Apology* 5.3)
 - b. “His disciples also, spreading over the world, did as their Divine Master bade them; and after suffering greatly themselves from the persecutions of the Jews, and with no unwilling heart, as having faith undoubting in the truth, at last by Nero’s cruel sword sowed the seed of Christian blood at Rome.” (*Apology* 21.25)
 2. Pliny’s letter to Trajan in the early second century seems to reveal that there was no legal precedent in Pontus-Bithynia as to how to handle Christians who came before him in the courts.
 - a. Pliny is in doubt about what to do with Christians as if there is no historical precedent for their treatment in courts: “Having never been present at any trials concerning those who profess Christianity, I am unacquainted not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them.” (*Pliny to Trajan, Letter 96*)
 - b. Trajan does not appeal to any official Roman policy to prosecute Christians as such and urges Pliny not to seek Christians out for this purpose: “It is not possible to lay down any general rule for all such cases. Do not go out of your way to look for them.” (*Trajan to Pliny, Letter 97*)
- E. In the NT outside 1 Peter we do see **persecution of another kind**. We have clear documentation of acts of hostility toward Christians throughout the empire that seem to have been instigated by **various hostile forces among the Roman populace locally**.
1. In the early days of the church **local Jews** used their own power or prevailed upon Roman power to persecute Christians.
 - a. The persecutions by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem against the early church (Ac. 3-5)
 - b. The persecutions by Paul against the Way (Ac. 7-9)
 - c. The persecutions in the provinces against Paul by the Jews (Ac. 13, 17, 18)
 - d. The persecutions by the Jews against Paul upon his return to Jerusalem (Ac. 20)
 2. At other times we can see persecutions incited by **Gentiles** feeling the economic impact of the gospel’s influence upon their idolatrous and occult practices
 - a. The persecution of Paul and Silas (Ac. 16)
 - b. The riot in Ephesus (Ac. 19)
 3. In Revelation we see an atmosphere in which Christians were suffering in Asia.
 - a. The patience of the saints had been tested in Ephesus and Thyatira (2:2-3, 19).
 - b. Christians in Smyrna were poor, perhaps due to the oppression of the Jewish population and the discriminatory practices later described in the book (2:9).

- c. Antipas has been killed in Pergamum (2:13) and it was as if Satan had set up his throne in that city.
 - d. The synagogue at Philadelphia had persecuted the church there (3:9-10).
4. This survey reveals that persecution for NT disciples was pervasive during the early decades of the church's existence. Though being a Christian was not commonly made a matter of legal proscription, it is hard to find a time when Christians were not hated and harassed simply because of how they lived.
- a. Jesus had predicted this response by the world (Jn. 15:18-16:4; Mt. 24:9).
 - b. This persecution would be adequate to explain the phrase of 1 Peter 5:9, "knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren in the world."
 - c. Carson and Moo suggest this scenario: "By refusing to engage in the quasi-religious customs surrounding the official Roman governmental structures, by resolutely setting themselves against some of the immoral practices prevalent at the time, and by meeting so often on their own to celebrate the Lord's Supper, Christians were regarded with suspicion and hostility. The readers of 1 Peter were probably being criticized, mocked, discriminated against, and perhaps even brought into court on trumped-up charges." (639)
- F. All things considered it does not appear that the external evidence supports an official Roman persecution but rather the **various persecutions** that arose from time to time from the unbelieving populace like we read about in the rest of the NT.

III. The nature of the disciples' suffering (the internal evidence)

- A. What **clues** do we have from the language of Peter's epistle? Slaughter offers this general analysis of the terms used to describe the disciples' suffering in the epistle:
1. "In the broad sense of trial, tribulation, hardship, and suffering the apostle frequently used the following words: *πάσχω* ('to suffer, endure,' 2:19-21, 23; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 15, 19; 5:10), *πάθημα* ('suffering, misfortune,' 1:11; 4:13; 5:1, 9), *πειρασμός* ('test, trial, temptation, enticement,' 1:6; 4:12) *πύρωσις* ('fiery test, fiery ordeal,' 4:12). The presence of suffering is expressed in 4:12 ('Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you'), and 5:10 ('After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace...will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you'). The problem of suffering is demonstrated further by the readers' responses of fear (*φοβέομαι*, 3:6, 14) and anxiety (*μέριμνα*, 5:7) to their situation. The atmosphere created by suffering evoked these emotions in the hearts and minds of Peter's audience and he sought throughout the letter to exhort and encourage them in view of their sentiments." (76)
 2. The language of Peter's letter does not appear to suggest an official proscription of Christianity per se.
 - a. Though the Christians were suffering painful circumstances that tested their faith and induced great fear and anxiety, no references are made explicitly to governmental roundups, interrogations, and martyrdoms like those described in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny.
 - b. However this does not mean that the persecutions mentioned could not have led to death in some cases. And one should take into consideration that the suffering of Jesus that disciples are called upon to follow includes suffering in death itself (1 Pet. 2:21-25; 3:18ff).

- c. This is not to diminish the severity and difficulty of the things Christians were facing; it is simply to seek a proper context for Peter's message.

