

# CHAPTER 4

The work of a Christian is twofold — doing the will of God and suffering his pleasure. This chapter directs us in both. The duties we are here exhorted to employ ourselves in are the mortification of sin, living to God, sobriety, prayer, charity, hospitality, and the best improvement of our talents, which the apostle presses upon Christians from the consideration of the time they have lost in their sins, and the approaching end of all things (v. 1-11). The directions for sufferings are that we should not be surprised at them, but rejoice in them, only take care not to suffer as evil-doers. He intimates that their trials were near at hand, that their souls were in danger as well as their bodies, and that the best way to preserve their souls is to commit them to God in well-doing.

## 1 PETER 4:1-3

### THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN

The apostle here draws a new inference from the consideration of Christ's sufferings. As he had before made use of it to persuade to patience in suffering, so here to mortification of sin. Observe,

**I.** How the exhortation is expressed. The antecedent or supposition is *that Christ had suffered* for us in the flesh, or in his human nature. The consequent or inference is, “*Arm and fortify yourselves likewise with the same mind, courage, and resolution.*” The word flesh in the former part of the verse signifies Christ's human nature, but in the latter part it signifies man's corrupt nature. So the sense is, “As Christ suffered in his human nature, do you, according to your baptismal vow and profession, make your corrupt nature suffer, by putting to death the body of sin by self-denial and mortification; for, if you do not thus suffer, you will be conformable to Christ in his death and resurrection, and will cease *from sin.*” Learn,

**1.** Some of the strongest and best arguments against all sorts of sin are taken from the sufferings of Christ. All sympathy and tenderness for

Christ as a sufferer are lost of you do not put away sin. He dies to destroy it; and, though he could cheerfully submit to the worst sufferings, yet he could never submit to the least sin.

**2.** The beginning of all true mortification lies in the mind, not in penances and hardships upon the body. The mind of man is carnal, full of enmity; the understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God, ~~4018~~ Ephesians 4:18. Man is not a sincere creature, but partial, blind, and wicked, till he be renewed and sanctifies by the regenerating grace of God.

**II.** How it is further explained, v. 2. The apostle explains what he means by being dead to sin, and ceasing from sin, both negatively and positively. Negatively, a Christian ought *no longer to live the rest of his time in the flesh*, to the sinful lusts and corrupt desires of carnal wicked men; but, positively, he ought to conform himself to the revealed will of the holy God. Learn,

**1.** The lusts of men are the springs of all their wickedness, ~~4018~~ James 1:13, 14. Let occasional temptations be what they will, they could not prevail, were it not for men's own corruptions.

**2.** All good Christians make the will of God, not their own lusts or desires, the rule of their lives and actions.

**3.** True conversion makes a marvellous change in the heart and life of every one who partakes of it. It brings a man off from all his old, fashionable, and delightful lusts, and from the common ways and vices of the world, to the will of God. It alters the mind, judgment, affections, way, and conversation of every one who has experienced it.

**III.** How it is enforced (v. 3): *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles*, etc. Here the apostle argues from equity. "It is but just, equal, and reasonable, that as you have hitherto all the former part of your life served sin and Satan, so you should now serve the living God." Though those were Jews to whom the apostle wrote, yet the living among the Gentiles they had learned their way. Observe,

**1.** When a man is truly converted, it is very grievous to him to think how the time past of his life has been spent; the hazard he has run so many years, the mischief he has done to others, the dishonour done to God, and the loss he has sustained, are very afflicting to him.

2. While the will of man is unsanctified and corrupt, he walks continually in wicked ways; he makes them his choice and delight, his work and business, and he makes a bad condition daily worse and worse.

3. One sin, allowed, draws on another. Here are six named, and they have a connection and dependence one upon another.

(1.) *Lasciviousness* or wantonness, expressed in looks, gesture, or behaviour, ~~413~~Romans 13:13.

(2.) *Lusts*, acts of lewdness, such as whoredom and adultery.

