

• *An additional underlying problem*

• *Suffering persecution*

• *Suffering in marriage*

• *Suffering injustice*

• *Various types of suffering*

• *Suffering in the New Testament – generally ill-treatment from others*

1. The Christian does not have to feel guilty about suffering

• *Not all sufferings are caused by particular sins*

• *God allows and controls suffering*

• *Many Old Testament examples of God testing His people*

But in much of what Peter has said there is an additional underlying problem for his friends in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and elsewhere. Many of these relationships that he has mentioned may bring suffering. The people around us may persecute us. Peter has said we may have to go through various trials^{☐1}. He has mentioned Jesus' suffering^{☐2} and has warned his friends that they may have to face slander^{☐3}. He knows that servants may have unreasonable employers^{☐4} and may face harsh treatment^{☐5}. Christ suffered leaving an example for us to follow^{☐6}. Peter has spoken of the way Jesus faced insult^{☐7}.

Husbands may be 'disobedient to the word'^{☐1}, and cause their wives suffering. Wives may cause their husbands much pain and distress (although the way husbands ill-treat wives and the way wives ill-treat husbands is different).

Much of what Peter has said has behind it the dilemma of unjust suffering. Sooner or later the Christian will experience injustice. Sooner or later we shall need Peter's help! There are different kinds of suffering. Christians in the western world tend to think specially of sickness or bereavement. The main kinds of suffering mentioned in the Old Testament are sickness and plagues, military defeat and what happens afterwards, natural disaster such as famine. The Psalms especially make much of oppression by enemies; Psalm 34 is an example.

The worst forms of suffering involve unjust treatment at the hands of other people. We can bear up well in a time of natural disaster. Much worse – and much more embittering – is when we face various kinds of hostility or unfairness at the hands of others. Most embittering of all is ill-treatment at the hands of those who are close to us. When the New Testament speaks of 'suffering' it is not generally thinking of sickness; it is generally thinking of ill-treatment from others.

Peter now takes up the particular problem of unjust suffering^{☐1} and asks his friends to realise the special time in which they live^{☐2}. Then in 1 Peter 4:12 he will focus on the theme even more, writing a kind of appendix to his letter – on unjust suffering.

1. The Christian does not have to feel guilty about suffering. In considering suffering the Christian needs special discernment. The tendency of many people is to link sin and suffering too tightly. Then we feel guilty because we are suffering – or we want to make others feel guilty because of their suffering. 'If you were really obeying the Lord, this would not happen to you', we say to ourselves or to others.

It is true that suffering arises from sin, in this sense, that the fall of the human race brought about suffering. But it is not right to think that all sufferings are caused by particular sins – which Jesus denied in Luke 6:24–25; 16:19–31; 13:1–5; John 9:1–3).

The point is often made in the Old Testament that it is God who allows and controls suffering. Although Satan is involved, God controls and directs even Satan. God uses suffering to test His people^{☐1}. Examples are found especially in the story of Abraham^{☐2}, the Israelites in the wilderness, and in the stories of Daniel. He puts us into situations where disobedience causes suffering and obedience enables escape from suffering.

Or God allows and controls suffering in order to discipline His people^{☐1}.

☐1 1:6-7
☐2 1:11
☐3 2:12
☐4 2:18-19
☐5 2:20
☐6 2:21
☐7 2:23

☐1 3:1

☐1 3:13-4:6
☐2 4:7-11

☐1 see Deuteronomy 8:2-3
☐2 Genesis 22

☐1 Job 5:17; Proverbs 3:11

• Sometimes suffering is discipline

• Sharing the sufferings of Christ - persecution

2. Suffering cannot harm the zealous Christian in any profound sense

Only occasionally is a particular suffering caused by a particular sin (see John 5:14; 1 Corinthians 11:30; James 5:14-18).

It is the **righteous** who suffer. Jesus was the greatest sufferer of all time. He still suffers with His people^{□1}. Persecution may be God's will for us^{□2}; it is sharing the sufferings of Christ^{□3}. The more mature we are, the more God will ask us to endure trials and troubles for Him.

2. Suffering cannot harm the zealous Christian in any profound sense. Peter says 'And who is the one who can harm you, if you become zealous for what is good?'^{□1}. We tend to answer: 'plenty of people!' But deeper discernment is needed; the answer is 'no one!'

Since all that I meet
Shall work for my good,
The bitter is sweet,
The medicine is food;
Though painful at present,
It will cease before long:
And then, O how pleasant
The conqueror's song!

□1 Acts 9:4
□2 3:17
□3 4:13

□1 3:13

3. However, the 'freedom from harm' might be slow in coming!

• Suffering comes and goes

• Ultimately no one can harm us

3. However, the 'freedom from harm' might be slow in coming! Peter acknowledges this. 'Even if you suffer on account of righteousness...'. He knows that great distress can be brought upon the Christian. He has already said 'Christ . . . suffered ... leaving you an example', and he knows how severe were the sufferings of Jesus, in body and in spirit. It does not happen all the time. Peter says 'you suffer...' and has said 'now for a little while you may if it is necessary have to suffer'^{□1}. Persecution does not necessarily go on all the time; it comes and goes.

Ultimately no one can harm us. No one can affect our eternal destiny. No one can hold back the comfort of God. No one can stop the 'Spirit of glory' coming upon us^{□1}.

□1 1:6

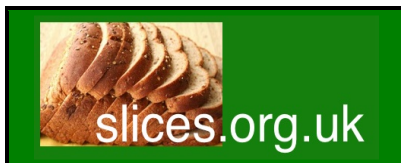
□1 4:14

4. Amazingly, the Christian is to treat injustice as a blessing

• Rejoice – not in the troubles themselves but in the knowledge that blessing will result

4. Amazingly, the Christian is to treat injustice as a blessing! This is one of the most surprising aspects of the Christian life. We rejoice in trials and troubles. Of course we do not enjoy the troubles themselves, but we rejoice in the knowledge that it is God's appointed way of bringing much blessing into our lives. 'Count it all joy...' says James^{□1}. 'We rejoice in our tribulations...' says Paul^{□2}. 'You are rejoicing, though... you... may ... have to suffer...', says 1 Peter^{□3}. We rejoice because troubles rightly received are a sign that blessing is on the way.

□1 James 1:2
□2 Romans 5:3
□3 1:6



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