B. Christians were subject to various forms of **verbal abuse**.

1. Christians were being "slandered as evildoers" (1 Pet. 2:12). The word $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\iota\varsigma$ might be translated "speak against, speak evil of, defame, slander." (BADG)
2. Christians were being "insulted" (1 Pet. 3:9). The word $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\iota\varsigma$ might be translated "verbal abuse, reproach, reviling." (BADG) The same word is used in describing the reviling of Jesus on the cross (2:23).
3. In 1 Pet. 3:16 the persecutors are identified with the word $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\iota\varsigma$ and are thus "mistreaters or abusers". The action of the abusers is described with the word $\alpha\iota\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\iota\varsigma$ which would suggest "causing shame or disgrace." (Elliott, 631)
4. Christians were being "maligned" (1 Pet. 4:4). The idea of the Greek word $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\iota\varsigma$ is to "malign, defame, insult, revile, vilify, heap abuse on another." (Elliott, 727)
5. Christians were being "reviled" (1 Pet. 4:14). The Greek word $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\mu\alpha\tau\iota\varsigma$ might be translated to "reproach, revile, to heap insults upon." (BADG)
6. It is possible to document from ancient sources some of the "slanderous" things said about Christians at different times in Roman history. They were called:
 - a. Atheists or haters of God and advocates of *superstitio*.
 - 1) Suetonius wrote of Nero's deeds: "Punishments were also inflicted upon the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief." (*Lives of the Caesars*, 6:16)
 - 2) Tacitus called their faith as "a most mischievous superstition" (*Annals* 15.44).
 - 3) In Roman terms *religio* referred to "the traditional honors paid to the gods by the state" whereas *superstitio* referred to either "excessive devotion towards ritual and the gods" which might also "threaten the stability of *religio* and the state" (Beard, North, and Price, 216-217).
 - b. Haters of mankind
 - 1) It is interesting to note Tacitus' description of Christians in his reporting of Nero's persecutions against them after the fire of A.D. 64 at Rome:
 - 2) Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind." (*Annals* 15)
 - c. Guilty of abominations (Cannibalism & incest?)
 - 1) Tacitus referred to disciples in Nero's reign as "a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace." (*Annals* 15)
 - 2) Tertullian asked for proof of the slanderous things non-believers rumored took place among Christians: "Yet who ever came upon a half-consumed corpse (amongst us)? Who has detected the traces of a bite in our blood-steeped loaf? Who has discovered, by a sudden light invading our darkness, any marks of impurity, I will not say of incest, (in our feasts)?" (*Nations* 1.7.20)

- C. Christians may have in some settings been subjected to **physical abuse**.
1. 1 Pet. 2:20 seems to suggest the possibility that Christian slaves might have been beaten by their masters. The word $\beta\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$ can mean to “strike with the fist, beat, cuff someone.” (BAGD)
 2. Seneca especially criticized his fellow-Romans for their severe treatment of slaves: “We resort to the sword and to capital punishment, and an act that deserves the censure of a very light flogging we punish by chains, the prison, and starvation.” (*Essay on Anger*, Book 3).
 - a. This quote reveals the extremes to which masters could go in mistreating those under their authority as slaves.
- D. These persecutions were possible in any number of **relationships**.
1. Christians might be falsely charged before authorities as being “evil doers” (1 Pet. 2:12, 15).
 2. Christians might be abused or mistreated by unbelieving masters (1 Pet. 2:20). Peter uses the term $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}\mu\alpha\iota$ to describe these masters. Literally it means “crooked” but might in this context be translated by “cruel” or “unjust.” (Elliott, 517)
 3. Christian woman might be subjected to intimidating or fearful actions by her husband (1 Pet. 3:6).
- E. The **emotional impact and pain** of these persecutions was very real.
1. The persecutions caused “distress” (1 Pet. 1:6). The Greek verb $\lambda\upsilon\pi\omega$ might suggest being made “sad, sorrowful, distressed.” (BAGD) Likewise house-servants also might endure “sorrows” or “grief” (1 Pet. 2:20).
 2. The persecutions caused “fear” (1 Pet. 3:6). The term might suggest ideas of being “terrified” or “intimidated”.
- F. Advocates of official persecution as the background for Peter’s letter have focused particularly on **the language of two passages** in the letter—1 Pet. 3:15 and 1 Pet. 4:12.
1. Does “be ready to give an answer” necessarily suggests a legal defense before governmental authorities?
 - a. Some suggest that the need to give an *apologia* (1 Pet. 3:15) points to an official legal persecution.
 - b. Elliott suggests four reasons why this “answer” or “defense” is not necessarily a legal one.
 - 1) The phrases “always” and “to everyone who asks” suggest an ongoing state of preparedness for a response to inquiry from any quarter.
 - 2) The verb *aiteo* involves the action of requesting rather than demanding an answer.
 - 3) The question and reply concern “the hope” believers have, a thing of little concern to the authorities in a context of interrogation.
 - 4) The manner of the response seems more appropriate for occasional queries than official inquests. (627)
 2. Does the expression “fiery ordeal” suggest martyrdom by fire?

- a. The reference to “fiery ordeal” might evoke images of people being burned at the stake like the Christians at Rome. However Peter is using the language of the smelter. The allusion is to the fire which is the means by which metals are separated from dross and thus refined and made pure. This verse and 1:6-7 build upon the same metaphor of suffering as a proof of faith (Earl, 412).
 - b. “The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and a man is tested by the praise accorded him.” (Pr. 27:21) “Crucible” translates the Greek word in the LXX also found here in 1 Peter 4:12 and translated as “fiery ordeal.”
- G. By looking at both the external and internal evidence we may conclude with Achtemeir that the persecutions of Peter’s epistle were “**more social than legal and stemmed more from offended citizens than from official policies**” and that they were “**for the most part non-lethal**” though both fearful and painful. (*Between Text and Sermon*: 1 Pet. 1:13-21, 306)

