

ARMED WITH CHRIST'S ATTITUDE
1 PETER 4:1-5

Have you ever noticed how different people can view the same thing altogether differently?

For example, how would you respond if you were to go home today and, lo and behold, there was a great big pile of manure in the middle of your back yard?

Some of you would be repulsed and offended by that pile. You'd view it as a filthy, foul-smelling, good-for-nothing eyesore. You'd see it as an awful intrusion into what *had* been a very comfortable, orderly, tidy setting. And you'd want nothing more than to remove it as quickly as possible.

Some of us, (in particular, those who have already been dismissed to Children's Church), would view that pile as paradise. It is something on which they could climb, and make roads and tunnels with toy tractors, and down which they could slide and tumble to their heart's content. Never mind what it smells like or how badly it soils their clothes, they view it as a delightful addition to the playground.

Still others of you might look at that pile of manure with another perspective. You see it and immediately begin to visualize an enormous, colorful garden where the corn stands eight feet tall and where the tomatoes are six inches in diameter. You see it there and say, "Wow, that's exactly what I needed." You don't deny that it smells, that it's unsightly, and that it is going to require a lot of sweat and labor to work it into the soil. But you are looking down the road at some very positive results. You see the contribution that manure will make in the health and vitality of your garden. And that's why you're able to put up with it—even welcome it.

I repeat, different people can view the same things altogether differently. It all depends on your *perspective*.

That is certainly true when it comes to the difficult and unpleasant circumstances that are part of our Christian experience. Take trials, for example. We *naturally* view them as a nuisance, a hindrance, an unnecessary interruption to an otherwise comfortable life. That's why we go to such great lengths to avoid them. That's why when we *do* experience them we complain about them, or get discouraged, or try to alleviate them as quickly as possible.

It's because we cannot see the garden for the manure pile. We don't really understand that trials are the fertilizer of our faith. Oh, we know it up here (in our heads), but when push comes to shove, we resist and sometimes resent them.

That's a *natural* response.

But according to the Bible one of the things that makes Christians different from other people is that we are capable of having *supernatural* responses, which are often just the opposite of natural ones. That's because we have the Spirit of God living in us who gives us the mind of Christ, enabling us to see things from His perspective. That means, in part, that we can see beyond the immediate and look down the road to how it fits into God's eternal plan.

And that big picture perspective most certainly applies to the painful situations that inevitably arise and threaten our physical and emotional well-being. Peter has addressed this subject several times in his first letter, and he does so again in chapter 4. **Verse 1.** *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.*

Again, Peter is talking about suffering, and the “therefore” at the beginning of the verse takes us back to the preceding context, specifically **3:17-18a**. ¹⁷ *It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.* ¹⁸ *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God (NIV).*

Jesus suffered. He suffered to the point of death, and when He died it *seemed* like it was a horribly tragic death—that He was the victim of a violent, bloodthirsty mob and that His death was senseless. But we know from hindsight that suffering unto death was part of God’s plan for Him. It was actually the pinnacle of God’s plan for Him.

Jesus Himself was aware of this. He said, long before He was crucified, “No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:18a). And, “*The Son of Man has come into this world...to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). So when Jesus was hanging on a rough-sawn piece of timber on the town garbage heap just outside Jerusalem He was not at all surprised. He was not wondering why God allowed this to happen to Him. He was not feeling sorry for Himself or thinking about how He could retaliate.

He was thinking about what His death would accomplish. The writer of Hebrews tells us that “for the *joy* set before him he endured the cross” (12:2). Jesus was anticipating something on the other side of death that was so precious to Him that He willingly and patiently endured His temporary suffering, as brutal and horrific as it was. That “joy” set before Him is you and me and the millions of people who would be reconciled to God and receive eternal life from His death. Jesus experienced what He experienced for our sakes—*to bring us to God.*

And Peter tells us that if we have that same attitude when we suffer, then we also can patiently endure it, knowing that it will also produce positive results. He says in **verse 1**, “*Arm yourselves also with the same attitude.*” You too, says Peter, are suffering temporarily. And for some of you it’s very painful, it seems senseless, and it feels like it’s never going to let up. But put your eyes on Jesus. Remember that He was able to endure because His suffering produced a very positive result. He knew, while He was suffering, that God was going to turn tragedy into triumph, and so He could rest in God, even while experiencing the most painful, humiliating circumstances imaginable.

That was Christ’s attitude, and that’s the attitude that will help us in our suffering. Peter exhorts us to “arm ourselves” with this attitude. That’s a good translation of that Greek word, which essentially means “to prepare or equip oneself,” or “to make oneself ready.” Not surprisingly, it was used of a soldier putting on his armor when preparing for a battle, armor that was intended to protect him from becoming a casualty.

