

HoliMess Remember Our Example

May 29/30, 2010

Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

HoliMess: Remember Our Example

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: 1 Peter 4

Introduction

WWJD. “What would Jesus do?” The year was 1896, and the novel, *In His Steps*, appeared which was based on dramatized sermons preached by Charles Sheldon, the author. An earlier generation wrote and taught about the *imitation dei*, “the imitation of God,” but Sheldon’s work tried to update the idea and apply it to the challenging social problems facing Americans at the turn of the 20th century. Part of the story is the perplexity of a homeless man who tells a preacher:

It seems to me sometimes as if the people in the big churches had good clothes and nice houses to live in, and money to spend for luxuries, and could go away on summer vacations and all that, while the people outside the churches, thousands of them, I mean, die in tenements, and walk the streets for jobs, and never have a piano or a picture in the house, and grow up in misery and drunkenness and sin.

The message was sharp: don’t call yourself a Christian unless you are willing to take the life of Jesus seriously and *live as he lived*. Of course, what was intended as a call to serious imitation of Jesus drifted into a popularized campaign in the 1990’s, complete with WWJD bracelets.¹ If people practiced the message, the symbolic accessory was perfectly fine. Still, it would be best if the initials were engraved in human hearts and lives. But that’s secondary to the central theme.

Frankly, this is pretty serious stuff — this matter of “following Jesus.” When Jesus told his followers about what he required of them, his words included references to suffering:

And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:38).

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me (Matthew 16:24).

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:27).

But Peter has already told us about the strong connection between what Christ did and what we ought to do:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow **in his steps** (1 Peter 2:21).

And there is the familiar phrase made popular by Sheldon’s novel, but, more importantly, found alongside the suffering of Jesus which Peter calls “an example.” As we noted in our previous study of this verse, the word “example” is from the Greek *hupogrammos* which corresponds to a school boy’s *copybook*.²

In this week’s study, we examine 1 Peter 4 which emphasizes suffering through the example of Christ, and suffering as “a Christian.”

1. Statistically, more occurrences of words for “suffering” appear in *1 Peter* than in any other book of the New Testament (16 out of 105 verses), with chapter 4 having the plurality of instances (5).
2. Peter prefers the Greek word family derived from *paschō* (verb, 11 times) and *pathēma* (noun, 4 times), with one instance of *lupeō* (verb, in 1:6) which emphasizes the sorrow and pain involved.

¹ Today there’s even a website (www.whatwouldjesusdo.com) which sells all sorts of WWJD-branded bracelets, jewelry, watches, rings, music, sportswear, and gifts.

² *Background Notes*, May 8/9, 2010, p. 9.

3. Of these, six occurrences pertain to the sufferings of Christ (1:11; 2:21, 23; 4:1, 13; 5:1), while the remainder have to do with the sufferings of his followers (1:6; 2:19, 20; 3:14, 17; 4:15, 16, 19; 5:9, 10).
4. The range of themes include:
 - a. The sufferings of Christ a matter of Old Testament prophecy (1:11).
 - b. Unjust suffering a common experience (2:19, 20; 3:14, 17; 4:16)
 - c. Suffering occurs “in the flesh” (i.e. a human experience) (4:1).
 - d. Suffering is shared with Christ (4:13).
 - e. Suffering should not be for personal wrongdoing (4:15).
 - f. Suffering is within the will of God and we can trust Him when it happens (4:19).
 - g. Suffering is world-wide among the family of Christians (5:9).
 - h. Suffering is for “a little while,” and eventually relieved by the grace of God (5:10).
 - i. Whereas the wider culture views suffering as a source of shame, the Christian must see it as a blessing, an opportunity to glorify God, and be joyful for what is coming next, i.e. our vindication (3:14; 4:13, 16).
 - j. Grace is seen, experienced and released through righteous suffering (2:19, 20).

Among the principal concerns of chapter 4 is the role of suffering in the removal of sin from human life. We commonly refer to this as “redemptive suffering.”

In his emphasis on the importance of suffering in human life, Peter is in agreement with Paul’s teaching as well, as this text illustrates:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:1-5).

All of this takes us back in our thinking to the primary Old Testament text on suffering:

3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:3-5).

Notice the redemptive effects of the Suffering Servant, Jesus the Messiah. From these texts arise the notion of "redemptive suffering," the idea that suffering is not wasted pain somehow dissipated within the human universe, but a powerful agent for eventually ridding the world of evil. At the center of Isaiah's description of the Servant is the reminder that in bearing our suffering, he in turn is "wounded for our transgressions and iniquities." What he embodies are the wounds of suffering in the form of "stripes" which provide "peace and healing." Yes, there is a connection between suffering and sin, but it is not the widely held and fatalistic view prevalent in the ancient world that all suffering must signal the commission of sin. Rather, biblical suffering attracts to the bearer the weight of sin so that it might be carried away and finally dealt with.

A culture which lacks this perspective can only see suffering as equivalent to evil, and such a society wants to take measures to rid itself, not of the evil, but of the suffering. Relief arrives in the form of death — the ultimate release from suffering. But in so doing, that society fails to give witness to the cross and the possibility that evil's demise lies in the endurance of suffering not in the release from it.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the nature of suffering receives thorough treatment as evidenced by these findings:

1. Suffering is not in vain (Galatians 3:4).
2. Sufferings gains it honor by being connected to the sufferings of Christ (Acts 5:41; 9:16).
3. We do not suffer alone, but suffer "with Christ" (Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; 1 Peter 4:13).
4. Present suffering must be weighed in light of future glory (Romans 8:18).

5. Some suffering is a necessary loss that we might gain something greater: Christ! (1 Corinthians 3:15; Philippians 3:8, 10).
6. We suffer with one another to fulfill the purpose of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:26; Colossians 1:24).
7. Our sufferings contribute to the well-being of others (2 Corinthians 1:6-7; Ephesians 3:13).
8. Faith acquires authenticity through suffering ("not only believe, but also suffer") (Philippians 1:29).

Suffering and a Way of Thinking (4:1-6)

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,¹ arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.³ 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.⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you;⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ 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.