(3.) *Excess of wine*, though short of drunkenness, an immoderate use of it, to the prejudice of health or business, is here condemned.

(4.) *Revellings*, or luxurious feastings, too frequent, too full, or too expensive.

(5.) *Banquetings*, by which is meant gluttony or excess in eating.

(6.) *Abominable idolatry*; the idol-worship of the Gentiles was attended with lewdness, drunkenness, gluttony, and all sorts of brutality and cruelty; and these Jews living long among them were, some of them at least, debauched and corrupted by such practices.

4. It is a Christian's duty not only to abstain from what is grossly wicked, but also from those things that are generally the occasions of sin, or carry the appearance of evil. *Excess of wine* and immoderate feasting are forbidden as well as lust and idolatry.

## ~~400~~ 1 PETER 4:4-6

### THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN

I. Here you have the visible change wrought in those who in the foregoing verse were represented as having been in the former part of their life very wicked. They no longer run on in the same courses, or with the same companions, as they used to do. Hereupon observe the conduct of their wicked acquaintance towards them.

1. *They think it strange*, they are surprised and wonder at it, as at something new and unusual, that their old friends should be so much altered, and not run with as much violence as they used to do *to the same excess of riot*, to the same sottish excesses and luxury which before they had greedily and madly followed.

2. *They speak evil of them*. Their surprise carries them to blasphemy. They speak evil of their persons, of their way, their religion, and their God. Learn,

(1.) Those that are once really converted will not return to their former course of life, though ever so much tempted by the frowns or flatteries of others to do so. Neither persuasion nor reproach will prevail with them to be or to do as they were wont to do.

(2.) The temper and behaviour of true Christians seem very strange to ungodly men. That they should despise that which every one else is fond of, that they should believe many things which to others seem incredible, that they should delight in what is irksome and tedious, be zealous where they have no visible interest to serve, and depend so much upon hope, is what the ungodly cannot comprehend.

(3.) The best actions of religious people cannot escape the censures and slanders of those who are irreligious. Those actions which cost a good man the most pains, hazard, and self-denial, shall be most censured by the uncharitable and ill-natured world; they will speak evil of good people, though they themselves reap the fruits of their charity, piety, and goodness.

II. For the comfort of the servants of God, it is here added,

1. That all wicked people, especially those who speak evil of such as are not as bad as themselves, shall *give an account*, and be put to give a reason of their behaviour, to him who is ready to judge, who is both able and duly authorized, and who will ere long judge and pass sentence upon all who shall then be found alive, and all such as being dead shall then be raised again, <sup><SUB></sup>James 5:8, 9; <sup><SUP></sup>2 Peter 3:7. Observe, The malignant world shall in a little time give an account to the great God of all their evil speeches against his people, <sup><SUB></sup>Jude 1:14, 15. They will soon be called to a sad account for all their curses, their foolish jests, their slanders and falsehoods, uttered against the faithful people of God.

2. That for this cause was the gospel preached also to those that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the Spirit, v. 6. Some understand this difficult place thus: *For this cause was the gospel preached* to all the faithful of old, who are now dead in Christ, that thereby they might be taught and encouraged to bear the unrighteous judgments and persecutions which the rage of men put upon them *in the flesh, but might live in the Spirit unto God*. Others take the expression, *that they might be judged according to men in the flesh*, in a spiritual sense, thus: The gospel was preached to them, to judge them, condemn them, and reprove them, for the corruption of their natures, and the viciousness of their lives, while they lived after the manner of the heathen or the mere natural man; and that, having thus mortified their sins, they might live according to God, a new and spiritual life. Take it thus; and thence learn,

1. The mortifying of our sins and living to God are the expected effects of the gospel preached to us.

2. God will certainly reckon with all those who have had the gospel preached to them, but without these good effects produced by it. God is ready to judge all those who have received the gospel in vain.

