

A Petrine View of Believers' Suffering and Its Implications for the Contemporary Church: A Focus on 1 Peter 4:12–19

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Abstract

The prominent theme in 1 Peter is suffering because of being a Christian. Peter instructs Christians on how to respond to the inevitable reality of suffering facing the first-century church. According to him, Christian suffering is not a strange phenomenon to believers in Christ (4:12). He, therefore, encourages Christians under persecution in the Greco-Roman world to joyfully suffer as Christians and not as a result of wrongdoing (4:15–18). In their suffering, believers profoundly share in Christ's sufferings and anticipate the sharing of the promised glory to be revealed (4:13–14). The study uses the historical-critical method to explore the teaching of 1 Peter 4:12–19. In light of the impending judgment on all humanity, the believers are to trust God and continue to do good amidst their suffering (4:19). Peter's message of suffering is indispensable to the church today as it faces attacks from within and without.

Keywords: Trials, Believers, Suffering, Glory, Christ, Ashamed, Judgment, 1 Peter

Introduction

From time immemorial, humanity has struggled with the question of suffering. C. S. Lewis remarked, "I have never for one moment been in a state of mind to which even the imagination of serious pain was less than intolerable."¹ In the Bible, Job lamented while suffering and did not seem to comprehend the purpose of the suffering he endured.² He clung to hope and defended his innocence when viciously attacked by friends who condemned him

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 1940), iv.

² Job chapter 3 is a poetic description of Job's reaction to pain.

as a sinner (Job 6:8–30).³ This paper is about suffering for being a Christian. The persecution of Christians because of their faith should be a concern. For instance, in Kenya, eleven Christians were disembarked from a bus and killed for refusing to recite the Islamic Shahada.⁴ How should Christians respond? The message of 1 Peter 4:12–19 addresses how Christians can respond to suffering and hostilities. The exegetical method seeks to discover the text's meaning as the author intended.

Historical Background of 1 Peter

Petrine authorship of 1 Peter was universally accepted until nearly 200 years ago. However, in 1808, Herman Heimart Claudius questioned Petrine authorship.⁵ Since then, there have been debates about the authorship of the epistle.⁶ Daniel Arichea and Jobes uphold Petrine authorship of 1 Peter,⁷ but other scholars, like Donald P. Senior, argue that someone else other than Peter wrote the letter pseudonymously.⁸ However, internal evidence within the letter supports Petrine authorship. The author identified himself as Peter (1:1) and had witnessed the sufferings of Christ (5:1). That Peter knew Silvanus (1 Pet 5:12), who was once helpful in the delivery of another apostolic letter (Acts 15:22–23), strengthens the Petrine authorship. External evidence, particularly church tradition, supports Petrine authorship of 1 Peter. Church Fathers like Polycarp, Eusebius, and Ireneaus quoted and embraced the letter as Petrine.⁹

Erland Waltner views 1 Peter as a letter encouraging hope for Christians living in an oppressive environment.¹⁰ Arichea and Nida propose that the hostility towards the believers was from government authorities, pagan elements of society, or the members of the families of the Christian converts.¹¹ Most probably, the hostilities happened during the time of Nero (AD 54–68). The cult of the emperor required all citizens of the empire to pay homage to the

³ Kenneth L. Barker, *Zondervan NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984), 736-737.

⁴ Jordyn Pair, "11 Christians Pulled off Bus, Executed in Kenya for Failing to Recite Islamic Shahada," Accessed December 13, 2019, <https://disrn.com/news/11-christians-pulled-off-bus-executed-in-kenya-for-refusing-to-recite-islamic-shahada>.

⁵ John H. Elliot, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday & Co., 2000), 118.

⁶ Erland Waltner and J. Daryl Charles, *1–2 Peter, Jude*. (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1999), 17-18. The authors discuss reasons against Petrine authorship.

⁷ Daniel Arichea, *A Translator's Handbook on the First Letter from Peter* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1980), 2.

⁸ Donald Senior P and Daniel J Harrington, *1 Peter Jude and 2 Peter* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 4–7.

⁹ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, 1988, 22.

¹⁰ Erland Waltner and J. Daryl Charles, *1-2 Peter, Jude*. (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1999), 17–22.

¹¹ Arichea, *A Translator's Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, 1.

emperor.¹² Horrell observes: “Christians were largely in conformity to obeying the authorities, often alluding to Romans 13, but not to worship the emperor.” Their slogan was, “honor Caesar as Caesar, but worship only to God.”¹³ The Christians would undoubtedly resist the demand for the worship of Caesar. This resistance may have sparked and intensified persecution.

