

## How We Serve - Gifts

July 8, 2018 - 1 Peter 4:1-11

### Stewards of God's Grace

**4** Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, 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** For 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.

**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.

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### 4:1-11

#### Persevere in the New Life

**4:1-2.** “Arm yourselves” borrows the imagery of soldiers arming, training or otherwise preparing themselves for battle and possible death. The sense seems to be that those who died with Christ through faith (cf. 2:24) are genuinely prepared to suffer with him in any other way, including martyrdom.

**4:3.** Unlike certain maligned religions, social clubs demanded orderly behavior at parties. Nevertheless, dinners at the homes of patrons and probably those of social clubs lasted far into the night, with heavy drinking and men often pursuing slave women or boys; religious festivals were similar occasions for immorality. Social clubs, household cults and virtually all aspects of Greco-Roman life were permeated with the veneration of false gods and

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spirits. Although this behavior was not immoral from the general Greco-Roman perspective, Jews and Christians condemned it as immoral. Jewish people rightly regarded this behavior as typical of Gentile men in their day—especially, though not exclusively, on pagan festivals.

**4:4.** Although Jewish people did not participate in the lifestyle characterized in 4:3, their pagan neighbors often portrayed them as lawless and subversive because of their alleged antisocial behavior. The earliest pagan reports of Christians testify that the same prejudices were applied to them, although the authorities never found evidence substantiating these rumors from those they interrogated under torture. Nero’s accusation against the Christians he butchered was that they were “haters of humanity,” i.e., antisocial. But rumors of Nero’s own base immorality offended even the Roman aristocracy.

**4:5.** These pagans, not the Christians (3:15), would have to give “account” at the final trial. Since the Old Testament period, the final day of judgment had often been portrayed in courtroom terms.

**4:6.** Although some commentators regard “those who are dead” as souls of the dead, they seem to be Christians “judged” by earthly courts and executed, who would nevertheless be raised by the Spirit, as in 3:18. Compare Wisdom of Solomon 3:1–6.

**4:7.** In many Jewish traditions (including Dan 12:1–2), the end of the age would be preceded by a period of great suffering; the impending end, therefore, calls for exhortations to perseverance in seriousness and prayer.

**4:8.** Proverbs 10:12 seems to prohibit gossiping about one another’s sins or slandering one another (cf. Jas 5:20). The implication here may be that love overlooks one another’s faults, although some scholars have suggested that it means that those who love will themselves find grace in the day of judgment (1 Pet 4:5–6).

**4:9.** Hospitality was receiving others, especially taking in travelers of the same faith who needed a place to stay. As generally in the ethical ideals of antiquity, lodging and provisions were to be provided generously, not grudgingly.

**4:10–11.** Like Paul (Rom 12:4–8), Peter emphasized the diversity of gifts in the church and the need for all of them until the end. Speaking as if one uttered divine “oracles” would no doubt refer to the gift of prophecy, or at least prophetic inspiration in some form of speaking for God. On prophecy and serving, see comment on Romans 12:6–8 and 16:1.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (1 Pe 4:1–11). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

### 1. christlike attitude (4:1–6)

Maintaining proper conduct in suffering requires that Christians maintain a Christlike attitude, living for the present in God's will, knowing that they will live for eternity in His presence.

4:1. **Therefore** (*oun*, an inferential conjunction) Peter referred back to Christ's suffering in 3:18 and applied the principles of patient endurance in unjust suffering to his readers' immediate situation. He exhorted believers to **arm** themselves with **the same courageous attitude** or mind-set Christ had regarding suffering. The word translated "arm yourselves" (*hoplisasthe*, used only here in the NT) referred to a soldier putting on armor (cf. Eph. 6:13). With the same determination and care with which a soldier puts on his armor, Christians are to adopt Christ's "attitude" (*ennoian*, lit., "thought"; Heb. 4:12 has the only other biblical usage of this word) toward persecution, an unswerving resolve to do God's will.

Identification with Christ, arming oneself with His attitude, also means sharing in His suffering and death. Christ **suffered in His body**, and a believer suffers **in his body** also. One who has suffered in this way **is done with sin**, that is, his being identified with Christ demonstrates (as does baptism) his break with a sinful life. Because of Christ's death, "we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin" (Rom. 6:6–7).

4:2. **As a result** Christians who have adopted Christ's mind-set have counted themselves dead to sin. They **live the rest** of their lives not **for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God** (cf. 2:15; 3:17; 4:19).

4:3. Christians were exhorted to live for the present in God's will because old habits were a thing of **the past**. In blunt language Peter stressed that there must be a definite break from **what pagans choose to do** (*boulēma tōn ethnōn*, lit., "desire of the Gentiles"), the wasted years of **debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and ... idolatry** (cf. Gal. 5:19–21). This exhortation probably had a strong impact on Gentile Christians who used to live in gross sin.

4:4. Christians are to live in the present for the will of God because old acquaintances are now persecutors. Godless men are genuinely surprised by the changed lives of those who once were like they are. **They think it strange** (*xenizontai*, from *xenos*, "stranger"; cf. v. 12). A changed life provokes hostility from those who reject the gospel. Consequently **they heap abuse on** (*blasphēmountes*, lit., "blaspheme") believers.

