

# Ministry of Grace Church

## 1 Peter 4:1-11 - Speaker Notes

### Introduction

Throughout chapter three Peter talked about suffering for righteousness' sake. He closed the chapter giving Christ as our example of suffering for the glory of God. Here is a quick overview of this chapter. Peter starts off this chapter exhorting us that since Christ suffered in the flesh, we should have the same attitude as He did. He set aside His own desires in favor of the will of God the Father. Likewise, we should no longer live for our desires. Instead, we should live for the will of God. After all, we have had plenty of time in the past to indulge our own desires and it is time to move on to more spiritual things.

He will also tell us that when we do change our manner of living, we shouldn't be surprised if those with whom we used to indulge our fleshly desires don't understand why we no longer join with them. In the end they, too, will be judged. But look, the end of all things is already drawing near so we Christians need to show true love and hospitality to one another. After all, the world won't. We should freely share the gifts that God has given us with our fellow Christians and do so in a way that will glorify God.

Peter also tells us that we should not be surprised at the trials we will go through because we are Christians. Instead, we should rejoice that we are partakers of Christ's suffering. If we suffer because of our commitment to Christ, then we are truly blessed. If and when any one of us suffers because of being a Christian let us give God the glory.

Remember that we *will* undergo trials and chastening by our Heavenly Father because He loves us. This chastening is for our own good and is making us more like Christ. If we who are saved receive such chastening, imagine how the unsaved will feel at the end of their life when they face their Judge. Finally, Peter will tell us to keep in mind that paying the ultimate price for our faith (our life) may be what pleases God the most.

Okay, that's a general overview, now let's look a little deeper into this chapter.

### 1 Peter 4:1-2

**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— so as to no longer live the rest of the time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.**

This is one of those controversial verses. According to Peter, he who has suffered in the flesh, "has ceased from sin." Since Christ never did sin, this can't be referring to Christ. Some have argued that this implies that when we really and truly die to sin in our flesh we will have attained a state of holiness in which we no longer sin. This may be what some denominations teach, but I don't believe it is what Scripture teaches.

The Apostle Paul addresses this same issue in it the book of Romans:

**For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified**

with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died has been justified from sin. (Romans 6:5-7)

In this passage it is pretty clear that Paul is talking about us putting our “old man” to death. The term “old man” refers to our sin nature. He goes on to say:

knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:9-11)

It is clear that Paul is teaching that we haven’t really died, nor has our sin nature really died, but that we should consider ourselves to be dead to sin and not let it control our lives.

Therefore, back to Peter, what he is telling us is that if we are suffering for righteousness, we can identify with the suffering that Christ went through. And, whereas His suffering culminated in his atoning death for us we can consider ourselves to have died with him (at least our sin nature) and we can live a fulfilled life, no longer controlled by our sin nature. And - If, during suffering, we have the same understanding as Christ, that this suffering is God’s will, then we should:

no longer live the rest of the time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

In other words, for the remainder of the time that we are living our earthly life, we should not be allowing our fleshly lusts to control us. Instead, we should be living for the will of God. Well, what are these fleshly lusts? According to the Apostle John they are:

... the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life ... (1 John 2:16)

So, it’s not just sexual lust we are talking about, but all those desires that we have that cause us to focus on ourselves rather than God. They include the overly strong desire for food, for pleasure, for “stuff” like a new car or a new house, or a new kitchen, or a new boat, or the desire to be admired because of a position of prominence. In short, it’s anything that causes us to focus on “me” instead of on “Him.”

### **1 Peter 4:3-5**

**For the time already past is sufficient for you to have worked out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, maligning you, but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.**

Peter has just told us that we should no longer live for our fleshly lusts, but for the will of God. He now tells us that it’s time for change. We’ve spent enough time living like the ungodly to know that’s not the will of God. We did enough of these things in the past to know that they don’t give us true happiness and certainly don’t give us peace. All they really do is produce headache and heartache.

We could probably sum up Peter’s description of these activities as illicit sexual activity, drunkenness, drug abuse, partying, excessive leisure activities (like game playing) and the

worship of things instead of God. That's how many of us lived before we were saved. Peter is saying that our past indulgences are to be put behind us so we can live for God. None of these things is what God wants from us.