IV. Peter’s message to the suffering saints

A. The importance of identity—Remember who “you are”!

1. All of 1 Peter is about suffering in some way. So as we quickly survey the book from the beginning let’s consider how each section of the book contributes to this overarching theme.
2. One of the important motifs in Peter’s epistle is identity. There is significance in the way Peter initially addresses his readers.
 - a. They are described as “aliens” (1:1, 2:11), “strangers” (2:11), and people viewed in terms of their “stay” on earth (1:17).
 - 1) Some scholars give these expressions in the book a sociological import. Elliott suggests that the label *paroikoi* should be taken literally as a reference to “by-dwellers” who were less than citizens but not total strangers. Because of their differences from the local population in terms of language, clothing, customs, religious traditions, etc. they were subject to suspicion and hostility of the kind Peter describes in the book. (94)
 - 2) Thurston suggests that the epistle may have been written to people who had fled Nero’s persecutions in Rome. Thus, Peter’s readers are “aliens” and “strangers” in a literal sense. Furthermore he adds, “This may explain Peter’s use of the name ‘Babylon’ in referring to Rome. Babylon was the great world power which made war against God’s nation, Judah, and dispersed its people throughout the world. Similarly, Rome had dispersed God’s nation, the Christians. In this analogy, then, the Christians would correspond to the Diaspora, and Rome to Babylon.” (*Interpreting 1 Peter*, 174)
 - 3) Hiebert suggests that the terminology is figurative: “It is more natural to hold that Peter uses the term in a metaphorical sense to picture his readers as a scattered minority in a non-Christian world. They were not closely unified groups surrounded by an alien environment but minorities dispersed far and wide in various areas... “Sojourners” views them in relation to the land in which they are now living as aliens; the “dispersion” links them to their true homeland from which they are now absent. (*Designation of the Readers in 1 Peter 1:1-2, 67*) Harrison presents a similar view (*Exegetical Studies in 1 Peter*, Part 3).
 - 4) It seems best in view of the fact that the description is a universal one (*i.e.* describing all believers in the region) to view it metaphorically. They are

-
- aliens and strangers (people not at home in this world) because they are in fact the people of God whose true fatherland is in heaven.
- b. This unique relationship is the result of their salvation. As God's people they are distinct from the world in four ways (1 Pet. 1:1-2).
 - 1) Selected by the Father
 - 2) Sanctified by the Spirit
 - 3) Sprinkled by the Son
 - 4) Submissive to the Son
 3. Immediately following this prescript, the first section is rhetorically tied together by a description of the blessings, responsibilities, and mission that attach to Peter's readers because of their identity as the people of God.
 - a. The theme of God's household or family seems to bind together the blessings of 1:3-11.
 - 1) They have been born again into the family of God (1:3).
 - 2) They have as a result a living hope of an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and that fades not away (1:4).
 - 3) They have the protection of God to receive that inheritance (1:5) even though they must undergo various trials (1:6-7).
 - 4) They have access to blessings which the prophets sought to know about (1:10-12). Isaiah knew about the Savior; but they knew the Savior!
 - b. Moreover the theme of God's household or family seems to underlie the exhortations of 1:14-2:3. Having briefly exhorted the blessed family of God to a prepared and watchful hope (1:13) Peter exhorts his readers in terms of their relationship to God as His children.
 - 1) They are to be obedient children (1:14).
 - 2) They are to imitate the Father (1:15).
 - 3) Since they address God as Father, they are to live in fear or respect (1:17).
 - 4) They are to fervently love their brothers and sisters from their hearts (1:22).
 - 5) They are to grow and develop in their faith (2:2).
 - 6) In sum, it might be said that all that a head of a household might expect to receive from his children, God has a right to expect from His children. Hence the theme of God's household dominates the imperatives of this section.
 - c. Finally the theme of God's household or family seems to underlie the unique mission of Peter's readers described in 2:4-10. Here particularly through the "you are" statements that tie this section together rhetorically, one can see the theme of their identity as God's chosen people.
 - 1) "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

-
- 2) “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9-10).
 - 3) Peter appropriates God’s descriptions of those who were formerly His chosen people—Israel at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:5-6). He sees the church as the new “Israel of God” (Cf. Gal. 6:16), the new chosen people (cf. “elect” 1:1), using the language of God’s old covenant people to describe His new covenant people.
 - a) On this basis we may also conclude that the “Gentiles” of 2:12 are those who are not a part of this New Israel of God.
 - b) These statements focus on the new identity of Peter’s readers and the unique mission to which God has called them, namely, to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).
 - d. One might even suggest a rhetorical inclusion at 2:10 where Peter closes this section with the affirmation “you were not a people, but now you are the people of God!”
4. The significance of this section for Peter’s suffering readers is powerful and encouraging.
- a. Peter frankly acknowledges that as God’s people they will have to suffer because of who they are (1 Pet. 1:6-8)!
 - 1) They will be “distressed by various trials.”
 - 2) However their persecutions will be subject to “the will of God” (1 Pet. 4:19) and will be a part of God’s providence “if necessary” to fulfill His purposes or to prove their faith (1 Pet. 1:6).
 - b. But the great news is that who they are will also bring to them all the wonderful blessings of this section!
 - 1) The purpose of these trials will be to prove their faith; and the proof of that faith will result in “praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6-8).
 - 2) They should therefore cherish the present blessings they have as members of the family of God and find joy in the future blessings they will have “at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”
 - c. When God’s people affirm their special blessings, their special responsibilities, and their special mission as God’s people, then they will find in these truths the solidarity and strength to stand opposed to the world about them. When they remember who they are, then they will have reason to “stand firm”, knowing that they have access to “the true grace of God” (1 Pet. 5:12).
 - d. One might also remember that for Peter the question of his identity marked one of the great failings of his life as a disciple. The pointed question that led to Peter’s denials was one of identity (Mt. 26:69-75).
 - e. Now Peter urges his readers in keeping with the Lord’s commission to strengthen his brothers (Lk. 22:32) to not ever forget who they are nor to be ashamed of
-

their identity as the people of God, however foreign or strange they may be made to feel in this world or however much it may cause them to suffer!

