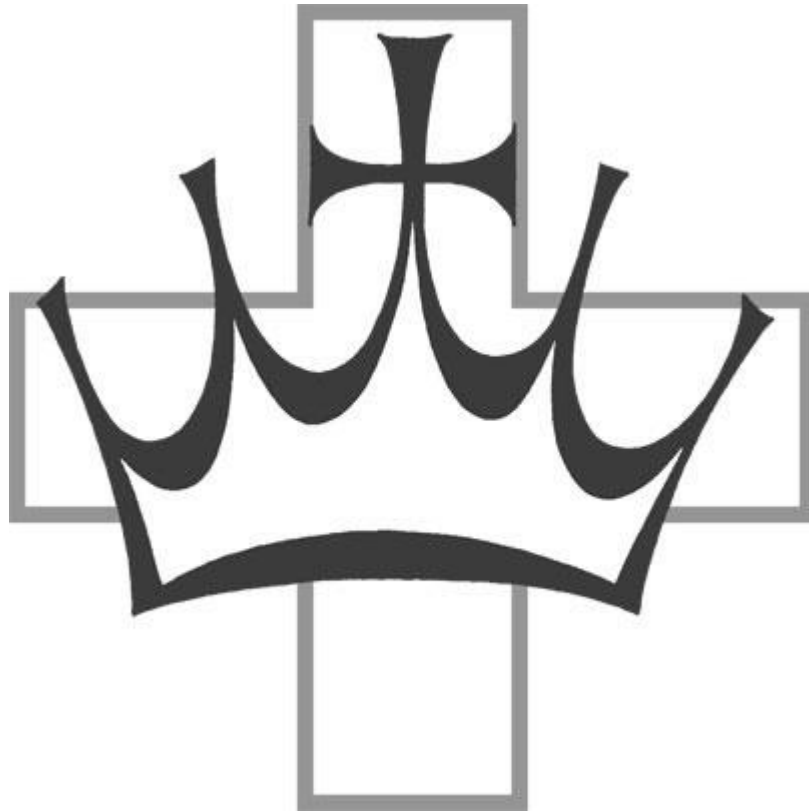


# **Living the End Times Life**

*An Isagogical and Exegetical Study of 1 Peter 4:1-11*



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## **Introduction**

The words just jumped off the papyrus. Πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος ἤγγικεν. “...But the end of all things is near.” The struggling Christians in Asia Minor were searching for hope in an increasingly hopeless world. Many of them were Gentiles, whose pagan roots were deep socially, culturally, and religiously. These were first-generation congregations—the newest of new mission congregations comprised of the newest of new Christians. Many of them had become Christians through the Gospel preaching of the Apostle Paul or one of his associates. They could still recount how the Holy Spirit had blessed the spread of the Gospel in their local regions and city-states, but life was getting more and more difficult.

Paganism was so intertwined into the social and cultural fabric of their society that following Christ meant breaking off from the way of life they had known since birth. Following Christ meant they could no longer attend in good conscience the civic festivals to the gods filled with immorality and overindulgence. Following Christ meant they would no longer participate in the disgusting practices of worshiping the local idols down at the local temple. Following Christ meant they would no longer engage in the wine-fueled carousing so common in their communities. Now following Christ did not mean cutting themselves off from society and forming some kind of monastic community, but it did mean a significant change to their very way of life, even as they lived in a society hell-bent on plunging headlong into a flood of wild living.

Of course, their families and friends took notice of this significant change in their lifestyle when they became Christians, but the novelty of their Christianity was starting to wear off for everyone, even the local leaders. Loved ones and friends were shocked when they refused to go down to the local temple festival to indulge in immoral “worship”. Word of this Christianity soon made its way to the local leaders, who believed that if the gods were going to bless the region or the city-state, it required the full-bodied devotion of every citizen, and the Christians wanted nothing to do with that idolatrous worship. Whispers of “atheism”<sup>1</sup> and “traitorous acts” began to circulate among the pagans about these Christ-followers, these “Christians”, and the heat slowly started to turn up. It was a lot of ignorant talk, but accusations of wrongdoing were being leveled against these innocent Christians. The pagans heaped abuse and slander on the Christians to the point of blaspheming them and their Christ. To their families and friends and neighbors, they were dead. They were anathema. They were traitors to the Greek and Roman way of life and treated as such. Like the readers of the book of Hebrews, these verbal attacks had not turned into violence, but as history bears out, that time would eventually come. In spite of what these Christians had learned from Paul and the others, they were suffering and needed hope. They needed a reminder to keep on faithfully serving the Lord in spite of the struggles and trials and abuse they were enduring at the hands of people they knew and loved.

That is where the inspired letter of 1 Peter comes into the picture. It is a letter of hope in the midst of suffering for the sake of Christ. It is a letter of love for those following their Savior-God beneath the heavy burden of the cross. It is a letter of encouragement for struggling, hurting, weary saints who need to be reminded that they are God’s chosen people. They are his royal priesthood called to declare the praises of him who called them out of darkness into his wonderful light. In spite of their suffering here and now, they need to know that there is an eternity awaiting them in heaven purchased by the holy, precious blood of Christ. In spite of the passing of 2,000 years since the inspired writer put pen to papyrus, 1 Peter is an extraordinarily relevant letter for Christians living and serving in 21st century

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<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, atheism in the ancient sense. Although Christians believed in a God, it was to the exclusion of any other deity, including the local deities. In the eyes of the pagans, they were therefore “atheists”.

North America, and worthy of further study for ourselves and with our people.<sup>2</sup> However, our task this morning is to study the first eleven verses of chapter 4, where the Apostle encourages and instructs us and the struggling souls whom we serve, in **Living the End Times Life**.

