

Choose Suffering Over Sin

February 1, 2015

Welcome to CrossWinds. It is great to have you. I want to say a special, “Hello” to those of you connecting via the Internet. This morning we continue our study in the book of 1 Peter called “Hope In Hard Times”. The latter part of the book is teaching us how to live a holy life when going through trials. Peter had a special focus on how to honor God when the suffering we face is undeserved.

This morning he continues on the theme of suffering. In the verses we are about to study, Peter’s goal was that we would be willing to suffer for holy living rather than collapse when faced with the pressures of living in a sinful society. Peter’s objective was that we would develop the necessary courage to live a holy life in an unholy world, even if it costs our lives. Let’s read the text before we study it.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. 1 Peter 4:1–6 (ESV)

Peter gave us six truths to remember when we are tempted to follow the sinful ways of society. Remembering these truths protect us from folding under pressure. Let’s jump in and look at the six truths we need to remember.

1. Remember that suffering for righteousness is to be expected.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking... 1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)

Peter's point was simple. Suffering for righteous living is normal. Don't be shocked. Many times the wicked get away with murder and the righteous suffer when they don't deserve it.

We tell our children that honest living and right choices always pay off. That is not always true. Many times the wicked prosper and those who honor God suffer. The Psalmist wrestled with this.

For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Psalm 73:3–5 (ESV)

In the news we hear about people who are caught doing insider trading on Wall Street. We read about people like Bernie Madoff who steal millions of dollars. What is amazing is not the number of people who are caught cheating. What is amazing is the number of people who aren't caught but they are doing the same things and getting away with it. They don't suffer for sin.

Many of us experience work politics. People are fired or denied a promotion simply on account of a boss' personal agenda. It isn't fair but people get away with it all the time. Those who are honest and don't play into corruption but live a holy life often find themselves in trouble because they didn't follow the sinful ways of the world around them. This is exactly what Jesus experienced.

But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' John 15:25 (ESV)

Jesus did absolutely nothing wrong; he lived a holy life. That is why he was hated. When we choose right living that honors God, we should expect to be hated by society, just like Jesus.

Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. John 15:20 (ESV)

The more we become like Christ, the more we can expect to be treated like Christ. Expect to suffer for right living, just like Jesus.

If you are a young adult and choose to honor God relationally and abstain from premarital sex, expect lots of pressure for intimacy before the wedding night from your friends. Many of them will be shocked and think you are weird because you are not involved premaritally. Probably the most powerful pressure will come from the media where every television program seems to have couples in bed. Most movies have a sex scene. Soon we feel that "everybody is doing it." Maybe I should be doing it. Maybe we shouldn't be doing everything sexually before marriage but we should probably be doing something sexually before marriage. The Bible's standard for premarital intimacy is absolute purity. Young men are to treat young women as sisters with absolute purity before the wedding night. (See 1 Timothy 5:2) When you act out the Bible's standard for sexual purity, don't expect people to accept you.

This means when you are at a friend's house and he or she decides to watch an "R" rated movie with sex and gore, you have to make a choice. You could decide to go home or you could leave the living room and park yourself in front of the chips and dip in the kitchen for the next 2 hours during the movie.

Either way, when you make a choice for a holy life, your friends will mock you. They may even leave you. We will suffer for righteousness.

Peter said we need to be prepared for this kind of suffering. Don't let it shock you. The more choices we make for holiness where we imitate Christ, the more we will be treated like Christ and hated without reason. Expect to suffer for right living. It is normal.

2. Remember that it is always better to choose suffering over sin.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking... 1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)

While Jesus knew that a righteous living would ultimately lead to his rejection, suffering and death, he prepared himself to keep choosing suffering for holiness over sin by fixing his thoughts on this truth. It doesn't matter how tempting the sin. It doesn't matter how high the price for holiness. *It is always better to choose the pain of suffering over the pleasures of sin.*

In the short-term, right living is usually costly, but over the long-haul into eternity it always pays off when we stand before God.

Jesus had to arm his mind with this truth, just like we need to arm our minds with this truth or we will repeatedly give in to sinful pressures.