However, it's easy for many of us to say, "I've never committed any illicit sexual activity. I never got drunk or high on drugs, and I never went to wild parties, so this doesn't apply to me." What we often fail to see in this verse is that Peter groups "the worship of things other than God" in the same category as those other things.

Have you ever possessed anything that was so important to you that you were determined to hang on to it, or that you spent so much time on that it made you forget about your commitments to God? These are idols. I once had a car that was like that to me, and God had to tarnish my idol for me.

However, I don't want you to miss this. Leaving old habits behind comes at a cost. Most of us have had the experience where under the conviction of the Holy Spirit we have stopped doing some activity that was inconsistent with life as a faithful Christian. When we finally realize that we need to quit and get our focus back on God, our friends (even some Christian friends) sometimes will not understand. We may have even experienced the wrathful tongue of those with whom we had previously joined ourselves, not simply wondering why we stopped doing it with them, but actually attacking us verbally as if we had accused them of wrongdoing.

Remember, Peter included idolatry along with other descriptions of obvious unchristian-like behavior. When we get caught up in any kind of behavior that has a greater importance than God, it becomes idolatry, and it takes our focus away from God, but it often happens so gradually that we aren't even aware of it. These things aren't sinful in themselves, but they are deadly in their effects on our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

But notice what Peter says:

but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead

Those with whom you used to charge headlong into sin, those who are now railing on you for leaving such practices, will have to give an account of themselves to the Great Judge some day. Peter is reiterating the fact that there is but one righteous judge, and as he previously said of Christ:

who being reviled, was not reviling in return; while suffering, He was uttering no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. (1 Peter 2:23)

Likewise, we need to be prepared to receive such slanderous accusations at the hands of others from whom we have separated ourselves. Remember we are to suffer patiently for having done the right thing, knowing that it is they who will have to give account of such slander to the Righteous One who will judge all mankind one day. So let us suffer patiently and humble ourselves before the One who has said:

"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," ... (Hebrews 10:30)

## **1 Peter 4: 6**

**For to this the gospel has been proclaimed even to those who are now dead, so that though they were judged in the flesh as men, they live in the spirit according to the will of God.**

This next verse is very tricky so let's look at it carefully. Peter starts out with the expression, "For to this." Peter is not referring to the thing just said, but to the thing about to be said (the latter part of this verse).

The phrase, "the gospel has been proclaimed even to those who are now dead ..." is a somewhat debated expression that some believe refers to Christ going into Hell to preach to the dead spirits in prison. We looked at this last time and determined that the verse:

in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, (1 Peter 3:19)

is not talking about Christ preaching the gospel to people in Hell. Rather, it is talking about Noah proclaiming the coming judgment of the flood. We noted that he "proclaimed" the coming judgment, he did not "preach" repentance.

**For to this the gospel has been proclaimed even to those who are now dead, so that though they were judged in the flesh as men, they live in the spirit according to the will of God.**

What the current verse means instead, is that the gospel was previously preached to those who are now physically dead (though spiritually alive). I believe that this interpretation is also borne out by the remainder of the verse.

Peter is saying that the gospel was preached in the past to some who are now physically dead; although, because they believed the gospel, they are spiritually alive. Therefore, they may have been judged by men and put to death for their faith and actions, but they continue to live spiritually (eternally) according to the judgment of God (they are declared righteous). This interpretation also fits in with what Peter has been talking about in the past few verses and seems to sum up what he has been saying.

There are many Christians who have been judged as heretics or as evil doers because they followed God's teaching instead of what the church leaders claimed as truth. The Reformation was filled with such examples, and even in the early church many were put to death for holding forth the truth instead of the party line of the religious rulers. The Apostle Paul, himself, was responsible for such condemnation and martyrdom of believers before he was confronted by the truth on the road to Damascus.

In other words, though we may go through suffering at times, even at the hands of those who think they are doing God's work, we should take such suffering patiently just as Christ did when He suffered for us. And – even if we lose our lives for our faithful witness, God will be glorified and will be pleased with us for having been faithful - even unto death.