### **The Context of 1 Peter 4:1-11**

Before we can take an in-depth look at 1 Peter 4:1-11, we ought to take a brief 10,000 ft. look at where we are in the epistle itself. First a brief outline of the book that breaks the epistle into three major portions between the greeting and farewell:<sup>3</sup>

#### **Theme: Stand Firm in the True Grace of God**

Greetings to the Elect of God (1:1-2)

- I. The Origin and Characteristics of God's People (1:3-2:10)
- II. God's Holy and Humble People Live Lives Set Apart (2:11-4:11)
- III. God's People Stand Firm in Grace Despite Trial (4:12-5:11)

Farewell to the Elect of God (5:12-14)

Now let's zoom in a little closer. The Apostle's purpose in writing this epistle was to bring hope and to give real encouragement to believers suffering beneath the cross of persecution. The first major section (1:3-2:10) focuses on who his readers really are—God's chosen people made holy in the blood of Christ and heirs of an inheritance that will never spoil or fade, yet also a royal priesthood given the task of declaring the praises of him who had called them out of the darkness of sin and unbelief.

In view of God's grace and mercy<sup>4</sup> that has given them hope, Peter then launches into the second major section (2:11-4:11) of his epistle with instructions, encouragements, and admonitions on the responsibilities of God's holy, humble people. As God's holy, chosen people, they are to live lives that not only demonstrate their Christian faith, but give glory to their gracious God with the goal that perhaps their godly living might provide an open door for the Gospel to be shared with unbelievers. Peter's encouragement in 2:12 is apropos as one of the themes in this second major section: *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*<sup>5</sup>

Peter starts out with specific instructions for his readers to carry out their God-given callings in society at large—their callings as citizens (2:13-17), as slaves (2:18-20), and as faithful followers of Christ living in an increasingly anti-Christian society (2:21-25)<sup>6</sup>. From a view of society at large, the Apostle then focuses his attention on husbands and wives carrying out their God-given callings in marriage (3:1-7). From there he offers brief instructions to the Christian community (3:8-12) before transitioning back to encouraging his readers to let their lights shine even in the midst of persecution and suffering (3:13-

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that at our sister seminary – Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, the book of 1 Peter is a required course in their curriculum. WLS has taken strides to offer it as an annual Winterim offering, besides teaching it along with the other General Epistles. In these latter days, we would all do well to study this timely epistle!

<sup>3</sup> This brief outline of 1 Peter and discussion of the context of 1 Peter 4:1-11 that follows are based on arguably one of the best topical outlines of 1 Peter available – Dr. Ernst R. Wendland's topical outline found in Appendix 1 of his paper: "Stand Fast in the True Grace of God": A Study of 1 Peter. Available in the WLS Essay File - <http://www.wlssays.net/node/886>. Other outlines from other notable commentators can be found in Appendix A of this paper. I have also created a Bible study based on the Wendland outline of 1 Peter that is available at your request.

<sup>4</sup> To paraphrase Paul in Romans 12:1.

<sup>5</sup> NIV84. Unless otherwise noted, all other Scriptural quotes in the footnotes come from NIV84.

<sup>6</sup> Peter's application of Isaiah 53 to Christ from an NT perspective and its implications for suffering Christians is worthy of more time and consideration than available here. There is certainly a connection between 2:21-25 and 4:1-11.

4:11). He reminds them that they are to continue to faithfully serve the Lord as innocent sufferers and witnesses for Christ (3:13-17) and as beneficiaries of the salvation won by Christ (3:18-22).

In 3:18-22, Peter presents the suffering, death, and exaltation of Christ—and the connection believers have to that salvific work through Holy Baptism—as the motivating factor for them to continue doing good as God’s holy, humble people.<sup>7</sup> Motivated as beneficiaries of the salvation won by Christ, the Apostle turns back to instructions and encouragements for his suffering readers in 4:1-11. The portion for our consideration concludes the second major section of 1 Peter, a conclusion that is made all the more obvious by a notable doxology in 4:11.

In the third and final section, the Apostle prepares his readers for present and future trials and tribulations instructing them about the characteristics of those who suffer for the cause of Christ (4:12-19). He then provides final instructions for God’s holy and humble people (5:1-9) and a final encouragement (5:10-11) that concludes with a final blessing. Throughout this final section, Peter returns to the common themes of the epistle as he gives his readers living hope in the midst of suffering while lifting their eyes heavenward with the expectation of Christ’s return. As we will see, that apostolic theme of Christ’s return as source of hope and motivation is at the heart of 1 Peter 4:1-11.

### **1 Peter 4:1-6 – Living as Followers of Christ’s Example in View of the Judgment**

**1 Peter 4:1-2** – Χριστοῦ οὖν παθόντος σαρκὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς τὴν αὐτὴν ἔννοιαν ὀπλίσασθε, ὅτι ὁ παθὼν σαρκὶ πέπαυται ἀμαρτίας **2** εἰς τὸ μηκέτι ἀνθρώπων ἐπιθυμίαις ἀλλὰ θελήματι θεοῦ τὸν ἐπίλοιπον ἐν σαρκὶ βιώσαι χρόνον.

**JGT**<sup>8</sup> – *Therefore because Christ suffered in the flesh, equip yourselves also with the same way of thinking, because he who suffers in the flesh has ceased from sin, so that he no longer lives the remaining time in the flesh for sinful human cravings, but for the will of God.*

#### **Definitions Worth Defining:**

πάσχω – Aor. Act. Part. Gen. Masc. Sg. Circ. Causal – to suffer, endure suffering

ὀπλίζω – Aor. Mid. Inv. 2Pl. – to get by equipping, equip, arm (Generally a military verb)

τὴν αὐτὴν ἔννοιαν – The translation of ἔννοιαν has been debated for many years largely due to the question of how it relates to the following ὅτι clause. “The same way of thinking” seems to be as good of a translation as any, especially if the ὅτι clause is understood as a causal clause.

παύω – Perf. Pass. Ind. 3Sg. – to cease, cause to stop

βίωω – Aor. Act. Inf. – to live

ἐπιθυμίαις – sinful cravings, lusts, desires

τὸν ἐπίλοιπον...χρόνον – the remaining time

#### **Grammar Notes Worth Noting:**

οὖν – Inferential (drawn from 3:18-22)

σαρκὶ...σαρκὶ... - In both cases, Wallace cites this as an example of a dative of sphere = “in the sphere of the flesh”.<sup>9</sup> We might call it a dative of location. A case could also be made for dative of reference. Either way, the emphasis seems to be on Christ’s human nature during his humiliation compared analogously to the human nature of God’s people.

<sup>7</sup> In many ways, not unlike Paul’s discussion of the same topics in Romans 6.

