

THE CHRISTIAN IN CRISIS

God's Purposes...Your Response

INTRODUCTION

The issue of suffering is one that may consistently baffle even the most committed believer. Perhaps you know what it is to cry out in puzzled anguish like the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk, asking God *why?* and *how long?* Maybe you've picked up the modern cliché, "Life's not fair." But is this true? Does the sovereign Lord possibly have specific *purposes* that sufficiently answer the pressing *why?* Can the believer live victoriously in the knowledge that "*how long?*" is not an eternity?

Scripture is not silent on this crucial matter. From early Genesis right through the end of Revelation, God speaks clearly and forcefully, offering His glorious comfort to His suffering children. He does indeed give the Christian "everything that pertains to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), although He may not answer every specific question that comes to mind. Nearly every page of Scripture contains some piece of wisdom on the issue of suffering. Yet in the midst of this abundance, there is hardly a better place to turn on the matter than to the first epistle of Peter. This particular book is packed with both promises and exhortations to sustain the struggling believer. God's basic purposes come to light on its pages, along with His instructions on how the believer ought to respond in order to accomplish those purposes. Peter speaks both to present suffering and potential suffering. He speaks to unjust suffering as well as suffering that results from our own sin. The Christian who takes the time to explore this portion of God's Word will not be disappointed, but will surely find the strength, comfort, and hope that he needs to patiently endure the trials of earthly life.

BACKGROUND

Authorship. The opening words of the epistle identify the author as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." Overlooking what appears to be obvious, some have objected to Petrine authorship on the basis of several different objections:

- (1) Peter is considered "unlearned" in Acts 4:13, and this is said to be inconsistent with the level of Greek in 1 Peter.
- (2) The theology is too much like that of the Apostle Paul.
- (3) The epistle reflects a time period after Peter's death.
- (4) There is little indication that the author is familiar with the events of the life of Jesus.¹

However, these objections can be answered. The term "unlearned" may simply mean that Peter lacks the formal education of a rabbi. The similarity to Pauline theology should pose no problem, since *God* is the ultimate author of all Scripture. The theologies of Peter and Paul *ought* to be comparable! The text is not specific enough to identify the time period; Peter addresses *both* present sufferings *and* potential times of trial. Although the original setting is important to our understanding, God's Word, spoken here through Peter, applies to *all* believers during *all* time periods.

The final objection may be the most significant, and perhaps the one most readily answered. While Peter does not offer historical narrative about the earthly life of Christ, he presents the sufferings of Christ as an example to the suffering believer. This is particularly striking in 2:23, where our Lord "entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly." It is a wonderful comfort

¹ Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), p. 23.

to know that these powerful words were penned by an eyewitness to the crucifixion--one who denied Christ three times, but repented and was transformed into one of the boldest preachers of all time! Knowing Peter's background, the believer can be encouraged. Peter is an *example* of what he preaches.

Finally, it seems to require actual deception on the part of the author, if this person is **not** Peter. Since the objections are not convincing, it is wise to trust that the apostle Peter is indeed the author of this powerful epistle.

Audience. There are some indications that the original recipients were converted Jews. For example, they are "of the dispersion" (1:1). However, several key phrases would be highly out of place if applied to the pre-conversion life of a Jew. For example, "the empty way of life handed down to you by your forefathers" (1:18) hardly describes the traditions of Abraham, Moses, and other key forefathers, although it might be argued that Pharisaic regulations were rather empty. Similarly, Peter describes the former lifestyle of his audience, in 4:3-4, as characterized by lusts, drunkenness, orgies, idolatry, and godlessness. Despite the disobedience of the Jews throughout history, this seems to more accurately reflect the lives of surrounding pagan nations. Thus, it seems more probable that Peter's audience consists primarily of converted *Gentiles* rather than Jews. Either way, his words have extreme relevance to the lives of all Christians. Whether Jew or Gentile, the unbeliever is spiritually dead in sins and without hope. In Christ, the distinction between the two is abolished (Galatians 3:28), and all believers may find hope in this epistle.