For example, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, God the Father led him into the wilderness for a 40-day fast without food. At the end of 40 days Jesus was weak. He was hungry. He was vulnerable. That is when Satan tempted him. In Luke 4 we see Satan tempting Jesus to turn stones into bread to satisfy his legitimate physical needs in a way that was outside of his father's will for a time of fasting in his life. Satan tempted him by telling him he deserved food. It

seemed reasonable to have food after 40 days. It would have been so tempting to follow Satan's reasonable suggestion in those moments when Jesus' life was in the balance from starvation. Jesus strengthened his mind against that temptation with this thought. "It is always better to choose righteous living, even if it involves suffering, than to give in to the pleasures of sin, even if they seem reasonable and expedient."

It is the same way at the end of Jesus' ministry. Before he went to the cross, when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he desperately wanted to avoid the cross. At that crossroads he said, "God, not my will be done but your will be done." He said, "I am willing to choose suffering, if that is your will for my life, rather than avoid suffering for being in your will, because that would be sin."

Just like Jesus, at our weakest moments, we will also find ourselves tempted by Satan to give into sinful pleasures that may seem quite reasonable. Arm yourself with this truth. It is always better to suffer for right living and for being in the center of God's will for your life than it is to sin — no matter how tempting the sin or how reasonable the sinful choice may seem.

If we don't remember to think about temptation like Jesus, we will give in to those reasonable temptations every time rather than look to God for forgiveness.

3. Remember that a willingness to suffer for righteousness shows I made a break with sin.

...for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.
1 Peter 4:1–2 (ESV)

This is a challenging verse. I don't think it means that everyone who suffers in the flesh ceases to sin. If that was true, there would be very little sin in our lives. It is true that God frequently uses suffering to turn the hearts of his children to repentance and away from sin, but when faced with suffering, that isn't always what happens. Sometimes, instead of ceasing to sin when faced with suffering, people grow bitter toward God. What does this verse mean?

I think it means that when we are willing to choose suffering for righteous living instead of choosing sinful living because of the pressure around us, that is evidence to ourselves and to others that we made a clean break with sin in our lives. Talk is cheap. We can say Jesus is our savior. We can say he is No. 1 in our lives. We never know that is true until we have to suffer for it.

In Iraq, a Christian that chooses right living and acknowledging Christ publicly may be separated from his or her family. Christians may be impoverished or killed. It is only when we see Christians that are willing to suffer to make a break from the sinful living of their pasts that we know they are living for Christ in the present.

We don't live in Iraq. The price for following Christ and living a holy life isn't a life or death situation. How many of us are willing to pay a price? What friends have you left behind because you made a clean break with sinful living and now you can't be around them anymore because those friends constantly led you toward sin?

What movies have you turned off after you watched the first 10 minutes because you made a clean break with the sin of your past and you are willing to

lose the \$5 rental charge? Have you every walked out of a movie theatre because you have made a clean break with sin and refuse to be entertained by something that glorifies sin and death?

If you are a single man or woman, are you willing to pay the price of loneliness because you refuse to date non-Christians? It is only when you are willing to suffer with loneliness on the weekend because you are committed to only dating someone who loves Jesus that you know you made a clean break with sin in your life.

4. Remember that the sin of my past is always more than enough.

For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. 1 Peter 4:3 (ESV)

Peter wanted us to understand that whatever amount of sin we have in our pasts, it is more than sufficient. It is more than enough. Some people come to Christ from a colorful past. They want nothing to do with the sinful lifestyles they left behind. Other people come to Jesus from relatively tame pre-Christian lives. When society pressures them to go along with unholy living, they reason that it wouldn't be that bad to sin a little. For instance, when your friends are texting or messaging they use three letter swear words like OMG or 4Q or MOFO and you don't want to be left out so you start using those acronyms that most parents don't understand.

Peter put his foot down and said whatever amount of sin we have in our past, it is already more than enough. Do not compromise. Live a holy life even if

it hurts. It is always better to choose suffering for holiness than to choose sin.

That was the way Jesus looked at life; it is the way we need to look at life.

Peter then gave us few example of the sinful societal pressures Christians are to put out of their lives.