Although Selwyn argues that the persecution of Christians was “spasmodic and particular rather than organized on a universal scale, a matter of incidents rather than of policy.”¹⁴ However, the letter attests to the suffering because of being Christians (1 Peter 4:16) and that it was global (5:9). Although there was no official law prohibiting Christianity, the Christian faith was endangered.¹⁵ Furthermore, Peter was in Rome and may have been aware of what was happening in the empire. Besides, the suffering of thieves, murderers, evildoers, and meddlers (4:15) for their actions usually occurred in the legal system rather than sporadically.

When Peter wrote the letter, the believers had already suffered grief in the diverse trials (1:6–7). In addition, they were accused falsely of wrongdoing (2:12–20). The emphasis on suffering for good in 3:13–17 affirms the existence of suffering. The following section presents an exegesis of the selected text.

Exegesis of 1 Peter 4:12–19

1 Peter 4:12–19 is part of the larger section of 4:12–5:11. It is the body closing of the entire letter.¹⁶ The whole section addresses the trials of Christians in the ancient world.¹⁷ The main addresses Christians (4:16), also known as ὁ δίκαιος, the righteous ones (4:18).

Christian Suffering is Not a Strange Thing (v. 12)

Verse 12: Ἀγαπητοί, μὴ ξενίζεσθε τῇ ἐν ὑμῖν πυρώσει πρὸς πειρασμὸν ὑμῖν γινομένη ὡς ξένου ὑμῖν συμβαίνοντος.¹⁸

Translation: Beloved, do not think it strange because of the fiery trials among you that you are experiencing as if something strange were happening to you.¹⁹

¹² Christopher Bryley, ed., “Persecution and the ‘Adversary’ of 1 Peter 5:8,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 3 (2017): 85.

¹³ David G. Horrell, *1 Peter*, New Testament Guides (London, United: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008), 87.

¹⁴ Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), 55.

¹⁵ Christopher Bryley, ed. “Persecution and the ‘Adversary’ of 1 Peter 5:8,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 3 (2017): 87.

¹⁶ Duane Frederick Watson and Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 107.

¹⁷ Archibald M. Hunter, *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 12 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 85.

¹⁸ Greek Text based on Barbara Aland et al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, n.d.).

The adjective Ἀγαπητοί (beloved) is a vocative that demonstrates an affection for the believers. In 1 Peter, the word features six times (1:8, 22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8; 5:14). It was a common designation of the tender love of believers to one another, which affirmed: “familial love binding the community together.”²⁰ Peter used this word to show his genuine love for these believers, forming a solid backdrop for his message to them about suffering.²¹

The phrase μὴ ξενίζεσθε (do not think it strange) is a combination of the prohibitive μὴ and a present imperative ξενίζεσθε. It usually forbids the continuation of action already in progress. The imperative is perhaps an exhortative rather than a command, functioning as an encouragement for the believers.²² The use of πυρώσει does not refer to a literal fire; Wright remarks that this metaphor conjures images of the refiner’s fire; in this case, referring to God’s refining work.²³ The term describes removing dross from metal. Peter had alluded to faith purified through fire like gold (1 Peter 1:6–7). Watson and Callan think πειρασμὸν refers to a God-given test. However, in Luke 4:13, the temptation was from Satan. It was a temptation from an evil entity to dissuade Jesus from His mission. In 1 Peter 4:12, the devil tempts Christians to make them suffer and frustrate their commitment to Christ. Peter encourages believers not to be surprised at the fiery trials they are suffering, as though something strange was happening to them. Scriptures point out that suffering is inevitable for a believer (1 Thess 3:3; 1 Tim 3:12; 1 John 3:13). Christ also warned his disciples of suffering (John 15:18–21). As Hillyer summarizes, “Conversion does not bring exemption from troubles, though it does assure believers of divine assistance through troubles.”²⁴ Peter’s point in verse 12 is that suffering is not strange, and Christians should not be surprised by suffering. Next, Peter explored Christian suffering as sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Christian Suffering is Sharing in Christ’s Sufferings (vv. 13–14)

Text: Verses 13-14: ¹³ἀλλὰ καθὼς κοινωνεῖτε τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθήμασιν χαίρετε, ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ χαρῇτε ἀγαλλιώμενοι· ¹⁴εἰ ὀνειδίξεσθε ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ, μακάριοι, ὅτι τὸ τῆς δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἀναπαύεται

¹⁹ The translations of the selected passage are mine.

²⁰ Duane Frederick Watson and Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 109.

²¹ Prior, Peter focused on what might possibly befall Christians. Here, however, he ponders practically on the things that would cause real pain to the believers. See Homrighausen, Elmer G. *Exposition of 1 Peter*, 142.

²² The function of the present imperative preceded with μὴ is prohibitory. It call calls for a stop in an action that is already ongoing.

²³ Francis Wright Beare, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London; New York: Macmillan; St. Martin’s, 1964), 164.

²⁴ Norman Hillyer, Hendrickson Publishers, and Authentic Media, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Peabody; Carlisle: Hendrickson Publishers: Paternoster Press, 1992), 130.