GOD'S PURPOSES

Peter points out that the believer suffers *according to God's will* (4:19). The genitive here ought to be taken as subjective: God actually wills, or ordains, the Christian's suffering. It is not by random chance, but according to His good plan. God is glorified in the sufferings of His people. Several major purposes come into clear focus as we examine Peter's writing. These can be readily remembered as the four "T's": Testing, transformation, testimony, and teaching.

Testing

Using a *ὡς* clause, Peter states one of God's specific purposes during the opening lines of his letter. The trials of the believer are not "bad luck," not the result of mere chance, but intended by God for the testing, or examining (*δοκιμιον*), of the believer's faith. This word has the sense of proving that faith to be genuine. How easy it is to praise God when all is well! How easy it is to trust God, to believe in His goodness, and to make a profession of faith, during good times. But it is the tough times that separate that sheep from the goats, the true believers from those whose faith is false. The related verb form is used in reference to the refining of gold through the fire. The believer's faith is even *more precious* than gold. Dennis Johnson points out here the allusion to Malachi 3:1ff., as well as Proverbs 27:21.² The Lord is compared there to a "refiner's fire"

² D. E. Johnson, "Fire in God's House: Imagery from Malachi 3 in Peter's Theology of Suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19)," JETS 29:3 (September 1986), pp. 288.

which serves to purify. Sometimes the church is purified and strengthened by persecution. So, too, is the individual believer.

It is worth noting here, as well as in 1:18, the comparison between the immortal and the perishable. The believer has a faith that is immortal, and he is promised eternal life. Gold and silver, so valuable in the eyes of the world, are corruptible (φθαρτοις), subject to decay. The first use of this comparison shows Christian faith to be more precious (πολυτιμωτερον) than gold. The second instance compares the blood of Christ, which is the basis of that faith, to gold and silver. In each case, the believer is pointed to an *eternal* perspective, renouncing the fleeting pleasures that the pagan world holds dear.

Transformation

A second significant purpose for suffering is to conform the believer to the image of Christ, the One who suffered and died for his sins.

Election. Notice how both the believer and Christ have been elected and called according to the foreknowledge of God. The letter is addressed "to the elect"... "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1:1-2). Christ was also foreknown "before the foundation of the world" (note the similarity to Ephesians 1:4, speaking of the believer), but made manifest now "because of you" (1:20). God's "foreknowledge," προγνωσις, implies more than a simple knowledge in advance. It has the sense of predestination, something that God has *ordained* and determined in advance.³ It is intimately entwined with the concept of election. Both the believer's salvation, and its

³ Grudem, p. 85.

accomplishment on the cross through Christ's suffering and death, were determined in advance according to the will of God. Even at the beginning of the epistle, the believer has something vitally important in common with Christ: election. At the same time, the Christian must remember that Christ's election is based on His *worthiness*, but the believer is shown *mercy*.⁴ Thus there is a call to give thanks to God in a spirit of humility.

Stones/Cornerstone. Another rich comparison occurs in 2:4-8, where Christ is called both a "living stone" (2:4) and a "cornerstone" which is elect and precious (2:6). Believers have the privilege of being also called "living stones," being built into a "spiritual house" or "holy priesthood" that they may offer spiritual sacrifices (2:5). The imagery here is unusual and powerful, as a stone is normally not *living*. Yet Peter combines here the sense of a solid, immovable rock, with the activity of building. Christ is the chief cornerstone on which many stumble (2:8), but believers are called to be "living stones," following in His steps as they are built into a temple to glorify God.

Holiness. Quoting Old Testament exhortations (Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7), Peter commands his readers to be holy, because God is holy and He is the One who has called the believer (1:15, 16). The Christian is to become increasingly like his Savior. Obedience, as we will discuss later, is a key element in the believer's response to suffering. In addition, *holiness* implies a separation from the world. Believers are *God's* people, belonging to Him, set apart as His family.⁵

⁴ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), p. 93.

⁵ Jay E. Adams, *Trust and Obey*. (Greenville, SC: A PRESS, 1978), p. 37.