The ordinary way of thinking about suffering is to avoid it at all costs. Nobody likes to suffer, unless of course they are bedeviled by a sadomasochistic malady. Certainly an adjustment to accept all suffering without distinction probably stems from a deeper dissatisfaction with life and a resignation, passively expressed, to whatever happens. We can maladapt to suffering and thereby validate it. This is not the Christian way of suffering. Suffering has no virtue *in itself*, but can become redemptive when united with the purposes of God. Peter makes such a point in 4:1 where he affirms the simple fact of Christ's suffering ("Since therefore Christ suffered..."). Christ's suffering is "in [the] flesh" from the Greek *sarki*. Peter doesn't make all of the same negative associations of "flesh" (*sarx*) that we find elsewhere in the New Testament. He simply refers to the sufferings which belong to life *in the body* — the pre-resurrection body of ordinary human life. Of this "flesh" or bodily existence, Peter tells his readers that it is:

1. Fragile like grass and flowers, capable of withering under the scorching heat of the sun (1:24).
2. Susceptible to suffering and death (3:18; 4:1).
3. Can be defiled by "dirt" (3:21).
4. The reality where we now live (4:2).
5. The context for future judgment (4:6).

"Flesh" refers simply to *human embodied existence* in which we all live until we die, and which is characterized by suffering. Of special importance is that Christ experienced real suffering because he was a real human being. Peter counters what came to be known as *Docetism*: that Jesus only *seemed to be* human. Suffering was not something *beneath* him or *unworthy* of him or *impossible* for him. As ironic and seemingly contradictory as this may appear, Jesus Christ in his *whole person* (both human and divine) experienced the full range of suffering. Indeed, he freely chose to suffer in order to achieve the purpose of God on behalf of the human race. In this case, Peter tells his audience that suffering — both Christ's and ours — is the instrument by means of which we are "done with sin" (*pepautai hamartias*). The finality involved with this action gets expressed in the perfect verb tense of *pauō*. The perfect tense in Greek refers to action in the past which has continuing effects in the present. There is also a causal element: "to make to cease." Suffering, Peter reminds his readers, is not merely a passive experience which creates victims, but an intentionally chosen activity calculated to bring to an end the reign of sin. There is the slightest hint of *intervention* involved. Suffering makes something else happen.

Suffering does not *naturally* bring sin to an end since suffering is not intrinsically good. However, what Peter tells his readers is that the suffering of Christ invests the suffering of the Christian with meaning. Our suffering becomes redemptive by virtue of Christ's suffering. Peter wants his audience to "arm themselves with the Christ-suffering way of thinking." The Greek text says *humeis tēn autēn ennoian holisasthe*. Peter uses the intensive form of the pronoun "you" with the imperative verb "to arm" or "to equip" or "to furnish" (*hoplizō*). The object of this verb is the noun *ennoia* which refers to "a thought in the mind," "notion," or "conception." The word also has the nuance of "a way or manner of thinking," "disposition," or "manner." Peter is calling for

new habits of the mind, particularly as they have to do with the role of suffering. This is an invitation to “new thinking,” and a new *orientation* of thought which redirects the mind from seeing suffering entirely in negative terms, but instead in terms of what Christ himself accomplished by means of suffering on the cross. Paralleling the words of Paul in Philippians 2, Peter is essentially saying “have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” We might also add that the word “repent” literally means to “change one’s mind,” and alter the agenda which once governed how we approach suffering.

Getting to the heart of this fresh awareness, Peter makes the specific correlation between *suffering* and *cessation of sin*. The suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross decisively dealt with sin by taking the full force of its assault on himself, doing battle with it by going into death, carrying it, and then coming out the other side victorious over it. If we view the whole compass of Jesus’ work leading to and beyond the cross, we are witnessing his experience of suffering. This connection between suffering and the final solution for sin is implied throughout the New Testament in terms of the cross. For Peter, that connection is especially tight. By implication, we are told, if Christ suffered and thereby “set sin packing,” then we, too, can undergo the ultimate defeat of sin in our lives.

Human life in its present form is limited in duration (4:2). We will all someday die. From the moment we become Christians until that decisive day, we have a choice to make: how will we spend our time? To what extent will the example of Christ influence us to make good use of both his suffering and ours? “Live the rest of the time” — this is Peter’s way of talking about the interval between the present and the future for the Christian. The Greek strings together several words to refer to this interval, calling it “the remaining-in-the-flesh-to-live-time” (*eis to ... epiloipon en sarki biōsai chronon*). What do we do with this time? Will it be lost to us, or will we simply “bide our time,” waiting out either our death or the Second Coming? Peter sees suffering as the instrument for *learning how to stop serving our passions and start serving God*. In that sense, we follow Paul’s instructions, to “redeem [buy back, make good use of] the *time*, since the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5). Even now Christ, sitting at God’s right hand, awaits the *time* when “his enemies will become his footstool” (Hebrews 10:13). This is the *time* to “wake up from sleep” for salvation approaches, and in the meantime we are to “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:11ff). For each of us, that *time* grows short (1 Corinthians 7:29). Peter himself refers to his own days as “the last *time*” (1:5), carrying a certain urgency. This is the “*time* of your exile” (1:17), and a *time* long overdue with regard to personal moral transformation (4:3). It is the *time* for judgment to begin at the household of God (4:17). Christ was keenly aware of how his *time* related to the events swirling around him, and often told others “my time has not yet come” (John 2:4; 7:6, 8; 8:20) or “the hour has come” (Mark 14:41; John 12:23, 27; 13:1). He knew what *time* it was, and faithfully discharged his work of suffering in accordance with God’s will (John 12:27; Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42).

What time is it (4:3)? That is a moral question for Peter as well as an eschatological one. As Christians we have left behind an old way of life — one in which the peer pressure of a whole culture has to be set aside. The text calls this the “Gentile” way of life, referring to our “doing the will (*boulē*) of the Gentiles.” Compare this with Paul’s instruction to “not be conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2): “world” (*kosmos*) and “Gentile” function much the same in these passages. That’s why Peter wrote about changing our *way of thinking* in 4:1. What sorts of Gentile “sins” does Christian suffering enable us to overcome? Peter offers one of several “sin lists” found in the New Testament. This is a classic catalog of “vices.” Not doing these things does not, in itself, guarantee righteous living before God. Lists of vices serve as ways of reading progress — to what extent have these things left our regular ways of behaving? Their absence serves as a sign that the experience of suffering is having its redemptive effect on us.

Several terms appear in this list:

1. “Sensuality.” (*aselgeia*). **Extreme licentiousness and debauchery.** Even pagans found some actions so reprehensible as to pronounce them impure. Josephus, the Jewish historian uses this word seven times to describe excessiveness and wantonness of moral actions. Our idea of perversion applies here.

