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Title: “Faithfully Serve the Church / Faithfully Suffer for Christ”

Scripture text: 1st Peter 4:7-19

Scripture Reading: 1st Peter 4:7-19 (NASB - New American Standard Bible)

<sup>7</sup>The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer. <sup>8</sup>Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Be hospitable to one another without complaint. <sup>10</sup>As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. <sup>11</sup>Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>12</sup>Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; <sup>13</sup>but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. <sup>14</sup>If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup>Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; <sup>16</sup>but *if anyone* suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

<sup>17</sup>For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup>AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? [Proverbs 11:31] <sup>19</sup>Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again today. Last week, we took a look at the first eight verses of chapter 4 of the First Epistle of Peter. Although I included verses 7 and 8 in my sermon last week, these verses actually belong to the next section of the chapter, verses 7 through 11.

Let me read 1 Peter 4:7-10 – “<sup>7</sup>The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober for the purpose of prayer. <sup>8</sup>Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Be hospitable to one another without complaint. <sup>10</sup>As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

This section begins with the statement that “The end of all things is near; therefore, ...” As I told you last week, this statement about *the end of all things is near* is not saying that the end of history and the return of Christ will happen very close to right now, but rather that this current church age has begun and could end at any moment, so we must be ready for it and live in expectation that Christ could come at any time.

Let’s read Matthew 24:42-46, where Jesus says this about His return – “<sup>42</sup>Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup>But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. <sup>44</sup>For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will. <sup>45</sup>Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup>Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.”

We must always be on the alert. We must always be ready for His return. The faithful and sensible servant of Christ is one who is active in doing the business of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And in 1st Peter 4:7-10, Peter tells us some of the key activities that we disciples of Christ ought to be engaged in.

Let’s look at those verses again – “<sup>7</sup>The end of all things is near; **therefore**”:

Verse 7 – “Be of sound judgment and sober for the purpose of **prayer**.”

Verse 8 – “Above all, keep fervent in your **love for one another**, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

Verse 9 – “**Be hospitable** to one another without complaint.”

Verse 10 – Each of us has received a special gift (we call these *spiritual gifts*) so we should **employ our spiritual gift** in serving one another.

These are some of the key activities that we are to be involved in: sober-minded **prayer**, **love** one another fervently, **be hospitable** to one another, **employ the spiritual gift** you have received.

I commented on verses 7 and 8 last week. In verse 7, we must be sober minded and have sound judgment in order to have effective prayers.

Verse 8 says “Above all.” This is the most important thing in our relationships and activities. “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another.” Christians are to love one another. And forgive one another. Ephesians 4:32 – “<sup>32</sup>Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

The end of 1 Peter 4:8 – “... love covers a multitude of sins.” When we choose to love and forgive instead of choose to hate and take revenge, this has a tendency to make bitter feelings fade away into insignificance.

Verse 9 – “Be hospitable to one another without complaint.” We ought to be hospitable to one another. However, because we are all still imperfect, there might be a time when you show kindness to someone but then kindness isn’t returned to you. In such times, you might have a tendency to feel bitter and to grumble or complain. But Peter exhorts us to keep on being hospitable and to shun any complaining or grumbling. Let’s keep on loving and forgiving one another.

Verse 10 – “<sup>10</sup>As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Each of us has received a spiritual gift, as 1st Corinthians chapter 12 tells us. And we are supposed to employ our spiritual gift in serving one another, as 1st Corinthians 12:7 says. In this way, we are to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” The New International Version (NIV) translates this verse saying that we are to be “faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” *God’s grace in its various forms*. God’s grace is manifested in a variety of ways through a variety of people in order to build up the church: a community of faithful disciples who are being witnesses of the gospel of Christ to the society around us.

Ephesians 4:11-13a – “<sup>11</sup>And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; <sup>13a</sup>until we all attain to the unity of the faith, ...”

The Greek word for gift in 1 Peter 4:10 and in 1 Corinthians 12 is *charisma*. It means “gracious gift” and we often say “spiritual gift” because these gifts of grace come to us from God’s Holy Spirit.

Let’s read 1 Corinthians 12:4-14 – “<sup>4</sup>Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup>And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup>There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. [*Isn’t it interesting how all three members of the Trinity are mentioned in these three verses: the Holy Spirit in verse 4, the Lord Jesus Christ in verse 5, and God the Father in verse 6. And we are told that there varieties of gifts, varieties of ministries, and varieties of effects.*] <sup>7</sup>But to each one [Christian] is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [*Please note: we each receive at least one gift, but we don’t keep it for ourself, but rather the gift is given to us for the*

*common good, to be used to build up the community of the church.]* <sup>8</sup>For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; <sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup>and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup>But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. <sup>12</sup>For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup>For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup>For the body is not one member, but many.”