Suffering. The believer is called to follow Christ in suffering and to imitate His righteous responses. Christ suffered unjustly; He committed no sin (2:22). Likewise, the Christian is warned that just suffering, that which is deserved because of sin, has no honor or credit (2:19). In fact, it actually dishonors God. While Christ's purposes in suffering cannot be imitated, in that He died for the redemption of others,⁶ the believer is called to a Christ-like response. Dr. Clowney points out that Peter weaves together two themes regarding the suffering of Christ: the *example* that He left, and the *saving purpose* of the crucifixion.⁷ Peter goes so far as to say that the believer is *called* to suffer for the cause of Christ, *because* Christ has suffered on his behalf. Certainly, in view of what He has done for the sake of our salvation (4:1), it is not too much to ask that we be ready to also suffer for Him, and to respond as He did.

Testimony

One of God's most significant purposes comes to light at several points in the epistle. The believer's suffering is intended to be a testimony to God's power and to bring glory to Him. We noted earlier that in 1:7 Peter states that suffering has come in order to prove the genuineness of the Christian's faith. At the end of the same verse, he goes on (using an aorist passive subjunctive construction to express purpose) to say that through this suffering and testing there ought to be found praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Grudem points out the possibility that this may reference the praise to be *received*

⁶ Adams, p. 89.

⁷ Clowney, p. 117.

by believers at the final judgment.⁸ However, the receiving of praise by God's people certainly brings glory to Him. Grudem also notes, helpfully, that the idea of a future revelation reminds us that the specifics of God's purposes are not fully known at the present time.⁹

Several exhortations also spell out the believer's responsibility to glorify God and give testimony to the world. In 2:12, the Christian is commanded to live such a good life that even the pagans, who accuse the him of wrongdoing, will be forced to glorify God "on the day of visitation." Similarly, he must always be prepared to give a defense of the hope that is in him, doing so with a good conscience so that those who slander him might be ashamed (3:15, 16). Perhaps, though it is not explicitly stated here, those who hear that defense might come to Christ. The testimony of a believer's life, in addition to words spoken with gentleness and fear (of God), may be used by God to testify of His love and draw others into the kingdom. As that takes place, God is glorified. Specific exhortations in 4:10-11 command the believer to use his gifts to serve others and glorify God. If he speaks, he is to do so as if his words were the words of *God*, and to serve with the strength that God provides. The purpose (note the *in* clause) is that God might be glorified in *all things* through Jesus Christ. "All things" includes the trials of the believer's life, and surely it is no coincidence that these exhortations precede a major section (4:12-19) regarding suffering for Christ's sake.

⁸ Grudem, p. 64.

⁹ Grudem, p. 65.

Teaching

Peter draws a contrast between just and unjust suffering, urging the reader to endure *unjust* suffering for the cause of Christ (2:19-20, 3:13-18, 4:14-18). *Just* suffering, brought about by one's own sin, is not commendable and does not bring glory to God! However, it ought to be noted that God *disciplines* His children (Hebrews 12:1-12), teaching them to walk in His ways. While this is not the particular emphasis in Peter, it is a very real purpose. God may also teach His children through their unjust trials--patient endurance, deeper trust in Him, and a growing eternal focus.

THE BELIEVER'S RESPONSE

The epistle of 1 Peter abounds with exhortations on how God expects His children to respond to earthly trials. As "resident aliens," they are to anticipate suffering for His sake, responding in trust, obedience, and even *rejoicing*. Their hope is to be founded on the eternal life graciously provided by God, rather than on the passing pleasures of the world.

