

1 Peter Chapter 4

Suffering Is the Context for the Christian Life



Chapter 4 continues the discussion on suffering begun in 3:13. Here Peter makes the point that suffering is not just some strange thing that they will go through, but it is the normal Christian life here on earth. Their situation is not unusual, odd, or exceptional.

The chapter outlines as follows:

- A. Suffering and Sin 4:1-6**
- B. Suffering and Service 4:7-11**
- C. Suffering and Rewards 4:12-19**



Picture of Jesus and the Pharisees from www.dkimages.com

A. Suffering and Sin 4:1-6

1 Peter 4:1 *Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*

The meaning of the first phrase describing Christ's suffering in the flesh is debated. The question is whether it refers to Christ's entire life and His death, or just His death. Those believing it refers only to His death see this passage as an encouragement to endure martyrdom if necessary. But the context seems to be an encouragement to live in suffering not just, or even primarily, to die in suffering.

The command of the verse, to *arm yourselves* is ὀπλίσασθε (*hoplisasthe*), a military term used only here in the New Testament. It is written as an aorist middle *to take it upon yourselves to arm yourselves*. The qualifying phrase is τὴν αὐτὴν ἔννοιαν (*with*) *the same purpose* (as Christ in His suffering). The word for *purpose* is a combination of the word *in* and *mind*. It can mean *thinking, understanding, intention, or purpose*. This word is used only one other place in the New Testament, Hebrews 4:12 where the Word of God is said to *judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*. So they were to intentionally arm themselves with the same mind or understanding of Christ as He lived and died, in the flesh.

The most difficult question of the verse is: What does it mean: *he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin*? Ryrie has a good perspective on this. He writes:

The thought is this: Christ suffered in the flesh. He is your example. So, arm yourselves by taking the same view of suffering as Christ took, which is to accept it in the will of God. Thereby the dominion of sin is broken in practical experience (“Ryrie Study Bible,” p. 1981).

When we suffer because we refuse to live as the sinful culture around us is living, then we will cease from having the sinful temptations of that culture. Of course, everyone who suffers as a believer still has a sin nature and will continue to sin. The point is *the dominion of sin* is broken, when we live as Christ did.

When I suffer as Christ did:

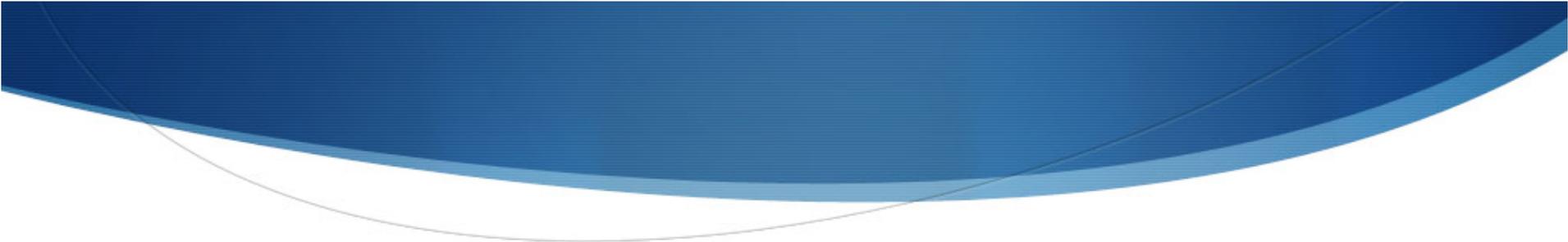
I am suffering because I am trying not to be like the world.

Therefore, I am not trying to be like the world.

But sin is trying to be like the world.

Therefore, when I am not trying to be like the world, I have ceased from sin.

Therefore, when I suffer as Christ did, I have ceased from sin.



1 Peter 4:2 *so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*

This is what Peter means by suffering causing us to cease from sin. If we suffer the loss of the *lusts of men* and live in a moral environment defined by *the will of God*, then we will have ceased from sin. So it is all about what we lust for. The secret to ceasing from sin is to lust after the will of God rather than the lusts of men.