Peter is telling us that if we put on Christ’s attitude when we are suffering we will be protected from the things that we might otherwise experience during such times. Discouragement, hopelessness, resentment, bitterness, or despair. What is more, if we deliberately arm ourselves with Christ’s attitude we don’t have to be blind-sided or way-laid by trials. In fact, *we can rejoice when we suffer, knowing that God will use it to accomplish his purposes.*

And what are those purposes? Peter has identified several in this letter thus far, and there is another one at the end of **verse 1b**. “*...arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.*”

Some of you might be a little disappointed. “Done with sin? Is that all? Gee, I thought the reward for enduring suffering would be a little more exciting...and enjoyable. Being “done with sin” isn’t much of an incentive.”

If you are a follower of Christ, then the Spirit of God lives in you, who gives you the opportunity to have the mind of Christ. And if you have the mind of Christ, then the things that are precious to Christ will be precious to you; the things that are abhorrent to Christ will be abhorrent to you. And what that means on a very practical level is that you *want* desperately to be done with sin. Because sin is our mortal enemy. It is the very antithesis of who Christ is. It obscures our view of Christ, destroys our fellowship with Christ, and obstructs our walk with Christ.

And suffering is a means by which sin loses its appeal. We see sin for what it really is—ugly, destructive, detestable—and we don't want anything to do with it. What we want, during times of suffering, is the comfort and hope and blessing and grace and peace that only come from Jesus. We need Jesus to give us these things in order to survive each day, and we see sin, any sin, as a barrier to receiving those things from Jesus.

I had a conversation with a friend who, thirty years ago, lost his thirteen year old son to leukemia. Prior to his death there had been months and months of chemotherapy and painful bone marrow transplants and extended hospital stays and all the emotional trauma that went along with an illness of this kind. I remember how difficult it was for him and his wife and their three younger children. And I asked him if he ever thought about those days and all the suffering and agony they went through. And he looked off in the distance and his eyes welled up with tears. And he said, "I miss those days."

I said, "You mean you miss Trevor?"

"Oh yeah, I miss Trevor," he said, "but I miss those *days*. Because it was while we were experiencing all those hard things that I felt so close to God. I was dependent on His grace each and every day, and His grace proved to be sufficient. He was my only Source of comfort and peace and strength, and He was more than enough. The things in this world had no appeal to me. I miss that."

When you are suffering, armed with the attitude of Christ, your spiritual vision becomes sharper. Your spiritual antennae become more sensitive. Spiritual realities come into focus. Your relationship with God becomes the most precious thing you have. It's not merely a relationship that gives you a little spiritual boost during your morning devotions; it's a relationship that sustains you moment by moment throughout the day. You are dependent on Him for your strength and security and sometimes even your sanity, and in that dependence there is a joy that transcends the pain.

Someone said it well: "You'll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you've got. And when Jesus is all you've got, then you'll know that Jesus is all you need."

When you are desperate, when you are hurting, sinful desires lose their appeal and attraction. Sin seems so incredibly senseless, and you don't want to have anything to do with it.

That's what Peter means when he says, "*...he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.*"

By the way, it's not that Peter is saying that suffering may produce sinless perfection in this life. That's not possible this side of heaven. He is saying that those painful, trying circumstances are a means of purging our lives from the dross of sin. Suffering advances and accelerates the process of becoming more like Jesus. And that's what our lives are all about.

Every few weeks, it seems, there is a bunch of hype in the media about how much money has accumulated in the lottery and how rich the person is going to be who wins it.

And such news always initiates a frenzy. People waiting in line for hours to buy tickets so they might get lucky and win.

Why do people get excited about this? Because they fantasize about a carefree, pain-free existence where they can be independent and free to do whatever they want. Where they can afford to indulge themselves to their hearts' content.

Let me ask you something: What would you rather have? A care-free, pain free life where you can indulge yourself to your heart's content and, as a result, be spiritually weak and dull and dry and barren? Or, experience adversity and affliction and be spiritually alive and vital and fresh and strong and sharp? Would you rather be materially and physically comfortable in this life and be constantly pestered by temptations that you can never seem to conquer, or go through painful trials and be done with sin?

What do you want in life? I hope it's the same as what Jesus wants for you. In Paul's letter to Titus we read, ¹¹ *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (2:11-14 NIV).*

Jesus wants a pure bride. Not a bride that flirts with the world; not a bride that is having an affair with sin. He saved us so we could be done with all of that. Look back at **1 Peter 4:2**. ² *As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. (NIV).*

There was a time, before we met Christ, when we were ruled by the operating system of self-will. All we wanted was to do our own thing and follow our own path and get our own way. We were tyrannized by our selfish desires.

But when Jesus got a hold of us, He set us free from selfishness. He gave us a new operating system, the Holy Spirit, who enables us to want what God wants. But even though the Spirit resides in us, that old operating system still rears its ugly head. So there are frequent struggles between the flesh, which compels us to live for ourselves, and the Spirit, who compels us to live for God. Sometimes those struggles are intense.