Aliens and Sojourners

Two Greek terms are used by Peter to remind the believer of his heavenly citizenship. The letter opens with an address to the elect *παρεπιδημοις*. Bauer defines this word as one who is "staying for a while in a strange place, *sojourning*...stranger, exile, sojourner, resident alien...Christians, who are not at home in

this world."¹⁰ It is also used in Hebrews 11:13 to describe the Old Testament examples of faithful believers. Peter combines this term with *παροικου*ς in 2:11 (also used in 1:17), showing how this "resident alien" status is the basis for the believer's good conduct as a servant of God. This second term is defined in Bauer as "stranger, alien, one who lives in a place that is not his home."¹¹ Dr. Clowney points out that although some might wish to take these terms literally, in view of the conditions of the original audience, they ought to be taken figuratively. Peter's letter is addressed quite inclusively to all the people of God, and the Israelites, even in their promised land, were called "resident aliens."¹² Thus the term is a clear reminder to the believer that his hope is future-oriented. He belongs to God, and his future is in heaven, not this passing world. The terminology here brings a comfort and hope to the suffering Christian.

The Hope of Heaven

The believer's perspective must be eternal in its focus, even though he faithfully attends to his God-given responsibilities on earth. He draws strength for the battles of this life from the knowledge of his assured eternal destiny with the Lord.

The theme of eternity is clearly established in the first chapter of this epistle. Verses 1-3 describe the believer's salvation in breathtaking terms. His hope is *living*, because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead (1:3). God has given him *new life* according to His great mercy (1:3). His inheritance is

¹⁰ Bauer, p. 165.

¹¹ Bauer, p. 629.

¹² Clowney, p. 227-9.

described as imperishable, pure/undefiled, and permanent, guarded (τετηρημενην--perfect tense!) in heaven (1:4). Not only is the inheritance guarded, but the believer himself is guarded (φρουρουμενους). Here the present tense is a comforting assurance of God's *continuing, ongoing* watchfulness, even in the midst of fiery trials. In verse 9, Peter points out that the τελος (goal, purpose) of the believer's faith is the salvation of his soul. Keeping his eyes on that final goal is crucial during times of testing. This salvation is so great that even the prophets and the angels have longed to know more about it (1:10-12). Chapter 1 concludes with additional stress on the living, enduring word of God, through which the believer has been born anew of *imperishable* seed (1:23-25). Though physical life is temporary, like the grass of the field, the life given to the believer through God's word and power is *eternal*. He must never forget that, and indeed, Peter references it again as a basis for further exhortations (see 4:7, for example).

Suffering is Certain

Peter leaves no doubt that his readers can *expect* suffering as a natural, ongoing part of their time on earth. They are not to be astonished or surprised (ξενισθε) as if something strange, foreign, or unusual (ξενος) were happening. The painful ordeals of life are not at all extraordinary. More than mere inconvenience, these trials are described as *fiery* (πυρωσει), or burning, an allusion that was used earlier to describe the process of refining gold. The extensive wildfires in Southern California in 1993 are a striking reminder of the extreme heat and pain that is caused by fire. It is tempting to expect, and even to teach others, that

receiving Christ will put a permanent end to all problems. Yet the Christian cannot expect to escape the "heat," but rather must expect and even welcome it, understanding God's purposes and joyfully anticipating the eventual complete victory that Christ promises. God's fire purifies His people, then moves out in eschatological judgment on His enemies.¹³

God's people can expect to suffer ridicule, slander, and other abuse at the hands of surrounding pagans. Several words are used to describe such abusive treatment, which is often verbal in nature:

(1) *Καταλαλεω* (2:12, 3:16) means to "speak against, speak evil of, defame, slander someone."¹⁴ The Christian is to live in such a manner that such accusations will be found false.

(2) *λοιδew* (2:23 [Christ], 3:9 [the believer]) is a stronger term meaning to "revile, abuse."¹⁵

(3) *σκολιος* (2:18), "crooked, unscrupulous, dishonest,"¹⁶ describes the master (or modern employer!) to which the Christian slave (employee) must submit.

(4) *κακων* (3:9) is a broader term describing actions that are evil, injurious, harmful, or even dangerous, and intended as such.¹⁷

(5) *ξενιζω* (4:4), though not abusive in and of itself, describes the astonishment of the pagans when the Christian does not join him in his sinful passions.

¹³ Johnson, p. 289.

¹⁴ Bauer, p. 412.

¹⁵ Bauer, p. 479.

¹⁶ Bauer, p. 756.

¹⁷ Bauer, p. 398.