Translation: ¹³But as you partake in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

The adversative conjunction ἀλλὰ (but) introduces a proper Christian reaction to suffering. As believers κοινωνεῖτε²⁵ τοῖς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθήμασιν (partake in the suffering of Christ), they are called to χαίρετε²⁶ (rejoice). Beare remarks that a new bond of κοινωνία is experienced through the endurance of persecution.²⁷ Enduring persecution as believers demonstrates that our union is with Christ. The attitude of joy amidst suffering is also taught in Rom 5:3–5, “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”²⁸

The reason for rejoicing is ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ χαρῇτε ἀγαλλιώμενοι (so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation). The conjunction ἵνα (so that) holds the resultative force. The reason for rejoicing in suffering was because of the depth of unity they could enjoy in Christ when His glory is revealed.²⁹ Peter’s idea of rejoicing in suffering in order to share in the glory of Christ seems to draw from a Jewish worldview (Dan 7:20–23; Joel 2:2, and Rev 2:10). The future consummation of triumph and glory for Christians, just as Christ triumphed and was glorified, inspires reason for rejoicing in suffering. Achtemeier sees τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ as also referring to the good things that the Christian will experience when Christ returns.³⁰ The call to joyfully suffer in the present time is strengthened by the hope of future rejoicing and triumph over all suffering.³¹

²⁵ Taking κοινωνεῖτε as durative present, since their fellowship with Christ started before the writing of this letter, and continued to the time of Peter’s writing.

²⁶ The present imperative verb χαίρετε is a customary present. By use of the imperative form, Peter was exhorting them to rejoice by not only focusing on the current painful experience they are facing, but continue doing so in the ensuing painful experiences. The imperative may as well be a command to obey.

²⁷ Beare, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 164.

²⁸ Crossway Bibles, *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

²⁹ This is a recurrent theme in the New Testament. See Rom 8:17, Phil 3:10-12 and Heb 10:32-34. The depth of fellowship with Christ subsumes all the suffering, and looks forward to relief and eternal rest from suffering.

³⁰ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 307.

³¹ Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle General of Peter: An Introductory and Commentary* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1988), 179.

Verse 14 opens with the first-class conditional conjunction εἰ³² that usually treats the action in focus as fact. Believers were indeed being insulted because of the name of Christ. The verb ὀνειδίζεσθε also means to ‘revile’ and has an element of anger.³³ Elliot sees it as verbal abuse and public shaming.³⁴ The insults were not as a result of what the believers did. Instead, the phrase ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ (in that name of Christ) shows the reason for the insults. Because of being associated with Christ, a vital relationship existed between the believer and Christ Jesus the Lord. While Christians prided over the name of Christ, their oppressors treated it as downright degrading.

By use of μακάριοι (he is blessed), Peter contended that believers who were insulted on account of Christ were blessed.³⁵ Jesus Himself affirmed the blessedness of those who would suffer because of Him (Matt 5:10–11). Peter thus showed that their suffering was evidence that God truly blessed them and honored them to be associated with Christ. The particle ὅτι (because) introduces the reason the believers were blessed: ὅτι τὸ τῆς δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἀναπαύεται (because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you). The two neuter definite articles τὸ at the beginning of each of the two phrases share the one neuter noun, πνεῦμα, in the second phrase. There is an ellipsis in the first phrase where the neuter noun πνεῦμα is left out. The two phrases could have been written fully as τὸ τῆς δόξης [πνεῦμα] καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα, where the καὶ would be taken as indicating apposition or exegesis, that is, τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα (the second phrase) is explaining further or giving another meaning of the first phrase, that is, τὸ τῆς δόξης [πνεῦμα]. Senior considers this construction a hendiadys.³⁶ It appears that the words καὶ τὸ were added to the original.³⁷ Literally, the phrase would read, ‘of glory and of God, the Spirit.’ The noun πνεῦμα (the Spirit) is modified by both ‘the glory’ and ‘God.’ The Spirit of glory is the Spirit of God and, therefore, can be properly rendered as “the Spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God.” The rendering can also be ‘the glorious Spirit of God.’ Matthew Henry observes, “the Spirit of

³² Ngewa, Samuel, “Intermediate Greek,” July 2016, 53. The εἰ must be viewed in light of the context, which clearly shows that these believers will not escape being chided and even hurt. See Senior and Harrington, *1 Peter Jude and 2 Peter*, 128.

³³ Joseph H Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*. (Baker Book House, 1994).

³⁴ John Hall Elliott and SCM Press (Londyn), *A Home from the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 774.

³⁵ The nominative μακάριοι, literally, blessings(!) serves an adjectival function, and is rendered here as a predicate nominative, affirming a state of blessedness. Peter’s audience were truly blessed to be partakers of the suffering.