2. “Passions.” (*epithumia*). **Strong desire.** Usually in direct contrast with the “will of God.” Lacks the focus and concentration of careful thought. Something which human beings want with great intensity, and which they imagine they cannot live without. In classical usage it has the connotation of “longing after” something. The verb root is *epithuō* which means “to strive vehemently.” Curiously, a related series of words mean “to offer incense,” and point to a special form of desire which finds expression in a religious ritual practice. That is, persons want something with such urgency, that they will offer incense to rouse the gods to meet their needs. In the book of *James*, a warning is made about such an illegitimate use of prayer: “2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:2-3).
3. “Drunkenness.” (*oinophlugia*). Chemical means for numbing suffering and clouding choice. Literally, “to set on fire with wine.” Implies a habitual state.
4. “Orgies.” (*kōmos*). **Reveling, carousing, orgies.** Language associated with certain festivals in worship of the pagan gods, such as Bacchus and Dionysius. Compare Romans 13:13.
5. “Drinking parties.” (*potos*). Associated with drinking and carousing.
6. “Lawless idolatry.” (*eidōlōlatría*). Idolatry. A Jewish designation not found in the classical writers. One prominent praiseworthy feature of Judaism in the eyes of its Gentile admirers was the rejection of images as proper representations of God. How can God be depicted if he is supreme over all? That being said, the Gentile converts to Christianity grappled with the holdovers of their life in pagan temples, worshipping pagan gods. This word also applied to the problem of food offered to pagan gods and idols in the pagan temples (see 1 Corinthians 10:7, 14). In its extended meaning, the word also denoted forms of greed and covetousness (see Colossians 3:5). Anything which takes the place of the one true God as an object of devotion and worship is an idol.

Similar lists are found throughout the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 1:29-31; Colossians 3:5, 8; Ephesians 4:31; 5:3-4; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; :4-5; 2 Timothy 3:2-4; Mark 7:21-22.³

The best test of Christian morality is administered by one’s former associates — so Peter argues in 4:4 as he appeals to the “surprise” (*xenizō*) expressed by those who had once been the Christian’s companions. The verb is a bit stronger than ordinary surprise. Its meaning is “to be a stranger or foreigner.” This is precisely the identity acquired by followers of Jesus because they are now living different lives from their wanton past. “They treat you like strangers” might better capture the meaning and reinforce the imposed identity of the Christ followers. What the former companions protest is the failure to “join with them” in certain practices. The Greek word for “join” is *suntrechō*. Peter may well have in mind the ubiquitous trade guilds and other economic associations to which the Christians once belonged before they found new associations in the body of Christ. Loss of membership in the guilds was a painful outcome of conversion to Christ — paramount to the Christ-suffering spotlighted by Peter’s letter. One might lose the ability to “buy and sell” as a result.

The weapon used to oppose the Christians is described by the word “malign.” The underlying Greek word is *blasphēmēō*, a wide-ranging verb meaning “speak against God, blaspheme, speak against, slander, insult.” What occasions this verbal mistreatment? The text tells us that refusal to join the “flood” (*anachysis*) of “dissipation, reckless living, profligacy” (*asōtia*). The key idea in this behavior is its wastefulness or prodigality resulting from an abandonment of self-control. Usually the conduct lacks awareness or concern for consequences (see also Ephesians 5:18). It would appear that persons acting in this way despise the thought that their actions matter at all. “We can do whatever we want to; it’s our body and we will do with it whatever we choose.” This lack of accountability *outside* the personal realm is the issue.

In 4:5, Peter takes up the nuance of *asōtia* and adds that such persons “will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” Similar language appears in Paul’s challenge to the citizens of Athens in Acts

³ Burton Scott Easton, “New Testament Ethical Lists,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 51, No. 1 (1932): 1-12.

17 where he declares that God will judge the world through the resurrected Jesus. Although the Christian's former companions were accountability scofflaws, they must one day face the consequences for their actions, and not even death can spare them. Peter supports this contention by once more alluding to the Noah story where persons *soon to die* had the "gospel" preached to them by the Spirit of the pre-incarnate Christ (see 3:18-22). God was desirous that His fallen world in the days of Noah heed the warnings, the safety of the ark, and thereby be rescued from the flood waters. Peter picks up the "flood" language in 4:4 where it applies to the irresponsible life-style of the Christian's former companions whose lives are a "flood of profligacy."

Notes on "Preaching to the Dead" (4:6)

Along with 1 Peter 3:19, this text has stirred considerable controversy in the history of interpretation. When commenting on the former text, we noted that the Holy Spirit inspired the preaching of Noah to wicked humanity before the Flood, announcing coming judgment ("he condemned the world," Hebrews 11:7). In the present passage (4:6), Peter writes that "the gospel was preached" (*euēgghelithē*) "to the dead [ones]" (*nekrois*). The verb tense of this preaching is aorist and refers to a past completed event. Unlike 3:19 where the verb refers to "proclamation" (from *kērussō*), in this case the word clearly means "preach the gospel." The idea that the gospel was preached in the Old Testament finds support in virtually every text which the New Testament applies to the coming of Jesus. As Peter told his readers in 1:11, the Spirit-inspired prophets of the Old Testament closely examined their prophecies in order to understand "the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." If such prophecies went forth prior to the coming of Jesus, they might legitimately be called "preaching the gospel."

However, the contention arises from the phrase "to [the] dead" (*nekrois*), the dative case of *nekros* — the common term for a person who is dead. Does this mean that the Gospel was preached to persons *while they were dead*? Or, does it refer to a preaching to persons *who are now dead*? That is, is Peter advocating a post-mortem evangelism? To get at the answer requires making sense out of the Greek words which introduce 4:6, namely, *eis touto gar*: "For toward this..." This construction appears elsewhere indicating the *purpose for which something is done*. Some examples include:

1. In Mark 1:38 Jesus directs his witness to "other towns," adding "for that (*eis touto gar*) is why I came."
2. Paul tells how the risen Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:16) with the words "for this reason (*eis touto gar*) I have appeared to you, to appoint you as a servant and a witness..."
3. Explaining the meaning of Jesus' coming, Paul writes to the Romans: "For this end (*eis touto gar*) Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9).
4. "For this is why (*eis touto gar*) I wrote, that I might test you..." (2 Corinthians 2:9).
5. "For to this end (*eis touto gar*) we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God" (1 Timothy 4:10).