(6) *πασχω*, the most general term of all, is to suffer, endure, undergo, even to the point of death.¹⁸ It is used to describe both the sufferings of Christ (1:11, 2:21, 2:23, 3:18, 4:1, 4:13, 5:1) and the sufferings of the believer (2:20, 3:14, 3:17, 4:1, 4:13, 4:15-16, 4:19, 5:10) in 1 Peter. It is thus not *merely* verbal abuse that the believer must patiently and joyfully endure, but even martyrdom for the cause of Christ.

Peter reminds the reader of the spiritual battle that underlies persecution (5:8-9). The believer must be constantly alert to the reality of his ultimate spiritual enemy, the devil, who walks around roaring like a lion and seeking to *devour* him, overwhelming him and swallowing him up. This does not suggest unwarranted terror, but a watchfulness on the part of the Christian, so that he is not deceived by the enemy's tactics. He must *resist* the devil firmly, knowing that his fellow believers throughout the world are enduring similar struggles. At the same time, he must be self-controlled and prepared for action (1:13). The imagery here of "girding up the loins of your minds" echoes Ephesians 6:14. This ancient metaphor is a clear call to be ready for action.¹⁹

Rejoice!!

Rejoicing is a prominent theme in 1 Peter. It may not be the most natural response to fiery trials! Yet in view of the glorious, imperishable, heavenly inheritance that is assured to the believer, he must respond joyfully to his trials. This is a

¹⁸ Bauer, p. 634.

¹⁹ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter (Word Biblical Commentary)*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1988), p. 53-4.

key element of the overall righteous response to suffering that ought to characterize Christians.

That joy is first encountered in 1:6, following Peter's detailed description of the inheritance guarded in heaven for Christians. The word used here (*αγαλλιασθε*) is unusually strong. It means to be glad, to be overjoyed, to exult.²⁰ This is no fake smile hiding a despairing spirit! Verse 1:8 drives home the point even more, as the believer exults in Christ with unspeakable joy. The believer is able to maintain this astonishing spirit of joy, in the midst of fiery trials, because of the salvation that God has graciously provided in Christ.

The form of the verb *rejoice* in 1:6 could be either indicative or imperative. An article on this issue thoughtfully explores the possibilities.²¹ The author points out that although the letter as a whole is engaged in exhortation, the mood of this beginning section is imperative. He also explores the antecedent of *εν ω*, which could perhaps be the entire preceding phrase regarding salvation, or "in the last time." He concludes that the antecedent is the latter, that the indicative mood here is used in a future sense, and therefore the rejoicing is to take place at a later time, when the believer is finally at rest with the Lord. However, an imperative in the midst of indicatives is neither grammatically nor theologically impossible. The indicative(s), in this instance a vivid description of eternal life, may build the foundation for an exhortation, particularly one like this that is so contrary to normal expectations! The possibilities here are intriguing and future rejoicing is not to be ruled out. However,

²⁰ Bauer, p. 4.

²¹ Troy Martin, "The Present Indicative in the Eschatological Statements of 1 Peter 1:6, 8," *Journal of Biblical Literature* III/2 (1992), p. 307-314.

I am inclined to conclude that the present tense verb here, *rejoice*, is an exhortation based on the certainty of salvation, or at the very least, an indicative describing the ongoing attitude of the believer who understands the greatness of his salvation. Jay Adams shares the view that Peter intends exhortation:

"He is saying that the Christian's **hope** is so glorious that when he contrasts it with those sufferings that **sadden** him, he has reason for gladness in spite of the severity of the **trials** that he must endure. In this respect, Paul's words about hope and suffering in Romans 8:18-25 exactly parallel Peter's."²²

Later in the epistle (4:13), Peter does give a clear exhortation to rejoice. There the Christian is to rejoice that he shares in the sufferings of Christ, *in order that* he be overjoyed when His glory is revealed. This passage combines both the present attitude of ongoing joy with the reality of even greater rejoicing at the time of final victory.