Sensuality — *Sensuality is living for what feels good at the moment.* The word sensuality is typically used to describe sexual sin because our sex drive pushes us to do what feels good in the moment. It is premarital sex, because it feels good in the moment. It is an affair at work, because it feels good in the moment. It is looking at someone of the opposite sex lustfully, because it feels good at the moment. It is pornography, because it feels good at the moment. Sensuality also includes outbursts of anger when you tear somebody up because they made you angry. Yelling at them made you feel good in the moment. Peter said that is not the Christian life. We don't just follow our feelings. We restrain our feelings and seek to honor God. We make a clean break from a life that is determined by what is sinful but feels good at the moment.

Passions — *Passion is living to satisfy your physical and emotional appetites.*

That appetite could be food. Christians don't live to just satisfy their food appetite. It could be sexual. Some girls live to satisfy their sexual appetites.

They need to have a boy. Some guys live to satisfy their sexual appetites. They need to have a girl. That is the kind of life we are to make a clean break with.

Some people live to satisfy their appetites for success and significance. They live for their appetites of popularity and power. We don't live that way. We live to honor God, not just satisfy our cravings.

Drunkenness — *Drunkenness is drinking too much alcohol.* It is drinking to the point of losing control. It is not God's will that a Christian gets drunk. That is the old lifestyle. We make a clean break from that kind of living. All of this should be put behind us.

Orgies — *Orgies are wild parties.* Christians are not party animals. We avoid those kinds of parties. That was the old lifestyle, not a life of holiness. Orgies may or may not involve sexuality. The Greek word means going to a party where you drink, get drunk and do stupid things with other people. It means getting drunk and waking up realizing you are in bed with someone you don't know. It is getting drunk and realizing you took hard drugs, which is something you would never do if you weren't drinking with other people at a wild party. It means drinking with other people and doing something foolish like getting behind the wheel of a car and trying to give them a ride home. This could be a big party like Mardi Gras or a small party at your friend's house. It could be going to the bar. It is going to a party, getting drunk and doing stupid things with other people. Christians separate themselves from this kind of living. There is already more than enough sin in our pasts. We don't need to add to it.

Drinking parties — *Drinking parties are literally drinking contests.* It is you and a friend seeing who can drink the most shots of tequila. Let's see who passes out first. Nothing is new under the sun. This is the kind of thing we avoid as Christians. There is already enough sin in our pasts. We don't add to it.

Lawless idolatry — *Lawless idolatry is disgusting pagan worship.* This sounds weird. It sounds like Peter was talking about illegal idol worship. If this kind of

idol worship was illegal for pagans, why would Peter need to tell Christians to avoid it? In the Greek the word *lawless* can also be translated as *vile* or *disgusting*. I think that is closer to what Peter meant in this context. Peter said stop participating in the disgusting practices of the pagan religions around you. You are Christians. Make a clean break with the disgusting idol worship of your past. Stop it.

Then Peter told us what we should expect if we make a clean a total break from sinful living.

With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you... 1 Peter 4:4 (ESV)

When we make a clean break from sinful living, our friends, family and coworkers will be shocked. They will be not be able to understand why we don't join them in the river of sin in which they swim. People will give you a hard time when you decide that the sin of your past is more than enough and you make a clean and total break from sinful living in your life.

This recently happened to us. David, my oldest son, has a Net-flix account. He let us use it on my phone. We were recommended to watch a television series featured on Netflix. We started watching the program. I have to tell you that it is suspenseful. It had us on the edge of our seat.

The more episodes I watched, the uneasier I became. The graphic killing scenes, the severed head that showed up in a box, the graphic stranglings scenes plus using a knife to cut off a hand kept sticking in my mind. As I was praying about this, I realized I was letting myself be pressed into an unholy lifestyle of sinful entertainment. Sex and murder was my entertainment. I was

letting myself, and my family, compromise with fallen values of society and not make a clean break with sinful living.

There really wasn't much discussion about it at home. I got up one morning and told Cindy I didn't want our family watching the show because the sex and violence were graphic and I didn't want us and our children having those images planted in our minds. We needed to make a complete and total break from the sin in our society. She agreed.