3. It is no matter how we are judged according to men in the flesh, if we do but live according to God in the Spirit.

## 1 PETER 4:7-11

### SOBRIETY, WATCHFULNESS, AND CHARITY

We have here an awful position or doctrine, and an inference drawn from it. The position is that the *end of all things is at hand*. The miserable destruction of the Jewish church and nation foretold by our Saviour is now very near; consequently, the time of their persecution and your sufferings is but very short. Your own life and that of your enemies will soon come to their utmost period. Nay, the world itself will not continue very long. The conflagration will put an end to it; and all things must be swallowed up in an endless eternity. The inference from this comprises a series of exhortations.

**1.** To sobriety and watchfulness: “*Be you therefore sober*, v. 7. Let the frame and temper of your minds be grave, stayed, and solid; and observe strict temperance and sobriety in the use of all worldly enjoyments. Do not suffer yourselves to be caught with your former sins and temptations, v. 3. *An watch unto prayer*. Take care that you be continually in a calm sober disposition, fit for prayer; and that you be frequent in prayers, lest this end come upon you unawares,” <sup><213></sup>Luke 21:34; <sup><130></sup>Matthew 26:40, 41. Learn,

**(1.)** The consideration of our approaching end is a powerful argument to make us sober in all worldly matters, and earnest in religious affairs.

**(2.)** Those who would pray to purpose must *watch unto prayer*. They must watch over their own spirits, watch all fit opportunities, and do their duty in the best manner they can.

**(3.)** The right ordering of the body is of great use to promote the good of the soul. When the appetites and inclinations of the body are restrained and governed by God's word and true reason, and the interests of the body are submitted to the interests and necessities of the soul, then it is not the soul's enemy, but its friend and helper.

**2.** To charity: *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves*, v. 8. Here is a noble rule in Christianity. Christians ought to love one another, which implies an affection to their persons, a desire of their welfare, and a hearty endeavour to promote it. This mutual affection must not be cold, but fervent, that is, sincere, strong, and lasting. This sort of earnest affection is recommended *above all things*, which shows the importance of it, <sup><124></sup>Colossians 3:14. It is greater than faith or hope, <sup><133></sup>1 Corinthians 13:13. One excellent effect of it is that it will *cover a multitude of sins*. Learn,

**(1.)** There ought to be in all Christians a more fervent charity towards one another than towards other men: *Have charity among yourselves*. He does not say for pagans, for idolaters, or for apostates, but among yourselves. *Let brotherly love continue*, <sup><111></sup>Hebrews 13:1. There is a special relation between all sincere Christians, and a particular amiableness and good in them, which require special affection.

**(2.)** It is not enough for Christians not to bear malice, nor to have common respect for one another, they must intensely and fervently love each other.

**(3.)** It is the property of true charity *to cover a multitude of sins*. It inclines people to forgive and forget offences against themselves, to cover and conceal the sins of others, rather than aggravate them and spread them abroad. It teaches us to love those who are but weak, and who have been guilty of many evil things before their conversion; and it prepares for mercy at the hand of God, who hath promised to forgive those that forgive others, <sup><4064></sup>Matthew 6:14.

**3.** To hospitality, v. 9. The hospitality here required is a free and kind entertainment of strangers and travellers. The proper objects of Christian hospitality are one another. The nearness of their relation, and the necessity of their condition in those times of persecution and distress, obliged Christians to be hospitable one to another. Sometimes Christians were spoiled of all they had, and were driven away to distant countries for safety. In this case they must starve if their fellow-christians would not receive them. Therefore it was a wise and necessary rule which the apostle here laid down. It is elsewhere commanded, <sup><3831></sup>Hebrews 13:1, 2; <sup><523></sup>Romans 12:13. The manner of performing this duty is this: it must be done in an easy, kind, handsome manner, *without grudging* or grumbling at the expense or trouble. Learn,

**(1.)** Christians ought not only to be charitable, but hospitable, one to another.

**(2.)** Whatever a Christian does by way of charity or of hospitality, he ought to do it cheerfully, and without grudging. *Freely you have received, freely give.*

**4.** To the improvement of talents, v. 11.

**(1.)** The rule is that whatever gift, ordinary or extraordinary, whatever power, ability, or capacity of doing good is given to us, we should minister, or do service, with the same *one to another*, accounting ourselves not masters, but only *stewards of the manifold grace*, or the various gifts, of God. Learn,

**[1.]** Whatever ability we have of doing good we must own it to be the gift of God and ascribe it to his grace.

**[2.]** Whatever gifts we have received, we ought to look upon them as received for the use one of another. We must not assume them to

ourselves, nor hide them in a napkin, but do service with them *one to another* in the best manner we are able.