4:5. Those who have spent their lives in indulgence and idolatry will someday **give account** (*apodōsousin logon*, lit., “give back a word or an account”; cf. Matt. 12:36; Luke 16:2; Acts 19:40; Heb. 13:17). Peter warned that these people must one day face the One **who is ready** (i.e., willing) **to judge**. No one will escape this final judgment of the words and works of his earthly life, when Christ will judge both **the living** (*zōntas*) **and the dead** (*nekrous*) (cf. Acts 10:42; Rom. 14:9; 1 Thes. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:1).

4:6. **For this ... reason**, because everybody must give an account to God, **the gospel was preached even to those ... now dead**. This has been interpreted as referring to (a) those who are spiritually “dead in sin,” (b) those who heard and believed the gospel but have since died, (c) those who died without hearing or believing the gospel. Barclay preferred the third interpretation, assuming that 3:19 refers to Christ’s preaching to the dead. Consequently he believed that here “was a breathtaking glimpse of a gospel of a second chance.” This interpretation has no scriptural support and is contrary to orthodox Christian doctrine (cf. v. 5).

In verse 6 Peter, in contrast with verse 5, encouraged his readers with the fact that rather than facing judgment for their sins, those who had heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ faced an altogether different future. The penalty for their sin has been paid by Christ on the cross. The last earthly effect of sin is physical death. Believers still die physically; they are **judged ... in regard to the body** (cf. suffering in this life “in his body,” v. 1). But for Christians physical death does not lead to judgment but to eternal life. They **live ... in regard to the Spirit**. Those armed with a Christlike attitude will live forever in God’s presence.

## 2. christlike service (4:7–11)

Encouragement to endure suffering comes not only from a believer’s future hope but also from the Christlike service of others within His body.

4:7. **The end ... is near** (*ēngiken*, lit., “draws near”; the same form is used in James 5:8 to refer to the Second Coming). After mentioning Christians who had died (1 Peter 4:6), Peter then referred to the imminent return of Christ for His church. The shortness of the time remaining is motivation to live for and serve Jesus Christ (v. 2). As a result, Christians are to **be clear-minded** (*sōphronēsate*, lit., “be of sound mind”; cf. Mark 5:15) **and self-controlled** (*nēpsate*, lit., “be sober”; cf. 1 Peter 1:13; 5:8) **so that** they are able to **pray** (cf. Eph. 6:18). Prayer, of high priority in persecution, is to be clear, reasonable, sober communication with God.

4:8–9. **Love** (*agapēn ... echontes*) **each other deeply**. “Deeply” (*ektenē*, “stretched” or “strained”) was used to describe the taut muscles of an athlete who strains to win a race (cf. *ektenōs* in 1:22). A Christian’s unselfish love and concern for others should be exercised to the point of sacrificially giving for others’ welfare. **Love covers over** (*kalyptei*, lit., “hides”)

**a multitude of sins.** This kind of strenuously maintained love is not blind but sees and accepts the faults of others (cf. Prov. 10:12; 1 Cor. 13:4–7). Christian love may be displayed through extending free food and lodging, offering **hospitality** (*philoxenoi*, lit., “being friendly to strangers”) **without grumbling** to those who are traveling. During times of persecution, hospitality was especially welcomed by Christians who were forced to journey to new areas.

4:10. Believers should be diligent in using their spiritual gifts. Each **gift** (*charisma*) is to be used **to serve** (*diakonountes*; cf. *diakonos*, “deacon”) or “minister to” **others**. The phrase **faithfully administering** (*hōs kaloi oikonomoi*) could also be translated “as good stewards.” A “steward” was one who served as a house manager; he had no wealth of his own, but distributed his master’s wealth according to his master’s will and direction. The “gift” (*charisma*) stems from **God’s grace** (*charitos*). His grace is manifested to His church as believers exercise their spiritual gifts in service to each other. His grace is evident **in its various forms**, that is, it is “manifold” (nasb), variegated, rich in variety (*poikilēs*; cf. 1:6, where Peter said trials are *poikilois*, or varied).

4:11. Peter divided Christian service into two general categories: the one who **speaks** (*lalei*) and the one who **serves** (*diakonei*; cf. v. 10). This division relates to the distinction God’s leaders made between ministry roles (Acts 6:2–4). These two general ministry functions often overlap. Both groups function through dependence on God’s gracious provision. The reason for relying on God’s words (cf. Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12) and **strength** (*ischyos*, “power”) is that **God** will receive the praise **through Jesus Christ**. At the mention of Christ’s name Peter offered an appropriate word of praise as a benediction: **To Him be the glory and the power** (*kratos*, “might”) **forever and ever. Amen.** (Cf. the similar benediction in 1 Peter 5:11.) The praise and credit for Christian ministry should always be given to Christ.<sup>2</sup>

### Verse one

In 3:18–22 Peter spoke of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus and of His example of patience and submissiveness under unjust treatment. Now, he exhorts the saints to arm themselves with the same mind that Christ had regarding unjust punishment. Our Lord’s attitude toward unjust suffering is found in the words, “It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing” (3:17). The Greek word translated “arm yourselves” was used of a Greek soldier putting on his armor and taking his weapons. The noun of the same root was used of a heavy-armed foot-soldier who carried a pike and a large shield. The word was used of heavy-armed as against light-armed troops. Peter could have used the latter word. The Holy Spirit selected the former. The Christian needs the

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<sup>2</sup> Raymer, R. M. (1985). 1 Peter. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 852–854). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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heaviest armor he can get, to withstand the attacks of the enemy of his soul. To have the same attitude toward unjust suffering that the Lord Jesus had, will cause us to react toward this suffering as He did.

