

As we continue our study in 1 Peter, we conclude today the portion that we have been looking at for the past two weeks – a passage that began in 1 Peter 3:18 and concludes at 1 Peter 4:6. I would like to read again, 1 Peter 3:18-4:6 (READ).

We saw two weeks ago that the suffering of Christ was once and for all. We saw that all of the Old Testament sacrifices looked to the one final and perfect sacrifice for sins and that for those of us who believe, we are alive through the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead.

Then last week we saw that Christ preached to those who had departed, and the fact we can't come to a definitive conclusion as to who these people were and when this actually happened. As I said there were various interpretations, but no major doctrine of the Scriptures is in question.

But there was the example that the salvation of Noah in the ark was a type of baptism. We stated clearly that the waters of baptism do not save, but is symbolic of our union with Christ. We also saw, in conclusion that our Savior, following his ascension is now at the right hand of God, where he is waiting to come again in judgment.

As we begin chapter 4, we see that very important word – *Therefore* – and as I have said on other occasions, whenever we see the word therefore, we have to ask what is the therefore, there for!. So, I ask that question now. What is therefore, there for?

Generally, when we see the word “therefore” it refers to what the writer has stated before. In other words, as a result of what the writer has already written, he then states that because of this, we are to do or not do certain things. It is usually a concluding statement.

In this case, the same is true, as he refers to the suffering of Christ, and what it means. But in 1 Peter 4, Peter then emphasizes what he wants to teach us – that is, the pilgrims of the dispersion and us – by restating what he has already stated.

Look at what he says in 4:1 “*Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh ...*” Here Peter makes clear reference to what has been a major theme in the 1st three chapters of 1st Peter – that of the suffering of Christ and that we, as Christians will suffer also.

But it is because of the suffering of Christ that he then states that there are certain truths that must be evident – that is, certain behaviors and certain actions for those who have been the recipients of the sufferings of Christ – that is, those who have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord and who believe that he suffered and died for their sins.

Again, look at what he says... “*arm yourselves also with the same mind ...*” What Peter means by this is that we need to be ready to suffer as Christ suffered for our faith in Christ as Savior. There were those who suffered during the time that Peter wrote this letter. There are those who are still suffering simply for being a Christian. Just the other day there was a report of a Christian worker in Afghanistan who was executed by the Taliban simply for being a Christian.

Peter then says something that many have taken the wrong way: “*for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased*”

from sin...” Peter is not talking about sinless perfection – that is, once we have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord that we no longer sin. No, a definite, absolute no! We will still sin ... we will still sin until we meet the Lord in glory or until he returns.

No, what this phrase means is that we are identified with Christ in his sinlessness. Our Savior, while he did not sin, was tempted, as the Scriptures says, in all points that we were. As we read in Hebrews 4:15 *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* There is nothing that we have gone through or will go through that Christ cannot sympathize with us, because he has been there – and yet, without sin.

Now, what this phrase means for us – and for all Christians – is that because we have the Spirit of Christ within us, we no longer have to give in to the power of sin. Sin is not longer the controlling factor in our body.

We just need to consider what he says next: *“that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles; when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.”*

Here Peter is talking about the non-Christian – the Gentile – and describing what his life was like before he came to faith in Jesus Christ. Remember, this is nothing new. The Christian is to live his life different than the non-Christian, or as Peter says here, the Gentile.

Consider what the Apostle says in Romans 13:13: *“Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”*

There is to be distinction between the way that the Christian walks and the non-Christian, that is those who still give in to the works of the flesh as we read in Galatians 5:19-21: *“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

As Peter goes on he states that the world – the non-Christian world – thinks it strange if we don’t live the way that they do. Consider the fact that Hugh Hefner is a hero to the most of the world, or at least in the U.S ... that those who live, and they shall remain nameless – that those who live mocking the ways of God that he has revealed in the Scriptures are considered normal, while we who do not live that way are considered the strange ones.

Remember what we saw in 1 Peter 2:9 as he describes us: *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;”* I said then that a better translation for *His own special people* is that we are a peculiar people. As we do not follow the ways of the world, we are indeed peculiar.

This is exactly what Peter states about the pilgrims of the dispersion, which as we have seen includes us – *“In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.”* And not only do they think it strange or peculiar, they speak evil of us.

Think about those who stand up for the sanctity of human life – that life begins at conception, and that the taking of that life is wrong – we are not thought of well, to say the least. Look at the criticism that is heaped upon those who teach abstinence before marriage.

And think of those of us who believe that God created man and women – and that marriage is to be between a man and a woman, and that we believe that homosexuality is a sin. We are considered homophobes ... we are considered narrow ... we are considered as bigots — we are considered the peculiar and strange ones.

But God has His standards, and that is what we are to follow. We, as Christians, now do not have to follow the ways of the world ... they way of the non-Christian. We can, by the power of the Holy Spirit live as God wants us to live, not as the non-Christian – even if they speak evil of us.

However, all those who speak evil of us, and make fun of us will all have a surprise coming to them. One of my favorite bumper stickers says “If you live like there is no God, you’d better be right!” That is exactly what we have here, because as Peter goes on, he says that judgement is coming: *“They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”*

The Scriptures teach that us that we all must stand before the judgement seat of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says: *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*

Now, we know that as Christians – that is, those of us who have faith in Christ as Savior, we KNOW that he will be there to intercede on our behalf. He will make it known that he suffered and died for our sins. You see when God looks at us through Christ, He no longer sees our sin, but the perfect, sinless righteousness of Jesus Christ.

But for those who have rejected Christ as Savior they will have to pay for their sins and they are open to the wrath and judgement of God. The scriptures are clear as to their end – Matthew 25:31-34 makes it clear: *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:’”*

Those who have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord will be welcomed into the kingdom. But those who have not, will be sent to hell where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. As we read in Mark 9, and remember this is a reminder of how Jesus feels about sin we read: Mark 9:43-48: *“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.’ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire; “where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.”*

I think you get the picture, and remember one thing – while some, even in the Christian community want to deny the existence of hell, Jesus spoke more about hell than he did about heaven.

And we know that even those who are dead are without excuse, because as we read: *“For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”*

Again, this is one of those difficult passages to interpret, even among Bible-believing Christians. But the point is that even those who are dead are without excuse.

So what does this all mean for us? At its root it means that we are to live our lives in accord with what God has revealed in His Word. We do not have to follow the ways of the world because we have the Spirit of the living Christ within us.

Therefore, when we are tempted ... when we suffer for being a Christian we need to remember that we are not alone and that have the Spirit of Christ living within us that will enable us to resist temptation and to endure any suffering.