## **1 Peter 4:7-9**

**The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound thinking and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.**

**Truth to learn:** The end is very near, so be serious about what you do and how you pray.

There is some disagreement as to what Peter means by “the end of all things is at hand.” There are three predominant views. The first is that Peter was referring to the end of the Jewish temple worship in Jerusalem. In Peter’s mind, as in the minds of many early church believers, Christianity was simply an extension of the Jewish belief system. At the time of the writing of this epistle (around 65 AD), the Roman government was increasingly displeased with the Jewish resistance to Roman rule. Because of the persistent Jewish resistance, not many years after the publication of this letter, the temple along with much of the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans.

The second interpretation of this phrase is that it refers to the coming of the Messiah to judge the nations. It was the belief of the early church that the return of Christ was not a distant future event, rather something that could occur at any time.

The third interpretation is that Peter simply means the end of earthly life for the suffering believers to whom he is writing. This interpretation seems to lend itself to the subject matter that Peter has been talking about in the previous verses; although, any of these interpretations could be valid.

No matter how you interpret this verse, the message from Peter is: since time is running short, we need to take some specific action. There is something sobering about believing the end is near that causes us to take stock of our lives, knowing how quickly life can end. So, take stock of your life now since time is short. Be sober minded and let our sober attitude result in prayers. We Christians have a hope that the world doesn’t understand. We know that existence doesn’t end when we die. In fact, for a Christian, that is when it really begins. What we have here on this earth is simply the preliminary part of our lives when we determine how the eternal part will be spent. Or, as I have said before, the life we’re living now is just the audition for our real life which is yet to come.

Life on this earth is short; it can end quickly, and Jesus Christ could return at any moment. All the prophetic events that precede His return have occurred with the exception of the rapture of His church. Let’s not waste our last remaining days with frivolous activities. Instead, let’s be sober minded and spend our time in watchful prayer, especially praying for those who have not yet received the gift of salvation.

But, as Peter tells us in this verse, of greater importance than even these things, we need to have fervent love for one another. Since he was writing this letter to Christians, it means that we are to love our fellow Christians with a self-sacrificing love, being more concerned for their well-being than our own. But it’s not just love, it’s “fervent love” that we are to have for one another. The word “fervent” is from the Greek word *ektenēs*, which literally means “stretched out.” As used here it means “continual or intense.”

Why are we commanded to have fervent love for each other? Peter says it’s because love covers (or hides) a multitude of sins. This is not to say that we are to ignore the sins of a brother or sister. It means that we are to love each other this way so that we will be gracious and forgiving of each other’s faults. We need to be more concerned about the well-being of our Christian brothers and sisters than our own selfish motives and feelings. If a brother or sister is living in sin, we have a responsibility to approach him or her in a loving manner with his or her ultimate good in mind. It also means that when a brother or sister sins against us, we need to be more concerned for their spiritual well-being than our own bruised selfish

pride. Again, it doesn't mean that we ignore the offense; rather, it means that we approach the offender in a loving way to let him or her know that they injured us, having already forgiven them and freed them of any blame.

Keep in mind that love is an action verb, not just a feeling. In light of what Peter just told us ("the end is near" and "be watchful in prayer"), we should consistently demonstrate fervent love to our Christian brothers and sisters. Part of considering the well-being of others above our own, as Peter tells us, is being hospitable to one another. Within the church this is characterized by opening our homes to one another and getting together for fellowship.

Peter takes this even one step further by saying that we should do this without complaint. In other words, we shouldn't expect others to be hospitable to us just because we are to them, and we shouldn't complain about the hardship or time or expense we have laid out to be hospitable to others. Rather, we should do it cheerfully, expecting nothing in return.

The basic idea that Peter is conveying to us is that we should be quick to share God's blessing on us with others of like faith. We are not to be a friend of the world, and the world certainly will not be friendly to us if we are holding forth a faithful witness for our God. Therefore, we should be providing friendship, fellowship, and communion with other believers, and it should be done cheerfully with a complete absence of discontent.