The words “suffered in the flesh” are in the same construction as the similar phrase “being put to death in the flesh” (3:18). In the latter expression we found that Peter was speaking of the fact that our Lord was put to death with respect to the flesh, thus suffering with respect to the flesh. This suffering was the result of unjust treatment. The same holds true in 4:1 where the Christian who has suffered in the flesh is the Christian who has suffered ill-treatment from the persecuting world of sinners. The fact that he has been persecuted is an indication of another fact, namely, that he has ceased from sin. The world directs its persecution against those who are living lives of obedience to God, thus those who have ceased from sin. The verb is passive. Literally, the Christian “hath got release” from sin. God broke the power of sin in his life when He saved him. Thus our reaction to unjust suffering should be that of a saint, not a sinner, since we have in salvation been released from sin’s compelling power.

### **Verse two**

In this verse, the apostle tells his readers why God breaks the power of the sinful nature at the moment the Christian is saved. It is in order that he should no longer live the rest of his earthly life in the sphere of the cravings (lusts) of men, but live in the sphere of the will of God. The word “lust” in Greek speaks of any strong craving, here, an evil craving.

### **Verse three**

The word “past” describing “time is in the Greek the perfect participle of a verb meaning “to pass by, to go past.” The tense used implies that the course is closed and done, and looked back upon as a standing and accomplished fact. Thus should a Christian view his life previous to salvation, namely, as a closed matter. He died with Christ, and has been raised to newness of life. Old things have passed away. All things have become new. The old habits, associates, practices, places, amusements, everything of the old life which is not in accord with the Word of God should be taboo in the new life he is now living as a Christian. The word “suffice” is in the Greek, “sufficient.” That is, Peter argues that there was sufficient time before salvation for the unsaved to go the limit in sin. The word “wrought” means in the Greek “to work out to the end.” “Will” is literally, “desire, inclination, counsel,” the advice of the world.

Then the apostle enumerates some of the sins which were part of that world out from which they were separated. “Lasciviousness” is the translation of a word which refers to actions that excite disgust and shock public decency. In the New Testament, the prominent idea in the word is that of sensuality. The Greek word translated “lusts” is not limited to the sense of a sexual desire, but has the unrestricted sense of a passionate desire, here a sinful

one, as the context indicates. The words “excess of wine” are the translation of a Greek word made of two words, “wine” and “to bubble up or overflow.” “Revellings” is the translation of a word which meant at first, “a village merrymaking.” Then it came to mean “a carousal” such as a party of revellers parading the streets, or revels held in religious ceremonies, wild, furious, and ecstatic. “Banquetings” is from a Greek word speaking of drinking bouts possibly held in connection with pagan religious rites such as Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 10:14 where he forbids Christians to drink the cup of demons. The Greek word translated “abominable” means “contrary to law and justice, illicit, criminal.” These idolatries were forbidden by Roman law. They must have been pretty bad.

#### **Verse four**

The word “run” literally means “to run in company with” others. It means here “to run in a troop with others like a band of revellers.” The word “excess” is the translation of a Greek word meaning literally “a pouring forth or an overflowing.” It was used in classical Greek of the tides which fill the hollows. Alford translates it by the word “slough,” a state of moral degradation or spiritual dejection into which one sinks or from which one cannot free one’s self. The word “riot” in the Greek text is seen in its classic New Testament usage in Luke 15:13 where the prodigal son squanders his substance with riotous (same word) living. The word is made up of the Greek word meaning “to save” and Alpha privative which makes it mean “not save,” and when used as a descriptive word for an individual, speaks of him as being “an abandoned man, an incorrigible,” and when used to describe a manner of life, it speaks of “an abandoned dissolute life, profligacy, prodigality.” The words “think it strange” do not have the idea in the Greek of thinking something odd or unusual, but of thinking something to be foreign in nature to something else. The people of the world, the former associates of these Christians to whom Peter is writing, thought it a thing foreign to the natures of these Christians when they did not run any more in a troop like a band of revellers with them in the same slough of dissoluteness. They did not realize that their totally depraved nature which before salvation had given them a love for sinful things, now had its power over them broken, and that another nature, the divine nature, had been given them as their new motivating principle of life which caused them to hate the things they once loved and love the things they once hated.

#### **Verse five**

The English translation does not make it clear whether the word “who” refers back to the unsaved or to the saved in verse 4. Here is where Greek grammar is an invaluable and accurate help. The word “who” is in apposition with the participle translated “speaking evil,” and refers to the people of the world who shall give an account to God who is holding Himself in readiness (Greek) to judge the living (“quick” obsolete English for “living”) and the dead.