B. The importance of excellence—“Keep your behavior excellent!”

1. The Christian’s sense of who he is should powerfully impact how he acts.
 - a. Peter begins this section with a reminder of the unique identity of God’s displaced people—“I urge you as aliens and strangers...” (1 Pet. 2:11).
 - b. This is not merely a theoretical label but an accurate description of people who live by the standards of another king and country.
2. Peter encourages them with a two-fold exhortation to exemplary behavior.
 - a. First he exhorts them to abstain from fleshly lusts (1 Pet. 2:11).
 - 1) The Christian is a walking civil war (cf. Gal. 5:16-24).
 - 2) He cannot win the battle without until he first wins the battle within!
 - b. Second he urges them to keep their behavior “excellent” (1 Pet. 2:12). The Greek word $\kappa\alpha\lambda\omega\varsigma$ is a word with a broad semantic range conveying the concepts of “beauty, appropriateness, moral goodness, freedom from defects.” (BAGD)
3. These general exhortations introduce the second major division of the letter, indicated by the vocative “beloved” (1 Pet. 2:11; cf. also 4:12). Throughout the section Peter will explain how this “excellence” is manifested.
 - a. Excellence should characterize the Christian’s life in all areas.
 - 1) In subordination to civil authorities (2:13-17)
 - 2) In subordination to masters of households (2:18-26)
 - 3) In subordination to one’s unbelieving husband or in consideration of one’s (unbelieving?) wife (3:1-7).
 - 4) In a harmonious attitude toward society in general (3:8-12)
 - b. This excellence is to be manifested in spite of the possibility that suffering may come from that relationship.
 - 1) The government may act upon false and unproven charges (1 Pet. 2:15)
 - 2) The master may be crooked and harshly treating his servants resulting in sorrows and even beatings (1 Pet. 2:19-20)
 - 3) The unbelieving husband may seek to intimidate his wife (cf. 1 Pet. 3:6)
 - 4) As a member of the community he may be “insulted” or be the object of evil doing (1 Pet. 3:9).
4. By maintaining excellence in all his relationships, a Christian can accomplish a number of things.
 - a. **He may disprove the slanderous accusations of the hostile person** (1 Pet. 2:12).
 - 1) Peter acknowledges the fact of hostile slander.

-
- 2) But the disciple through excellence in his behavior can “silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Pet. 2:15). The Greek expression is vivid—to muzzle or gag.
- b. **He may even be able to lead the hostile person to the Lord** (1 Pet. 2:12)
- 1) It is all the more important to live with excellence and to suffer patiently not only to silence the slanderers but also to cause them “to glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12)
 - a) The term “visitation” translates $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma\iota\varsigma$, a word suggesting oversight or visitation where salvation is brought to someone in need (cf. Mt. 19:41; Jas. 1:27).
 - b) The “day of visitation” of 1 Pet. 2:13 seems to be the day when God comes to the slanderer with salvation resulting in his glorification of God.
 - c) Thus Peter’s message seems to build upon the Lord’s statement, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)
 - 2) The slanderer, by means of the good works of the believer, is constrained to glorify the God of the one he once slandered.
- c. **He may engender the favor or honor of God.**
- 1) In 1 Pet. 2:19 Peter shows that proper behavior as a servant toward an abusive master does indeed have “credit” ($\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma\iota\varsigma$) with God (Cf. Lk. 6:32-24).
 - 2) This word occurs in extra-biblical Greek in the semantic field of terms for “honor” such as “good report”, “fame”, or “praise” (Elliott, 520).
- d. **He may obtain a greater fellowship in the sufferings of Christ**
- 1) To the servant facing a crooked master (1 Pet. 2:18-25) Peter upholds the example of Christ. Jesus’ life is like a template or pattern (Greek term $\epsilon\upsilon\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma\iota\varsigma$) over which the servant must now place his life in imitation.
 - 2) To follow in His footsteps he must like Jesus “bear up under” sorrows and refrain from reviling those who revile him or even uttering threats calculated to intimidate the persecutor into inaction (1 Pet. 2:23).
 - 3) In this he follows in the footsteps of another “suffering servant” (note that Peter’s OT passages are taken from the “Servant” songs of Isaiah) who also was beaten by the Romans despite no wrong-doing (cf. Mt. 26:67; Mk. 14:65).
 - 4) Every blow that the abused slave received would remind him of the “stripes” Jesus had suffered and endured for his sake and would bring him into a deeper fellowship with Christ’s sufferings (cf. Phil. 3:10).
 - 5) Peter alone in the NT uses this expression, “Christ suffered for you.” (Elliott, 524)
- e. **He is able to inherit the Lord’s blessing of a “love of life” and the ability to “see good days”** (1 Pet. 3:10).
-

- 1) Peter's general description of social excellence in 1 Pet. 3:8ff includes the proper handling of painful circumstances—"not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).
- 2) As an incentive to this behavior Peter reminds his readers that in doing what is right they will ultimately "love life and see good days" because the omniscient eyes of Lord are upon His faithful people and will respond to their prayers for help and deliverance, a truth often affirmed in the psalms.

C. The importance of faithfulness—Responding properly to suffering

1. It is difficult to tell whether Peter in 1 Pet. 3:13 begins a new section or simply enlarges upon the call to excellence with specific application to suffering.
 - a. Carson and Moo suggest that the address "beloved" at 2:11 and 4:12 serve as structural markers that divide the text into three major sections. (636)
 - b. Clearly the goal of this section to the end of the book is to encourage the suffering disciple to respond properly to various aspects of persecution.
2. How Christians were to respond to the persecutor (1 Pet. 3:13-4:6)
 - a. **Realize that doing what is right will not usually bring harm but will always bring God's blessing** (1 Pet. 3:13).
 - 1) Peter's quotation of Psalm 34 serves as an important bridge to this section. On the one hand, it summarizes the excellent life that God's people should live and promises God's blessing to those who live it, no matter how they may be treated by unbelievers.
 - 2) In keeping with the promise of Psalm 34 Peter does not expect living right to invariably result in hostility; but even if it does, there is always a blessing for the believer.
 - b. **Do not fear their fear and do not be troubled** (1 Pet. 3:14).
 - 1) Peter has already alluded to Isaiah 8 and taken a lesson from the crisis of the Assyrian invasion. Just as God became to the unbelieving Israelites "a stone of stumbling and a rock to stumble over" (Is. 8:14), so Jesus Christ likewise became to those who did not believe in Him "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (1 Pet. 2:8).
 - 2) Now it appears that Peter draws a lesson from the same text for the faithful who like Isaiah and his disciples faced the hostility of their contemporaries.
 - a) While proclaiming the message of God, Isaiah and his disciples were warned not to be afraid of what the unbelieving Jews feared. Instead they were to fear only the Lord (Is. 8:12-13).
 - b) Now likewise Peter urges the faithful with the Lord's words to Isaiah and his children, "Do not fear their fear and do not be troubled" (1 Pet. 3:14).
 - c. **Sanctify Christ and be ready to give an answer** (1 Pet. 3:15)
 - 1) This phrase provides the corollary idea to v. 14. In Isaiah 8:13 God had warned, "It is the Lord of hosts whom you shall regard as holy".