There are a variety of people in the church – Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free – but we were all “baptized into one body” and therefore we ought to be showing unity ... and each of us are “made to drink of one Spirit.” In verse 11, the one Holy Spirit distributes each gift to each individual Christian in accordance with the will of the Holy Spirit (not *our* will). Verse 14 – the body is unified, but we are many individuals working together to build up the body and be a witness to the world.

Let me read what Bible commentator Thomas Schreiner says:

Even though every believer possesses at least one gift, the gifts are not necessarily the same. God’s grace manifests itself “in its various forms,” so that the diversity of gifts reveals the multifaceted character of God’s grace. What is most important, of course, is the purpose for having gifts. Gifts are not given so that believers can congratulate themselves on their abilities. They are bestowed “to serve others.” ... The point is that spiritual gifts are given to serve and to help others, to strengthen others in the faith. They are bestowed for ministry, not to enhance self-esteem. Paul emphasized the same theme, reminding believers that gifts are given to build up and edify others, not to edify oneself (1 Cor 12:7, 25–26; 14:1–19, 26; Eph 4:11–12). When believers use their gifts to strengthen others, they are functioning as “good stewards” (NRSV, *kaloi oikonomoi*) of God’s grace. ... Spiritual gifts are not fundamentally a privilege but a responsibility, a call to be faithful to what God has bestowed.<sup>1</sup>

Let me read those last two sentences again: “When believers use their gifts to strengthen others, they are functioning as ‘good stewards’ of God’s grace. ... Spiritual gifts are not fundamentally a privilege but a responsibility, a call to be faithful to what God has bestowed.” May we each faithfully exercise the gift God has given us to help build up the body of Christ, the church. If you want to learn more about the spiritual gifts, I invite you to look at the sermon I did entitled “A Place of Service.”

Let’s return to Peter and read 1 Peter 4:10-11 – “<sup>10</sup>As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. <sup>11</sup>Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

*So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

This ought to be a focus in all that we do. Not only do we serve other people and seek to bring them into the Kingdom of God, but we must remember that everything we do ought to bring glory to God through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the building up of a community of Christian disciples.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), p. 214.

Let us move on to the next section of chapter 4.

1 Peter 4:12-14 – “<sup>12</sup>Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; <sup>13</sup>but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. <sup>14</sup>If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

This reminds us of what we read in 1 Peter 1:6-7 and James 1:2-4, both of which tell us that difficult trials come to us for the testing and refining of our faith. There is nothing strange in this, Peter says.

The Apostle Paul says this in 2 Timothy 3:12 – “<sup>12</sup>Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

And Paul said this in Romans 5:3-5 – “<sup>3</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” We rejoice over our tribulations, because tribulations brings about perseverance; then perseverance forms in us proven character; and then proven character leads to hope.

The Apostle John said this in 1 John 3:13 – “<sup>13</sup>Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.”

And the Lord Jesus said this to His disciples in John 15:18-20 – “<sup>18</sup>If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup>If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. <sup>20</sup>Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

These are some of the ways in which we “share the sufferings of Christ.”

Let’s return to 1 Peter 4:13 – “<sup>13</sup>But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.” When we are persecuted for the sake of Jesus Christ, we share in His sufferings. And we exult – we rejoice triumphantly – when Christ’s final revelation of His glory arrives, when Jesus returns again as the triumphant King.

Commentator Thomas Schreiner has this to say:

How believers respond to suffering, in other words, is an indication of whether they truly belong to God at all. The promise of future joy, in fact, energizes the joy that will be theirs in the future. ... Peter exhorted readers to rejoice in their present sufferings so that they will be able to rejoice and exult forever when Christ returns.<sup>2</sup>

Let’s read 1 Peter 4:14-16 – “<sup>14</sup>If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. <sup>15</sup>Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; <sup>16</sup>but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), pp. 219–220.

This echoes what Peter said in chapter 2, verses 19-20 and chapter 3, verse 17. Let's take a look at 3:17 – <sup>17</sup>“For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.” Let us all choose to do right and thus honor God.