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**Verse six**

The key to the understanding of this difficult verse is found in the context of the entire book. In 1:6, 7 we are told that the recipients are in heaviness in the midst of manifold trials. In 2:18–25 we have the case of Christian household slaves being unjustly punished because of their Christian testimony. In 3:8–17 the saints are instructed as to their behavior when undergoing persecution. In 4:12–19 the apostle deals with the glory of suffering for righteousness' sake. He speaks of this persecution of the saints by the world as a judgment that begins at the house of God, the Church (4:17). In 4:1–11 he speaks of the necessity of having the mind of Christ as armored protection against the persecution of the world. Thus the phrase “judged according to men,” refers to the judgment spoken of in 4:17 which is defined as to its nature by the words in verse 14, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ.”

The words “them that are dead,” refer to Christian believers who had died. The gospel had been preached to them and they had become Christians. As a result of this they had been judged according to men while they were on earth. This judgment was in the form of persecution because of their Christian testimony. The word translated “according to” means literally “down,” and speaks of domination. This judgment was in the hands of men and was administered by them.

The words “in the flesh” are to be construed with “might be judged,” for they balance up the words “in the spirit” which clearly are to be understood with “live.” We have here the dative of respect. These Christians were judged with respect to the flesh, that is, with respect to their earthly existence in the body. The natural result of accepting the gospel would be the living of a Christian life, and the natural result of that would be persecution. But these Christians died, many of them as martyrs. Now, in heaven they were living according to the Word of God with respect to their spirits, their human spirits. They in their disembodied state were serving the Lord in the future life.

**Verse seven**

The word translated “of all things” is first in the sentence, and thus in the emphatic position. “Of all things the end is at hand.” “Be ye sober,” is literally, “Be ye of sound mind.” Sobriety of mind is in view here. “Watch” is the translation of a Greek word meaning “to be calm and collected in spirit.” “Unto” is in the Greek literally, “with a view to.” Tyndale translates, “That ye may be apt to.” That is, a calm and collected spirit is conducive to the act of praying. It results in prayer. The Christian who is always on a tear, whose mind is crowded with fears and worries, who is never at rest in his heart, does not do much praying.

**Verse eight**

The word “charity” is the translation of the Greek word speaking of God’s love (John 3:16), the love produced in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22). The word today refers to the act of alleviating the necessities of the poor. The Greek word has no such idea in it. The Greek word here translated “fervent” means literally “stretched out.” The idea is that of a love that is extended to reach the one loved. It is the act of one who, instead of living a self-centered life, gives of himself to others. The word means here, “intent, earnest, assiduous.” “Have among yourselves” is literally “having (love) toward one another.”

The words “above all” are more properly “before all in order of importance.” That is, love is a prerequisite to all proper exercises of Christian duty. Courtesy without love is a cold thing. Generosity without love is a harsh thing. Love makes all the other virtues what they should be. The reason for this exhortation to love one another is that love covers a multitude of sins. That is, when one Christian truly loves his fellow Christian, he will not publish abroad his failings, but will cover them up from the sight of others. How much gossip is eliminated when we love each other.

### **Verse nine**

The word “hospitality” is the translation of a Greek word meaning literally “friendly to strangers.” Thus the thought in the mind of the apostle is not that of hospitality shown to one’s friends who do not need it, but to Christians who in their travels for the Lord Jesus, or for whatever other reason, may be in need of food and shelter. The persecutions which some of these Christians were enduring deprived them often of the necessities of life, and such an exhortation as this was needed.

### **Verse ten**

“As” is in the Greek text “in whatever quality or quantity.” The word “gift” here is not the usual Greek word, but one that refers to the special spiritual enablements given graciously to certain Christians as an aid in the discharge of the special duties to which God has called them, as in I Corinthians 12 and 13. The word “stewards” is literally “one who governs a household.” It speaks of the responsibility of the proper use and disposition of something entrusted to one’s care.

### **Verse eleven**

The Greek word “oracles” was used in classical Greek of the oracular utterances of heathen deities. In the Christian system it refers to divine utterances or revelations.

Translation. (1) Therefore, in view of the fact that Christ suffered with respect to the flesh, you also yourselves put on as armor the same mind, because the one who has suffered with respect to the flesh has gotten release from sin, (2) with a view to his not living the rest of his time while in his physical body in the sphere of the cravings of men, but

in the sphere of the will of God. (3) For adequate has been the time that is now past and done with, for you to have carried to its ultimate conclusion the counsel of the Gentiles, walking as you have done in disgusting sensualities, in cravings, in wine-guzzlings, in carousals, in drinking bouts, and in unlawful idolatries, (4) in which they think it a thing alien to you that you do not run in a troop like a band of revellers with them in the same slough of dissoluteness, speaking evil of you, (5) who (namely, the people of the world) shall give an account to the One who is holding Himself in readiness to judge the living and the dead. (6) For, for this purpose also to the dead was the good new's preached, in order that they might be judged by men with respect to their physical existence, but live according to God with respect to their spirit existence. (7) But of all things the end has come near. Be of sound mind therefore, and be calm and collected in spirit with a view to (your giving yourselves to) prayer; (8) before all things in order of importance, having fervent love among yourselves, because love hides a multitude of sins. (9) Show hospitality to one another without murmuring. (10) In whatever quality or quantity each one has received a gift, be ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the variegated grace of God. (11) If anyone speaks, as utterances of God let them be. If anyone ministers, let him minister as out of the strength which God supplies, in order that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, in whom there is the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.<sup>3</sup>