Peter uses the expression three times in his letter. Besides the present instance, it appears in these places:

6. "For to this [*eis touto gar*] you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (2:21).
7. "...for to this [*eis touto gar*] you were called, that you may obtain a blessing..." (3:9).

The combination of the conjunction *gar* with the prepositional phrase *eis touto* invariably implies *purpose*.

In the present context, Peter seems to be saying, the reason anyone had the Good News preached to them was not that they might *avoid death* (or suffering, for that matter) — they all died, some of them under dreadful circumstances — but so that they might live *kata theon* ("according God's standard, in God's way of living"). Peter contrasts the judgment of their bodies (in death) with their living by the Spirit (in life). The argument depends on the preceding material in 3:5 where Peter tells his audience that God is ready to judge "the living and the dead."

We are now ready to examine the word *nekrois*, usually translated "to [the] dead." The word is in the dative case and appears without a preposition. It is possible to translate this as a dative of *respect*: "The Gospel was preached *with respect to [the] dead ones...*," or perhaps, "...for the dead ones [i.e. for the sake of]" (compare

Psalm 88:10). The Gospel has to do, after all, with the announcement that the dying Jesus has risen from the dead, and that his offer of life is God's remedy for the fact of death. The *purpose* of the Gospel, whether with respect to persons in the Old Testament or with respect to persons afterwards, is to offer eternal life through the resurrection. Given the context of suffering in Peter's letter, 3:6 is simply reinforcing the consistent message of the Bible: God intends to rectify the problem of death by providing life by the Spirit.

Persons facing suffering, as was true for Peter's readers, needed the hopeful message that out of death itself, life springs forth from God's Spirit. Believing this truth strengthened the resolve of suffering Christians in Asia Minor — and throughout the world. God's kingdom principles include the conviction that after suffering and death come glory and life. It was true with respect to the cross, and becomes true when followers of Jesus accept the responsibility of redemptive suffering.

The End of All Things (4:7-11)

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies - in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Peter and his readers lived in momentous times for Judaism and the Roman Empire. Old worlds were quickly coming to an end, and new worlds were taking their place. This section begins with familiar language — familiar, that is, to Christians living in the last half of the first century. *Pantōn de to telos ēggiken*: “Now then the end of all things has approached...” When the New Testament writers use the language of “the end,” they don't automatically mean the end of the space-time universe in an ultimate sense. Peter, in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, cited the prophet Joel and his prophecy about “the last days,” telling his Jerusalem audience, “This is that...” (*touto estin to...*) (Acts 2:16) — connecting the events witnessed in Acts 2 with the prophecy itself. The phrase “last days” (cited by Peter from Joel 2:28-32) was coded language for the climax of an historical period. Last days were regularly followed by “first days” or “new days.” In the case of Jesus, his coming into the world was climaxed by his death and resurrection — the “old and new” juxtaposed. On the one hand, the end of death had been signaled, but so had the beginning of new life. The followers of Jesus were literally living “between the times,” with the “old things passing away” and “the new things coming” (see 2 Corinthians 5:17 and elsewhere).

Those who read Peter's letter for the first time were witnessing the death knell of the old order, not only in Jerusalem (which fell in 70 C.E.), but also in Rome (which experienced civil war and saw four emperors in a single year, 69 C.E.).⁴ Though Asia Minor was not in the middle of these events, the results impacted the whole Empire, creating uncertainty and raising expectations that change was coming. The New Testament offers ample study material for the gathering storm, including the synoptic Gospels (Mark 13; Matthew 24; Luke 21); Pauline letters (the two Thessalonians letters); and *The Revelation*. Peter mentions the crisis-climax in selective terms. He doesn't feed the frenzy of “end of the world” theologies, but gleans from the inevitable outcomes ethical teaching for his readers. He doesn't offer details about what “the end of all things” entails, either by setting dates, naming persons or making predictions.

Instead, he moves immediately to the necessary changes his readers must make so that they might face these coming realities with Christian character and moral courage. The Greek word *oun*, “therefore,” introduces this section, implying that certain conduct *ought to follow* from knowing that events are reaching a climax. An old Gospel song begins, “*In times like these, you need a Savior; in times like these you need an anchor; Be very*

⁴ Students of history will recall the bloody aftermath of Nero's death, and the rapid succession and assassinations of Galba, Otho and Vitellius, culminating in regime change with the rise of Vespasian and the Flavian dynasty. Refer to the ancient historian Tacitus (56-120 C.E.) in his *Histories*, Book III. Also, Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Books III-IV.

sure, be very sure Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock...” (Ruth C. Jones, 1944). The lyricist continues by telling her reader that Jesus is the Rock and the Bible tells his story. She then adds the ethical instruction, “In times like these, O be not idle...” That is, when the *times* are *signs* of impending crisis, Christians should stand firm and remain active in the work of God, building for the kingdom.

What does that look like for Peter’s audience? Several specific instructions follow, in some cases flowing into each other. The writer is careful to explain *why* these specific actions contribute positively to the situation his readers face at “the end of all things.”

1. “Be clear-minded and self-controlled” (4:7b). The Greek words *sōphroneō* and *nēphō* appear together. They have to do, in this case, with *states* of the mind or heart that make possible the greatest amount of freedom in prayer (*proseuchē*). They are also associated with persons charged with “keep watch” over a military encampment, always on the alert for threats to security. The New Testament often connects prayer with vigilance, taking this *example from Jesus* in the Garden of Gethsemane where he challenged his disciples: “Watch and pray” (Mark 14:38; Matthew 26:41; Luke 21:36). Paul concludes his discourse on the *armor of God* (Ephesians 6:11ff) with instructions “to watch in prayer” over the encampment of God’s people. In the Gospels, persons once demon possessed but now liberated by Jesus are said to be “clear-minded” (Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35). The metaphor of military-like preparation also appears in other places (1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8). Of relevance to *1 Peter* is the linkage between “self-control/sober-mindedness” and the endurance of suffering found in 2 Timothy 4:5. Earlier in his letter, Peter requires sober-mindedness for immediate action (1:13). Later in his letter, this preparation of mind and heart is necessary to counter the strategies of the devil (5:8).
2. “Above all love each other deeply (4:8)”. The Greek says *pro pantōn tēn eis heautous agapēn ektenē echontes*. There may be an intentional parallel between the “end of *all things* (*pantōn*)” in 4:7 and the “above all things (*pantōn*)” here. Whatever Christians might think about all the crises of human history, loving one another ought to take precedence over all of them! The force of the preposition *pro* is “before” anything else. Too often we become preoccupied with the swirling events around us and allow them to shape our ethical response. Instead, Peter tells his audience, the moral imperative to have *agapē*-style love trumps them all. The adjective translated “deeply” is *ektenēs* which derives from a verb meaning to “stretch out” to the limit. Luke uses the adverbial form in his Gospel (22:44) to describe the *intensity* with which Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Gospels generally use the verb form when describing how Jesus “stretched out” his hand to heal or help persons in need (see Matthew 8:3; 14:31). Compare the features of *agapē* found in 1 Corinthians 13, and note the extent to which love “stretches” us!