<sup>8</sup> Definitely not intended to be a base translation for a WELS translation of the Bible.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel B. Wallace. Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, MI:Zondervan, 1959). 155.

ὅτι – Most familiar translations and commentators takes this as causal (NASB, HCSB, NIV11, NIV84), but some such as ESV attempt to take it as declarative (namely, that...). Causal seems to make more sense syntactically.

πέπανται ἀμαρτίας – Wallace cites this as a genitive of separation – “He has ceased from [doing] sin”.<sup>10</sup>

εἰς τὸ...βιῶσαι – Articularized infinitive clause – Can be translated as purpose or even as result (NIV)

ἐπιθυμίας...θελήματι – Datives of advantage

### **Explanation of 4:1-2:**

Coming off of Peter’s soul-strengthening encouragement in 3:18-22, with the simple conjunction οὖν in the midst of a genitive absolute, Peter provides the reason why his readers need to prepare themselves for living out their Christian lives in an anti-Christian world. In 3:18-22, he had pointed to Christ’s suffering and death as God’s gift of grace that brought them salvation, but in this verse, he uses that same suffering and death “in the flesh” as an example for these suffering Christians.<sup>11</sup> They are to have the same attitude as Christ when it comes to their own suffering for the faith.

ὅτι ὁ παθὼν σαρκὶ πέπανται ἀμαρτίας has been widely debated among scholars largely due to two questions about the clause—to whom does it refer? and what does it mean to “cease sin”? Regarding the first question, some have argued that it refers to both Christ and the Christian. Others argue that it refers only to Christ. Still others argue that it refers to the Christian only. The first option seems to simply be too awkward and ambiguous to say both.<sup>12</sup> The second option would imply that Christ “must once have been a sinner if he ceased from it”. The last option makes the most sense because in this verse Peter makes a connection between Christ’s suffering in the flesh and the believer’s suffering in the flesh. The verse also seems to be hortatory in nature as Peter encourages his readers to “equip yourselves”.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the second question, commentator Karen Jobes explains it well.

Peter has already instructed his readers that they, too, are called to suffer unjustly, because of this example set by Christ (2:21). In order to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to embrace their calling, and to face daily a society unfriendly to their values, Christians must be armed with the same disposition and resolve that allowed Jesus to set his face resolutely toward the cross. Suffering for their relationship with God in Christ then becomes something to be expected and not something to be avoided. Therefore, the content of the resolve enjoined on Christians, the same resolve that Jesus had, is *that* (*hoti*) those who suffer unjustly for their faith in God have demonstrated that they are through with sin to the extent that they would choose to suffer rather than to sin. And because they would rather suffer than sin, they can live out the rest of their time in the flesh no longer motivated by human desires but instead by the will of God (4:2). The fact that they are suffering demonstrates the true nature of their resolve. They have not just resolved to cease from sin that presents itself; they have in this case actually ceased from it, or they wouldn’t be suffering for righteousness. This interpretation fits the overall theme of the letter—suffering for being a Christian—as well as the immediate context of 4:2-4...<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wallace 109.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther. Volume 30: The Catholic Epistles. Luther’s Works: American Edition (Logos Digital Edition, 1999). (St. Louis: CPH, 1967). 117.

<sup>12</sup> Georg Stöckhardt. Kommentar über den Ersten Brief Petri. (St. Louis: CPH, 1912). 183.

<sup>13</sup> Karen H. Jobes. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Peter. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005). 263-265.

<sup>14</sup> Jobes 266.

In verse 2, we have either the purpose of ceasing from sin or the result of ceasing from sin, both of which lead to the same place in the life of a believer—no longer being yanked around by the sinful cravings of his sinful nature, but rather living “for the will of God”.

**Application(s) of 4:1-2:** While these particular verses are more introductory in nature, there are some applications we can already make at this point...

- Our encouragement for sanctification always has to start with a reminder or a review of justification. In the verses prior to this section, Peter gives a beautiful explanation of how the Righteous One died for the unrighteous, how Christ paid for the sins of all—even us! He even takes the time to point us back to the blessings we received in Holy Baptism, most notably the gift of salvation. Then with the beautiful picture of the risen and exalted Christ before their eyes, Peter turns the discussion towards living out their lives as followers of Christ’s example.
- The theology of the cross is quite evident throughout the book of 1 Peter, but in these verses Peter reminds his readers that if Christ suffered in the flesh, they can and should expect to suffer in the flesh for living according to God’s will. Seeing that Christ has suffered for us, however, is not a deterrent, but a motivation to endure suffering for doing God’s will, because Peter clearly put the picture of the risen and exalted Christ before their eyes first. For the believer, the struggle beneath the cross always has a happy ending—eternal life with the risen Christ.
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**1 Peter 4:3-5** – 3 ἀρκετὸς γὰρ ὁ παρεληλυθὸς χρόνος τὸ βούλημα τῶν ἐθνῶν κατειργάσθαι πεπορευμένους ἐν ἀσελγείαις, ἐπιθυμίαις, οἰνοφλυγίαις, κώμοις, πότοις καὶ ἀθεμίτοις εἰδωλολατρίας. 4 ἐν ᾧ ξενίζονται μὴ συντρεχόντων ὑμῶν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν τῆς ἀσωτίας ἀνάχυσιν βλασφημοῦντες, 5 οἱ ἀποδώσουσιν λόγον τῷ ἑτοίμως ἔχοντι κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς.

**JGT** – *For the time which has passed was sufficient for carrying out the desire of the pagans having lived in unrestrained behavior, sinful cravings, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and disgusting idolatry. In this, they are shocked that you do not run with them into the same flood of wild living and they slander you. Those ones will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

### **Definitions Worth Defining:**

ἀρκετὸς – Nom. Masc. Sg. – enough, sufficient, adequate

παρέρχομαι – Perf. Act. Part. Masc. Nom. Sg. Attr. Adj. – to be no longer available (Passive voice makes this verb “past”)

κατεργάζομαι – Perf. M-P./Dep. Inf. – to accomplish, carry out, do

πορεύω – Perf. M-P./Dep. Part. Acc. Masc. Pl. Circ. Prelim. – to live, travel, conduct yourself

ἀσελγείαις – Dat. Fem. Pl. – self-abandonment, “lack of self-constraint which involves one in conduct that violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable”<sup>15</sup>

ἐπιθυμίαις – Dat. Fem. Pl. – sinful cravings, lusts, desires

οἰνοφλυγίαις – Dat. Fem. Pl. – drunkenness

κώμοις – Dat. Masc. Pl. – excessive feasting, orgies (Consider this process: First “a village festival”; then “revelry, drinking party”; then “orgy”)

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<sup>15</sup> W. Arndt, F.W. Danker, W. Bauer. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000) (Logos Bible Software 5.1b). 141.