**4:1-6** *Suffering* in the *body* is therefore to be accepted because: it follows the example of Jesus; it unites the believer with his *attitude*; and it enables the sufferer to live *for the will of God*. It is important to weigh passages like this against some of the contemporary teaching on 'health and wealth'. Nowhere in the Bible are we taught that the Christian will always be prosperous and avoid suffering; rather, Jesus suggests the opposite may often be true (see Lk. 6:20-26; Jn. 16:1-4).

Mention of baptism in 3:21 may have prompted Peter to follow the same sort of argument as Paul uses in Rom. 6. Baptism symbolizes the believer's entry into the benefits obtained by Christ's suffering and death. In undergoing it the person baptized is regarded as mystically sharing those sufferings and death. The consequence of such a death in Rom. 6:11 is to 'count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus'. This is what Peter is stating here, adding a note of urgency by contrasting time spent in the past on indulging oneself with the opportunity for serving God in the future.

Those whose behaviour and habits are so changed become the targets for persecution. However, the Christian must remember that it is to God that all must give account of their conduct. The comprehensiveness of this judgment (5) leads Peter to make an aside remark that the death of Christians proves the value of preaching the gospel to people while they

<sup>3</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 11, pp. 110-117). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

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are alive. Though now in death they have received in their bodies God's judgment on sin, their spirits are still alive with him. (For other interpretations of this verse see the Notes below.)

In this section, therefore, Peter encourages Christians who are facing suffering (and possibly even martyrdom) by showing them from the example of Jesus that God's plan can be worked out through such suffering and that it will ultimately lead to victory (see 1:11).<sup>4</sup>

1. *Forasmuch then as Christ.* When he had before set forth Christ before us, he only spoke of the suffering of the cross; for sometimes the cross means mortification, because the outward man is wasted by afflictions, and our flesh is also subdued. But he now ascends higher; for he speaks of the reformation of the whole man. The Scripture recommends to us a twofold likeness to the death of Christ, that we are to be conformed to him in reproaches and troubles, and also that the old man being dead and extinct in us, we are to be renewed to a spiritual life. (Phil. 3:10; Rom. 6:4.) Yet Christ is not simply to be viewed as our example, when we speak of the mortification of the flesh; but it is by his Spirit that we are really made conformable to his death, so that it becomes effectual to the crucifying of our flesh. In short, as Peter at the end of the last chapter exhorted us to patience after the example of Christ, because death was to him a passage to life; so now from the same death he deduces a higher doctrine, that we ought to die to the flesh and to the world, as Paul teaches us more at large in the sixth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. He therefore says, *arm, yourselves*, or be ye armed, intimating that we are really and effectually supplied with invincible weapons to subdue the flesh, if we partake as we ought of the efficacy of Christ's death.

*For he that hath suffered.* The particle  $\delta\tau\iota$  does not, I think, denote here the cause, but is to be taken as explanatory; for Peter sets forth what that thought or mind is with which Christ's death arms us, even that the dominion of sin ought to be abolished in us, so that God may reign in our life. Erasmus has incorrectly, as I think, rendered the word "he who did suffer," (*patiebatur*) applying it to Christ. For it is an indefinite sentence, which generally extends to all the godly, and has the same meaning with the words of Paul in Rom. 6:7, "He who is dead is justified or freed from sin;" for both the Apostles intimate, that when we become dead to the flesh, we have no more to do with sin, that it should reign in us, and exercise its power in our life.

It may, however, be objected, that Peter here speaks unsuitably in making us to be conformable to Christ in this respect, that we suffer in the flesh; for it is certain that there was nothing sinful in Christ which required to be corrected. But the answer is obvious, that it is not necessary that a comparison should correspond in all its parts. It is then enough

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<sup>4</sup> Wheaton, D. H. (1994). 1 Peter. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1380). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

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that we should in a measure be made conformable to the death of Christ. In the same way is also explained, not unfitly, what Paul says, that we are planted in the likeness of his death, (Rom. 6:5;) for the manner is not altogether the same, but that his death is become in a manner the type and pattern of our mortification.

We must also notice that the word *flesh* is put here twice, but in a different sense; for when he says that Christ suffered in the flesh, he means that the human nature which Christ had taken from us was made subject to death, that is, that Christ as a man naturally died. In the second clause, which refers to us, *flesh* means the corruption and the sinfulness of our nature; and thus suffering in the flesh signifies the denying of ourselves. We now see what is the likeness between Christ and us, and what is the difference; that as he suffered in the flesh taken from us, so the whole of our flesh ought to be crucified.

2. *That he no longer.* Here he sets forth the way of ceasing from sin, that renouncing the covetings of men we should study to form our life according to the will of God. And thus he includes here the two things in which renovation consists, the destruction of the flesh and the vivification of the spirit. The course of good living is thus to begin with the former, but we are to advance to the latter.

