

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

1 Peter 4:1-19

Key Verse: 4:13

“But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

Last week, in chapter 3, we studied about the house church. In Peter's times, anyone who identified himself to be a Christian was liable to be condemned by the world as a criminal. Therefore, there were innumerable Christians who could not establish [church buildings](#) until after 200 years had elapsed. Nevertheless, after Jesus' ascension, the number of Christians increased day by day. The more the ungodly persecuted Christians, the more the number of Christians increased. But there were some spiritually immature Christians. Peter encourages young Christians how to live for the glory of God in such oppressive circumstances.

First, Jesus suffered in his body (1-3). Look at 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." Verse 1 is a summary of the full gospel of Jesus Christ. According to God's promise, God's one and only Son renounced his glory, power and honor of the kingdom of heaven. The Son came in order to save men from their sins. In order to save men from their sins, he suffered and died on the cross. After resurrection, he ascended into heaven.

When Peter said, "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body...", he is urging that Jesus Christ died for our sins. Jesus Christ also solved man's sin problem from the root. But human beings still wear earthly tents (2Pe 1:13), and they are the dust of the ground. In short, human beings are still living in a physical body. People's attachment to the world is very strong. Worldly people live in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry (3). Peter felt there was a danger that young Christians would be influenced by the sinful lives of worldly people. So Peter admonishes the flock of God under his care to think that their past sinful life was more than enough. They should not be tempted by evil desires through sinful people.

Why do we have to think that our past sinful life is enough?

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Because Jesus died for our sins. According to Paul, we call it the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Romans 6:5-7 says, "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." Paul, who knew the baptism of Jesus through his death and resurrection, said in Galatians 6:17, "Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." These verses emphasize that we should no longer be slaves to sin because we died with Christ. This is the reason why Peter said, "You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do."

Second, they think it strange (4-6). Look at verse 4. "They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you." What do worldly people think when they see converted Christians? They think: "They are strange guys; they have no fun. You know, we work so hard in this world, we must have some fun. But those Christian people only study the Bible and go to church and none of their wives wear heavy make-up or expensive clothes." Peter knew that the flock of God under his care live a different life from worldly people. Peter knew that the flock of God under his care had been criticized as strange people. Peter knew that they were wondering about themselves--if they were really strange people. So Peter encouraged them that they should not think they are strange. Rather, worldly people are strange. There was one devoted American woman missionary in Korea. She had a calling for Korean campus mission. So she left the American missionaries' compound, which was like a palace to Korean eyes, and lived with Korean people in a small rented room. She ate Korean food and she loved Korean people as her own children. Then the compound missionaries began to heap abuse on her, saying, "She is very strange. She is not one of us. We should send her back to America to check whether she has a sanity problem."

Worldly people say whatever they want to say. They say whatever their sinful nature directs. But that's not the end. Look at verse 5. "But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." This verse tells us that those who live according to their sinful nature deserve God's judgment. God is love (1Jn 4:16). But God judges because he is righteous. God judges those who lived in

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

the world like dogs. God's judgment is severe and everlasting. So the early Christians gave baptism for the dead in the hope that the spirits of the dead might be saved (6; 1Co 15:29). Here we learn that we, the children of God, are not strange people, as the ungodly see us. Rather we are the precious children of God, bought by the holy blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the ungodly say, "You are strange," we must have pity on them instead of being swayed by their habitual criticism.

Third, live as if Jesus is coming tomorrow (7). Look at verse 7. "The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray." Peter is talking about Jesus' Second Coming in this part. In Peter's times persecutions against Christians were intense. The early Christians yearned for good Jesus to come back soon and bring them back to his glorious kingdom. This kind of idea continued for three centuries. According to Jesus, the time of his coming again is not known to anybody, but only to God (Mt 24:36). Peter's point is that they should have the right attitude of Christian life, as if Jesus is coming at any moment. We must be like pure virgin brides who are waiting for the bridegroom's coming at any moment with unutterable happiness and joy of living. We should not think of other things--only our bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth, speak like God (7-11). There are always signs of the end of the age throughout history. The signs of the end of the age make people fearful and scatterbrained. But Peter says, "Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray" (7b). The world has never gotten better. The world was the world. Those who live in the world are mostly slaves of anxiety and despair and men of sighs. We can overcome the world by having a love relationship with God through prayer. So Peter said, "be clear minded so that you can pray." Prayer is personal conversation with God. When we pray the Spirit of God comes into our souls. Then we enjoy peace that passes understanding. Prayer seems to be wasting time. But prayer is the most important for all men.

Look at verse 11. "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." What can we do with our tongues? We must comfort others with our tongues. There is a saying, "With one sweet word a million-dollar debt

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

can be canceled." We must encourage others with our tongues. We must pray for others with our tongues. When we pray for others, we must speak from the word of God so that others may recognize that we speak like God. Why do we do this? If we speak like God, God may be praised. How wonderful it is when God is praised because of our tongues!