Reverence, Submission, and Trust

Following the example of his Lord, the suffering Christian is to entrust himself to God in reverential fear, demonstrating an attitude of humble submission. The world (or even other Christians!) may accuse him of failing to be "assertive," or may label him "codependent."²³ Even so, he must follow Christ's example.

²² Adams, p. 17.

²³ In other writings, I have critiqued these modern notions. Some people do cater to the demands of others out of ungodly motives, such as the fear of man. However, modern psychology's theory of "codependency" is rooted in a doctrine of man (and of God) that radically defies Scripture.

Reverential Fear of God. This fundamental attitude must undergird the believer's responses to trials (1:17). God is the judge of both the living and the dead, to whom the pagans will one day give an account (4:5). He is therefore the one to be feared, not man (2:17). He cares for those who love and trust Him, hearing their prayers, but turns His face against evildoers (3:12). Peter contrasts reverence for God with the fear of man (3:14-15), instructing the believer not to "fear their fear nor be troubled" (3:14b). He comes close to quoting Old Testament prophet Isaiah (8:12-13 in the LXX). The verb for "troubled," *ταρασσω*, is one "which means 'be shaken up, disturbed, frightened,' and often implies emotional turmoil (note its use in Matthew 2:3; 14:26; John 13:21; 14:1; etc.)."²⁴ This exhortation is particularly impressive coming from the disciple who had formerly denied his Lord three times, crumbling in the fear of man just prior to the crucifixion! Peter has learned his lesson, one that all believers need: The fear of man is overcome by reverence for God. The believer is to "set apart" (sanctify, regard with reverence) Christ as Lord in his heart, knowing that God is indeed in sovereign control. He is to respond to those who question him with "gentleness and *fear*, having a good conscience" (3:16).

Submission and Humility. As Peter gives instructions to believers in specific situations, he constantly emphasizes the need for submission to authorities established by God, and an attitude of humility that clashes with worldly pride. In 2:13-19, he speaks of submission to governmental authorities along with other human masters, as servants or slaves of *God*. While fear is due to God alone, the believer must *love* his brothers, *honor* the

²⁴ Grudem, p. 152.

king (2:17), and obey his master (2:18). All of this is "because of the Lord" (2:13), bringing glory to Him.

Similarly, wives are called to live in submission to their husbands (3:1-6), even those who disobey God's Word (3:1), because it is possible that those unbelieving husbands will be won to Christ "without a word" (3:1). Yet this is no one-way street! Husbands are called to honor their wives as co-heirs of God's grace. Failure to heed this admonition will hinder their prayers (3:7).

Responses to unbelievers must likewise be characterized by a gentle spirit (3:15-16), not a boastful, arrogant, or self-righteous attitude. Note how this lifestyle parallels that of the submissive wife, although here the believer responds to those who ask him to give a defense of his Christian faith (3:15).

In the church body, submission is again required. The elders are addressed first (5:1-4). They are called to set the example by their of shepherding God's people, not out of greed or in lording it over others, but by loving oversight and godly example. The younger ones are to be subject to the older ones (5:5). Yet *all* believers must be subject to one another, clothed in humility (5:5). God will properly exalt the humble in His own time, but He resists those who are proud in spirit (5:6).

Trust. Godly submission is possible for the believer because of Christ's own example, as portrayed so powerfully in 2:22, 23:

"Who did no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth,
Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return,
when He suffered, made no threat, but entrusted Himself to
the One who judges justly." (my translation)

This is the ultimate righteous response. Christ was subjected to the worst possible abuse, both verbal and physical. He was mocked and insulted, yet He responded in love. His sinlessness and deity

are affirmed in verse 22; there was no sin or deceit in Him. Though He might have rightly threatened or warned (*απειλεω*) those who so horribly mistreated Him, He did not. He knew the purpose of God the Father in sending Him to suffer for our sins, so He *entrusted* Himself to the One who judges justly. The Greek *παραδιδωμι* means to entrust, deliver over, hand over, or commit.²⁵ Grudem notes that Christ entrusted not only Himself, but *the entire situation*. He further suggests that the imperfect tense of this verb implies a repeated past action, not a one-time event.²⁶

The believer is exhorted to follow in His steps (2:21). "To this you were called" occurs not only here, but again in 3:9, where Peter expresses one purpose for enduring unjust suffering, returning a blessing instead of a curse. The believer will inherit an eternal blessing. In this epistle, the sequence of *suffering now...glory/blessing later* occurs repeatedly (see, for example, 1:6-7, 4:13, 5:4, 5:10). Christ suffered first and then entered into glory. So it is with the believer, who is called to imitate His righteous response.