[3.] In receiving and using the manifold gifts of God we must look upon ourselves as stewards only, and act accordingly. The talents we are entrusted with are our Lord's goods, and must be employed as he directs. And it is required in a steward that he be found faithful.

(2.) The apostle exemplifies his direction about gifts in two particulars — speaking and ministering, concerning which he gives these rules: —

[1.] *If any man*, whether a minister in public or a Christian in private conference, *speak* or teach, he must do it *as the oracles of God*, which direct us as to the matter of our speech. What Christians in private, or ministers in public, teach and speak must be the pure word and oracles of God. As to the manner of speaking, it must be with the seriousness, reverence, and solemnity, that become those holy and divine oracles.

[2.] *If any man minister*, either as a deacon, distributing the alms of the church and taking care of the poor, or as a private person, by charitable gifts and contributions, *let him do it as of the ability which God giveth*. He who has received plenty and ability from God ought to minister plentifully, and according to his ability. These rules ought to be followed and practised for this end, *that God in all things*, in all your gifts, ministrations, and services, may be glorified, *that others may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven* (<sup>4086</sup>Matthew 5:16), *through Jesus Christ*, who has procured and given these gifts to men (<sup>4008</sup>Ephesians 4:8), and through whom alone we and our services are accepted of God (<sup>3835</sup>Hebrews 13:15), to whom, Jesus Christ, *be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* Learn, *First*, It is the duty of Christians in private, as well as ministers in public, to speak to one another of the things of God, <sup>3916</sup>Malachi 3:16; <sup>4009</sup>Ephesians 4:29; <sup>4150</sup>Psalms 145:10-12. *Secondly*, It highly concerns all preachers of the gospel to keep close to the word of God, and to treat that word as becomes the oracles of God. *Thirdly*, Christians must not only do the duty of their place, but they must do it with vigour, and according to the best of their abilities. The nature of a Christian's work, which is high work and hard work, the goodness and kindness of the Master, and the excellency of the reward, all require that our endeavours should be serious and vigorous, and that whatever we are called to do for the honour of God and the good of others we should do it with all our might. *Fourthly*, In all the duties and



services of life we should aim at the glory of God as our chief end; all other views must be subservient to this, which would sanctify our common actions and affairs, ~~1~~ 1 Corinthians 10:31. *Fifthly*, God is not glorified by any thing we do if we do not offer it to him through the mediation and merits of Jesus Christ. *God in all things must be glorified through Jesus Christ*, who is the only way to the Father. *Sixthly*, The apostle's adoration of Jesus Christ, and ascribing unlimited and everlasting praise and dominion to him, prove that Jesus Christ is the most high God, over all blessed for evermore. Amen.

## ~~1~~ 1 PETER 4:12-19

### ADVICE TO SUFFERING CHRISTIANS

The frequent repetition of counsel and comfort to Christians, considered as sufferers, in every chapter of this epistle, shows that the greatest danger these new converts were in arose from the persecutions to which their embracing Christianity exposed them. The good behaviour of Christians under sufferings is the most difficult part of their duty, but yet necessary both for the honour of Christ and their own comfort; and therefore the apostle, having extorted them in the former part of this chapter to the great duty of mortification, comes here to direct them in the necessary duty of patience under sufferings. An unmortified spirit is very unfit to bear trials. Observe,