1 Peter 4:3 *For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.*

Peter says you have had enough sin in your past. You need to abandon your past. He calls this *the desire of the Gentiles* and describes it with an impressive list:

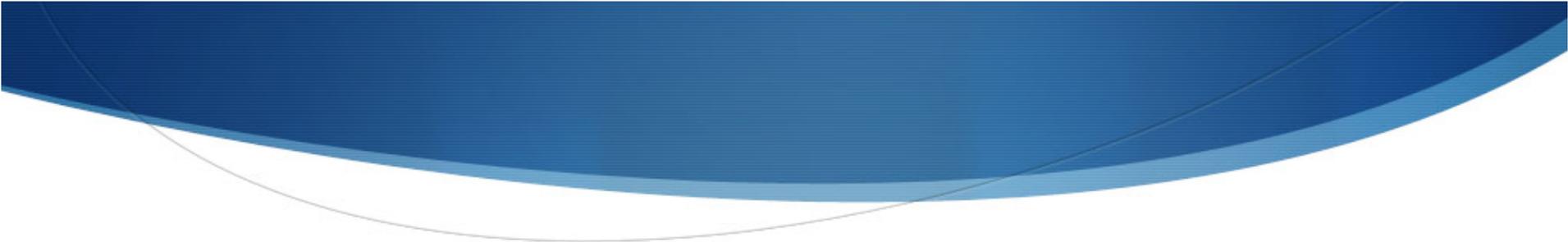
- *Sensuality*
- *Carousing*
- *Lusts*
- *Drinking parties*
- *Drunkenness*
- *Abominable idolatries*



Drinking picture from
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Sounds like life at any common university campus. But there is a difference. Today, we could add cohabitation, homosexuality, drugs, and oral sex. Also, the percentage of people committing it is greater, the opportunity is greater, and the tolerance is greater.

Anyway, Peter says to abandon all that, and to do so will cause suffering from the culture around you, but it will separate you from that sin.



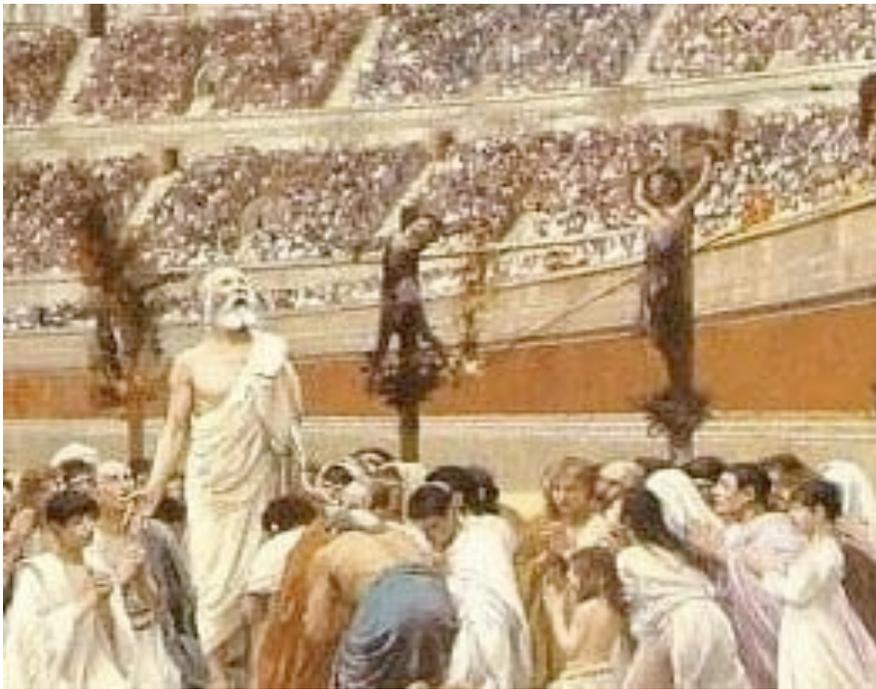
1 Peter 4:4-5 *In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

This sentence is written like a proverb with two contrasting statements: *they malign you; but they will give account to God*. The first statement says the worldly culture they came out of will be *ξενίζονται*, *surprised*. It's also surprising that Peter uses this word.

Peter uses it again in 4:12, where he says: *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you*. The word is common for a guest who shows up unexpectedly and requires housing.

Paul uses it for *lodging* in Philemon 22 and *hospitality* in Romans 12:13. Their former unbelieving friends are as surprised as when a guest shows up unexpectedly. It actually affects their lives, like making unexpected preparations to accommodate an unexpected guest.

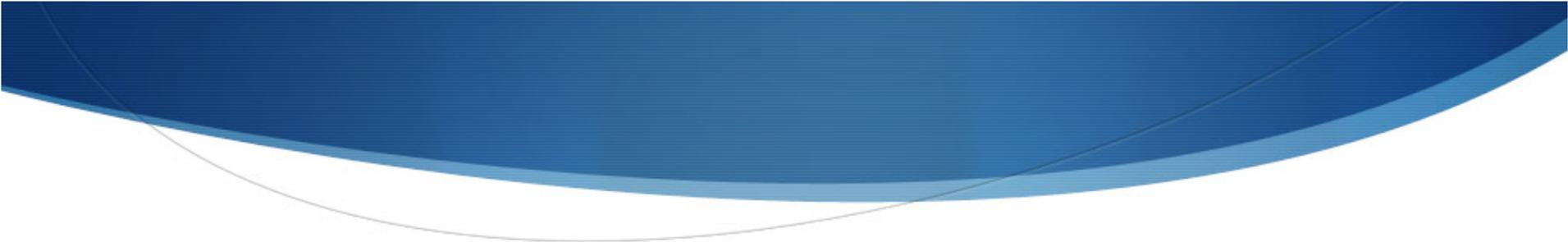
1 Peter 4:6 *For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.*