³⁶ Donald Senior P. and Daniel J Harrington, *1 Peter Jude and 2 Peter* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 129.

³⁷ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 308.

God is also the Spirit of glory, that will carry you through all, bring you off gloriously, and prepare and seal you up for eternal glory.”³⁸

The believers were blessed because, in their being insulted, they bore Christ’s name, and God was with them by His Spirit. God’s glory among the believers, by the indwelling Spirit of God, was the true indicator of blessedness. The phrase ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἀναπαύεται³⁹ (rests upon you) affirms that in their suffering, God’s glorious Spirit was upon them. Grudem considers the presence of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the believers.⁴⁰ Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be present with them in their trials (Mark 13:11). Schreiner rightly observes, “Believers who suffer are blessed because they are now enjoying God’s favor, tasting even now the wonder of the glory to come and experiencing the promised Holy Spirit.”⁴¹

Believers Should Not Suffer as a Result of Wrongdoing, But as Christians (vv. 15–16)

Text: Verse 15–16: μὴ γάρ τις ὑμῶν πασχέτω ὡς φονεὺς ἢ κλέπτης ἢ κακοποιὸς ἢ ὡς ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος· εἰ δὲ ὡς Χριστιανός, μὴ αἰσχυνέσθω, δοξαζέτω δὲ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦτοῦ.

Translation: But let not any of you suffer as a murderer or thief or evildoer or as a troublesome meddler. If, however, [anyone suffers] as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him keep glorifying God.

Not Suffering as Wrongdoers (vs. 15)

Peter distinguished between suffering for being a Christian and suffering because of one’s sinful actions. He adjured the Christians, μὴ γάρ⁴² τις ὑμῶν πασχέτω ὡς (But let not any of you suffer as, v. 15). The adverb μὴ is usually prohibitory, but it is properly viewed here as having an exhortative force. Yet, by the present imperative also, although the sense is captured better by an aorist subjunctive verb, it is possible that he was urging the believers not to begin doing wrong things that would bring their suffering. Muriithi states, “The only good reason for suffering is to suffer as a Christian.”⁴³

³⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible.*, vol. 6 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 173.

³⁹ The verb ἀναπαύεται is here taken as a static present.

⁴⁰ Grudem, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, 179.

⁴¹ Schreiner, Thomas R. *1, 2 Peter, Jude. Vol. 37.* (USA: B & H Publishing Group, 2003), 223.

⁴² Although γάρ is usually translated as “for,” I have translated μὴ γάρ as “but let,” to contextually remain consistent with the contrast that Peter emphasized between 4:14 and 4:15.

⁴³ Muriithi, 1 Peter, in *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 1523.

Peter listed four evils that should not be the source of suffering experienced by a Christian: φονεὺς (a murderer), ἡ κλέπτης (a thief), ἡ κακοποιὸς (an evildoer)⁴⁴ ἢ ὥς ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος (or as a troublesome meddler).⁴⁵ The first three are introduced by ὥς, forming a syntactical unit, and the last vice is set apart by ἢ ὥς so that it somehow stands apart, though equal to the first three. A Christian should not be a murderer (φονεὺς), one who takes away the life of another human being (Exo 20:15; 21:12–14; Num 35:30; Matt 19:18; Rom 13:9; Jas 2:11). The Greco–Roman law also prohibited murder, and the perpetrator would suffer for it.⁴⁶ Justice was known to follow murderers (Acts 28:4).

Second, a believer was not to be ἡ κλέπτης (a thief). The Bible forbids thievery (Exo 20:14; 1 Cor 6:10; Eph 4:28). Thieves and the wicked people will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Third, the word ἡ κακοποιὸς (an evildoer) occurs only in 1 Peter.⁴⁷ This adjective, meaning malefactor or evildoer, mainly occurs where there is a contrast between evildoers and those who do what is good (Luke 6:9; Mark 3:14). Peter had already given a directive concerning wrongdoing and urged for good deeds (2:12, 3:17). The goal seems to be a warning about general sinfulness. The New International Version (NIV) translates this as “any other kind of criminal.” Bryley sees the use of ‘evildoer’ as an understatement because of too much emphasis on etymology. He thinks that some Christians were criminals.⁴⁸ This could have been true, but Peter was specifically addressing a hypothetical situation, as reflected in 1 Peter 2:20. The list of criminal activities could be endless, and this word provides all.

The last vice, ἡ ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος, occurs only here in the New Testament and poses some difficulty in translating it. It has mostly been rendered as “a troublesome meddler”⁴⁹ to implicate one who interferes with other people’s affairs. Watson and Callan point out the Roman hatred for anyone who interfered in the affairs of others. They suppose Christians may have understood themselves “as the guardians of public morality in the fashion of the

⁴⁴ The adjective κακοποιὸς would apply to a wide range of sinful practices. NIV renders it as “any other kind of criminal.”

