

## “PARTICIPATING IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST”

1 Peter 4

This chapter is from a letter the Apostle Peter wrote to Christians driven out of their homes and their homeland by persecution. They were scattered to various countries and provinces of the Roman Empire. The pain of persecution was compounded by perplexity. Why? Who was I hurting? Why am I being persecuted unjustly? I didn't deserve this! Peter tries to comfort and encourage them. The high point of his explanation of why this happened to them is to say that in suffering for Christ we participate in the sufferings of Christ. In living for Christ we participate in His sufferings.

### 1.) We No Longer Live To Satisfy Our Sinful Human Desires

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 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. (1 Peter 4:1-3 NKJV)

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we are not only choosing forgiveness of sins and everlasting life, we are choosing to die to sin and live to do God's will.

knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. (Romans 6:6 NKJV)

Even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, we were participating in the sufferings of Christ. We were earning wrath and punishment from God for our sins of dissipation and detestable indulgences and for our sins of jealousy, gossiping, lying, backbiting, coveting, fraud, and hundreds of sins that may not seem sinful to us. It was our sins that Jesus took upon Himself on the cross. Our sins caused Christ to suffer. We were participants in His sufferings even then.

## 2.) We Participate In The Sufferings of Christ By Loving Our Brothers And Sisters In Christ.

There are two reasons that this is so: First, love brings suffering. When you open yourself in love to someone, you also make yourself vulnerable to being hurt by that person. Jesus suffered when "...many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.", when Peter rebuked Him, when the disciples quarreled about who would be greatest among them, when Judas betrayed Him, when Peter denied Him, when His own people screamed, "Crucify Him. We will not have this man to rule over us.", and when His own disciples at first did not believe that He was risen from the dead. When we love we will suffer. The word "passion" is used to mean "love" or to mean "suffering."

Second, if we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, they will share their sufferings with us. We will share our sufferings with them. In exile on the isle of Patmos, John was conscious of the persecutions of others.

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 1:9 NKJV)

Paul explains in the beginning of 2 Corinthians that one of God's purposes in ordaining us to suffer is that we can share the comfort we receive from God with others who are suffering.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation. (2 Corinthians 1:3-7 NKJV)

### 3.) When We Suffer, According To God's Will, As A Christian, We Participate In The Sufferings Of Christ.

Peter tells Christians not to be surprised at the painful trials they are suffering as though something strange were happening to them. They were caught unaware when they had to suffer for being Christians. I'm sure that we would be surprised if persecution and suffering for being a Christian were to be our experiences sometime in the future, We should not be surprised. Jesus told us,

"These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." (John 15:17-18 NKJV)

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33 NKJV)

We can understand that we may suffer tribulations because of our faith. It is harder to understand how, by suffering persecution for our belief in Christ that we are participating in the sufferings of Christ. After all the sufferings of Christ are part of His work in bringing salvation.

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20 NKJV)

In 1 Peter 4 and in several other places in the New Testament we are told that Christ in us is receiving abuse, insults, injustice, and persecution from our people, in our age, in our culture, in our circle of friends just as He once received abuse, insults, persecution, and rejection from the Jews among whom He lived. This suffering at the hands of people we know, in places we frequent takes place as Christ lives in us. We feel the pain, we receive the insults, injustice, persecution that is directed at Christ. We participate in His sufferings.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:16-17 NKJV)

We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Corinthians 4:8-11 NKJV)

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (Philippians 3:10 NKJV)

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, (Colossians 1:24 NKJV)

All Christians should know the daily experience of Christ living in us.

That can only happen if we are crucified with Christ, if we die to self and live for Him. We will only suffer persecution for Christ and participate in His sufferings if that is God's will for us.