Picture of Christians being burned alive
from www.bible-researcher.com

Some suggest this and 3:19 are a second chance at hearing the Gospel for those unbelievers who have died. Ryrie's interpretation is again preferable. He writes:

“The gospel was preached to those martyrs now dead. They were judged in the flesh and condemned to martyrdom according to human standards, but they are alive in the spirit after death.”



THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

By way of application, we need to understand that good Christians will suffer because they will be living contrary to the culture of the society around them. Christianity was born a counter-cultural movement. From the get-go, it was separated from the state, and all political governing bodies. That assures persecution.

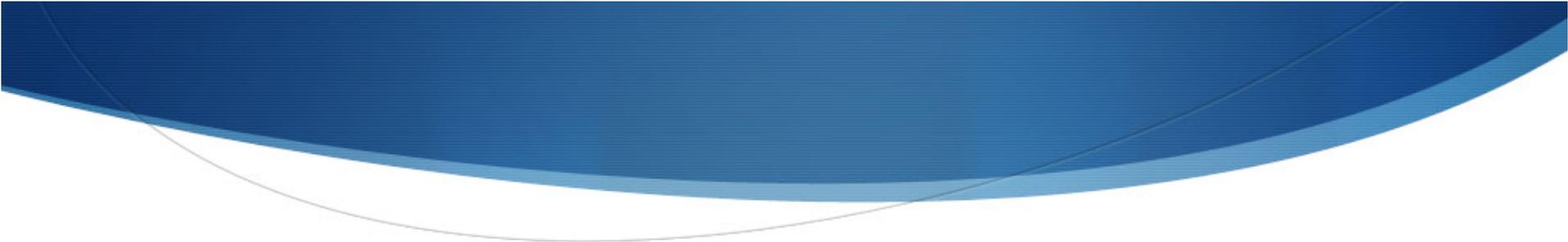
Most religions are not counter-cultural but part of the general culture. Take Islam, for example. It was born creating a government. It spread by military, so that by the time of Mohammed's death, there was no separation whatsoever between the religion and the state. As Islam spreads, it must create its own government. A good Muslim, then, is one who does not suffer because he or she is living consistently with the government and the culture dictated by that government. Islam means to submit. A Muslim is one who submits.



The same is true of Hinduism in India and Buddhism in Tibet. The same was true of Old Testament Judaism until they were exiled to Babylon. Then we see people like Ezekiel and Daniel suffering counter-cultural living. Christianity is the only world religion designed in such a way that a good follower is not necessarily considered good by the governing culture or the state in which he or she lives. Many Christian groups are trying to make the government and governing culture “Christian” so they don’t have to suffer. But Peter says counter-cultural suffering is what keeps us from sin.

When you become a Christian your social group is now changed and your behavior has no explanation your former worldly culture can understand. Why would anyone stop doing enjoyable activity which is not illegal and does not hurt anyone else? It is like most people’s answer to the homosexual question: “If it doesn’t effect me or hurt anyone, what do I care?” The Christian answer is: God cares.

If you look at Peter’s list of worldly activities and even add some of our own, they can be practiced in such a way that they are enjoyable, legal, and don’t hurt anyone else. So what’s the problem? Conservatives will be quick to say they are shortening their lives and lowering their productivity and becoming addicted to controlling substances. Of course, all sin causes problems because it is contrary to the way God created things to be.



But the unbeliever can say:

- So what?
- What if I don't want to live very long or be productive?
- What if it helps me cope, where I would otherwise be depressed?
- What if I have a responsible job and I do those things with my friends on weekends under controlled situations to reward myself for my work?
- What's wrong with that?

Peter says, here's what's wrong with it: *they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.* The problem is not that they are a detriment to society, the problem is, they will face a God who says it's sin and His righteous character demands that He judge everyone—those still living and those who are already dead.