Following on the heels of this instruction is its *result*. “Love conceals a *plethora* of sins (4:8b).” What is the intent of the word “conceal” which comes from the Greek word *kaluptō*? From the Old Testament we learn how God provided for the “covering” of sin so that His people might come into His presence. The provision came through the blood of an animal, sprinkled on an altar or on the persons themselves. The ancient Hebrew word for “to atone” is based on the more literal notion of “to cover” (*kāphar*). We are also reminded of the animal skins God gave to Man and Woman in Genesis 3 to make possible the restoration of their fellowship with each and God Himself. In a sense, Christian love does much the same thing, though it might well entail significance amounts of suffering in the form of humility and selflessness. However, the outcome is to set aside the damaging effects of sin often found in others by refusing to throw such sin back in their faces. From 1 Corinthians 13 we hear that love “... keeps no record of wrongs ... does not delight in evil ... (13:5b-6a).” Rather than secretly rejoicing when someone else “messes up,” *agapē* finds remedy for sin instead. Jesus did so on the cross, and we must do so in our treatment of others who sin against us.

3. “Offer hospitality to each other without grumbling (4:9).” The Greek word for “offer hospitality” is the adjective *philoxenoi*, a compound of *philos* (familial love) and *xenos* (stranger). Showing hospitality was a supreme value in the ancient world. For Christ followers in Asia Minor to open their homes often meant inviting persons from a variety of ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds. Since *1 Peter* concerns itself with life as a “stranger” in an unfamiliar place, including hospitality at this juncture in the letter is appropriate. The temptation to “grumble” sprang from the need to adjust to the language and culture of

other people groups as part of being hospitable to them. The Greek word here is an unusual one, *goggusmos*, which meant not only “to complain” but also “to whisper” or “to quarrel,” involving the connotation of “secret displeasure, not openly avowed.” It has to do with a state of mind which does something begrudgingly, but in a “hush-hush” fashion. In cultures where not everyone spoke the same language, these undertones might well have been spoken in a foreign tongue, thus disguising the meaning of what was said except for those who spoke the language. Such conduct was disrespectful, and Peter counsels the Christians in his audience against such conduct.

4. “Each one should use whatever gift he has to serve others” (4:10-11a). In this next instruction, Peter applies the example of Christ to the matter of spiritual gifts. We are to be like Jesus *in the way we serve one another*. This reminds us of Jesus’ own words in Matthew 20:26-28: “... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — 28 just as *the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Peter would have heard Jesus say this, and now he applies the example of such service to his audience. The main verb is *diakoneō* from which derives the idea of deacon or diaconate. Gifts (*charismata*) are about *furnishing* or *supplying* what others need. Elsewhere, Paul tells us about Christ’s own act of service in endowing the church with the ministries which benefit each member (Ephesians 4:7-16). He refers to such gifts as apportionments of God’s grace which “prepare God’s people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12). Those who receive these gifts, writes Peter, become “stewards” (*oikonomoi*) of them — that is, persons with specific responsibilities to use the gifts in beneficial ways. The word for *steward* has to do with *the management of a household* — an apt metaphor within the theme of *1 Peter*: we are members of *God’s household* while, at the same time, strangers in the world. Part of the way we overcome our *alien* status is through active participation in the life of the *serving community*.

Peter balances between gifts of *speaking* and gifts of *serving* in 4:11.

- a. The *speech* involved is not ordinary conversation but rather the sort which communicates God’s truth to others. The Greek word translated *oracles* is actually *logia*, an expression which has to do with collections of authoritative sayings taken from the Scriptures. In his second letter, Peter would make reference to the giving of fresh revelation in the form of spoken material (2 Peter 1:20-21). In that context, he calls such sayings “prophecy of Scripture [Writings] (*prophēteia graphēs*)” — combining both spoken and written features. Those who give the church such *logia* render an essential service for its growth and stability.
- b. The *service* (*diakoneō*) aspect draws attention to *the strength [ischuos] which God supplies*. Persons serving an alien culture as aliens themselves require more than human energy provides. Peter chooses the verb *chorēgeō* to communicate the idea of “supplies.” Our English idea of *choreography* derives from this term. The Greek word means “to lead a chorus, take the lead in a matter, furnish abundantly, supply.” When service unfolds within the Christian community, God takes the variety of gifts and *choreographs* the manner in which they work together for the common good — a beautiful good — of all. Service is not merely “grunt work,” wearisome tasks which “somebody *has* to do” or they won’t get done! **Service is the musical score and the graceful dance of the church in ministry to the world.**

The *speech* is God’s word as the musical score which the *service* proceeds to *perform* again and again for the benefit of all. Through service, the church lives out the example of Christ by becoming His body in the world. At times this body suffers with those who suffer; at other times, it rejoices with those who rejoice (see Romans 12:15).

Raising this noble view of *speech* and *service* to a new level, Peter reminds his readers of their purpose when he declares: “So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” When the suffering, alien, homeless, and pilgrim church embraces the speech of God and the service of God, it renders the performance of a lifetime — one which shines the light on the right place and the right Persons. Following the example of Christ in these ways, the church draws attention to God — the One True God Who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ. That’s what praise is all about, as the Greek word *doxazō* suggests. **Peter reveals the true heart of worship: persons who assemble in ordinary homes which lack material**

ornamentation but which are filled with the beauty of holiness live out the character of God through their speech and their service. When the character of God is in the spotlight, we come closest to grasping the meaning of *doxology* in worship. The goal of right worship is that we become what we worship.

The *Godspell* chorus reminds us:

Day by day
Day by day
Oh Dear Lord
Three things I pray
To see thee more clearly
Love thee more dearly
Follow thee more nearly
Day by day.

Seeing *God more clearly* lies at the center of Christian worship. The example of Jesus in speech and service brings us to that holy place. The result is love and holy imitation.