⁴⁵ Charles E. B Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 120. This word, ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος is only used once in the NT, and has difficulty placing exact meaning on it.

⁴⁶ Jobes, *1 Peter.*, 289.

⁴⁷ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 310.

⁴⁸ Bryley, “Persecution and the “Adversary” of 1 Peter 5:8,” 88.

⁴⁹ Watson and Callan, Jobes and Achtemeier all render it as such. Another possible translation is “busybody,” which closely relates to meddler.

cynics, who thought they should oversee others.”⁵⁰ Jobes sees meddling as one possible cause of suffering among Christians, which prompted Peter to address it.⁵¹

Suffering as a Christian (vs. 16)

In verse 16, Peter discusses suffering ὡς Χριστιανός (as a Christian).⁵² The word Χριστιανός occurs twice in the book of Acts. Believers were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26), and King Agrippa used it while trying Paul (Acts 26:28). The name comes from Christ, following a tradition of describing followers by the name of their leader.⁵³ Before this, believers may not have called themselves by this name, which outsiders regarded as “a cause of condemnation and shame.”⁵⁴ Instead, believers were called ἀδελφοί (brothers, Rom 1:13), μαθητῶν (disciples, Acts 6:1), and ἁγίοις (saints, 1 Cor 1:2). Peter’s use of Χριστιανός may have officially started its use among believers. The term was possibly already being used positively by the time Peter wrote the epistle. Under Ignatius, followers of Jesus Christ were called Christians by the second century.⁵⁵

The contrast between ‘being involved’ in the listed vices and ‘being a Christian’ indicates that they were all treated equally in society. Being a Christian was a crime, just like murder. For example, Pliny the Younger (AD 63/64-113) requested guidance from Emperor Trajan (53-117 AD) on punishing those accused of being Christians.⁵⁶ Pliny punished Christians for what he termed as stubbornness, “regardless of the content of what they believed.”⁵⁷ Bryley agrees that “simply being named a Christian was enough to incur harassment and persecution.”⁵⁸

Peter encouraged the suffering Christians μὴ αἰσχυνέσθω (not to be ashamed). By employing μὴ and the present imperative αἰσχυνέσθω, this prohibition construction affirms that the believers felt shame. The idea of αἰσχυνέσθω (shame) is feeling terrible to the point of recanting one’s faith. The treatment the believers received for being Christians made some of them coil back, even turning away from the faith. Later in the early centuries, in one of the letters written around 112 AD, Pliny referred to “Christians who had recanted even twenty-

⁵⁰ Watson and Callan, *First and Second Peter*, 111.

⁵¹ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 289.

⁵² Taking Χριστιανός as a subject nominative.

⁵³ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 109.

⁵⁴ Horrell, *1 Peter*, 90.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁶ “Biblical Literature - The First Letter of Peter,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature>.

⁵⁷ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 314.

⁵⁸ Bryley, “Persecution and the “Adversary” of 1 Peter 5:8,” 90.

some years earlier.”⁵⁹ Jobes argues that those suffering thought this was an ill-founded faith to offend authorities.”⁶⁰ Shame accompanied with recanting may have seemed attractive. The apostle Paul made a personal declaration of not being ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16).

Instead of being ashamed, Peter urged the believer to δοξαζέτω τὸν θεὸν (glorify God). As often as suffering would come their way, believers were to take it as an opportunity to glorify God, which is “ascribing honor to Him, acknowledging Him as to His being, attributes, and acts.”⁶¹ In this way, their focus would be on how God would be honored in it. To glorify God also carries the idea of confession of faith.⁶²

Glorifying God is executed ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τούτῳ⁶³ (in that name). The name in reference here is ‘Christ,’ referred back to by the anaphoric use of the article τῷ. Believers relate with τὸν θεὸν through Christ (1 Peter 3:16; 5:10). Thus, they must remain Christian both in conviction and conduct.

Judgment of Christians (vs. 17)

Text: 17 ὅτι ὁ καιρὸς τοῦ ἄρξασθαι τὸ κρίμα ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ θεοῦ· εἰ δὲ πρῶτον ἀφ’ ἡμῶν, τί τὸ τέλος τῶν ἀπειθούντων τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίῳ;

Translation: Because [it is] time for judgment to begin with the household of God. And if it starts with us, what will be the outcome for those disobeying the gospel of God?

In this verse, the author reflects on God’s calendar: the time of judgment had begun with the house of God (v. 17). The causal conjunction ὅτι (*because*) introduced the reason for the trials (the judgment). The καιρὸς (time) speaks about the opportune time “when the purpose of God is brought to consummation.”⁶⁴ It introduces a season in which the envisaged τὸ κρίμα (judgment) had (already) begun.⁶⁵ Judgment was to start from οἴκου τοῦ θεοῦ (household of God). The dual metaphor refers to the church as “the spiritual house of God” and “a household of God.”⁶⁶ The Christian fraternity is God’s household (Eph 2:19–20; 1

⁵⁹ Karen H Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 290.