Moreover, Peter defines here what is the rule of right living, even when man depends on the will of God. It hence follows, that nothing is right and well ordered in man's life as soon as he wanders from this rule. We ought further to notice the contrast between *God's will* and the *covetings* or lusts of *men*. We hence understand how great is our depravity, and how we ought to strive to become obedient to God. When he says, *the rest of time in the flesh*, the word *flesh* means the present life, as in Heb. 5:7.

3. *For the time past of our life may suffice.* Peter does not mean that we ought to be wearied with pleasures, as those are wont to be who are filled with them to satiety; but that on the contrary the memory of our past life ought to stimulate us to repentance. And doubtless it ought to be the sharpest goad to make us run on well, when we recollect that we have been wandering from the right way the greatest part of our life. And Peter reminds us, that it would be most unreasonable were we not to change the course of our life after having been enlightened by Christ. For he makes a distinction here between the time of ignorance and the time of faith, as though he had said that it was but right that they should become new and different men from the time that Christ had called them. But instead of the *lusts* or *covetings* of men, he now mentions *the will of the Gentiles*, by which he reproves the Jews for having mixed with the Gentiles in all their pollutions, though the Lord had separated them from the Gentiles.

In what follows he shews that those vices ought to be put off which prove men to be blind and ignorant of God. And there is a peculiar emphasis in the words, *the time past of our life*, for he intimates that we ought to persevere to the end, as when Paul says, that

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Christ was raised from the dead, to die no more. (Rom. 6:6.) For we have been redeemed by the Lord for this end, that we may serve him all the days of our life.

*In lasciviousness.* He does not give the whole catalogue of sins, but only mentions some of them, by which we may briefly learn what those things are which men, not renewed by God's Spirit, desire and seek, and to which they are inclined. And he names the grosser vices, as it is usually done when examples are adduced. I shall not stop to explain the words, for there is no difficulty in them.

But here a question arises, that Peter seems to have done wrong to many, in making all men guilty of lasciviousness, dissipation, lusts, drunkenness, and revellings; for it is certain that all were not involved in these vices; nay, we know that some among the Gentiles lived honourably and without a spot of infamy. To this I reply, that Peter does not so ascribe these vices to the Gentiles, as though he charged every individual with all these, but that we are by nature inclined to all these evils, and not only so, but that we are so much under the power of depravity, that these fruits which he mentions necessarily proceed from it as from an evil root. There is indeed no one who has not within him the seed of all vices, but all do not germinate and grow up in every individual. Yet the contagion is so spread and diffused through the whole human race, that the whole community appears infected with innumerable evils, and that no member is free or pure from the common corruption.

The last clause may also suggest another question, for Peter addressed the Jews, and yet he says that they had been immersed in abominable idolatries; but the Jews then living in every part of the world carefully abstained from idols. A twofold answer may be adduced here, either that by mentioning the whole for a part, he declares of all what belonged to a few, (for there is no doubt but the Churches to which he wrote were made up of Gentiles as well as of Jews,) or that he calls those superstitions in which the Jews were then involved, idolatries; for though they professed to worship the God of Israel, yet we know that no part of divine worship was genuine among them. And how great must have been the confusion in barbarous countries and among a scattered people, when Jerusalem itself, from whose rays they borrowed their light, had fallen into extreme impiety! for we know that dotages of every kind prevailed with impunity, so that the high-priesthood, and the whole government of the Church, were in the power of the Sadducees.

4. *Wherein they think it strange.* The words of Peter literally are these, "In which they are strangers, you not running with them into the same excess of riot, blaspheming." But the word, to be strangers, means to stop at a thing as new and unusual. This is a way of speaking which the Latins also sometimes use, as when Cicero says that he was a stranger in the city, because he knew not what was carried on there. But in this place, Peter fortifies the faithful, lest they should suffer themselves to be disturbed or corrupted by the perverse judgments or words of the ungodly. For it is no light temptation, when they among whom we live, charge us that our life is different from that of mankind in general. "These," they

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say, “must form for themselves a new world, for they differ from all mankind.” Thus they accuse the children of God, as though they attempted a separation from the whole world.

Then the Apostle anticipated this, and forbade the faithful to be discouraged by such reproaches and calumnies; and he proposed to them, as a support, the judgment of God: for this it is that can sustain us against all assaults, that is, when we patiently wait for that day, in which Christ will punish all those who now presumptuously condemn us, and will shew that we and our cause are approved by Him. And he expressly mentions *the living and the dead*, lest we should think that we shall suffer any loss, if they remain alive when we are dead; for they shall not, for this reason, escape the hand of God. And in what sense he calls them the living and the dead, we may learn from the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians.

6. *For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead*, or, He has been evangelized to the dead. We see in what sense he takes the former passage in the third chapter, even that death does not hinder Christ from being always our defender. It is then a remarkable consolation to the godly, that death itself brings no loss to their salvation. Though Christ, then, may not appear a deliverer in this life, yet his redemption is not void, or without effect; for his power extends to the dead. But as the Greek word is doubtful, it may be rendered in the masculine, or in the neuter gender; but the meaning is almost the same, that is, that Christ had been made known as a redeemer to the dead, or that salvation had been made known to them by the gospel. But if the grace of Christ once penetrated to the dead, there is no doubt but that we shall partake of it when dead. We then set for it limits much too narrow, if we confine it to the present life.