This trusting response, so contrary to normal inclinations, is based on the knowledge of God's ongoing, watchful care (1:5). The believer has been purchased by the precious blood of Christ (1:18-19), called out of darkness into God's light (2:9), and now *belongs* to the people of God (2:10). Knowing that he is God's purchased possession and child, the Christian can be absolutely certain of God's care and control over any situation, no matter how fiery the trial. He is also assured that, having trusted in Christ the Cornerstone, he will *never* (Greek double [emphatic]

²⁵ Bauer, p. 614.

²⁶ Grudem, p. 130.

negative) be put to shame (2:6). God's justice, in the end, does not fail to vindicate him.

Two specific exhortations near the end of the epistle are specifically concerned with the believer's entrusting of his life and situation to God. Concluding a major section on suffering for righteousness, Peter exhorts Christians to entrust their lives to their faithful Creator (4:19). He uses a verb, *παραιθῆμι*, that is similar to the one in 2:23, where Christ also entrusted Himself to God. This verb means to entrust, commit, or give over.²⁷ Grudem expands this definition: "to give to someone for safekeeping, to turn over to someone to care for."²⁸ Dr. Clowney notes that this same word is used for making a deposit of money. In the ancient world, where there were no banks, one might entrust his funds to a neighbor while on a journey.²⁹ It is this absolute trust that ought to characterize the believer immersed in earthly trials. Recalling God's continual care and concern, Peter calls the believer to cast all of his cares, or anxieties, on Him (5:7). Grudem wisely points out that verse 7 does not begin a new sentence, but continues the command to "humble yourselves" of verse 6, explaining *how* the Christian can dare to humble himself. He is able to humbly put others ahead of himself because *God* is more than able to care for him.³⁰ He is even able to endure unjust persecution!

²⁷ Bauer, p. 622-3.

²⁸ Grudem, p. 185.

²⁹ Clowney, p. 195.

³⁰ Grudem, p. 195.

Obedience

Obedience to God's commands is a crucial aspect of the Christian response to crisis. As the hymn title "Trust and Obey" emphasizes, obedience is intimately linked with trust in God. Jay Adams chose this title for his commentary on 1 Peter because these two words summarize "God's instructions for facing trials and tribulations."³¹ Peter covers several important aspects of that obedience in his first epistle.

Obedience and Election. The emphasis on obedience begins immediately, as in 1:2 believers have been chosen unto obedience.

Some see this as initial obedience to the gospel,³² whereas others believe this can only refer to daily obedience *after* salvation.³³ Jay Adams points out that this phrase is a perfect balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.³⁴ God elects the believer so that he might be cleansed by the blood of Christ, set apart, and *obedient*.

Obedience and Action. Later in the first chapter, Peter points out that the Christian has been redeemed from his former empty manner of life (1:18). Therefore, he is to be obedient to his heavenly Father, no longer conformed to the lusts that characterized pagan life (1:14). Setting his hope securely on eternity, he must "gird up the loins" of his mind. This phrase alludes to "the ancient Oriental custom of gathering up one's long robes by pulling them between the legs and then wrapping and tying them around the waist, so as to prepare for running, fast walking,

³¹ Adams, p. vii.

³² Michaels, p. 11.

³³ Grudem, p. 52.

³⁴ Adams, p. 9.

or other strenuous activity."³⁵ Thus the believer, while entrusting himself to God and remaining in humble submission to proper authorities, must at the same time be prepared for quick action in obedience to God. He is not a mere "doormat," or a pacifist, or a person resigning himself to "fate." He stands strong in the strength of the Lord, as Christ did when He faced crucifixion and refused to retaliate. He does what God requires of him, whether that means silence in the face of unjust persecution, or bold action.