πότοις – Dat. Masc. Pl. – A more localized, private drinking party that usually resulted in carousing

ἀθεμίτοις – Dat. Fem. Pl. – forbidden, disgusting, abominable, unlawful, lawless, despicable

ξενίζω – Pres. Pass. Ind. 3Pl. – to astonish, surprise, shock, cause a strong psychological reaction through the introduction of something strange or new

συντρέχω – Pres. Act. Part. Gen. Masc. Pl. Suppl. Compl. – to go with, run with

τῆς ἀσωτίας – Gen. Fem. Sg. – reckless abandon, debauchery, wild living

ἀνάχυσιν – Acc. Fem. Sg. – wide stream, wide flood

ἀποδώσουσιν λόγον – Fut. Act. Ind. 3Pl. – Idiom – to give an account

τῷ ἐτοίμως ἔχοντι – Pres. Act. Part. Dat. Masc. Sg. Attr. Adj. – “To him who is ready”

### **Grammar Notes Worth Noting:**

γὰρ – Causal

ἐν ᾧ - “In this” – Trailing relative (Wallace argues that this is an adverbial/conjunctive use of the relative pronoun)<sup>16</sup> – The pronoun goes back to the concept of how they lived as described in verse 3, rather than give a specific antecedent.

### **Explanation of 4:3-5:**

In 4:2, Peter looked ahead as he spoke of “the remaining time in the flesh” and how the believer will spend that “remaining time”—not being pulled around by selfish human desires, but being led θελήματι θεοῦ, “by the will of God”. In 4:3, the Apostle looks back on the life of his formerly pagan readers to remind them of what their lives were like before. He puts the word ἀρκετὸς right out there in the emphatic position to help his readers realize that that chapter of their lives is now over. “You’ve spent enough time doing all this, but no more because you live by the will of God!” As believers in Christ, suffering for the faith, Peter wanted them to remember that they would not be going back to that former way of life, even though their friends and family wanted them to do so.

Peter contrasts their former way of life devoted to τὸ βούλημα τῶν ἐθνῶν to their present way of life θελήματι θεοῦ. His Christian readers would now avoid these activities that were so prevalent in their former lives, and for good reason! The catalog of immoral activities that Peter lists is truly disgusting and repulsive to the redeemed child of God.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it would be very difficult for these new Christians to cut themselves off from those immoral, pagan activities. In a sense, they would be entering a “no-man’s land” by leaving their former way of life to follow God’s holy will.

One detail that we often miss when studying books like 1 Peter or the Pauline Epistles is how common activities like these were in Greek and Roman society because religion was so intertwined in the cultural and social life of the typical citizen of Greek or Roman communities. Alcohol fueled overindulgent feasting, which led to carousing and sexual immorality. Often these disgusting practices took place in the context of “acceptable” pagan worship at the local temple.

When Christians separated themselves from these activities initially, it resulted in surprise among their family members and friends and neighbors, but as time went on and the Christians still refused to take part in those immoral activities, that surprise turned into shock and anger. The verb ξενίζονται in 4:4 provides an interesting insight into what was taking place. This verb which can mean “welcome a stranger” also means “be shocked at something new—often in a bad way”. In a very real sense, these

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<sup>16</sup> Wallace also notes that this particular phrase is only used in 1 Peter – 1:6; 2:12; 3:16,19; 4:4 (343).

<sup>17</sup> Peter’s catalog is similar to Pauline catalogs in Ro 13:13ff. and Ga 5:19-21.

new Christians were becoming “strangers” to their former friends and family members. Sadly, that shocked anger turned to slander, which was essentially blasphemy against the Christians and their God.

As his readers turned their eyes downward in sadness over such blasphemy, Peter turns their eyes heavenward again in 4:5. Typically when Peter points his readers to the Last Day, it is to give them the hope of deliverance because Christ is coming soon. However, in 4:5, Peter gives them the hope of deliverance because Christ is going to judge those who blaspheme him and his people. Even in the promise of judgment on God’s enemies, God’s people can still have hope in the One “who is ready to judge the living and the dead”, because he controls all things even those who slander his people.

#### **Application(s) of 4:3-5:**

- As we look at the increasingly wicked and immoral society around us, Peter’s description of pagan activities seems no different than what is offered on television or the internet. Such immoral activities are even becoming more commonplace in communities like ours as well. So what do we do? What do we tell our flocks? Peter does not advocate the formation of monastic communities<sup>18</sup>, but a reminder to be in the world, but not of the world. What is against God’s will must be left behind for the sake of following him, even if it means suffering for it.
- A question that every one of our congregations, especially those on the East Coast, need to consider is what kind of community or family will we provide for a brand-new Christian who has recently converted from an unbelieving or non-Christian, pagan background? First-generation Christians are in a very difficult position when they leave what they were before. Things have not changed since the 1st century in this case. For example, becoming a Christian means for the former Muslim or Hindu the very real possibility that their family, friends, and community may cut them off as dead to them.<sup>19</sup> So what do we do? Our congregations need to be as ready to provide the family, the community necessary for those who come into the church from a non-Christian background as we do for those coming from other Christian denominations.
- Is there a time and place where we can make an imprecatory promise for God’s suffering people like Peter does when he points to the coming judgment on the Last Day in 4:5? While the hope for judgment on the wicked is not always where we tend to direct God’s people in times of suffering for the sake of Christ, there is a rightful place for such an imprecatory promise especially in times of persecution. At the very least, Peter’s reasoning for making such a promise sounds no different than the words of Luther regarding the Second and Third Petitions. For God’s kingdom to come and his will to be done, that prayer includes asking the Lord to crush the enemies of his people in order to deliver them and promote the free proclamation of the Gospel. There is also something to be said about finding comfort in knowing that we have a Savior-God who is in control of all things, including what happens to his people even in the midst of their suffering, and that that One will judge the living and the dead on the Last Day.
- Historical Observation: At the end of 4:5, did you notice an early hint at the wording that would eventually find its way into the ancient Baptismal “Rule of Faith” and develop into what we now know as the Apostles’ Creed?
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<sup>18</sup> ...To the disappointment of all who call themselves Papist.