Peter is telling us that suffering is a means by which the flesh is subdued. It weans us from those old selfish habits and patterns of thinking. It convinces us of the folly and futility of living to satisfy evil, selfish desires.

Suffering purifies us so that we want to do God's will. We want to obey Him. We want to be aligned with His thoughts and His purposes. We want to be men and women after His own heart. We want to display His character and promote His agenda and declare His glory and proclaim His message and advance His kingdom.

Peter continues, **verse 3**. *For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.* It's apparent that many of those to whom Peter was writing had had a rather sordid past. Someone called this the ugliest list of sins in the New Testament. It is a description of people whose lives are out of control—who are controlled by their passions. And the fact that these people had, before they came to know Christ, been participating in these kinds of activities reveals the immensity of God's grace. His grace is greater than any sin.

But Peter says, “You no longer live in that moral cesspool, and there’s no reason to go swimming in it anymore. You’re different now.” He said in chapter 1 “you’ve been redeemed from that empty way of life. You’ve been there, done that, and now you don’t even want to go near it.”

And that’s difficult for the people with whom you used to hang out and carouse to understand. **Verse 4a.** ⁴“*They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation...*”

That phrase “flood of dissipation” means literally “a swamp formed by the pouring forth of waters.” We would translate it, “a moral sewage pond.”

And the people who are swimming around in it can’t understand why you’ve gotten out and cleaned up. What’s more, when they see how clean you are it makes them mad. **Verse 4b.** *...And they heap abuse on you.*”

One of the reasons these Christians were suffering was because they refused to join in the sinful practices of their peers. And their refusal accentuated the guilt of their former friends, and the way they dealt with their guilt was by getting angry and abusive.

Verse 5. ⁵ *But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.* Every person will be introduced to Jesus Christ one day. If not as Savior, then most certainly as Judge. And the judgment to which this is referring is the final judgment when God will unleash His wrath upon those who have not received His Son as the Savior and Lord of their lives.

God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance, but He will not force anyone to do that. And, according to Scripture, *most* will refuse His offer of salvation and have to suffer the consequences.

“Consequences?” someone in the first century might say. “I’ll show you consequences. Look at these Christians. Look at all the horrible things they have to endure. If that’s what happens when you become a Christian, I don’t want any part of it. I’d just as soon grab for all the gusto I can in this life.”

But Peter continues. **Verse 6.** ⁶ *For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit*

A difficult verse to interpret, but keep in mind that Peter is talking about judgment. What ultimately happens to unbelievers, vs. 5, and believers, verse 6.

Many years ago there was an advertisement on television for Fram Oil filters. In the commercial, an auto mechanic is hoisting a blown engine out of a car, the result of failure to change the oil and filter. If only the owner had spent the ten bucks on a new filter a few thousand miles ago he wouldn’t be spending a few thousand bucks on a new engine today. And the ad closes with the mechanic saying: “you can pay me now, or pay me later.”

Some of Peter’s contemporaries were dead because they had taken a stance for Jesus. Their deaths were man’s judgment on their bodies. But that physical judgment is only a pittance compared to the eternal judgment upon unbelievers in verse 5. These believers were paying now, and their death was a small price compared to the glory that awaited them when they went to heaven.

On the other hand, these stubborn unbelievers would pay later in a place called hell, where the fire never dies and the suffering never ends and nothing is ever consumed. Where there is eternal loneliness and pain and despair.

Friends, do you realize how very short this life is? Do you understand that what you do in this life—the choices you make with regard to Jesus Christ—will determine how you spend eternity? Please consider the consequences.

I'm not going to lie to you. The Christian life is not a bed of roses. You might well experience some painful, trying circumstances. But I can guarantee on the authority of God's Word that when you embrace the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, when you repent of your sins and trust Him to save you, He will make you into a new creature, He will clothe you with His righteousness, and He will give you His mind and His heart. And when that happens you can have a perspective and a joy that transcends any problem in this world.

You can have Christ's attitude toward suffering, and be able to patiently endure it with the assurance that it will produce positive results.

Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus #335

1. O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!
 - *Refrain:*
Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.
2. Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
O'er us sin no more hath dominion—
For more than conqu'rors we are!
 - *Refrain:*
Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.
3. His Word shall not fail you—He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!
 - *Refrain:*
Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Armed with an Attitude

1 Peter 4:1-5

Main Idea: If we have Christ's attitude toward suffering, we can endure it with the assurance that it will produce positive results

Suffering for a Purpose (1)

**The positive purpose of Christ's sufferings—
"to bring us to God" (3:17-18)**

The positive purpose of our sufferings—"to be done with sin" (1c)

"Arming Ourselves" with Jesus' Attitude (1-2)

The meaning

The result (2)

"Not living for evil human desires"

"Living to do the will of God"

The Rationale (3-6)

The Moral Cesspool (3-4)

We've swam there long enough

We're ridiculed by our friends who are still swimming there

The Judgment of God (5-6)

Sinners will suffer the consequences

The righteous will inherit Life, even if they die