- 2) Now in a similar way Peter exhorts God's new covenant people. Taking their cues from the piel form of the OT Hebrew text, Kuykendall and Collins suggest that the best rendering would be, "but in your hearts revere Christ the Lord as holy" (78, cf. also the ESV).

d. **Keep a good conscience** (1 Pet. 3:16)

- 1) The disciple's life should maintain a consistency that would not result in charges of hypocrisy. Throughout the book Peter warns against committing evil deeds that deserve punishment (2:16, 20; 3:17; 4:15).
- 2) Elliot however suggests that the focus of this conscientiousness is not inward (one's personal understanding of wrong), but external (the objective revelation of God's will). Thus, he translates, "Maintain a sound mindfulness of God's will." (630)
- 3) By violating one's conscience the disciple would give the enemy occasion to blaspheme God (cf. Rom. 2:17-24) and give new impetus to slander His people.

e. **Arm yourselves to follow Jesus even in suffering** (1 Pet. 4:1-6)

- 1) For Peter the call to follow Christ is the key to enduring suffering.
- a) He was innocent of wrong-going ("just for the unjust").
 - b) He suffered greatly in spite of this ("died for sins").
 - c) However He suffered with the noblest of purposes ("that he might bring us to God").
 - d) Ultimately, He was made alive in the spirit and exalted to God's right hand (1 Pet. 3:18-22).
- 2) Peter exhorts the suffering disciples to live out this pattern in their lives as well—"arm yourselves with the same purpose".
- a) They must be sure that they are not suffering because of their sins, but because they have "ceased from sin" (1 Pet. 4:1) and because of their desire to do "the will of God" (1 Pet. 4:2).
 - b) They must be willing to endure suffering (1 Pet. 4:1).
 - c) They must suffer with a noble purpose—to lead others to the Lord. Our suffering is not vicarious as was Jesus', but it nonetheless may also have a saving effect on the lost (cf. 1 Pet. 2:12).
 - d) They will, though "judged in the flesh as men", like Jesus live in the spirit according to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:6).
- 3) What enables the disciple to endure the greatest possible suffering is his recognition of God's ultimate vindication. The believer has in Christ proof of victory over every hostile force. In the Day of Judgment those who have wickedly opposed God's people will receive their just recompense while the righteous will live forever in God's presence.

3. How Christians were to help one another in persecution (1 Pet. 4:7-11)

- a. In this section Peter moves from the external response to the persecuting unbeliever to the internal response toward one's fellow-sufferers in Christ.

-
- 1) Peter has alluded to the judgment that will vindicate the righteous (1 Pet. 4:5). This Day of Judgment is “the end of all things”, a theme that Peter will explore in his second letter (2 Pet. 3).
 - a) Elliot quotes Bowman on this point: “Early Christianity, in its perception of God, of time, of Jesus as the messianic agent of the end time, and of its own role in history’s final phase, was fundamentally inspired and shaped by this eschatological perspective.” (745)
 - 2) However Peter additionally calls attention to the imminence of this “end”. The word $\epsilon\lambda\theta\epsilon\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ might be translated “has come near”, is at hand”, or “is imminent”. It simply acknowledges the central truth of the gospel that the coming of Christ marks the fulfillment of the ages past and prepares the way for a new period of salvation soon to begin. (Elliot, 746)
- b. **Cultivate a mindset suitable for prayer (4:7).**
 - 1) Nothing can help God’s people conquer trial more than fervent united prayer; but we also must each prepare our hearts for this purpose by sound judgment and a sober spirit.
 - 2) Each disciple must prepare his heart to seek God not only alone, but also with others.
 - c. **Keep fervent in love (4:8)**
 - 1) Suffering sometimes brings out the worst in us. During times of pain we may be prone to lash out at those trying to help us.
 - 2) Consequently our love for one another needs to be fervent and forgiving.
 - d. **Be hospitable to one another without complaint (4:9)**
 - 1) Hospitality is “love of strangers” ($\phi\iota\lambda\alpha\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\iota\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$). Perhaps Peter realizes that persecution will cause people to have to flee to other places and there they must find reception among brethren willing to assist them.
 - 2) It would be easy to do this with feelings of resentment. Thus Peter urges “without complaint”. (The Greek word *goggusmov* is onomatopoeic sounding like someone grumbling.) Such persons might well remember the important message of Mt. 25:34-46).
 - e. **Teach and serve one another to the glory of God (4:10-11)**
 - 1) Again context is important. While a passage like this may be often quoted to resist those who recklessly oppose a “thus saith the Lord” in their religious practice (and not without justification), its primary thrust is to underscore the disciples’ need to edify one another with sound teaching and compassionate service in their times of suffering.
 - 2) But even here the goal of all one’s teaching and service is not self-glorification, but instead the glory of God. God is glorified because we speak His word and rely upon His strength.
 - f. It is hard to underestimate the value of the support disciples give one another in times of persecution. Peter exhorts the disciples to each fulfill these duties to one another.
4. How Christians were to respond to persecution itself(1 Pet. 4:12-19)
-