As if to offer his readers a bit of liturgy for their own worship services, Peter concludes 4:11 with an ascription of praise directly to God: *hō estin hē doxa kai to kratos eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn, amēn*. So dramatic and concise is this worship-act, the readers might well suppose that Peter has come to the end of his letter. However, such *internal* “doxologies” are really geared to punctuate and solemnize the ethical teaching which precedes them in the text. All ethical excellence should be directed to the praise of God, and what Peter skillfully achieves in this instance is to join his *paranesis* (ethics) with his worship. Notice the key features involved:

1. “To whom.” This is the *ascription* of praise to God as mediated through Jesus Christ. Properly, God *the Father* is the object of praise, but since there is no jealousy in the Trinity, Jesus shares the praise since he perfectly *exemplifies* the God whose character he reveals and whose throne he occupies. Other New Testament texts offer variety in saying this by using different prepositions, such as:

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Romans 11:36).

... it was fitting that God, *for whom and through whom* everything exists (Hebrews 2:10).

By directing praise in this way, the speaker is making God the *unique* object of such honor. No other being is *worthy* to receive this kind of praise. Indeed, the word “worship” is really an old English way of saying “worth-ship” — the attributing of ultimate *worth* to God *alone*. Jesus Christ alone is the uniquely appointed bearer of God’s character, and he mediates it for the benefit of the human race. “To whom” concisely focuses the act of worship on its only appropriate object by means of its only accredited example.

2. “... is glory and the power ...” The two nouns, “glory” and “power” appear together in Scripture. The combination of “glory and power,” in that order, appears in *Revelation* in the follow places (1:6; 5:13; 19:1), especially in contexts where the sovereign rule of God and Christ is emphasized. In the case of 5:13, the writer precedes the pair with “praise and honor” (*eulogia* and *timē*). A slight variation appears in Revelation 4:11, “glory and honor and power.” The reverse order, “power and glory,” occurs in Jesus’ description of “the coming of the Son of Man” (Mark 13:26). We can see the influence of the Old Testament in these examples, especially 1 Chronicles 29:11:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all .

The principal emphasis is on the *rule and ownership* of God over all things. That is, God is in control even though the world around seems out of control. When Christians live morally consistent lives, they reflect, by way of embodied example, the “glory and power” of God. By contrast, the surrounding culture with its pagan values injects chaos into God’s world. It is the ethical task of Christians to partner with God in restoring the moral order of His universe. By following the example of Jesus Christ, “glory and power” properly appear in the world as reflections of God’s character. The proper worship of God by His people lies at the center of this ordering process. When worship takes place at the beginning of the week (“on the

first day”), it serves to focus our moral energies on the character of God, and then, throughout the week, shape the world by *Christ living through us for the world*.

3. “... forever and ever ...” No single word expresses the idea of eternity in our Greek New Testament. That said, the common formula for talking about our *permanent future* is a combination of a preposition, *eis*, which points to a goal, with the twice used word *aiōn*, meaning “age” but used in the plural. The resulting phrase, “to the ages of the ages,” has the psychological effect of multiplying a single unit of time (the *age*) by that same unit again, yet in the plural. Among the Greeks and Romans, the idea of world *ages* was well-recognized. Often history followed cycles, each one designated with a kind of precious metal: “Gold, silver, etc.” Once diminished to baser material, history collapsed, only to be re-born. The Roman poet Ovid had such a scheme in his *Metamorphoses*. So did Virgil in his *Georgics*. Much earlier, the Greek Orphic thinkers followed a similar belief about human history. Of course, the big question was, “Are these cycles really taking us anywhere, or do we simply return eventually where we started from?” By declaring God’s “glory and power” “to the ages of the ages,” the Christian writers declare the triumph of ultimate purpose. For Peter’s audience, this is eminently Good News! The example of Jesus reaches its climax within history, and then the church becomes the messenger of that example until the day when God finishes what He began.
4. “... Amen.” We are accustomed to ending our prayers with this term, as well as punctuating the church’s worship. From the Hebrew, the term derives the idea of confidence, trust and faith, as expressed in the word *’āmēn*. The Greek New Testament merely adopts the Hebrew term, transliterating it rather than translating it. As a term for ending worship or prayer, it has the force of “so be it,” or “let it be.” Essentially it has an exclamatory function: “Truly!” and often appears in doublets, especially on the lips of Jesus in the Gospels: “Truly, truly” or “Verily, verily” (John 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24, 25; 6:26; and elsewhere). Jesus’ use differs from ordinary human use in that he places his *’āmēn* at the *beginning* of his sayings — thus *investing them with his authority*; normal usage placed the term at the *end*, *acknowledging* the authority. Peter follows the normal usage, since this is a prayer-praise ascription used in worship.

Suffer as a Christian (4:12-19)

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory¹ and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And “if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”¹ ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

My grandson Lucas has a habit of saying “I think that’s strange, Grandpa” when he encounters something new. Learning proceeds from the strange to the familiar, attempting to make the necessary connections so that knowledge does not become fragmentary or merely anecdotal. Human beings either rewire themselves through fresh experiences, or they collapse under the weight of the strange and unfamiliar. Our approach to experience is a delicate marriage of synthesis and analysis, of thesis and antithesis. Peter’s audience was, as you will recall, made up of persons who lived in social dissonance with their surrounding culture. They were not supposed to allow this “foreignness” to isolate them from the world so that the Gospel failed to make its intended impact. The church was called to be a mission not primarily a monastery.

That said, early Christianity struggled with its *resident alien* status, especially in the wild-lands of Asia Minor. While we can’t blame them for feeling “strange” in their pagan environment, another sort of experience was not supposed to affect them in the same way. Suffering, Peter has already argued, belongs to the calling of the Christian. Jesus himself is the embodiment of the Suffering Servant whose suffering redeems the human race. When the trial comes to the Christian, then, it shouldn’t be a huge surprise. This is the burden of 4:12-19. The Greek language, perhaps, did a service to the readers of this letter, since the words for “strange” and “surprise” have the same root (*xenos*). Peter seems to be saying to his audience: “Yes, you are strangers (*xenoi*), but don’t

be surprised (*xenizō*) by the suffering you experience as a Christian. Though strangers, you are not a stranger to suffering.”