B. Suffering and Service 4:7-11

1 Peter 4:7-11 can be outlined as follows:

*The end of all things is near;
therefore,*

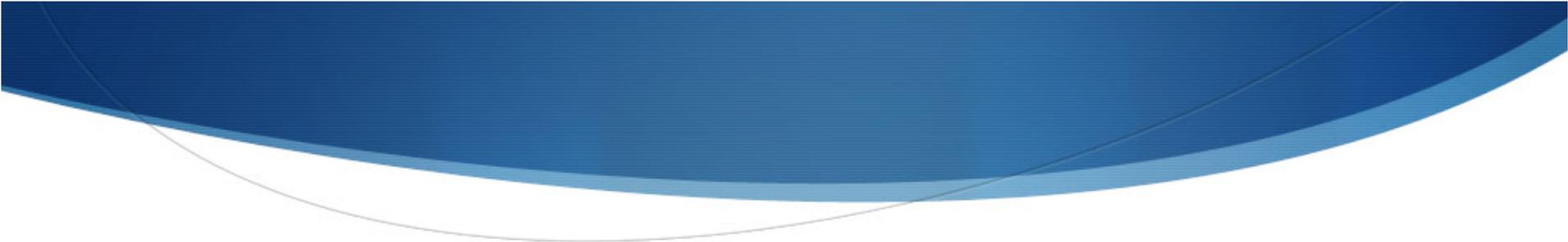
- 1. be of sound judgment and*
- 2. sober spirit*
for the purpose of prayer.

Above all,

- 1. keep fervent in your love for one another,
because love covers a multitude of sins.*
- 2. Be hospitable to one another without complaint.*
- 3. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good
stewards of the manifold grace of God.*
- 4. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God;*
- 5. whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies;
so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom
belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*



Foot washing picture from
northwestanglican.blogspot.com



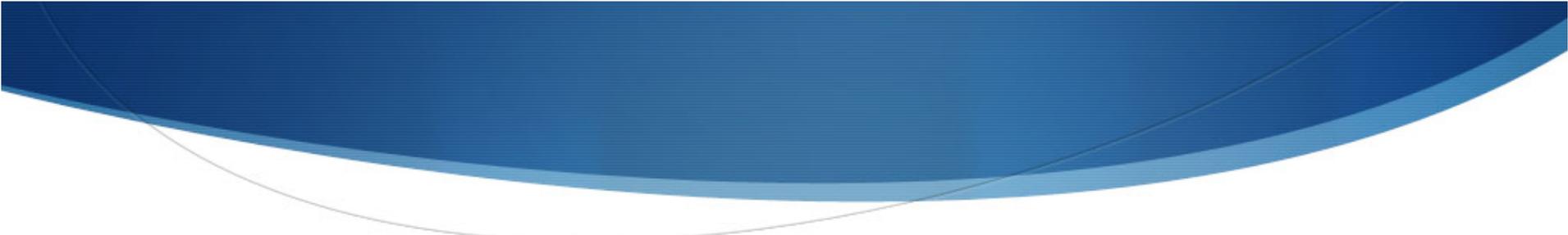
1 Peter 4:7 begins with Peter saying: *The end of all things is near*. Notice he is referring to the destruction of the whole earth (2 Peter 3:12) at the end of time, not any one event approaching that time.

therefore,

- 1. be of sound judgment, σωφρονη/sate.* The Louw and Nida lexicon says this word means: “to be able to reason and think properly and in a sane manner — ‘to be in one’s right mind, to be sane, to think straight, to reason correctly.’”
- 2. sober spirit, νη/yate.* The word means *to be self-controlled or sober*, as in not drunk with wine.

for [the purpose of] prayer. The word *purpose* is not in the text.

Notice that the response to a nearness of the end of all things is not emotional, mystical or religious, but sound, reasonable thinking, and self control.



1 Peter 4:8-11 gives five commands for serving fellow believers. *Above all*, probably does not mean these are the five most significant commands but that they are essential for Christian service.

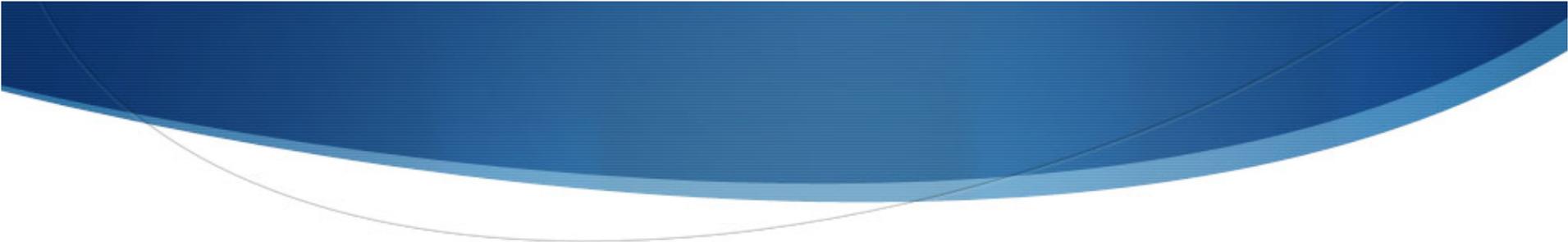
1. (Verse 8) *keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.* Here Peter uses ἀγάπη to describe what would usually be φιλεω, brotherly love. Then he quotes the popular phrase from Proverbs 10:12, used also in James 5:20. In this context, *love covers a multitude of sins*, not for salvation or a relationship with God but for ministering to one another. This does not mean we should avoid calling another into account for our sins. But once there has been repentance of sin, then those sins are past, and love should *cover* any reference to them.
2. (Verse 9) *Be hospitable to one another without complaint.* Now Peter uses φιλόξενοι, a form of brotherly love, to describe hospitality without γογγυσμοῦ, *murmuring, grumbling, or complaining.*