*That they might be judged.* I omit the explanations of others, for they seem to me to be very remote from the Apostle’s meaning. This has been said, as I think, by way of anticipation, for it might have been objected, that the gospel is of no benefit to the dead, as it does not restore them to life. Peter concedes a part of this objection, and yet in such a way, that they are not deprived of the salvation obtained by Christ. Therefore, in the first clause, when he says, “that they might be judged in the flesh, according to men,” it is a concession; and “judged” means here, as often elsewhere, condemned; and *flesh* is the outward man. So that the meaning is, that though according to the estimation of the world the dead suffer destruction in their flesh, and are deemed condemned as to the outward man, yet they cease not to live with God, and that in their spirit, because Christ quickens them by his Spirit.

But we ought to add what Paul teaches us in Rom. 8:10, that the Spirit is life; and hence it will be, that he will at length absorb the relics of death which still cleave to us. The sum of what he says is, that though the condition of the dead in the flesh is worse, according to man, yet it is enough that the Spirit of Christ revives them, and will eventually lead them to the perfection of life.

7. *But, or, moreover, the end of all things is at hand.* Though the faithful hear that their felicity is elsewhere than in the world, yet, as they think that they should live long, this false thought renders them careless, and even slothful, so that they direct not their thoughts to the kingdom of God. Hence the Apostle, that he might rouse them from the drowsiness of the flesh, reminds them that the end of all things was nigh; by which he intimates that we ought not to sit still in the world, from which we must soon remove. He does not, at the same time, speak only of the end of individuals, but of the universal renovation of the world; as though he had said, "Christ will shortly come, who will put an end to all things."

It is, then, no wonder that the cares of this world overwhelm us, and make us drowsy, if the view of present things dazzles our eyes: for we promise, almost all of us, an eternity to ourselves in this world; at least, the end never comes to our mind. But were the trumpet of Christ to sound in our ears, it would powerfully rouse us and not suffer us to lie torpid.

But it may be objected and said, that a long series of ages has passed away since Peter wrote this, and yet that the end is not come. My reply to this is, that the time seems long to us, because we measure its length by the spaces of this fleeting life; but if we could understand the perpetuity of future life, many ages would appear to us like a moment, as Peter will also tell us in his second epistle. Besides, we must remember this principle, that from the time when Christ once appeared, there is nothing left for the faithful, but with suspended minds ever to look forward to his second coming.

The *watchfulness* and the *sobriety* to which he exhorted them, belong, as I think, to the mind rather than to the body. The words are similar to those of Christ: "Watch ye, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh." (Matt. 25:13.) For as an indulgence in surfeiting and sleep renders the body unfit for its duties, so the vain cares and pleasures of the world inebriate the mind and render it drowsy.

By adding *prayer*, he points out an exercise especially necessary, in which the faithful ought to be particularly occupied, since their whole strength depends on the Lord; as though he had said, "Since ye are in yourselves extremely weak, seek of the Lord to strengthen you." He yet reminds them that they were to pray earnestly, not formally.

8. *And above all things.* He commends charity or love as the first thing, for it is the bond of perfection. And he bids it to be *fervent*, or intense, or vehement, which is the same thing; for whosoever is immoderately fervent in self-love, loves others coldly. And he commends it on account of its fruit, because it buries innumerable sins, than which nothing is more desirable.

But the sentence is taken from Solomon, whose words are found in Prov. 10:12, "Hatred discovers reproaches, but love covers a multitude of sins." What Solomon meant is sufficiently clear, for the two clauses contain things which are set in contrast the one with the other. As then he says in the first clause that hatred is the cause why men traduce and

defame one another, and spread whatever is reproachful and dishonourable; so it follows that a contrary effect is ascribed to love, that is, that men who love one another, kindly and courteously forgive one another; hence it comes that, willingly burying each other's vices, one seeks to preserve the honour of another. Thus Peter confirms his exhortation, that nothing is more necessary than to cherish mutual love. For who is there that has not many faults? Therefore all stand in need of forgiveness, and there is no one who does not wish to be forgiven.

This singular benefit love brings to us when it exists among us, so that innumerable evils are covered in oblivion. On the other hand, where loose reins are given to hatred, men by mutual biting and tearing must necessarily consume one another, as Paul says (Gal. 5:15.)

And it ought to be noticed that Solomon does not say that only a few sins are covered, but a multitude of sins, according to what Christ declares, when he bids us to forgive our brethren seventy times seven, (Matt. 18:22.) But the more sins love covers, the more evident appears its usefulness for the wellbeing of mankind.

This is the plain meaning of the words, It hence appears how absurd are the Papists, who seek to elicit from this passage their own satisfactions, as though almsgiving and other duties of charity were a sort of a compensation to God for blotting out their sins. It is enough to point out by the way their gross ignorance, for in a matter so clear it would be superfluous to add many words.