⁶¹ W. E. Vine and William Jr White, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Co, 1985), 437.

⁶² Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 314. See also Romans 1:21; 15:6, that relate glorifying God with a confession of faith.

⁶³ The Dative ὀνόματι is treated here as a dative of sphere. A Christian ought to suffer with the convictions of being a believer in Christ, and conducting oneself as such.

⁶⁴ Beare, *The first epistle of St. Peter.*, 169.

⁶⁵ Here, τοῦ ἄρξασθαι is taken as a constative aorist. It points out to the beginning of great judgment, which will (and does) continue to the Last great day of Judgment. Applied to believers, among whom Peter notes that it begins, it is a continuing purging process. It is certainly true that the verb also carries a proleptic nuance. It views the judgment that commenced as something that will certainly happen, and now the beginning spoken of is a “birth-pang.”

⁶⁶ Watson and Callan, *First and Second Peter*, 112.

Tim 3:15). Also, because the church is the bearer of truth, Peter cautioned believers not to be evildoers and get deserved punishment.

The first part of verse 17 is from Isaiah 10:10–12. This prophecy, alongside others (Ezek 9:6; Mal 3:1–6), depicts God’s cleansing of His household before the rest of society. Believers belong to God, who allows judgment. Earlier, Peter alluded to God refining His people through suffering (1 Peter 1:6–8).⁶⁷

This judgment does not refer to the eternal condemnation of the believers. Instead, it refers to purging the believers, urging godly living, and confronting believers living in sin. Achtemeier rightly observes that the suffering of the Christians is not part of the final judgment, but contrast is drawn between real judgment for wrongdoing at the Last Day compared to the current suffering for being Christian.⁶⁸ Why would God use pagan entities to bring about His eschatological reality? Bechtler writes, “Paradoxically, the hostility of the larger society toward Christians (4:16) is here symbolized as God’s judgment, and the difference between Christians and non-Christians is pictured... not as a categorical distinction but as a difference of degree.”⁶⁹ Peter’s point was that God uses the suffering of believers to purge them, and in this sense, judgment had begun in His house. What about non-believers? That is what Peter turns to in verse 17b.

Judgment of Non-Believers (v. 17b)

If judgment begins with Christians, Peter wondered, τί τὸ τέλος τῶν ἀπειθούντων τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίῳ; (What will be the outcome for those disobeying the gospel of God?) The interrogative τί applies force to the question. Peter shudders at the resultant judgment that will befall the heathen, described as τῶν ἀπειθούντων⁷⁰ (the disobedient). Their disobedience is about τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίῳ (the gospel of God), that is, the good news of the kingdom of God (Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thess 2:2, 8–9). The suffering would be far greater than what Christians experience. Their punishment does not draw from momentary rebellion against the gospel but intentional and long-term rejection of the truth.⁷¹ Achtemeier rightly observes, “Christians facing situations where denial of their faith could appear to alleviate

⁶⁷ Norman Hillyer, Hendrickson Publishers, and Authentic Media, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude* (Peabody; Carlisle: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 133.

⁶⁸ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 315.

⁶⁹ Steven Richard Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 145.

⁷⁰ I take the participle τῶν ἀπειθούντων as a genitive of comparison since it is a contrast between the believers and those who are not responsive to the word of God. The attributive use of the participle τῶν ἀπειθούντων is further treated as a durative present, to imply that the disobedience to the gospel was not an event more than a lifestyle. The unbelievers could not accept the good news of Jesus Christ in the immediate context and thereafter. This incessant unbelief would attract the damnation echoed by Peter.

⁷¹ Many other New Testament texts bring this out. Consider 2 Thess. 1:8; 2:9–12.

their suffering, that such denial will in fact only guarantee that their eventual end will involve suffering far worse than any they must now endure.”⁷²

Text: Verse 18: καὶ εἰ ὁ δίκαιος μόλις σῶζεται, ὁ ἀσεβὴς καὶ ἁμαρτωλὸς ποῦ φανεῖται;

Translation: And if the righteous is saved with difficulty, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?