3. (Verse 10) *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* This is the only New Testament use of the word χάρισμα (*charisma*) for *gift*, outside the writings of Paul. The emphasis in this verse is on the individual serving the individual *as each one has received* – *each one serves*.

4. (Verse 11) *Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God.* Literally: *if anyone speaks* [do so] *as the words of God.* This refers to the content of the message. Not that every one speaking has a prophecy from God but that his content would be something consistent with the Word of God.



Giving alms picture from www.dkimages.com

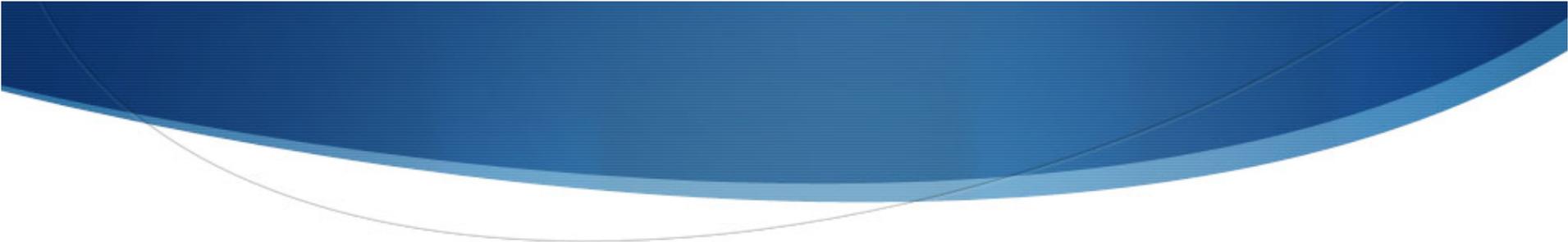
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5. (Verse 11) *whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies.* This is not meant to divide up people into speakers and servers but to say that all forms of service are to depend on the strength of God.

... so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. This purpose statement tells us that God the Father is glorified through Jesus Christ as He receives glory and dominion forever. The word $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\iota\nu$, *all, every, or the whole*, modifying $\delta\omicron\xi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\eta\tau\alpha\iota$, the *glory* of God, seems to indicate that there is no other way to glorify God except through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

In my opinion, the most difficult thing to understand in the New Testament is the apostle's declarations about the nearness of the end of the age. So we shall stop and look at that a bit.

The teaching of Jesus on this subject is much easier to follow. Although we cannot identify all the details, His statements about future prophetic events are straightforward and understandable. But the statements of the apostle are difficult. The first statement of 1 Peter 4:7 is a case in point. Peter says: Πάντων δὲ το τέλος ἤγγικεν, *But of all [things] the end is near*. Jesus never said anything like that. He told them to be ready, be alert, be waiting, but He also told them not to predict dates for His coming and that all the signs of the tribulation period must come first (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; Acts 1: 6-8). But the apostles spoke regularly of the end being near (Romans 13:11; Hebrews 9:26; James 5:8; 1 John 2:18).



What's in Peter's mind on this subject? Here he says: *The end of all things is near*. But he does not mean that he can figure out God's time of ending the world. In 2 Peter 3:3-4, he says:

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

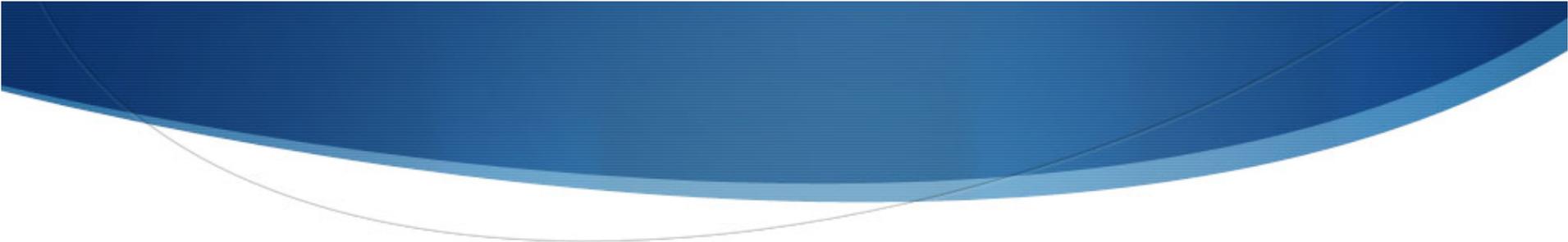
From these verses, we can conclude that for Peter *near* does not mean *soon*. Actually, he predicts a day far away from his day when people will be mocking the coming of Christ saying *ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning*. Peter goes on to explain *that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day* (2 Peter 3:8). So, for Peter, *near* could be tomorrow or thousands of years away.

Also, it is the end of all things Peter is talking about, not just the coming of Christ. He describes that in 2 Peter 3:12 as *the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!* So Peter looks all the way past the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and the Millennial Kingdom, to the final destruction of the world and says it is *near*.

As to the nearness of the end times, I suggest the New Testament authors had three things in mind:

1. The end of the world, that is, the time when God will bring about His prophetic events is **next**. It was *near* in the sense that nothing predicted in the Old Testament or by Christ needed to take place before these events happened. This Church Age we live in is the last age before God begins His time of judgment (often called *the day of the Lord* – 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10).



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2. We who live in this Church Age are to **be ready** as if this event is soon because we don't know when it is coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:50ff), but we know that we are in the last age before it is coming. The apostles are not playing games with us saying it is *near*. They are saying it is next, and the timing of next is unknown (*with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day* – 2 Peter 3:8), so next is also near. 2000 years = 2 days with God, and that's *near*.

 3. When Paul clarified the Rapture of the Church in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (which Christ first mentioned in John 14:1-3, and his half-brother James refers to in James 5:7-8), the idea of *soon* included the idea of **sudden**. The end time events included the Second Coming of Christ, preceded by certain Tribulation events, but also an appearing of Christ for His Church which was not preceded by any signs. That event was sudden, imminent, of an unknown time, and therefore always seen as *near*.

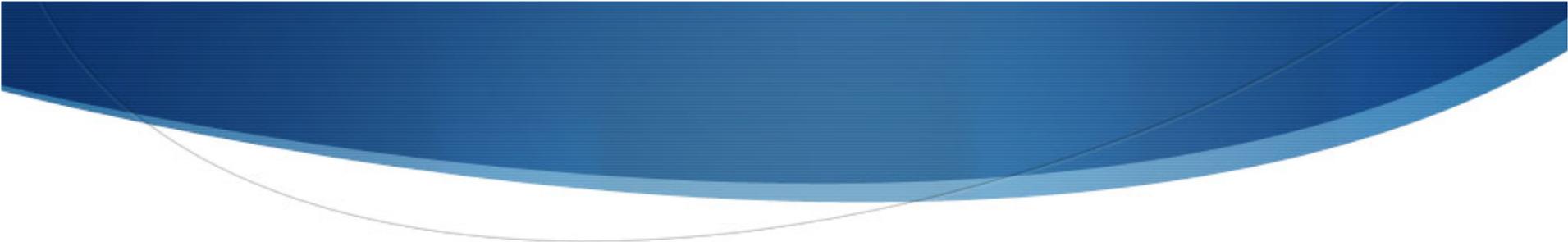
C. Suffering and Rewards – 1 Peter 4:12-19

1 Peter 4:12-13 *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.*

After telling them not to be surprised (which he said before), he uses a phrase which can be understood in two different ways. Literally, it reads: τῇ ἐν ὑμῶν πυρώσει, *the among you burning*. The two different interpretations are:

1. This is a metaphorical use of *burning* for general persecution as in 1:7.
2. This is a prediction of their martyrdom, as Christians were burned in Rome by Nero.