### **1 Peter 4:10-11**

**As each one has received a gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God— whoever speaks, as one speaking the oracles of God; whoever serves, as one 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 might forever and ever. Amen.**

Everyone in the body of Christ has gifts that the Holy Spirit has bestowed on them. Some gifts are spiritual and others are material. The gifts that Peter is talking about are not things that we have earned ourselves, but things that God has entrusted to us. Peter makes that very clear when he admonishes us to be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." The gifts (abilities, talents, possessions, etc.) are bestowed upon us by the graciousness of God Himself and, as Peter points out in this verse, are to be shared in a ministering manner within the body of Christ. Therefore, you can see that everything we have is really a gift from God, and we are entrusted to use and take care of these gifts *for the good of the church universal*.

If we put this all together, we see that Peter is telling us that we are to unselfishly serve one another (Christians) with the gifts that God has freely bestowed on us (spiritual or material) in a manner that will please and glorify God.

Now Peter gets specific about two very important types of gifts in the body of Christ, the speaking gifts and the serving gifts. The speaking gifts are those which involve the use of words. These include preaching, teaching, counseling, encouraging, singing, or other verbal functions within the body of Christ. Peter tells us that if we are using any speaking gift within the church we should treat our words as the very utterances of God.



This is an awesome responsibility for those of us who have speaking responsibilities in the Church and is not to be taken lightly. First, we must be sure it is because of God's gift that we are speaking. Then, we need to be certain that what we are saying is, in fact, the message that God wants us to deliver. It must be consistent with what is taught throughout the Bible. Therefore, the words that come out of our mouths should only be words that would come out of God's mouth. Think about that the next time you are asked to present special music at your church or the next time you teach a Sunday school lesson.

The other gifts that Peter is talking about in today's verse are the serving gifts. Though not always as visible as the speaking gifts, they are just as important. For instance, those who serve in the nursery so that others can receive the spoken message without distraction are doing a mighty service to God and to the church.

Or, as some of you in this church are, it is about looking for opportunities to be helpful so as to make things easier for others. Some of you may think, "I don't really have a spiritual gift, but I can help others." Don't denigrate such an important spiritual gift! Just because your actions are behind the scenes doesn't mean that they are any less blessed, any less important, or any less needful gifts from God.

How do we know what areas of ministry we should be involved with in our church? Peter even gives the answer to this question. If we can do it so that God will be glorified, then we should do it. If it is for personal glory, we shouldn't!

### **So What?**

It may seem strange to you that we are spending so much time talking about us, as true Christians, suffering at the hands of non-Christians or those who simply claim to be Christian. After all, we live in a Christian country where we have the freedoms of religion and speech. However, in the last days before the return of our Lord, such freedoms may not exist. Certainly after the Rapture, those who get saved (yes, many will be saved during the tribulation) will come under intense pressure to adhere to the party line of the (false) world religion. Those who refuse - will forfeit their lives, to the glory of God.

Even now, in the years immediately before the rapture, there is growing animosity against those of us who hold fast to the fundamental beliefs of true Christianity, even in this country! Therefore, let us not waste our little remaining time on this earth satisfying ourselves, that is, our fleshly lusts. Let us, instead, seek out ways to be obedient to the will of God so as to bring Him glory! After all, He suffered and died for us, let us suffer and live for Him!

Can you think of a time when you were obedient to God and then suffered for it due to the words of others who felt injured or offended by your obedience? If so, you have already suffered for righteousness' sake, and you are blessed, as Peter told us in **1Peter 3:14**,

**But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed ...**

Your suffering is pleasing to God, and some day you will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

There is something sobering about believing the end is near that causes us to take stock of our lives, knowing how quickly life can end. So, take stock of your life now since time is short. Be sober minded and let our sober attitude result in prayers.

The end is near! Therefore, let us watch... and pray... and witness, with our lives as well as our mouths! Let's be faithful and suffer patiently. And, if we do suffer for being faithful, let it be because we are faithful to God rather than to ourselves or others around us.

Finally, are you sharing with the rest of the church the gifts and abilities that God has given to you? Or are you a Christian sponge, taking in all that others give you (materially or spiritually) but not giving anything back to the body of Christ? God wants you to share liberally with other Christians. We all need to be involved, actively serving the body in one way or another.

“... so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ ...”

Let's pray.