-
- a. If it is important for disciples to respond properly to the persecutors, it is equally important to respond properly to the persecutions themselves. In this section Peter calls upon believers to encounter persecution with a faithful mindset that sees the place of suffering in the larger purposes of God.
- b. **Don't be surprised by it** (1 Pet. 4:12)
- 1) Peter uses the same term used to describe the unbeliever's surprise at the Christian's refusal to run with them in sinful activities (cf. 1 Pet. 4:4); but now in the negative. The Christian should not be caught off guard by persecution. It is the inevitable result of faithful living (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12).
 - 2) As in 1 Pet. 1:6-7 the process of purifying metals by fire is used to describe the benefit of suffering to the believer. It determines the genuineness of the disciple's faith. (Earl, 412)
- c. **Rejoice in it** (1 Pet. 4:13-14)
- 1) This joy is like that of the apostles (Peter included) who "rejoiced that they were found worthy to suffer for His name" (Ac. 5:41). Likewise Paul regarded this "fellowship of His sufferings" as one of the great gains of becoming a disciple (Phil. 3:10).
 - 2) Peter here applies the Lord's beatitude, "Blessed are you when men revile and persecute you" (Mt. 5:11-12). This blessedness or happiness ($\Sigma \diamond \diamond \Sigma \approx \Sigma$) is the happiness of knowing that we are in the favor of God.
 - 3) In the NT context God's choice and acceptance of His people was made known by the sign of the Spirit's coming upon them (cf. for example Ac. 19:6 with Eph. 1:13-14; or Gal. 3:1-5 with 4:6). Thus Peter sees their persecutions as further evidence of the life-changing work of the Holy Spirit. Consequently Peter adds that they should rejoice "because the Spirit of God and glory rests" upon them (1 Pet. 4:14).
- d. **Don't be ashamed but glorify God in it** (1 Pet. 4:15-16)
- 1) Peter warns again of suffering for wrong doing such as being a "murderer, thief, evil doer or troublesome meddler" (4:15).
 - a) The expression "troublesome meddler" might not appear to belong to this list of serious offenses.
 - b) Brown suggests however that the concept of "meddling" was more serious in the Greco-Roman world than might be suggested by our modern conceptions and could appropriately appear with the other terms of 1 Pet. 4:15. On the basis of etymology and larger topos she comments, "In conclusion, *ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος* in 1 Pet 4:15 fits the parameters of the Greco-Roman topos of meddling and likely refers to movement outside of culturally appropriate social boundaries. This type of interference in the social order has political ramifications and as such would be understood as involving insubordination to the polis. The admonition in 4:15 to avoid this insubordinate behavior fits the Petrine concern for ensuring that Christian behavior reproached by pagan neighbors is truly good and not evil (cf. 2:11-12; 4:15-16). In fact, the prohibition against behaving as an *ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος* provides a
-

thematic parallel to the submissive behavior commended earlier in the domestic code (2:11-3:12).” (Brown, 567)

- 2) But if one suffers “as a Christian” let him “glorify God” in this name.
 - a) The term $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\iota\alpha\iota$ is the Greek form of a Latinized adjective describing those who were “partisans of Christ.”
 - 1] Luke reports its first use to describe disciples in Syrian Antioch (Ac. 11:26).
 - 2] Its rare use in the NT may suggest that it was a derisive label coined by unbelieving Gentiles.
 - 3] Interestingly it is most often found on the lips of unbelievers in the first century (cf. Ac. 26:28, 1 Pet. 4:16, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny) but then on the lips of believers in later centuries (Horrell, 361).
 - b) Elliot suggests that the word “Christian” might have the derisive suggestion of a “Christ-lackey.” (793ff)
 - 1] Unbelievers have always given expression to their hatred of God’s people with derisive name calling.
 - c) For the follower of Jesus, such a label was not a cause of shame, but rather a means by which to glorify God. The expression “in that name” seems to refer to the label “Christian.”

e. **See God’s judgment in it** (1 Pet. 4:17-18)

- 1) Persecution could be considered the initial stages of God judgment—His way of judging the sin in his own people before judging the sin in the whole world.
 - a) The Greek term for “time” (*kairos*) may denote a “propitious” or a “critical” point in time. (Elliot, 797)
 - b) The concept of the pre-judgment of God’s people before the nations is found also in the message of God’s OT prophets (Jer. 25:29ff).
 - c) The Hebrew writer seems to make a similar connection between the discipline of the Lord and persecution (cf. Heb. 12:4-6).
 - d) This judgment of sin in God’s house is not easy to bear; it is in fact with “difficulty” that the righteous is saved.
 - e) The idea is not that saved people will just barely make it to heaven if they make it at all. It is instead to call to mind the stark contrast between God’s treatment of the sins of the saved as opposed to the sins of the lost that have persecuted His people.
- 2) “But if it is so with God’s people, where does that put the person who does not obey God at all? Their sufferings are “purificatory with a view to salvation, though they involved temporary earthly pain and loss. The final stages of God’s judgment will bring only condemnation and eternal loss on the ungodly who obey not the gospel of God.” (Stibbs, 158)

f. **Entrust oneself to the righteous judgment of God** (1 Pet. 4:19)

- 1) Suffering “according to God’s will” suggests suffering in connection with obedience to His word.
 - 2) The verb “entrust” (ἐπιτιθέω) was used in classical Greek of giving one’s possessions into the safe-keeping of a friend (Elliot, 805).
 - a) Many NT usages also have this connotation of committing something of great value to another (Lk. 12:48; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:2; Ac. 14:23; 30:32).
 - b) In this case the believer commits his very “soul” to God as did the psalmist (Ps. 31:5), the Lord (Lk. 23:46), and Stephen (Ac. 7:59).
 - 3) In the end responding faithfully to persecution means believing that He who made the world is also the just Judge of it and will be faithful to His promise to reward His righteous servants.
 - 4) Here again Peter calls upon His suffering servants to follow the pattern of “the Suffering Servant” in entrusting Himself to God (cf. 1 Pet. 2:23).
 - g. The value of this section is in helping Christians with the challenging question that all sufferers seem to ask—“Why? Why must we suffer?” Peter’s answer would enable them to see the usefulness of suffering in God’s plan and meet it with joyous acceptance rather than shameful surprise.
5. How leaders were to help Christians in times of persecution (1 Pet. 5:1-5)
- a. **Feed the flock with the right motivations**
 - 1) An elder cannot have a swelling head, a grasping hand, or a dragging foot.
 - 2) In this paragraph we can see various grammatical forms of the three common terms for the leaders of the congregation: elder, overseer, and shepherd.
 - 3) When God’s people are hurting they need leaders who they can count on to encourage and comfort them with the truth and to show them the way by a godly example.
 - b. **Let the younger be subject to the elder**
 - 1) It seems likely that “elder” here still refers to the overseers; but with a reminder of the wisdom of age. Younger people may at times overlook the valuable experience and help of these mature Christians.
 - 2) These νεοφύτοι might be “new converts” to the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15-16; 1 Tim. 3:6 where similar distinctions are made but not with the same Greek term). (Elliot, 838)
 - c. The value of this section is in stressing the importance of maintaining God’s order of leadership in troubled times. Especially in times of persecution God’s people need the steady and mature leadership of elders who can help steer people through the choppy waters of hostility and provide experienced insight into how to overcome the particular challenges that God’s people may face in their own unique circumstances.
6. How each disciple could prepare his heart for the test of persecution (1 Pet. 5:6-11).