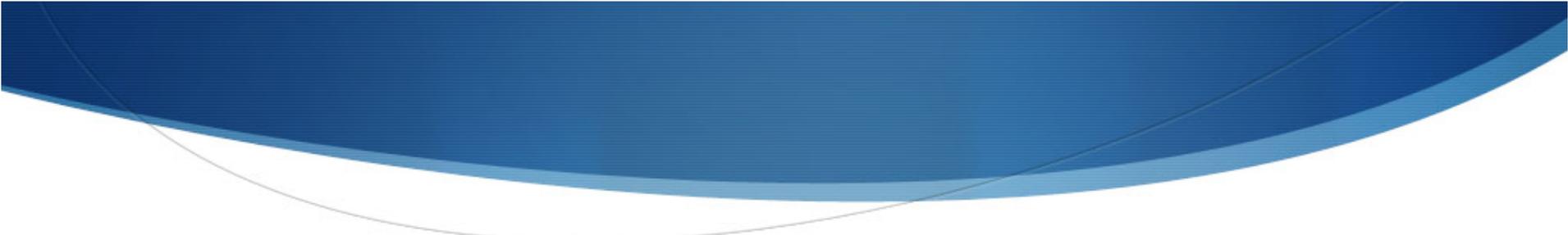
The second interpretation is because the burning of Rome and blaming it on the Christians was just before or just after the writing of 1 Peter. If this had already happened, it could be Peter had it in mind. But (as in chapter 1) the context is more about things which had already come upon them and ongoing things of daily living.



The next phrase: πρὸς πειρασμὸν ὑμῖν γινομένη, *for your testing comes*, again goes to motives for interpretation. The word πειρασμὸν can mean *temptation* or *testing*. A temptation tries to get you to sin and a testing tries to prove your faith. The event or situation may be the same, but since God does not tempt anyone (James 1), this is a testing. For the believer, there is no way to know if a particular event originates from God or Satan. But two things are clear:

- It is according to the sovereign plan of God, who does not test us beyond what we are able to endure, while providing a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- The response is to avoid sin and pursue the righteousness of Christ.

In verse 13, Peter ends the sentence telling them to rejoice because they have the opportunity for greater rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.



1 Peter 4:14 *If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

Blessed is the word meaning *happy*, used in the Sermon on the Mount. The verse is similar to 3:14, and both seem to refer to Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:11 (*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me*), in which case, it is definitely a blessing in heaven as a reward for suffering for Christ here.

The Spirit of glory and of God is most likely a reference to the Holy Spirit. The point is, the Holy Spirit has led them into a situation of suffering for Jesus which, therefore, results in heavenly rewards.

1 Peter 4:15 *Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler*

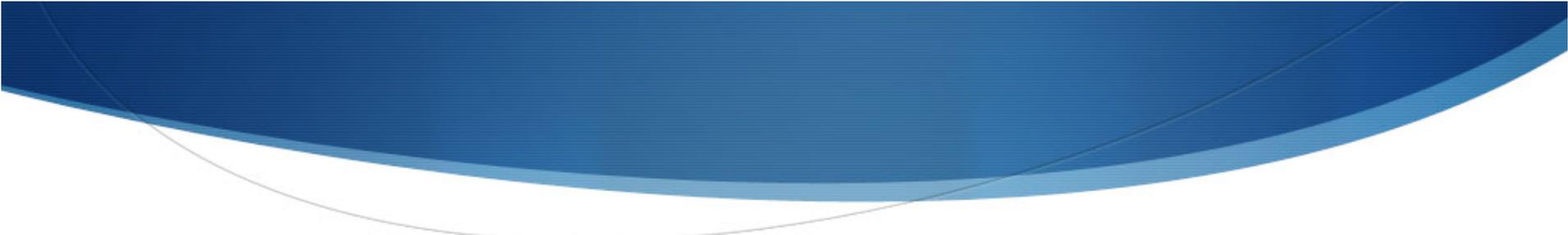
Peter's point is to emphasize the need to make sure their suffering was for doing the things of the Spirit of God. This is the same point Peter made in 3:17.

1 Peter 4:16 *but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.*

The point of this verse is obvious and a continuation of the theme Peter has been developing all through the chapter (since 3:13). The interesting thing here is the word Χριστιανός (*Christianos*) we translate as *Christian*. The word occurs three times in the Bible (here and in Acts 11:26 and 26:28). In Acts 11, we are told the word originated in Antioch. In Acts 26, King Agrippa told Paul he is almost convinced to become a Χριστιανός (*Christianos*). So it seems the word was becoming an acceptable label at that time. Originally, the movement was called “The Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22), apparently, after Christ’s statement *I am the way* in John 14:6.