If I tell guys at the gym that our family is no longer watching this popular program because we are committed to righteous living, I know they will think I am weird. I am sure they won't invite me over their house for a party after that. Some people may intentionally avoid me because they think I am a total prude.

The truth is that many Christians will also think I fell off the deep end. If I told you the name of the program I suspect a number of you watch it every weekend.

I want to remind you what Peter taught us.

1. It is always better to choose righteous living than enjoy the brief pleasures of sin.
2. I want to remind you that it is only when we are willing to suffer for right living that we know we have made a clean break with sinful living.
3. I want to remind you that the sin of our pasts is more than sufficient. Never rationalize yourself into thinking just a little sin is no big deal, so we can compromise with the sinful pressures of society.

This is what the Bible says about our entertainment.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

Print that verse out on a piece of paper and tape it below your television. Make sure it is printed big enough so you can read it from your couch. Read that while you are watching TV and see if you don't change the channel or shut off the television. I know some of you think I am off the deep end. Let me tell you about Christians in the first century and how they separated themselves from their society.

The Christians in the first century were considered by many in the ancient world to be the kill joys who lived boring lives. Why did they have this reputation? Christians in the first century made a clean break with most forms of entertainment in Roman culture. Christians stopped attending the theatres because the performances involved sex and nudity. I know we would also not attend a theatre that showed live sex and nudity. The problem is that the modern theater has moved from public forums to the privacy of our own homes. What is different between being entertained by sex and nudity on a television in our home theater instead of sex and nudity in a public theatre?

Christians also stopped attending the gladiatorial games because they thought watching blood, gore and death was a sinful form of entertainment and not part of a holy life. Today we don't watch death live, we watch death on our television screens in a cinematic recreation that is more vivid than if it were live in a public arena. It seems to me that we should separate ourselves from those types of entertainment. The early Christians did.

When Christians in the ancient world separated themselves from those popular forms of entertainment they were known as haters of humanity and society. They weren't haters of humanity. They were just people who understood that the sin of their pasts was more than enough. They want to make a clean break with sinful living.

5. Remember that everyone will give an account to God.

...but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.
1 Peter 4:5 (ESV)

One of the great temptations that comes along with suffering for a holy life is deep-seated anger toward the person that hurts us. We want to call them to account. In some situations it is appropriate to correct people. For example: Parents have a responsibility to point out the sin of their disobedient children (Proverbs 13:24). Policemen have a right to stop the sins of law-breaking citizens (Romans 14:4). Employers have a right to point out the performance of slack employees (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Elders have a right to point out the sin in members of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17).

Most of the time, when we suffer for righteousness, it is not God's will that we call other people to account. Instead we hand it over to God who promises to judge justly.

The general belief system in the ancient world was that everyone should get as much fun out of life as they could because once we die, we die. Not many religions taught accountability for life after death.

The Bible tells us everyone is accountable for their actions in eternity. Everyone, including Christians, will be judged by God based on how they lived.

Hell is just eternal punishment. That means the greater the sins of someone apart from Christ amasses, the more heinous the punishment of their eternity.

For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Colossians 3:25 (ESV)

As Christians, our sins are forgiven by Jesus. He took the punishment we deserved. While our sin is paid for, we still are judged in eternity. Christians are rewarded in eternity for how we live on Earth. Those who choose to suffer for righteousness rather than go along with the pressures of a sinful society will be richly rewarded for their suffering. The reward for choosing to suffer instead of choosing to sin will always far outweigh any of the pleasures earthly sin could offer or any of the painful suffering for righteousness that is endured. If the reward in eternity didn't outweigh the suffering, then it wouldn't be called a reward. Remember what Peter said to Christians:

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 1 Peter 1:17 (ESV)

As Christians, we need to think carefully about how we live. God promises to judge and reward us. When we choose to suffer for righteous living rather than sin, we will be rewarded for it.