Peter quotes Proverbs 11:31:

If the righteous receive their due on earth,
how much more the ungodly and the sinner!
(NIV, 1984)

Although this text in the LXX addresses the earthly life,⁷³ Peter applied it to the end time. D.A. Carson observes that the OT context does not consider God’s judgment as relaxed even for the righteous, who have to bear temporal judgments, much less the wicked, who will experience the full severity of it.⁷⁴ Peter’s use of the first-class conditional clause καὶ εἰ ὁ δίκαιος μόλις σῶζεται seems misplaced when referring to the righteous being *saved*. Textually, the LXX notably replaces “in the earth” with μόλις, here rendered as “with difficulty.”⁷⁵ The word σῶζεται (saved) here connotes one being delivered from pain, not necessarily of judgment, but more appealingly, trouble.⁷⁶ Achtemeier sees the salvation of a righteous man in a redemptive sense and asserts that it is difficult.⁷⁷ It seems unlikely, except if Christians renounced their faith in the face of suffering. The conditional clause states this as a fact. It is difficult to insulate believers from suffering. The use of μόλις (hardly) in verse 18 emphasizes the difficulty. What about the non-believer? Comparatively, the depth of peril the unrighteous would have to undergo, according to Peter, is unparalleled.

Peter mentioned ὁ ἀσεβὴς (the ungodly) and καὶ ἁμαρτωλὸς (and the sinner) as those who would suffer. These two refer to the same person.⁷⁸ The ungodly (ὁ ἀσεβὴς) refers to one who is “destitute of reverential awe towards God, condemning God, impious...”⁷⁹ The word is similar to 2 Peter 2:5, where God judged the ungodly people in Noah’s time. The

⁷² Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 316.

⁷³ The LXX’s use of μόλις σῶζεται makes it easy for Peter to look at it eschatologically.

⁷⁴ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2007), sec. 1 Peter.

⁷⁵ Beale and Carson, 1 Peter 4:18.

⁷⁶ Taking σῶζεται as an iterative present. The saving is from suffering from time to time, based on the conduct of the believers, and not as redemption from sins. Otherwise, it will imply that salvation is by works, which is unscriptural.

⁷⁷ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 317.

⁷⁸ This seems to follow the Granville Sharp Rule because of the connection between the two nominative nouns with the καὶ. The implication is that Peter could be referring to the same person.

⁷⁹ Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

phrase καὶ ἁμαρτωλὸς (and the sinner) explains someone especially wicked. One might say that both ἀσεβῆς and ἁμαρτωλὸς are synonyms focusing on gross rebellion against God. There is some difficulty in how to render ποῦ φανεῖται,⁸⁰ whether the emphasis is on appearing or becoming.

Nevertheless, it seems proper to conclude that the focus is on *what will become of the wicked*. The force of ποῦ φανεῖται suggests the inevitable perishing of sinners and the ungodly in judgment.⁸¹ Therefore, the argument of verse 18 contrasts with the lesser-to-greater; believers' current suffering is too small compared to the final judgment of unbelievers⁸² when Christ's glory shall be revealed.

Suffering Christians Should Trust God's Faithfulness and Do Good (v. 19)

Text: Verse 19: ὥστε καὶ οἱ πάσχοντες κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ πιστῷ κτίστη παρατιθέσθωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν ἐν ἀγαθοποιίᾳ

Translation: Therefore, those suffering according to the will of God should entrust their souls to the faithful Creator in doing good.

Verse 19 closes the pericope. Peter returns to the present. By use of the conjunction ὥστε (therefore), he offers advice to οἱ πάσχοντες (those suffering). As a circular letter, it could also address those who would later have to bear the pain of suffering.⁸³ Also, οἱ πάσχοντες portrays suffering that was not touching every person individually. This rendering would find great support among the advocates of partial persecution of the believers in the Roman empire,⁸⁴ although even where the suffering of believers was widespread, it might be more accurate to imagine that a few escaped the suffering.

Only those suffering κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ (according to the will of God) were Peter's focus. Those who have had a redemptive mission patterned their lives after Christ.⁸⁵ Jesus Christ also suffered according to the will of God, not for any wrongdoing (Matt 26:42). Jobes rightly notes that "persecution sorts out those who are truly Christ's from those who are not."⁸⁶

⁸⁰ The verb φανεῖται is a deliberative future. Peter wonders the weight of what will befall such a person. It will unbearable!

⁸¹ Thayer, *Thayer's Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁸² Watson and Callan, *First and Second Peter*, 112.

⁸³ Watson and Callan, *First and Second Peter*, 10.

⁸⁴ Travis B. Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter: Differentiating and Contextualizing Early Christian Suffering* (Leiden, Netherlands: BRILL, 2012), 4–5.

⁸⁵ Donald Senior P and Daniel J Harrington, *1 Peter Jude and 2 Peter* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 133.

⁸⁶ Jobes, *1 Peter*, 245.

Christians suffering according to the will of God were to entrust their souls to the faithful Creator. The imperative verb *παρατιθέσθωσαν* in its middle voice means to commend oneself to another for protection or safety.⁸⁷ In times of trial, believers were entreated to commit themselves to the all-powerful God who would faithfully deliver them through their suffering.