-
- a. It is hard to resist the idea that Peter's final words of exhortation came from his own experiences in being unprepared for the trial that led to his denial of the Lord.
 - 1) The night he failed the Lord he had refused to serve his fellow-disciples by washing their feet, boasted of his superior devotion and greatness, slept in the garden, and resisted the enemy with physical violence.
 - 2) In many ways the following exhortations seem to be reflections of Peter's failure to pass the test of persecution during the trial of Lord.
 - b. **Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another** (1 Pet. 5:5)
 - 1) The expression is graphic—gird yourselves! Did Peter remember the image of Jesus girding himself with a towel to do what none of the disciples would humble themselves to do? (Jn. 13:3-5).
 - 2) Did he remember how that though he in particular would not stoop to do this task, he could hardly let the Lord do it for him? (Jn. 13:6ff)
 - 3) Pride goes before a fall. Humility enables disciples to not become overconfident in the face of difficulty nor refuse to be of service to others in times of need.
 - c. **Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God** (1 Pet. 5:6)
 - 1) If humility is important in our relationship with one another, how much more with God!
 - 2) Peter's statement is founded upon Wisdom's appeal: "Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted. The wise will inherit honor, but fools display dishonor" (Prov. 3:34-35).
 - 3) Suffering sometimes brings out pride. We may find ourselves resentful that we should be treated badly. We may say, "I deserve better than this!" Humility causes us to abandon such foolish thoughts, and instead submit to His purposes and rely upon His power.
 - 4) Peter's reminder of His "mighty hand" lends special force to this imperative. He is the one who created it all. He is the one who will judge all. No matter how powerfully the forces of evil prevail upon the disciple His powerful hand can deliver us.
 - d. **Cast all your anxiety upon Him** (1 Pet. 5:7)
 - 1) Peter's exhortation may rest upon the Greek text of Psalm 54:23: "Cast your anxiety on the Lord and he will sustain you."
 - 2) Persecution is surely the occasion for anxiety. Such anxiety can only be overcome by casting it upon the Lord, knowing that He cares for His people. (cf. 3:12)
 - e. **Be of sober spirit; be on the alert** (1 Pet. 5:8)
 - 1) Did Peter here recall the words of the Lord in the garden, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation; the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:41).
 - 2) Did he remember how that he fell repeatedly into sleep instead of heeding the Lord's warnings?
-

-
- f. **Resist the devil, firm in faith, knowing that others also suffer** (1 Pet. 5:9)
- 1) Did Peter remember the drawn sword of the garden? Now he understood that the real enemy is not man, but Satan—“your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour!”
 - 2) And he had learned that the resistance the disciple puts up is not carnal but spiritual.
 - 3) “...in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.” (Ephesians 6:16)
 - 4) God’s people can take consolation in the fact that we are not personally picked out to experience suffering for the name of Christ. It is the lot of all who faithfully serve the Lord.
- g. **Experience the growth and blessing of suffering** (1 Pet. 5:10)
- 1) Looking at the book as a whole one can see the valuable benefits of suffering in the life of a disciple; but here Peter summarizes the inward benefits of suffering to the one who patiently endures. Consider this alliterative outline by Kirk. Suffering provides:
 - a) Proof of one's faith (1:6-7; 4:12)
 - b) Protection of one’s integrity (2:13,15)
 - c) Presentation of one's calling (2:20-21)
 - d) Promise of one's blessing (3:14; 4:14)
 - e) Purification of one's motives (4:1-2)
 - f) Provision of one's exultation (4:13)
 - g) Perfection of one's character (5:10)
 - 2) Peter sees suffering as God’s gracious work to assist the disciple in his spiritual growth.
 - a) “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.” (1 Peter 5:10)
 - b) “Perfect” (καταρτίζω) is variously translated “mend” (Mt. 1:19; 2 Cor. 13:11), “fully train” (Lk 6:40), “restore” (Gal. 6:1), “unite” (1 Cor. 1:10), “make whole or complete” (1 Thes. 3:10; Heb. 13:10).
 - c) “Confirm” (βεβαιώω) might be translated “reinforce, support, confirm, strengthen”. It was this charge Jesus gave to Peter to accomplish for his brethren after his fall and conversion (Lk. 22:31-32).
 - d) “Strengthen” (ἐνδυναμώνω) is found only here in the NT and suggests the idea of “strengthening.”
 - e) “Establish” (ἐκτιθεῖν) uses a building metaphor with the idea of being “grounded” or “established.” (Elliot, 866-867)
- h. **Focus on the glory to come** (1 Pet. 5:10)
-

- 1) Though far more is said about suffering than glory in 1 Peter, its anticipation underlies all of its exhortations. Peter urged the disciples to remember while suffering that they had been called to “eternal glory in Christ” (5:10). This “eternal glory” stands in sharp contrast to the sufferings which are to be for a “little while”.
 - 2) Peter’s introductory picture of the household of God takes them to the gates of their eternal abode with God, “to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, reserved in heaven” (1 Pet. 1:4).
 - 3) He urges them to fix their hope completely on the grace to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:13).
 - 4) Peter himself appealed to them as “a partaker of the glory that will be revealed” (1 Pet. 5:1).
 - 5) Regrettably our present sufferings are more real to us than the future glory to which we have been called. That can only be remedied by constant reflection on God in all His greatness and the prospects of being in His presence forever.
- i. **Stand firm in the true grace of God** (1 Pet. 5:12).
- 1) The threat of persecution may have caused some Christians to doubt whether this was the life for them or whether in such circumstances they could truly believe that they were in God’s favor. Peter assures them that the life they are living places them in the “true grace of God.” This is the real thing!
 - 2) “Stand firm” (ἵστασθε) conveys the idea of “holding one’s ground” or “standing firm” as if in battle (cf. Eph. 6:14).
 - 3) In many ways this final imperative is really the charge of the whole book. Don’t allow the world’s hostility to turn you away from the Lord and His blessings!
- D. So then Peter’s message is **a beautifully-woven treatise on how one should conduct himself** as one of God’s children while living as a stranger in this world.
1. He skillfully interweaves the themes of identity, excellence, and trust, urging God’s people to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus for whose sake they are now also suffering.