9. *Use hospitality, or, Be hospitable.* After having generally exhorted them to love one another, he specially mentions one of the duties of love. At that time hospitality was commonly used, and it was deemed in a manner a sacred kind of humanity, as we have stated elsewhere. He then bids them mutually to exercise it, so that no one might require more from others than what he himself was prepared to render. He adds, *without murmurings*, for it is a rare example that one spends himself and his own on his neighbour without any disparaging reflection. Then the Apostle would have us to show kindness willingly and with a cheerful mind.

10. *As every one hath received.* He reminds us what we ought to bear in mind when we do good to our neighbours; for nothing is more fitted to correct our murmurings than to remember that we do not give our own, but only dispense what God has committed to us. When therefore he says, "Minister the gift which every one has received," he intimates that to each had been distributed what they had, on this condition, that in helping their brethren they might be the ministers of God. And thus the second clause is an explanation of the first, for instead of ministry he mentions stewardship; and for what he had said, "as every one hath received the gift," he mentions the manifold graces which God variously distributes to us, so that each might confer in common his own portion. If then we excel others in any gift, let us remember that we are as to this the stewards of God, in order that

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we may kindly impart it to our neighbours as their necessity or benefit may require. Thus we ought to be disposed and ready to communicate.

But this consideration is also very important, that the Lord hath so divided his manifold graces, that no one is to be content with one thing and with his own gifts, but every one has need of the help and aid of his brother. This, I say, is a bond which God hath appointed for retaining friendship among men, for they cannot live without mutual assistance. Thus it happens, that he who in many things seeks the aid of his brethren, ought to communicate to them more freely what he has received. This bond of unity has been observed and noticed by heathens. But Peter teaches us here that God had designedly done this, that he might bind men one to another.

11. *If any man speak.* As he had spoken of the right and faithful use of gifts, he specifies two things as examples, and he has chosen those which are the most excellent or the most renowned. The office of teaching in the Church is a remarkable instance of God's favour. He then expressly commands those called to this office to act faithfully; though he does not speak here only of what we owe to men, but also of what we owe to God, so that we may not deprive him of his glory.

He who speaks, then, that is, who is rightly appointed by public authority, *let him, speak as the oracles of God*; that is, let him reverently in God's fear and in sincerity perform the charge committed to him, regarding himself as engaged in God's work, and as ministering God's word and not his own. For he still refers to the doctrine, that when we confer any thing on the brethren, we minister to them by God's command what he has bestowed on us for that purpose. And truly, were all those who profess to be teachers in the Church duly to consider this one thing, there would be in them much more fidelity and devotedness. For how great a thing is this, that in teaching the oracles of God, they are representatives of Christ! Hence then comes so much carelessness and rashness, because the sacred majesty of God's word is not borne in mind but by a few; and so they indulge themselves as in a worldly stewardship.

In the meantime, we learn from these words of Peter, that it is not lawful for those who are engaged in teaching to do anything else, but faithfully to deliver to others, as from hand to hand, the doctrine received from God; for he forbids any one to go forth, except he who is instructed in God's word, and who proclaims infallible oracles as it were from his mouth. He, therefore, leaves no room for human inventions; for he briefly defines the doctrine which ought to be taught in the Church. Nor is the particle of similitude introduced here for the purpose of modifying the sentence, as though it were sufficient to profess that it is God's word that is taught. This was, indeed, commonly the case formerly with false prophets; and we see at this day how arrogantly the Pope and his followers cover with this pretence all their impious traditions. But Peter did not intend to teach pastors such hypocrisy as this, to pretend that they had from God whatever doctrine it pleased them to

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announce, but he took an argument from the subject itself, that he might exhort them to sobriety and meekness, to a reverence for God, and to an earnest attention to their work.

*If any man minister.* This second clause extends wider, it includes the office of teaching. But as it would have been too long to enumerate each of the ministerial works, he preferred summarily to speak of them all together, as though he had said, “Whatever part of the burden thou bearest in the Church, know that thou canst do nothing but what has been given thee by the Lord, and that thou art nothing else but an instrument of God: take heed, then, not to abuse the grace of God by exalting thyself; take heed not to suppress the power of God, which puts forth and manifests itself in the ministry for the salvation of the brethren.” Let him then minister *as by God’s power*, that is, let him regard nothing as his own, but let him humbly render service to God and his Church.

*That God in all things may be glorified.* When he says, *In all*, the word may be in the masculine or in the neuter gender; and thus men or gifts may be meant, and both meanings are equally suitable. The sense is, that God does not adorn us with his gifts, that he may rob himself and make himself as it were an empty idol by transferring to us his own glory, but that, on the contrary, his own glory may everywhere shine forth; and that it is therefore a sacrilegious profanation of God’s gifts when men propose to themselves any other object than to glorify God. He says *through Jesus Christ*, because whatever power we have to minister, he alone bestows it on us; for he is the head, with which the whole body is connected by joints and bindings, and maketh increase in the Lord, according as he supplieth strength to every member.

*To whom be praise*, or glory. Some refer this to Christ; but the context requires that it should be rather applied to God; for he confirms the last exhortation, because God justly claims all the glory; and, therefore, men wickedly take away from him what is his own, when they obscure in anything, or in any part, his glory.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (pp. 120–133). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.