What, then, is the opposite of *surprise* in this context? We learn the answer from the structure Peter uses to package this section (4:12-19). He concludes with “Therefore...entrust...their souls to a faithful Creator...” (4:19). Where do we turn in strange and unfamiliar experiences? As Christians we turn to God with trusting faith and with faithful trust. Taken together, 4:12 and 4:19 form the literary pattern known as an *inclusio*. Internally, this section has other patterns which resemble the familiar *chiasmus* which we have noted in other texts.

A Do not be surprised, since suffering is no stranger to us (4:12)

B Rejoice in the suffering which leads to glory (4:13)

C Insult for the Name of Christ brings blessing from God (4:14)

D Don't Suffer for evil things, but suffer as a Christian instead (4:15-16)

C' Judgment begins at the house of God (4:17)

B' Righteous are saved through hardship (4:18)

A' Suffering is according to God's will, so entrust your souls to a faithful Creator (4:19)

Peter calls the form of suffering which faces his readers, *purōsis*, a “fiery trial.” This term is used of the actual process which puts metals into a furnace where they can be refined: “the refiner's fire.” Such a process has a clear and definite goal and is neither random nor chaotic, since Peter uses the word *peirasmos* (“period or process of testing”), preceded by the preposition *pros*, “for the purpose of...” Further, this is not a *strange* (*xenos*) thing “happening” to them. The word *sumbainō* involves movement (“walking, coming”) coupled with the word for “together” or “with.” The Christian relationship to purifying suffering is not that of strangers meeting in a dark alley, unknown to each other, and potentially hostile to each other. Rather, the Christian knows suffering because he knows the *suffering Jesus*, and shares in the “fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10). The cross has made a partnership between the Christian and suffering. But that partnership is not coerced by dread circumstance but by the purpose of God.

For individual Christians, adversity has been endowed by the cross with power to bring about character formation. It was no different for Jesus, as the writer of *Hebrews* phrased it:

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation...” (5:6-9a).

How was it that suffering led to “learning obedience” and then to “perfection”? Peter clarifies the underlying dynamic in **A'** of the chiasmus when he writes about “suffering according to God's will” and “entrusting you lives to a faithful Creator.”

1. Not all suffering leads to refinement if it is the consequence of disobeying the will of God or of failing to trust him. To an audience like Peter's, there were serious temptations to “take matters into one's own hands” and arrange a solution to the “strangeness” of things. Forcing external circumstances into the mold of self-driven desire, some might well have attempted to put the world right according to their own designs. Peter knew a great deal about doing that sort of thing. After all, in the Garden of Gethsemane, had he not taken up the sword to defend his Lord against the arresting officers of the Temple (Matthew 26:51-52; John 18:10-11)? He later saw that action in light of God's larger purposes. Ironically, in that same Garden, Jesus had just prayed, moments before, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Matthew 26:39ff; Luke 22:42; see also Hebrews 10:5-7). All of this echoes Peter's earlier words in 3:17, “It is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well-doing than for evil doing.”
2. Peter identifies a short list of possible bad behaviors prompted by “strange suffering” (4:15) Like many lists of vices in the New Testament, this one includes the more egregious crimes like “murder” (*phoneus*) or “theft” (*kleptēs*). Considering the social circumstances, these might well have daunted the Christians facing attacks from hostile neighbors or cruel employers or jealous peers. Government, the trade guilds, and

ordinary community life posed potentially hostile settings, and Christians, fighting for survival in a “strange” culture were sorely tempted to settle the score in drastic ways. Moreover, the present list of vices includes the word “meddler,” a translation of the Greek word *allotriepiskopos*. This is a compound word not found in classical Greek usage but seemingly invented to describe a person who attempts to take charge of something *foreign* to him or that doesn’t belong to him (*allotrios*, “belonging to another, foreign, alien” + *episkopos*, “overseer”). Undoubtedly, displaced persons arriving in Asia Minor, Christian or not, had no immediate real property — certainly did not have lands or homes. Faced with this homeless status, some Christians might have been tempted to find remedy in less than Christian ways.

3. Positively, if we are suffering because we are doing God’s will by following the example of Jesus, then this text gives us the assurance that *glory* will rest on us. In this context, “glory” (*doxa*) is the opposite of “shame” (*aischunō*) (4:16). That is, human beings might judge us to be failures, losers, weak, and defeated, but God bestows honor on us both now and in the future. Present honor takes the form of transformed character, refined in the fire of suffering. Future honor takes the form of vindication before the judgment throne of God where He gathers His people into His everlasting kingdom, and where He incorporates their refined characters into the completed form of His new creation. Moreover, we have the opportunity to bring glory to *God* though shame surrounds *us*.
4. What is the significance of the clause “Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (4:14). One immediate connection can be made to the “glory” which rested on the ancient Tabernacle/Temple. Sometimes called the *shekināh kābōd*, “abiding glory,” this *glory* referred to the pillars of cloud and fire which symbolized the presence and power of God living among the Israelites as they journeyed from Egypt to Canaan. They served as signs of God’s royal rule among His people, and, taken together, the two pillars framed the doorway into the palace of God. The cloud represented the canopy over Israel, protecting and shielding them from the heat of the sun; the fire served as a wall of protection against enemies at night in the wild desert-land and waste-places. For the New Israel, these symbols come to mean the saving presence of God, the Word-become-flesh and “tabernacling among us” (John 1:14). At the baptism of Jesus, we see the descent of the Spirit coming to “rest” on Jesus (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; John 1:32). Further imagery comes from Isaiah 61 where “the Spirit of the Lord is *on*” the Messiah as he comes to announce Good News and to achieve the salvation of God’s people.

The role of the Spirit as agent of transformation in the life of the Christian is central throughout the New Testament. Seizing upon language from the giving of Torah under Moses, Paul writes: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). From Romans 8 we have the connection between “the sufferings of this present time” and “the glory which shall be revealed in us,” made possible by the Spirit who lives within us.

5. The statement, in 4:17, “it is time for judgment to begin,” stands parallel to Peter’s earlier statement in 4:7, “The end of all things is near.” Both statements have an *eschatological* tone to them, though not necessarily referring to the Second Coming, *per se*. The word for “time” is *chairos* which points to a *season* rather than to a temporal period. That is, Peter draws attention to the *quality* of the time rather than to its *duration*. He has already noted the coming crisis, whether for Asiatic Christians only or for the whole world. Suffering belongs to what the Jewish thinkers called “the Messianic Woes,” a time of suffering connected to the arrival of Messiah and the “end of days.” From Peter’s perspective, such a significant epoch has come and will place extraordinary requirements on the life of the church. He speaks of “judgment,” using the Greek word *krima* which generally emphasizes the *decision* or *verdict* associated with the actions of the judge in a law-court. The outcome of the *krima* could be either vindication or condemnation.