Further, Peter admonishes Christians to demonstrate how much they had entrusted their hearts to God by doing good. Presumably, Peter may have been following the exhortation of Christ that persecuted Christians should love their enemies, do them good, bless them and pray for their persecutors (Luke 6:27–31). Achtemeier understands good works as the good done within the Christian community,⁸⁸ but since it is left open, it is reasonable to think that it applies to all society. Doing good as Christians attracted attacks from non-believers. The exhortation to continue doing good did not promise that things would become better. Williams makes an important observation:

...rather than fixing the problem, proper Christian conduct will only make it worse. In other words, the good works of Christians receive simultaneous positive and negative responses: to God, such acts are praiseworthy, but to the non-believers, they are a cause of hostility. The exhortation would then be to continue “doing good” despite the persecution that would inevitably ensue, all the while trusting that God’s response was of much greater importance.⁸⁹

Verse 19 calls believers to persevere in doing the will of God and doing good. The promise Peter gives is that God is faithful.

Application of the Study

This article has examined suffering for being a Christian. Painful suffering was a prevailing reality among Peter’s audience. Paul encourages them not to consider such trials as strange but as part of the life they have been called to live. They should also not be ashamed because the name of Jesus Christ is a badge of blessing and honor. Peter urged them to consider their suffering a privilege of sharing in Christ’s sufferings and that this suffering affirmed their blessedness because of the glorious Holy Spirit upon them. In Africa, Christian suffering is mostly treated negatively. The health and wealth preaching, which supposes these two as signs of blessedness, is partly responsible for explaining the misunderstanding.”⁹⁰ But real

⁸⁷ Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

⁸⁸ Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 317

⁸⁹ Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter*, 265.

⁹⁰ Bernard Alwala, “The Fate of Prosperity Gospel in Kenya,” *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion* 2, no. 1 (May 14, 2020): 13, <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-5370>.

suffering for one's faith happens. For example, the eleven Christians in Kenya that were disembarked from a bus and killed for refusing to recite the Islamic Shahada showed unique commitment to the faithful Lord.⁹¹ Also, on 2nd April 2015, gunmen, believed to belong to the Al-Shabaab militia attacked Garissa University in Kenya, killing 147 students and injuring 79 before detonating themselves. Those mainly annihilated were Christian students in a morning prayer fellowship.⁹² Their witness speaks highly of being associated with Christ in life and death.

Further, depending on contexts, Christians suffer from hatred, exclusion, insults, and rejection, like Christ (Matt. 5:11-12); in such cases, believers should look up to Christ for strength and guidance. For example, Open Doors,⁹³ the organization that serves the persecuted church around the world, has observed that converts from Islam in parts of Kenya have often suffered rejection, being castigated by their families, and are constantly on the verge of starvation.⁹⁴

Finally, Peter challenged the suffering Christians to beware of suffering from wrongdoing like stealing, murder, or even interfering with other people's affairs. Such suffering amounts to nothing. More importantly, Peter looked forward to the return of Christ when God would judge the wicked. During this eschatological moment, believers' suffering would be over, and their persecutors would be judged severely for disobeying the gospel. Thus, Peter urges believers to continue doing good and entrust themselves to God, who faithfully watches over them. Believers in the church need to be equipped and encouraged to endure and be joyful amidst suffering.

Conclusion

The paper addressed the issue of suffering for being a Christian in 1 Peter 4:12–19. Peter argued that suffering as a Christian is not a strange phenomenon; instead, it is part and parcel of the Christian calling. Suffering because of being a Christian involves sharing in Christ's sufferings, in which case Christians are to rejoice (vs. 13) and consider it a blessing. The joy is anchored on God's faithfulness and hope in the promised end when evil is defeated.

⁹¹ Pair, "11 Christians Pulled off Bus, Executed in Kenya for Failing to Recite Islamic Shahada."

⁹² BBC News. "Garissa University College Attack in Kenya: What Happened?" *BBC News*. Last modified June 19, 2019. Accessed December 13, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48621924>.

⁹³ A Christian Organization that serves to strengthen the persecuted church around the world.

⁹⁴ Open Doors USA, "Kenya," *Open Doors USA* (blog), accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/kenya/>.

The letter urges believers not to suffer because of wrongdoing but as Christians (vv. 15–18). It points out that suffering as a murderer, thief, evildoer, or even as a meddler is not suffering for Christ (v. 15). As they suffer because of their identity in Christ, Christians are encouraged not to be ashamed (v. 16). Their suffering is part of God's judgment which had started in the house of God (v. 17). God's severe, eternal judgment would come upon non-believers because they disobeyed the gospel of God (v. 18). Therefore, suffering Christians are urged to entrust themselves to the faithful Creator, who delivers. In the meantime, Christians are challenged to keep doing good (vs.19). The message of 4:12–19 is relevant to contemporary Christians and the church as they face a hostile world.

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