<sup>19</sup> This isn’t exclusive to non-Christian communities. This writer recalls a situation in one of his father’s congregations when a young woman from a devoutly Roman Catholic family married a young man who was WELS, and after BIC, she joined the Lutheran congregation. Her family purchased a grave plot for her and held a funeral of sorts. Years later when the woman suffered a number of miscarriages, the family blamed it on her becoming Lutheran.



**1 Peter 4:6** – 6 εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ νεκροῖς εὐηγγελίσθη, ἵνα κριθῶσι μὲν κατὰ ἀνθρώπους σαρκὶ ζῶσι δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι.

**JGT** – *For this reason the gospel was preached even to the dead, in order that even though they might be judged in the flesh according to human standards, they might live in the spirit according to God's standard.*

### **Definitions Worth Defining:**

εὐαγγελίζω – Aor. Pass. Ind. 3Sg. – to proclaim the good news, proclaim the Gospel

### **Grammar Notes Worth Noting:**

εὐηγγελίσθη – Some commentators describe this as a gnomic aorist, a proverbial statement.

μὲν...δὲ... - Conjunction pair indicates contrasting concepts

κατὰ ἀνθρώπους...κατὰ θεὸν – lit. “according to people...according to God...” – The idea of “in line with” is helpful for κατὰ here.

σαρκὶ...πνεύματι... - Similar to 4:1 – Dative of reference.

### **Explanation of 4:6:**

As we follow Peter's train of thought to the conclusion of 4:1-6, the context shows that this is not a reference back to “the spirits in prison” in 3:19. Instead, this is a reference to those who are now physically dead, but who had heard the Gospel while still alive. The primary debate on this passage is if it refers to Christians who have now died or to unbelievers. It seems that most commentators side with νεκροῖς being Christians who have died, especially in light of the concluding statements, but occasionally even commentators from our own circles say it refers to unbelievers. This writer sides with those who interpret νεκροῖς to mean Christians who have died.

The concluding statements bear that out rather clearly. In light of his comments on the coming judgment on the Last Day, Peter speaks of the effect(s) of the Gospel being preached to Christians of the past. By human standards, they were judged outwardly by what people saw, and God's people continue to be judged that way whether it is deserved or not. In spite of that human judgment, what matters most is God's judgment in the end. By God's grace, those who have “now died” actually “live” according to God's standard since they have been rescued through the hearing of the Gospel. In this case, Peter sounds a note of hope for his readers as he lifts their eyes heavenward to the return of their Savior.

### **Application(s) of 4:6:**

- In light of the coming judgment of Christ, Peter sounds a subtle note that speaks to the importance of remaining faithful to the Lord to the end and proclaiming the Gospel now. Yes, we might be judged by outward appearances. To the world not only are we not impressive, but we are even offensive because we follow God's will. That human judgment is quick to act when scandal or trouble rocks the Christian church, but for those who remain faithful to the Gospel to the end, there is eternal life and victory according to God's standard. On a related note, if the Gospel makes this kind of eternal impact on souls, especially on those who were once hardened against the Lord, we ought never diminish its predominance in our midst.
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**A Stöckhardt Summary of 4:1-6:** Christians should be served the cross and suffering in order to renounce sin and the world more thoroughly and to live the will of God. And they should not grieve if they are therefore ridiculed and slandered. For while the servants of sin and blasphemers have to expect

a dreadful judgment with the return of the Lord, a judgment which even deceased blasphemers will not escape, Christians by virtue of the Gospel, which they have received by faith, enter immediately by the judgment of death, initially in the spirit, into a new, perfectly holy, blessed, most excellent life, which never ends. Truly Christians have by suffering and even by death only victory.<sup>20</sup>

#### **4:7-11 – Living as Loving, Mutual Servers in Recognition of the End Times**

**1 Peter 4:7 – 7** Πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος ἤγγικεν. σωφρονήσατε οὖν καὶ νήψατε εἰς προσευχάς·

**JGT** – *But the end of all things is near. Therefore keep your head and be self-controlled for the purpose of prayer.*

#### **Definitions Worth Defining:**

ἐγγίζω – Perf. Act. Ind. 3Sg. – to draw near, come near, approach

σωφρονέω – Aor. Act. Impv. 2Pl. – to be prudent, reasonable, sensible, keep one’s head (A key concept in the Pastoral Epistles as well!)

νήψω – Aor. Act. Impv. 2Pl. – to be well-balanced, self-controlled, exercise self-restraint

#### **Grammar Notes Worth Noting:**

δὲ – Indicator that Peter is transitioning from discussing the life of a suffering Christian in light of the coming judgment in 4:1-6, and his instruction directed toward the community of believers in 4:7-11.

οὖν – Inferential (drawn from previous sentence – from motivation to action)

#### **Explanation of 4:7:**

In 3:22, Peter had concluded with a picture of the risen and exalted Christ. Now after discussing the challenges of the suffering Christian and the coming judgment, he refocuses the eyes of his readers on the Last Day when that same risen and exalted Christ will come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and finally bring his holy, chosen people home to heaven. Peter is starting to draw together themes like a symphony reaching its crescendo at this point in this section—Πάντων δὲ τὸ τέλος ἤγγικεν. ...But the end of all things is near! The words just jump off the page and set the tone for the instructions Peter has for God’s holy people as they rush towards the doxology at the end of the section.<sup>21</sup>

In light of that approaching Last Day, the Apostle instructs his readers to “keep their heads” and “be in control of yourself”. What Peter is saying here is that Christians ought not “freak out” when suffering comes or when indications of the end times make themselves more evident with the passing of time. Instead, there is a purpose for such sober-headedness—prayer. What Peter urges here is also a complete contrast to the out-of-control actions and lustful cravings of the previous verses.