Fifth, give hospitality to one another (9). Look at verse 9. "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." In Peter's time, there were many Christian strangers who were scattered all over the world because of persecution. At first, fellow Christians were willing to give hospitality. But it continued more than two decades. Then Christian hospitality became superficial. But if Christians did not give hospitality to Christian strangers, they could not survive because Christians were only allowed to stay in Christians' houses. Ungodly people never tolerated Christians, not to mention giving hospitality. The flock of God under Peter's care accepted Peter's admonishment and they continued to give hospitality to fellow Christians. In this way, the house church of Jesus Christ could survive. In this way, the church of Christ could be established as time passed. To give hospitality to a stranger is not an easy thing to do. But we must practice this. One missionary gave hospitality to many wicked students and suffered loss both mentally and materially. But he still gives hospitality to strange boys and girls.

Sixth, rejoice to participate in the sufferings of Christ (12-19). Look at verse 12. "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." The early Christians suffered much to believe in Jesus and proclaim his name. Peter was not helpless when he saw the flock of God under his care suffering. Rather, he encouraged them to rejoice to participate in the sufferings of Christ. Look at verse 13. "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." The word "participate" has four deep meanings.

First, to participate means to commit oneself to God. According to Bible teachings, God and man are inseparable. Man's relationship with God is like a vine and branch. A branch cannot sustain its life without the vine. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

you can do nothing." God is the Creator and man is the steward of God's world. God is the Father and we are his precious children. But God gave us the absolute freedom of choice (Ge 2:17). Therefore we must use our absolute freedom of choice as long as we do not violate the law of God; we must use our freedom of choice as long as we do not provoke God to wrath. But these days there are so many ungodly people. Jean Paul Sartre, an atheistic existential philosopher, mainly dealt with man's relationship problem. He said that it is better to have a contract marriage. Because of his bad influence man's relationship with God became worse.

One young man married and lived with his wife for the last 15 years. But he said once, "I never committed myself to my wife." He could not commit to his wife because he has no commitment to God. One young man said, "UBF is the best student movement in the world. But I cannot commit myself to UBF because UBF is not the only church in the world." His problem is not commitment to UBF, but his commitment to God.

But when the early Christians believed in Jesus, they believed Jesus' death for their sins and his resurrection for the living hope in the kingdom of God. When they believed in Jesus, they knew they were bought by the blood of Jesus. At the same time, they committed their lives to Jesus. So Peter said in verse 19, "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."

Second, to participate means to identify as Christians. At that time, anyone who identified himself to be a Christian was alienated and ill-treated. Many of them were killed. There is a story about Polycarp, an early father. He was an old man. He lived a holy life. He also helped many helpless people. At first, no one bothered him for his faith in Jesus Christ. Finally, the hand of persecutors reached him. Persecutors came and said to him, "If you deny the name of Jesus, we will save your life. If you claim his name, you will be burnt up." Then they piled up firewood and dumped him on it. The old man Polycarp said, "For 86 years I have been his servant, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my king who saved me?" Then they immediately burned him up. He was known as one of the first martyrs among the early fathers in Christian history. In fact, there were innumerable martyrs before father Polycarp.

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Third, to participate means to suffer to proclaim the name of Jesus.

At that time, the early Christians could not teach the Bible through one-to-one or invite someone to study the Bible. Romans who had lived corrupted lives persecuted the Christians beyond measure. However, most Christians witnessed to the name of Jesus through their holy lives. Many wretched people came to know Jesus through Christians' godly lives. In the matter of time, Romans could not trust any Romans because of their evil behavior, mainly because of their diseases caused by their immoral lives. Gradually, Romans only trusted Christians, and many noble Romans wanted to have daughters-in-law from among Christian women. The Roman Empire was still the only world-power nation. But their inner corruption and violence were ruining the fibre of their nation. Soon the Roman Empire crumbled. On the other hand, Christians' high standard of moral life, mutual love in Jesus and daily prayer overcame the world.

Fourth, to participate means to participate in the glory of God. How could early Christians participate in the suffering of Jesus so courageously? Look at verse 14. "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." This means that when we participate in the suffering of Christ, the glory of God rests on us. As a result, we do not feel pain; rather we feel the mighty Spirit of Jesus in our souls, and the heavenly glory of God rests on us.

In Acts 7 Stephen taught his people how God wanted to make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But his people rebelled against God again and again. With a broken heart, Stephen rebuked them by saying, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears" (Ac 7:51). Then they stoned him to death. At the time of his death, he said, "Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Ac 7:56). At the time of his death by stoning, Stephen saw the glory of God resting on him. So he could pray, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Ac 7:60). When we participate in the sufferings of Jesus Christ we can see the glory of God. We are strengthened by the mighty Spirit of Jesus. When we participate in the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ we can advance the kingdom of God on earth.

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Today we learned we must participate in the suffering of Jesus Christ so that the Spirit of God rests on us while we are on earth and we may inherit the kingdom of God as our inheritance in the future.