1 Peter 4:17 *For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

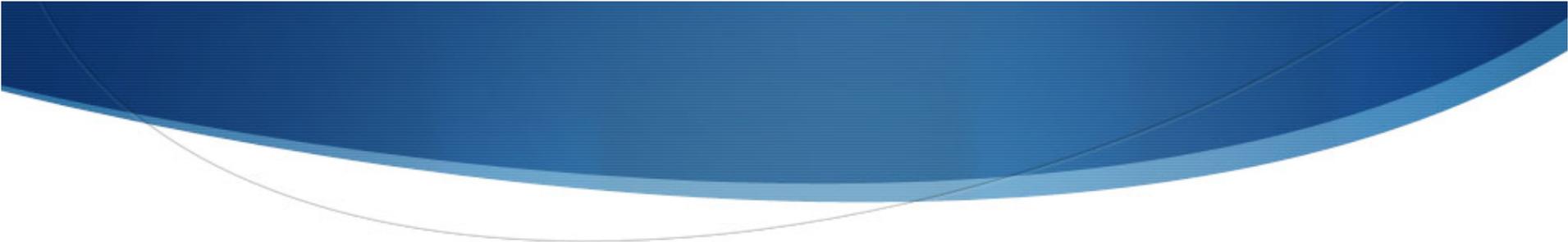
This verse begins with the phrase ὅτι [ὁ] καιρὸς τοῦ ἄρξασθαι τὸ κρίμα ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ θεοῦ, *Therefore [it is] the time (or season) to begin (or rule) judgment with (or from or by) the house of God.*



There are two ways to understand this phrase:

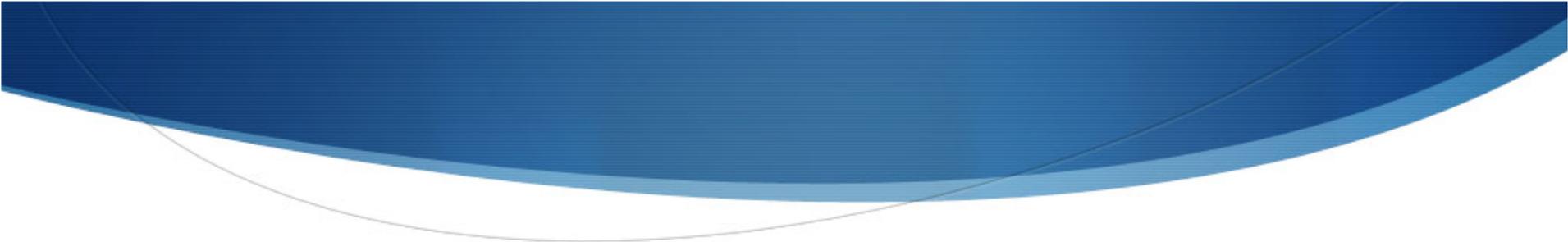
1. Most commentators understand this to mean that God will discipline His Church, and if He disciplines His church, how much more will He judge outsiders. And this may very well be correct. The context that follows this phrase is certainly about the judgment of God.
2. There are some words in the verse which suggest a different interpretation. If God is doing the judging of the Church, then why is this the *καιρός*, *time* or *season*, for judgment? The word *ἀπο* usually means *from* or *by*, so it sounds like the judgment comes *from the house of God*. Also, although all judgment is based upon the same character of the same God, the judgment (condemnation) of unbelievers has a very different purpose from the discipline (correction) of believers. The preceding context is also what believers do, not just what God does. So it is reasonable to interpret this as the Christians' discipline of one another.

Whichever view is correct, it is clear that Peter is pointing to the *κρίμα*, judgment according to the character of God. They were to judge themselves to be sure they were not suffering for sin, and God would judge their unbelieving persecutors by the same standard.



1 Peter 4:18 *“And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?”*

Next, Peter probably is referring to the Septuagint rendering of Proverbs 11:31 *Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.* But Peter applies the idea of the Proverb to eternal salvation. He makes an interesting point. Salvation is not easy. It can simply be received by faith, but it cost God a tremendous price. If God had to put Christ through the suffering of the cross, death, and separation from Himself to pay for the salvation of the righteous and to satisfy His justice, what is in store for the sinner?



1 Peter 4:19 *Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.*

This verse is set up as a command to those *who suffer according to the will of God*. The command is for them to παρατιθέσθωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν, *keep on taking it upon themselves* (the verb is a present, middle imperative) *to set their souls before God*. God here is called *a faithful Creator*. So the spiritual life of the believer is one of continually setting his soul before his Creator who is not like the fickle pagan gods but faithful to keep his own word and consistent with His own character.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

Sin causes suffering all by itself, because it runs contrary to the way God has made us. The other day I was mixing paint. Suppose I used my glasses to stir the paint? It would work, but then my glasses would suffer the consequences of being full of paint. Eventually, that would ruin my glasses because that is not what they were made for.



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Sin is that way. It works. It provides pleasures and solutions to problems, which are contrary to the way God made things. But those “solutions” eventually cause suffering. However, suffering for following the leading of the Holy Spirit, which is living a godly life and being a witness for Christ, will bring suffering from people of this world who have established a society where violating God’s laws is acceptable. Peter’s point is, make sure it is those people who are causing your suffering. Make sure it is not the violation of God’s laws which are causing your suffering.