#### **Application(s) of 4:7:**

- When Peter first wrote these words, it was maybe 30-35 years after Christ’s ascension. The urgency of Christ’s approaching return was palpable in the early church and in the apostolic and post-apostolic writings. Paul uses the reality of that Last Day as motivation many times in his epistles. A read-through of 1 and 2 Peter, as well as the writings of John, would show the same sense of urgency as motivation for God’s people to lead holy, humble lives in his service...but 2,000 years have passed since Jesus promised to return and that sense of urgency seems to be

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<sup>20</sup> Stöckhardt 203 – Translation by the author.

<sup>21</sup> Luther’s words on this verse offer food for thought: “...One must figure that it will not be so long until the end of the world as it had been from the beginning up to that time. It is not to be expected that mankind will see two or three thousand years after the birth of Christ. The end will come sooner than we think.” (122) Luther preached those words around 1522-23!

lost. How can that urgency be restored beyond lip service among us who serve in public ministry? How can we restore that urgency among our own people? Why does it need to happen?

- Note Peter’s response to Charismatics who claim that you have to be “caught up in the Spirit” for the best prayer: Keep your head and be self-controlled! Prayer is an opportunity to have a level-headed, heart-to-heart talk with God. Losing our heads over whatever is going in our lives will only hinder our prayers and perhaps even damage our faith.

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**1 Peter 4:8-9** – 8 πρὸ πάντων τὴν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς ἀγάπην ἐκτενῆ ἔχοντες, ὅτι ἀγάπη καλύπτει πλῆθος ἁμαρτιῶν. 9 φιλόξενοι εἰς ἀλλήλους ἄνευ γογγυσμοῦ.

**JGT** – *Above all, be fervent in your self-sacrificing love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.*

### **Definitions Worth Defining:**

πρὸ πάντων – above all, first in priority

ἔχοντες – Pres. Act. Part. Masc. Nom. Pl. Circ. Att. Circ. w/ Imv. Force

ἐκτενῆ – Adj. Acc. Fem. Sg. – eager, earnest, fervent (perseverance in devotion)

φιλόξενοι – εἰμί implied – lit. “being stranger loving”

ἄνευ γογγυσμοῦ - without grumbling/behind-the-scenes talk

### **Explanation of 4:8-9:**

In view of the Last Day approaching, the Apostle Peter urges his fellow believers to remain constant, fervent, and persevering in their ἀγάπη love for one another. With the struggles they were facing and pressures from the outside world, there was a good chance that that love would flicker and fade and finally disappear. Instead such love is needed all the more, especially in times of trial and tribulation, because that is what holds Christian congregations and communities together.

Peter paraphrases Proverbs 10:12<sup>22</sup> at the end of 4:8 with a quote that is similar to James 5:20<sup>23</sup> and 1 Corinthians 13:7<sup>24</sup> – “love covers a multitude of sins”. What he means by this is to support even further his strong encouragement for God’s people to maintain fervent, constant love among one another. Commentator Karen Jobes writes regarding Peter’s usage of this paraphrased proverb:

...Peter is not making a theological statement about sins being forgiven (“covered”) by God. Nor is he saying that sin in the church should be ignored or denied (“covered up”). Peter is concerned with behaviors that could destroy the Christian community; such behaviors must be extinguished if the church is to survive...By Peter’s definition, “love” is not a warm, fuzzy feeling but means treating others in the Christian community in such a way as to promote unity and to avoid or overcome behaviors that destroy relationships... [T]he fundamental characteristic that enables a Christian community to survive is the willingness and ability of its members to love in this way.<sup>25</sup>

That love then expresses itself within the Christian community in φιλόξενοι or hospitality towards fellow believers. This word is used in the qualifications of an overseer in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8.

<sup>22</sup> Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

<sup>23</sup> Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

<sup>24</sup> [Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

<sup>25</sup> Jobes 279.

Most commentators note that inns were not always reputable and travelers needed places to stay. For Christian travelers, that burden typically fell on their fellow believers wherever they traveled. There was also the reality of living in a time of persecution when many fellow Christians may lose their businesses and be dispossessed from their homes. They, in turn, would need long-term “hospitality” for themselves and their families—a responsibility that would often fall on their fellow Christians. Peter’s advice to these Christians was to provide hospitality—both short and long-term—without complaint or grumbling, but simply from hearts filled with thankfulness for God’s grace and with readiness for the Last Day.

### Application(s) of 4:8-9:

- Infighting is one of the most common problems in Christian congregations today, yet what can we learn from Peter’s encouragement to “keep constant in your self-sacrificing love for one another”? Perhaps it means utilizing your trained elders to help reconcile you with another member. Perhaps it means guiding the process to work out differences among your leadership not only to bring reconciliation to the situation, but also to help them see the need for Christian leaders to work together. Perhaps it means being an example for your leaders and your flock in showing love even for the most unlovable among them. Whatever we do to deal with infighting or conflict within our congregations, it has to start with the Christ-like love that Peter describes.
- Hospitality is one of the qualifications for an overseer, but it is a quality that is perhaps not as utilized as it could be to create opportunities for the ministry of the Word. Hospitality was a treasured responsibility in the ancient world and still remains so today in many eastern cultures. With people leading more and more isolated lives often away from home and family, our congregations have an opportunity to utilize hospitality (lit. “stranger loving” in Greek) for the spread of the Gospel and the nurturing of God’s people.

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**1 Peter 4:10-11** – 10 ἕκαστος καθὼς ἔλαβεν χάρισμα εἰς ἑαυτοὺς αὐτὸ διακονοῦντες ὡς καλοὶ οἰκονόμοι ποικίλης χάριτος θεοῦ. 11 εἴ τις λαλεῖ, ὡς λόγια θεοῦ· εἴ τις διακονεῖ, ὡς ἐξ ἰσχύος ἧς χορηγεῖ ὁ θεός, ἵνα ἐν πᾶσιν δοξάζεται ὁ θεὸς διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ᾧ ἐστὶν ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.