Evil desires are a focus of attention in several parts of the epistle. Such lusts characterized the futile pagan lifestyle from which the believer has been redeemed (1:14). They now *war against* the believer's soul (2:11)! In view of this strong language of warfare, it is no wonder that the Christian must be alert and ready for action. Having spent sufficient time indulging these fleshly desires in the past, and knowing that Christ has suffered in the flesh for him, the believer must turn from such desires and instead fulfill the will of God (4:1-3).

Love is essential to the believer's obedience, recalling Christ's summary of the law as love for God and others. Having purified his soul by obedience to the truth (the gospel), the believer is enabled to genuinely love others (1:22). Considering the perfect tense of the participle "having purified," plus obedience to the *truth* rather than simply to *commandments*, I believe this refers to salvation. It is the believer's new birth that makes it possible for him to obey the command given here to love others fervently. Peter drives this home in verse 23, stating that the Christian has been born again of imperishable seed, through the living, eternal Word of God. In chapter 4, he

³⁵ Grudem, p. 76.

elaborates further on Christian love, noting again its fervency (εκτενωσ). Such extensive love covers many sins. Καλυπτω is a verb which means to cover, hide, conceal, or remove from sight.³⁶ The Christian who loves is able to overlook the sins committed against him, entrusting himself to **God**, who judges justly.³⁷

Finally, Peter addresses the **speech** patterns of the believer. The tongue can be a powerful weapon (James 3:2ff.). In the context of suffering for righteousness, Peter exhorts the believer to restrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from deceit (3:10), just as no deceit was found in the mouth of Christ (2:22). He is to put off every kind of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil words (2:1), growing in the "pure milk" of God's Word as a newborn in Christ (2:2). Godly words must accompany godly actions.

Conclusion

Throughout the first epistle of Peter, the believer is carefully instructed concerning the suffering that he can expect to encounter while remaining on earth. He is shown that his suffering is not random, but according to God's good, eternal purposes. His faith is tested and strengthened. God molds him into the image of Christ, and he is exhorted to follow in the footsteps of his Lord as he responds to the threats and insults of unbelievers. He is a testimony to the world, bringing glory to

³⁶ Bauer, p. 401.

³⁷ Sometimes love involves "nouthetic" confrontation of sin (Matthew 18:15-20, Galatians 6:1-2), but never seeking of one's own vengeance, and always in a spirit of loving concern for the one caught in sin.

God by his righteous response to suffering. At all times, he must humbly entrust himself to God's care, and act in loving obedience.

It is appropriate to conclude with a key verse that summarizes the "suffering...glory" theme of 1 Peter:

"Now the God of all grace, the One who called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a short time...will Himself restore [complete], confirm, strengthen, and firmly establish you." (1 Peter 5:10, my translation)

These powerful closing words provide the believer with a solid foundation of eternal hope. Suffering, intense as it may seem, is temporary. The life of man is fleeting like the grass (2:24), but God's glorious Word endures forever. The Christian is graciously called to share in His eternal glory. **Therefore**, he can respond to trials in trust, joy, and righteousness.

© **1995, Christian Discernment Publications Ministry, Inc.**
www.christiandiscernment.com

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reference Works

Bauer, Walter, translated by William J. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (second edition). Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1957 and 1979.

Monographs

Adams, Jay E., *Trust and Obey*. Greenville, SC: A PRESS, 1978.

Clowney, Edmund, *The Message of 1 Peter*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988.

Grudem, Wayne. *1 Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988.

Michaels, J. Ramsey. *1 Peter (Word Biblical Commentary)*. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1988.

Journal Articles

Johnson, Dennis E., "Fire in God's House: Imagery from Malachi 3 in Peter's Theology of Suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society* 29:3 (September 1986).

Martin, Troy W., "The Present Indicative in the Eschatological Statements of 1 Peter 1:6, 8," *Journal of Biblical Literature* III/2 (1992).