When Peter says this *krima* begins (*archō*) with the “household of God” (*ho oikos tou theou*), he immediately correlates this with “us” and “those who obey the Gospel of God.” He is not, therefore, talking about the Jerusalem Temple, although he may well have that image in the background when he uses this metaphor for the church. Using this sort of *judgment* language, the writer envisions a two-pronged process whereby some will face an unfavorable verdict while others will receive a favorable one. He may actually

be combining the refining fire image (4:12) with the judgment image so that hope can be offered to the Christians that, in advance of the final judgment, God will purify His people and pronounce His favorable verdict in advance of the final one, even for those who might otherwise been condemned. In support of this assessment of things, Peter cites Proverbs 11:31 — an ancient Wisdom source. He uses the LXX version which translates the text a bit differently than the Masoretic Hebrew: the righteous person is saved *with difficulty* (from *molis*). Such a reading emphasizes *under what circumstances* salvation comes to the righteous. Paul had a similar understanding when he wrote: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” (Philippians 2:12). Notice he does not say *work for* your salvation but rather *work out* your salvation. Using words like “fear and trembling” along with the verb “to work” suggests that the process of living the Christian life is hard work. Of course, Paul encourages his readers in 2:13 by assuring them that “God is at work in you to will and to do his good pleasure.”

6. As we note above, in 4:19 Peter ends with an inclusion which parallels 4:12. Suffering should not take us by surprise nor does it take God by surprise since He is the faithful Creator who continues to build His new creation through our lives. Suffering belongs to His plan to shape, refine, and accommodate us to His eternal kingdom. It is, Peter reminds his readers, God’s will. What we must do is *trust His process*. The basis for this confidence is none other than Jesus Christ who trusted Himself to the will of God. The writer to the Hebrews combines these several themes — suffering, will of God, trust, and holiness — in his account of how Jesus achieved God’s purpose for human beings. We include an extended quotation of that key text here in conclusion.

10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,(1) 12 saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." 13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." 14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:10-18).

Notice especially 2:13 where the writer quotes from Isaiah 8:17ff and applies these first-person statements to Jesus himself: “I will put my trust in him.” This directly parallels Peter’s instruction to his readers: “commit” yourselves to your “faithful Creator.” What turned out to be true for Jesus is hereby promised to those who are willing to let the Creator God do His special work in their lives. Jesus suffered when tested, and therefore he is able to help those who are in the same circumstances.

Concluding Thoughts

Following Jesus as our example is more than the occasional imitation of certain things that Jesus said or did. This “example” does not live in some otherworldly realm of moral values. We don’t glibly ask “What would Jesus do?” and then proceed to pick and choose this or that fine teaching out of everything he spoke. Calling Jesus our *example* means that God’s plan for Jesus also included us. What God called Jesus to achieve, He has also called us to implement. Jesus was God’s prototype new creation person, and we are the production line version in God’s new world. That does not mean, of course, that we are cookie-cutter Christians whose minds, hearts and wills are somehow set aside so that God can manufacture duplicate versions of Jesus. Holiness honors the uniqueness of our humanity even as it is shaped by the uniqueness of God. Jesus was God’s “holy one” who came into the world as a real human being so that he might, among other things, reveal what a true human being ought to look like. In turn, as followers of Jesus, we are to submit ourselves to God’s master workmanship as our Creator and allow Him to restore His image in us by reflecting the image of Himself found in Jesus Christ. Paul puts it concisely in Ephesians:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).

The Greek is elegant here: “For we are his *poem*, created in Christ Jesus...” Jesus is the original composition but we are the performance of that original score. In fact each of us is a fresh performance of Jesus, the original, the paradigm, and the example.

Glory to God! Amen.

Resources: Brief Bibliography

A number of fine commentaries provide more in-depth discussions of the topics we will discuss in these studies of *1 Peter*. The following list is selective. When referenced throughout these *Notes*, the author’s name will appear in the footnotes. Consult this bibliography for full information on the sources.

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Digger Deeper: *HoliMess: Remember Our Example*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *HoliMess: Remember Our Example* carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. Three sections comprise this week's reading: 4:1-6; 4:7-11; 4:12-19. As you read chapter 4 of *1 Peter*, label these sections with appropriate titles. What do all of them have in common? What seems to be their special treatment of the Big Idea in each case?
2. What relevance does the example of Christ's suffering have for us? What does Peter mean by being "done with sin" in 4:1, what specific forms of sin does he emphasize (4:3)? Why these? How does Christ's example help us stop living in the "old ways"?
3. Explain Peter's distinction between the "evil desires" and the "will of God" in 4:2.
4. How do our "old friends" react when our lives start looking more like Christ (see 4:4)? What helps us handle this reaction (4:5)?
5. If *1 Peter* was written before 65 C.E., in what sense was "the end of all things near," as 4:7a claims? When events rush forward toward a crisis, what impact should this help, favorably, on our lives? List the different qualities which hardship cultivate, and comment briefly on them (4:7b-11a).
6. How did hardship impact the life of Jesus (compare Hebrews 5:7-9; 2:10:-18)?
7. What goal does Peter envision for Christ followers as a result of living a disciplined life (4:11b)?
8. Why might Christians be surprised by suffering, and how might they grew beyond this initial reaction (see 4:12-13)?
9. According to 4:13-14, what is the Christ-like response to suffering? Do you find this difficult? Why? Suggest some ways to work through this seemingly impossible response. How does the example of Jesus help us in doing so?
10. Under what circumstances might a Christian "suffer as a criminal"? What temptations brought on by circumstances might invite them to do so? Think about the special conditions of Peter's audience as you reply.
11. What does it mean to "suffer as a Christian" (4:16), and what instructions does Peter give persons who do so?
12. Why might "the house of God" need to be judged by God (4:17)? In what ways do you find this a strange statement, and how might you clarify the meaning? How does Peter's quotation from Proverbs 11:31 in 4:18 explain his meaning in 4:17? Explain: "It is hard for the righteous to be saved..."
13. What does it mean to "suffer according to the will of God" (4:19)? How do we go about "entrusting ourselves" to God as our Creator when we are in the midst of suffering? How did Jesus do so when he suffered?