**JGT** – *Just as each one has received a special gift of grace, use it to serve one another, as faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God. If someone speaks, do it as one who speaks the words of God; if someone serves, do it as from the strength which God supplies, in order in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.*

### Definitions Worth Defining:

χάρισμα – gift (usually refers to gifts of God’s grace)

διακονέω – Pres. Act. Part. Nom. Masc. Pl. Circ. Att. Circ. – to serve

ποικίλης – Gen. Fem. Sg. – manifold, various

λόγια θεοῦ - words/utterances/oracles of God

ἰσχύος – Gen. Fem. Sg. – strength, power, might

χορηγέω – Pres. Act. Ind. 3Sg. – to provide, supply in abundance

### Grammar Notes Worth Noting:

ᾧ - Dative of Possession with ἐστὶν – Reference to God or to Christ? God is likelier, but it remains debatable.

### **Explanation of 4:10-11:**

In view of the Last Day approaching, the Apostle Peter makes another exhortation that applies to the Christian community. Use the gifts that God has given to you in order to serve him. Peter teaches them some lessons about stewardship here that apply to us today.

1. A spiritual gift is a gracious gift (χάρισμα) of God.
2. Each person (ἕκαστος) has at least one spiritual gift, but probably more. (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7)
3. Spiritual gifts come in different forms (ποικίλης).
4. Spiritual gifts are not for serving and glorifying yourself, but for serving others (εἰς ἑαυτοὺς αὐτὸ διακονοῦντες).<sup>26</sup>

These gifts are then put to use in God's service and to his glory. Peter speaks of two kinds of spiritual gifts—speaking and serving. God's people are to faithfully use the gifts that God has graciously given them for this final purpose—that God may be glorified through Christ Jesus our Lord.

### **Application(s) of 4:10-11:**

- Peter takes us into the discussion of stewardship and the faithful management of “God's manifold grace”. We have been entrusted with what is not ours, yet every gift comes from the gracious hand of our God. The gifts he bestows are wide in variety and in depth. Rather than focus on the specific gifts, Peter focuses us on what we are to do with those gifts—serve one another with the gifts of God's grace and by doing so, glorify his saving name. If we have speaking gifts, use them as though we are speaking God's words. If we have serving gifts, use them supplied by his strength. When it comes to our stewardship instruction, our efforts need to be patient, but yet always centered on God's grace. Grace gave us and our flocks the gifts we have, and by God's grace, we will use those same gifts in service to God and his people.
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**A Stöckhardt Summary of 4:7-11:** The Apostle thus exhorts Christians in view of the approaching end of all things to diligent prayer, to persistent brotherly love, and to faithful stewardship of the manifold gifts of God.<sup>27</sup>

### **Final Thoughts on 1 Peter 4:1-11**

*...So what does living the end times life look like?*

Living the end times life means keeping our eyes fixed on the risen and exalted Christ, who will come again, while always keeping in view the suffering and death of Christ both as the salvific gift of God's grace and as our example in suffering. Living the end times life means being ready, even expecting, to suffer for the sake of Christ in this life, while always keeping in view the reality that suffering in this life is temporary compared to the eternal victory that awaits God's people. Living the end times life means being willing to leave behind a former way of life for the sake of Christ and God's holy will, while always understanding that to do so may make you a stranger to people you knew and loved. Living the

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<sup>26</sup> New Testament Department of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. General Epistles Class Notes. Received 20 June 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Stöckhardt 210 – Translation by the author.

end times life means faithfully living and proclaiming the Gospel even in the face of blasphemy against you and your Lord, while always remembering that the One who is in control of all things will one day come to judge the living and the dead. Living the end times life means keeping your head and being in control of yourself in all things because you know the end of all things is coming soon. Living the end times life means displaying Christ-like love even when others in your own family in Christ are unlovable because Christ is coming soon, while also realizing the need to receive such Christ-like love for ourselves when we come across as loveless and hurtful. Living the end times life means opening our homes for the sake of the Gospel, yet doing so willingly because Christ is coming soon. Living the end times life means faithfully administering the unique gifts that God in his grace gives to each and every one of his people, while always recognizing that God gives special gifts to different people in different ways and we can appreciate that as another example of our God's bountiful goodness. Living the end times life means daily lifting our eyes heavenward to bring glory and praise to our gracious God, who loved us and sent his Son to live and die and rise again, who will one day come again in glory not only to judge the living and the dead, but to bring us to be with him in glory. Living the end times life means yearning for that Last Day and living as if that Day could be today.

*What can we learn from this portion of 1 Peter about motivating and encouraging God's people to live the end times life?*

As ministers of the Gospel, we have a tendency to give lip service to "Gospel motivation"<sup>28</sup>, but do we really know what that is? Do we actually carry that out when we motivate and encourage God's people to serve their Lord? Sometimes that "Gospel motivation" is in reality nothing more than brow-beating or guilt-tripping or moralism covered in an evangelical<sup>29</sup> veneer. Sometimes our "Gospel motivation" is such a broad attempt to apply the Gospel that no one sees how it applies to them specifically.

However, you get neither impression from the Apostle Peter. Yes, he is giving clear, specific, and personal instructions to his readers, but the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ is always there as the reason for ceasing from sin, as the cause for withstanding blasphemy, as the motivation for being self-controlled and hospitable and self-sacrificing in love, as the well-spring for faithful, godly service.

As ministers of the Gospel, we would do well to spend more time at the feet of the Apostle Peter to be encouraged by the good news of our own Savior—Jesus Christ, and to learn how to encourage our own people to faithfully live the end times life, "so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." (4:11b)

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

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<sup>28</sup> Robert J. Koester's NPH Impact Series book, *Gospel Motivation: More Than "Jesus Died for My Sins"*, is an excellent resource on this subject both in identifying what is not "Gospel motivation" and what it should really look like.

<sup>29</sup> This is "evangelical" in the sense of Gospel-oriented rather than that which comes from the Evangelical community, although a certain connection could be made...