**I.** The apostle's kind manner of address to these poor despised Christians: they were his *beloved*, v. 9.

**II.** His advice to them, relating to their sufferings, which is,

**1.** That they should not think them strange, nor be surprised at them, as if some unexpected event befel them; for,

**(1.)** Though they be sharp and fiery, yet they are designed only to try, not to ruin them, to try their sincerity, strength, patience, and trust in God. On the contrary, they ought rather to rejoice under their sufferings, because theirs may properly be called Christ's sufferings. They are of the same kind, and for the same cause, that Christ suffered; they make us conformable to him; he suffers in them, and feels in our infirmities; and, if

we be partakers of his sufferings, we shall also be make *partakers of his glory*, and shall meet him with exceeding joy at his great appearing to judge his enemies, and crown his faithful servants, <sup>5000</sup>2 Thessalonians 1:7, etc. Learn,

[1.] True Christians love and own the children of God in their lowest and most distressing circumstances. The apostle owns these poor afflicted Christians, and calls them his beloved. True Christians never look more amiable one to another than in their adversities.

[2.] There is no reason for Christians to think strange, or to wonder, at the unkindnesses and persecutions of the world, because they are forewarned of them. Christ himself endured them; and forsaking all, denying ourselves, are the terms upon which Christ accepts of us to be his disciples.

[3.] Christians ought not only to be patient, but to rejoice, in their sharpest sorest sufferings for Christ, because they are tokens of divine favour; they promote the gospel and prepare for glory. Those who rejoice in their sufferings for Christ shall eternally triumph and rejoice with him in glory.

(2.) From the fiery trial the apostle descends to a lower degree of persecution — that of the tongue by slander and reproach, v. 14. He supposes that this sort of suffering would fall to their lot: they would be reviled, evil-spoken of, and slandered for the name or sake of Christ. In such case he asserts, *Happy are you*, the reason of which is, “Because you have the spirit of God with you, to fortify and comfort you; and the Spirit of 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. This glorious Spirit *resteth upon you*, resideth with you, dwelleth in you, supporteth you, and is pleased with you; and is not this an unspeakable privilege? By your patience and fortitude in suffering, by your dependence upon the promises of God, and adhering to the word which the Holy Spirit hath revealed, *he is on your part glorified*; but by the contempt and reproaches cast upon you *the Spirit itself* is evil-spoken of and blasphemed.” Learn,

[1.] The best men and the best things usually meet with reproaches in the world. Jesus Christ and his followers, the Spirit of God and the gospel, are all evil-spoken of.

[2.] The happiness of good people not only consists with, but even flows from their afflictions: *Happy are you.*

[3.] That man who hath the Spirit of God resting upon him cannot be miserable, let his afflictions be ever so great: *Happy are you; for the Spirit of God, etc.*

[4.] The blasphemies and reproaches which evil men cast upon good people are taken by the Spirit of God as cast upon himself: *On their part he is evil-spoken of.*

[5.] When good people are vilified *for the name of Christ* his Holy Spirit is glorified in them.

2. That they should take care they did not suffer justly, as evil-doers, v. 15. One would think such a caution as this needless to such an excellent set of Christians as these were. But their enemies charged them with these and other foul crimes: therefore the apostle, when he was settling the rules of the Christian religion, thought these cautions necessary, forbidding every one of them to hurt the life or the estate and property of any one, or to do any sort of evil, or, without call and necessity, to play the *bishop in another man's charge*, or busy himself *in other men's matters*. To this caution he adds a direction, *that if any man suffer* for the cause of Christianity, and with a patient Christian spirit, he ought not to account it a shame, but an honour to him; and ought to glorify God who hath thus dignified him, v. 16. Learn,

(1.) The best of men need to be warned against the worst of sins.

(2.) There is very little comfort in sufferings when we bring them upon ourselves by our own sin and folly. It is not the suffering, but the cause, that makes the martyr.

(3.) We have reason to thank God for the honour if he calls us out to suffer for his truth and gospel, for our adherence to any of the doctrines or duties of Christianity.