Let's look again at 1 Peter 4:16 – <sup>16</sup>“But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.” At this period of time in the first century, Christianity was not illegal, but Christians did suffer criticism and persecution from the unbelievers around them, and there might be a temptation for Christians to back away from their confession of faith and actually deny the faith. Peter is urging his fellow Christians not to feel ashamed at being known as Christians.

He is echoing something Jesus said in Mark 8:38 – <sup>38</sup>“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

Don't be ashamed to call yourself Christian. Instead, you can glorify God when you remain faithful under suffering and continue to identify yourself as a Christian.

The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy with these words in 2 Timothy 1:8 – <sup>8</sup>“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.”

I am quite fond of what Paul said a few verses later in 2 Timothy 1:12 – <sup>12</sup>“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”

This verse encourages me to continue the hardships we face as Christian witnesses and disciples in this world, because we stand on the foundation of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the promise of eternal life in the future when the day of Christ arrives and we receive our reward.

In the book of Revelation, in chapters 2 and 3, Jesus Christ dictates seven letters to seven churches, and He ends each letter with a promise to those people who remained faithful Christians through all of the suffering and overcame all the hardships. For example, let's read Revelation 3:5-6 – <sup>5</sup>“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. <sup>6</sup>“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Let us remain faithful through all hardships until the end and Jesus returns for us.

Next, let's return to 1 Peter chapter 4 and read verses 17 and 18 – <sup>17</sup>“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? <sup>18</sup>AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? [Proverbs 11:31].”

Verse 18 is a quotation of Proverbs 11:31, from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Verse 17 here mentions the household of God. This is Old Testament language and refers not only to the people of God but to the Temple. Peter is borrowing imagery from Ezekiel 9 and Malachi 3. In Ezekiel, God begins His judgment of sinners in Israel with the unfaithful ministers in the temple. Let me quote again from commentator Thomas Schreiner:

In Ezekiel 9 the Lord judges the sinners within Israel and begins from his sanctuary, the temple. The language of Ezek 9:6 is similar to Peter's in that the Lord said, “Begin at my sanctuary.” ... The language is similar, but the theology is actually quite different, for in Ezekiel rebellious sinners are

being destroyed, but in Peter the judgment does not involve the destruction of the godly but their refinement and purification. ... That the judgment in Peter does not involve destruction is clear from the parallel statement in [1 Peter 4:]18, where the godly are “saved.” We have already seen in 1:6–7 that the trials and difficulties of the righteous are designed to purify and refine believers so that they will receive their final reward (cf. also 4:12). ... In Ezekiel 9 the judgment literally begins at the temple, but now God’s judgment begins not at a building but with his people. The judgment that begins with God’s people purifies those who truly belong to God, and that purification comes through suffering, making believers morally fit for their inheritance.

The judgment here is the final judgment (cf. 1:17; 2:23; 4:5), but this judgment begins even now, in the present evil age. The judgment “begins with us,” which means that it commences with Christians. In the present age believers experience suffering, and this is the purifying judgment that begins with believers. ... If even those who are going to be saved are purified and judged by suffering, then the “outcome” (*telos*) or result of those who reject the gospel will surely be a greater punishment.<sup>3</sup>

I am reminded of Hebrews 12:4-11, where the discipline of God is compared to the discipline we receive from our earthly fathers. Although the discipline we get from our parents seems painful at the time, it forms us into responsible adults. Thus it is with God’s discipline. Hebrews 12:11–<sup>11</sup>“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

Let’s move on to 1 Peter 4:19 – <sup>19</sup>“Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

God is sovereign over everything, and therefore whatever happens to us has been allowed by Him. It is God’s will that we be faithful, disciplined followers, and that often means enduring some kind of hardship, even suffering and persecution. Those Christians who “suffer according to the will of God” are those who “share the sufferings of Christ” (verse 13 of this chapter), who “are insulted for the name of Christ” (verse 14), and who suffer as a Christian doing right rather than suffer for doing what is wrong (verses 15-16). We entrust our souls to our faithful Creator and He will reward us in the end.

I have come to the end of chapter 4. Let me close with a review of the main lessons to learn today:

- Have sound judgment for the purpose of effective prayer.
- Love and forgive one another – fervently, deeply.
- Put into practice your spiritual gift so that you can help build up the community of the church, which is called the body of Christ.
- Rejoice in the sufferings you must endure since these test our faith and refine us. This is God’s will.
- Suffer for doing right as a Christian, not for doing wrong as a lawbreaker.
- Do not be ashamed of Christ.
- Entrust everything to our faithful Creator.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), pp. 226–228.