## **Appendix A: Basic Outlines of 1 Peter with Particular Focus on 4:1-11**

### ***Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1 Peter (Karen H. Jobes)***

- I. A Greeting to the Christian Diaspora of Asia Minor (1:1-2)
- II. The Opening of the Letter: Reassurance for God's People (1:3-2:10)
- III. As God's People, Live Godly Lives (2:11-4:11)
  - A. Commendable Social Behavior as God's People (2:11-3:7)
  - B. The Inner Qualities of Righteous Living (3:8-12)
  - C. Suffering Unjustly for the Name of Christ (3:13-4:11)
    - 1. Suffering for Doing Good (3:13-17)
    - 2. Christ's Victory Over Unjust Suffering (3:18-22)
    - 3. Living Out Christ's Victory in an Unbelieving World (4:1-6)
      - a. Be Willing to Suffer Rather Than Sin (4:1-2)
      - b. Suffering Abuse from Unbelievers (4:3-4)
      - c. The Universal Scope of God's Judgment (4:5-6)
    - 4. Living Out Christ's Victory in the Christian Community (4:7-11)
      - a. Thinking Rightly in View of the End (4:7)
      - b. A Love that "Covers" Sin (4:8)
      - c. Gracious Hospitality (4:9)
      - d. Gifts of Grace as Acts of Service (4:10-11a)
      - e. Peter's Doxology (4:11b)
- IV. Consolation for the Suffering Flock (4:12-5:11)
- V. The Letter Closing: Final Words and Greetings (5:12-14)

### ***Kommentar über den Ersten Brief Petri (Commentary on the First Letter of Peter) (Dr. Georg Stöckhardt<sup>30</sup>)***

- 1:1-2 – Die Grußüberschrift (The Greeting-Title)
- 1:3-12 – Ein Lobpreis Gottes (A Praise of God)
- 1:3-2:10 – Allgemeine Ermahnungen zu einem christlichen Wandel (General Exhortations for a Christian Way of Life)
- 2:11-3:12 – Spezielle Ermahnungen hinsichtlich der Stellung der Christen in der Welt (Special Exhortations with Regard to the Position of the Christian in the World)
- 3:13-4:19 – Trost und Mahnung im Leiden (Comfort and Admonition in Suffering)
- 5:1-5 – Ermahnung an die Ältesten (Exhortation to the Elders)
- 5:6-14 – Eine Schlußermahnung und Schlußverheißung (A Concluding Exhortation and Concluding Promise)

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<sup>30</sup> Translations are mine.

***Stand Fast in the True Grace of God: A Study of 1 Peter (Dr. Ernst R. Wendland)***

Greetings to the Elect of God (1:1-2)

I. Origin and Characteristics of God's Holy People (1:3-2:10)

II. Responsibilities of God's Holy and Humble People (2:11-4:11)

A. Doing Good in the Society at Large (2:11-25)

B. Doing Good in the Context of the Marriage Relationship (3:1-7)

C. Doing Good in the Context of the Christian Community (3:8-12)

D. Doing Good in the Society at Large (3:13-4:11)

1. As innocent sufferers and witnesses for Christ (3:13-17)

2. As beneficiaries of the salvation won by Christ (3:18-22)

3. As followers of Christ's example in view of the judgment (4:1-6)

4. As loving, mutual servers in recognition of the end times (4:7-11)

III. Preparing for Present and Future Trials and Tribulations (4:12-5:11)

Farewell to the Elect of God (5:12-14)

***The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude (R.C.H. Lenski)***

1:1-2 – The Greeting

1:3-12 – The Great Doxology

1:13-2:10 – Hortations Due to the Relation to God

2:11-3:12 – Hortations Due to the Relations to Men

3:13-5:11 – Hortations Due to Sufferings and Trials

3:13-17 – How to Suffer for Doing Good

3:18-22 – The Exaltation of Christ an Assurance to Those Who Suffer

4:1-6 – Suffering in the Light of Death and the Judgment

4:7-11 – Exercising Christian Virtues in View of the End

4:12-19 – Rejoice in Suffering that You May Rejoice at the Revelation of Christ's Glory

5:1-5a – The Elders, Examples of the Flock

5:5b-11 – The Final Exhortations to All Church Members

5:12-14 - Conclusion

***The New American Commentary: Vol. 37: 1, 2 Peter, Jude (Thomas R. Schreiner)***

I. Opening (1:1-2)

II. Called to Salvation as Exiles (1:3-2:10)

III. Living as Aliens to Bring Glory to God in a Hostile World (2:11-4:11)

A. The Christian Life as a Battle and Witness (2:11-12)

B. Testifying to the Gospel in the Social Order (2:13-3:12)



- C. Responding in a Godly Way to Suffering (3:13-4:11)
  - 1. The Blessing of Suffering for Christ (3:13-17)
  - 2. Christ's Suffering as the Pathway to Exaltation (3:18-22)
  - 3. Preparing to Suffer as Christ Did (4:1-6)
  - 4. Living in Light of the End (4:7-11)

IV. Persevering in Suffering (4:12-5:11)

V. Concluding Words (5:12-14)

***The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle of Peter (Peter H. Davids)***

I. Greeting (1:1-2)

II. Foundational Themes of the Christian Life (1:3-2:10)

III. Relating to Societal Institutions (2:11-4:11)

- A. Introduction: Exhortation to an Ethical Lifestyle (2:11-12)
- B. Propriety vis-à-vis the State (2:13-17)
- C. Propriety of Slaves vis-à-vis Masters (2:18-25)
- D. Propriety of Spouses vis-à-vis an Unbelieving Spouse (3:1-7)
- E. Summary Call to Virtue and Suffering (3:8-22)
  - 1. General Introduction (3:8-12)
  - 2. The Example of Jesus (3:13-22)
- F. Exhortation to Firmness in the End Times (4:1-11)

IV. Coming to Grips with Christian Suffering (4:12-5:11)

V. Conclusion and Greetings (5:12-14)

***The People's Bible: James, Peter, John, Jude (Mark A. Jeske)***

Theme: Living Hope in a Hostile World

I. Greeting (1:1-2)

II. Cycle 1: Living Hope (1:3-2:3)

III. Cycle 2: The Living Stone (2:4-3:17)

IV. Cycle 3: The Living Christ (3:18-5:11)

- A. Christ Triumphant and Resurrected (3:18-22)
- B. Encouragement for Individuals (4:1-19)
  - 1. Living as Christians
  - 2. Suffering as Christians
- C. Advice for the Congregations (5:1-11)

V. Final Greetings (5:12-14)

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