3. That their trials were now at hand, and they should stand prepared accordingly, v. 17, 18.

(1.) He tells them that the time had come when *judgment must begin at the house of God*. The usual method of Providence has been this: When God brings great calamities and sore judgments upon whole nations, he

generally begins with his own people, <sup><2302></sup>Isaiah 10:12; <sup><259></sup>Jeremiah 25:29; <sup><396></sup>Ezekiel 9:6. “Such a time of universal calamity is now at hand, which was foretold by our Saviour, <sup><424></sup>Matthew 24:9, 10. This renders all the foregoing exhortations to patience necessary for you. And you have two considerations to support you.”

[1.] “That these judgments will but *begin* with you that are God's house and family, and will soon be over: your trials and corrections will not last long.”

[2.] “Your troubles will be but light and short, in comparison of what shall befall the wicked world, your own countrymen the Jews, and the infidels and idolatrous people among whom you live: *What shall the end be of those who obey not the gospel of God?*” Learn, *First*, The best of God's servants, his own household, have so much amiss in them as renders it fit and necessary that God should sometimes correct and punish them with his judgments: *Judgment begins at the house of God. Secondly*, Those who are the family of God have their worst things in this life. Their worst condition is tolerable, and will soon be over. *Thirdly*, Such persons or societies of men as *disobey the gospel of God* are not of his church and household, though possibly they may make the loudest pretensions. The apostle distinguishes the disobedient from the house of God. *Fourthly*, The sufferings of good people in this life are demonstrations of the unspeakable torments that are coming upon the disobedient and unbelieving: *What shall the end be of those that obey not the gospel?* Who can express or say how dreadful their end will be?

(2.) He intimates the irremediable doom of the wicked: *If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear*, v. 18. This whole verse is taken from <sup><413></sup>Proverbs 11:31, *Behold the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth; how much more the wicked and the sinner?* This the Septuagint translates exactly as the apostle here quotes it. Hence we may learn,

[1.] The grievous sufferings of good people in this world are sad presages of much heavier judgments coming upon impenitent sinners. But, if we take the salvation here in the highest sense, then we may learn,

[2.] It is as much as the best can do to secure the salvation of their souls; there are so many sufferings, temptations, and difficulties to be overcome, so many sins to be mortified, the gate is so strait and the way so narrow,

that it is as much as the righteous can do to be saved. Let the absolute necessity of salvation balance the difficulty of it. Consider, Your difficulties are greatest at first; God offers his grace and help; the contest will not last long; be but faithful to the death, *and God will give you the crown of life,* <sup><4120></sup>Revelation 2:10.

[3.] The ungodly and the sinner are unquestionably in a state of damnation. *Where shall they appear?* How will they stand before their Judge? Where can they show their heads? *If the righteous scarcely be saved,* the wicked must certainly perish.

4. That when called to suffer, *according to the will of God,* they should look chiefly to the safety of their souls, which are put into hazard by affliction, and cannot be kept secure otherwise than by *committing them to God,* who will undertake the charge, if we commit them to him in well-doing; for he is their Creator, and has out of mere grace made many kind promises to them of eternal salvation, in which he will show himself faithful and true, v. 19. Learn,

(1.) All the sufferings that befall good people come upon them *according to the will of God.*

(2.) It is the duty of Christians, in all their distresses, to look more to the keeping of their souls than to the preserving of their bodies. The soul is of greatest value, and yet in most danger. If suffering from without raise uneasiness, vexation, and other sinful and tormenting passions within, the soul is then the greatest sufferer. If the soul be not well kept, persecution will drive people to apostasy, <sup><4153></sup>Psalms 125:3.

(3.) The only way to keep the soul well is to commit it to God, in well-doing. Commit your souls to God by solemn dedication, prayer, and patient perseverance in well-doing, <sup><4117></sup>Romans 2:7.

(4.) Good people, when they are in affliction, have great encouragement to commit their souls to God, because he is their Creator, and faithful in all his promises.