Conclusion:

- I. I have come away from my study of 1 Peter with an even greater appreciation for **the practicality** of this book.
 - A. Of course, everyone has to deal with sickness, death, and the potential disaster that may strike any of us because we live in a world “subjected to futility” (Rom. 8:20).
 - B. But in every congregation it is likely that there are also those who are hurting because they must live with someone who does not appreciate their faith.
 - C. There may be those who work side by side with people who make cutting and denigrating remarks, and who may pass them by for promotions and raises because of their faith.
 - D. All of us live in a society where “important” people put us down and try to make us all look like hay-seeds.

- E. And who among us has not had our moments when we felt the sting of a slanderous barb coming from someone who could have and should have known better.
- F. If we live the life of distinctive holiness that God commands it will demand that we separate from the sinful practices of those with whom we may have once associated; and with that withdrawal will come hostility.
- G. 1 Peter was written for people like us who also may have to endure painful mistreatment simply because we are Christians.
- II. While suffering, we must not forget **the important mission** that attaches to our mistreatment.
- A. Our goal is not only to model excellence but to glorify God and win others by that excellence. In every relationship we need to show the misguided world how to live.
- B. 1 Peter teaches us that we always have a mission to the very ones who may be the source of our pain.
- III. The message of 1 Peter still has **great power to comfort and strengthen** us in times of grief and pain.
- A. Our pain is not pointless. Every day that we endure it brings us closer to God, closer to one another and closer to eternal glory.
- B. We follow a path already trodden by the Lord himself. When the prophets by the Spirit spoke of His coming, they spoke of two things—*“the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow”* (1 Pet. 1:11).
- C. When we follow the Savior, there will likewise be sufferings and then the glory to follow; first there will be a cross and then there will be a crown.
- D. We must learn then to embrace that hope so beautifully upheld in Peter’s epistle and wonderfully described by his fellow-apostle: *“For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison”* (2 Cor. 4:17).
- IV. In this world true believers will **never feel at home**.
- A. The fact that we belong to the household of God is a constant reminder that we will always feel this way until we come into the presence of the Father who has begotten us and bestowed upon us His inheritance. There in His eternal presence we will at last fully appreciate the message we have sung so many times—*“the way of the cross leads home”!*

Johnny Felker
 1139 Woodridge Place
 Mount Juliet, TN 37122
 jdfelker@att.net

Selected Bibliography

- Achtemeier, Paul J. “Between Text & Sermon: 1 Peter 1:13-21.” *Interpretation* (July 2006): 306-308
- “1 Peter. A Commentary on 1 Peter”. Ed. Edon Jay Epp. *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996.
- Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Beard, Mary, John North and Simon Price. *Religions of Rome, Volume 1: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Black, Alan. "1 Peter." *The College Press NIV Commentary*, edited by Jack Cottrell and Tony Ash. Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1998.

Brown, Jeannine K. "Just a Busybody? A Look at the Greco-Roman Topos of Meddling for Defining ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπός in 1 Peter 4:15." *JBL* 125, no. 3 (2006): 549-568.

Carson, D.A. and Douglas Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

Elliott, John H. "1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary." *Anchor Bible Commentary* 37B. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Harrison, Everett F. "Exegetical Studies in 1 Peter: Part 1" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 97, no. 204 (1940): 204. (Harrison presented a series of expository articles on 1 Peter beginning with this one).

Hiebert, Edmond. "Designation of the Readers in 1 Peter 1:1-2." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137, no. 545 (January 1980): 64.

Horrell, David G. "The Label ἡμεῖς ἡμεῖς ἡμεῖς ἡμεῖς : 1 Peter 4:16 and the Formation of Christian Identity" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 2 (2007): 361-381.

Kirk, Gordon E. "Endurance in Suffering in 1 Peter." *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1981): 46-56.

Kuykendall, Charles and C. John Collins. "1 Peter 3:15a: A Critical Review of English Versions." *Presbyterion* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 76-84.

Richard, Earl J. "Honorable Conduct among the Gentiles—A Study of the Social Thought of 1 Peter." *Word & World* 4 (Fall 2004): 412-420.

Robertson, A.T. *Epochs in the Life of Simon Peter*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976.

Slaughter, James R. "The Importance of Literary Argument for Understanding 1 Peter." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152, no. 72 (1995).

Thurston, Robert. "Interpreting 1 Peter." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17, no. 174.

Warden, Duane. "Imperial Persecution and the Dating of 1 Peter and Revelation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991): 203.

Websites where you can read the historical quotes in context:

Tertullian. "To the Nations" and "Apology." http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-15.htm#P1202_489126 under <http://www.tertullian.org/anf/index.htm>. Date accessed: February 12, 2008.

Suetonius. *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/6400>. Date accessed: February 12, 2008.

Pliny. "Letters to Trajan." <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext01/ltp1n10.txt>. Date accessed: February 12, 2008.

Eusebius. *Ecclesiastical History*. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250104.htm>. Date accessed: February 12, 2008.

Tacitus. *Annals*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/16927>. Date accessed: February 12, 2008.

Seneca. "On Anger". http://www.stoics.com/seneca_essays_book_1.html. Date accessed: February 12, 2008.