6. Remember that right living for Christ is never a losing proposition, even in the face of death.

For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. 1 Peter 4:6 (ESV)

This is a difficult text. I think it is referring to those who heard the gospel then died. I do not think it is referring to those who heard the gospel after they

died. That wouldn't make sense because the Bible tells us there is no second chance to hear the good news of Jesus and respond to it after death.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...
Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)

The point of this verse in 1 Peter is to encourage us. All dead Christians are alive in their spirit and are in God's presence until Christ returns. Dwelling with God until Christ returns is a pretty good proposition. Look what it is like in God's presence.

...in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

It is possible that some of the Christians Peter wrote to in this letter had friends that lost their lives for righteous living rather than going along with the sinful ways of society.

Peter encouraged them by reminding them the gospel was not preached to their dead friends in vain. They trusted in Jesus. They chose holy lives. They didn't go along with the sinful ways of the society. They skipped out on the drinking parties and sexual sins. They avoided what people thought was great earthly fun and replaced it with holiness. Some of them were so rejected by society they suffered to the point of losing their lives.

I am sure many people said, "What a waste." These Christians had absolutely no earthly fun. What a waste of a life. They died just like the rest of us. How did holy living pay off?

Peter said that because of their trust in Jesus they are now in God's presence where there is fullness of joy. While their dead bodies may look like

everyone else's, their eternities do not look like everyone else's. They are alive in their spirits in the very presence of God. Any earthly suffering they endured is nothing compared to the glory that was revealed to them.

...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:17 (ESV)

Peter assured us that even believers who paid the ultimate price for righteous living did not find that to be a losing proposition. Today they are enjoying the blessing of the very presence of God.

Conclusion¹

We don't know what brought Perpetua to faith in Christ or how long she was a Christian. Thanks to her diary and the diary of another prisoner, we know about her final days. Perpetua was a wealthy noblewoman who lived with her husband and infant son in the city of Carthage located in North Africa during the third century.

At that time, North Africa was the center of a vibrant Christian community. It comes as no surprise that when the Roman Emperor Severus decided to cripple Christianity, he focused his attention on this region of the world. Among the first to be arrested were five Christians taking a Bible class in preparation for their baptism. Perpetua was one of them.

After her arrest, her father immediately came to visit her in prison. He wasn't a Christian, and in his concern for her, he saw an easy way for her to save

¹ Galli, M., & Olsen, T. (2000). In *131 Christians everyone should know*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

herself — simply deny her faith in Christ and burn incense in worship to the emperor.

Perpetua took a vase and held it up to her father. “What is it?” she asked. “A vase,” he replied. She told him, “Just as a vase can be known by any other name I cannot be known by any other name than Christ’s. I am a Christian.”

Perpetua was a nursing mother, so she was soon moved to a better part of the prison to allow her to provide better care for her infant son. With the day of her trial approaching her father visited her repeatedly pleading with her to worship the emperor and spare him, her husband and her family the grief of watching her die.

The day of Perpetua’s trial arrived. She was one of five Christians brought before the governor. The first four claimed to be Christians and refused to worship the emperor. Then it came Perpetua’s turn.

Just as she was about to speak, her father burst into the room with her crying child in his arm. He begged her to simply worship the emperor so she could nurse her child. Perpetua stood fast. She refused to bend.

The emperor finally had enough. He commanded the guards to beat her father into silence, then he condemned Perpetua and her friends to die in the arena.

A short time later they were forced into the arena where wild beasts and gladiators roamed the floor. In the stands, the crowds roared with excitement to see the gore. They didn’t have to wait long. Almost immediately a wild cow charged the group, gored Perpetua with his horns and tossed her high in the air.

Afterward, a leopard attacked Perpetua, mauling her and her friends. In only minutes their clothing was covered in blood from their gaping wounds.

The crowd was not willing to wait for their final moments. They began chanting for the deaths of the Christians. Perpetua and her friends were lined up and one by one a sword was thrust through their bodies.

What the crowds didn't understand is that it is always better to choose to suffer for righteousness than to sin, no matter how high the price, even if it is death. Remembering that is always better to suffer for righteousness than to sin was the mindset of Jesus. It was the mindset of Perpetua. I pray it becomes the mind set of each one of us.

Let's pray...



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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