

# 1<sup>st</sup> PETER BIBLE STUDY

1 Peter 4:1-19

Lesson #15

## A Christian's Hopes and Expectations (Pt.2)

### Introduction

Last week we discussed chapter 3, versus 13 through 22, which was the end of that chapter, but it wasn't the end of the point that Peter was making, because chapter 4 continues right on with that same thought. Peter was one of those who sat there on a rock beside Jesus atop Mount Olivet and heard Him describe to them what to expect in the latter times. From the writings of the apostles it's clear that for the most part they held out high expectations of Christ's return within their own lifetimes, and now looking back nearly 2000 years, we understand that this is exactly what Jesus wanted. This is intentionally part of the preparation process of the chosen, because He desires every believer, in every generation to live in constant expectancy. He intends that His glorious return would be the blessed hope that sustains every believer throughout the centuries and millennia until that time actually arrives.

It is this blessed hope, this immediate expectancy, that keeps our faith vibrant, and our behaviors excellent. The obvious expectancy of the apostles, and the first and second century Christians, who suffered horrific persecutions was a tool given by Christ and the Father, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen and sustain the children of God, especially in times of persecutions and hardships. As we discussed at the beginning of this Bible study of first Peter, the main point of this letter, this epistle, is to prepare the saints for what Peter saw coming. Nero had burned down Rome and blamed it on the Christians. Peter understood the signs of the times and realized what was coming. He understood the brutal ruthlessness of Nero, and the general animosity towards the Christians. He was keenly aware of the rampant immorality that characterized the Roman Empire and the callous brutality of the people. It was obvious that Roman culture and Christian morality were on a collision course, because they were as different as night is from day.

Jesus had told Peter and the other disciples that if the world hated them then they should realize that the world hated Him first, and He also told them why. This is what He said to them:

*"The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. (Jn 7:7)*

The Lord had told his disciples that the world hated Him because He testified that its deeds were evil. Jesus told the people that they were sinners, and must confess their guilt and repent of their evil deeds. In spite of all His wonderful and miraculous healings of the sick and afflicted, nevertheless the people loved their sin, and had no desire whatsoever to repent. They were furious when the Lord condemned them, and in spite of having seen His miraculous works, and heard His words of forgiveness, they ended up in one harmonious course crying "crucify Him, crucified Him."

Why did the Lord first tell the disciples that the world couldn't hate them? Because at that time they also were simply unregenerate sinners themselves. The world couldn't hate them because they couldn't testify with any divine authority, they hadn't yet been regenerated, nor had they yet been commissioned by the Lord as His apostles to speak on His behalf. But they soon would be, and that's why He later told them:

*18 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. (Jn 15:18)*

So the question is - why would the world hate us? Genuine Christians are kind, and gentle, and forgiving, and helpful, and peaceful, and seek only good things for their community. So why in the world would anybody hate people like this? For the very same reason that it hated Jesus, because we do not overlook or condone sin. We are compelled to testify the truth when we see the world around us openly practicing sinful disobedience to God. We are compelled to call sin, sin, and compassionately urge our fellow countrymen to repent and obey the commandments of God for the overall good of our nation. Our God is slow to anger, and quick to forgive to those who repent, but He will not continue to overlook rampant disobedience forever. And in the day of His wrath no man, no people, no country can endure. So why do we choose to bring judgment on ourselves by flagrant disobedience? Do we really think that we can resist God? Do we really think we will escape His judgment? I assure you my dear fellow Americans, we will not.

So now as a fellow American I call on my country, I beseech my fellow countrymen to acknowledge our sins and repent of our ways while the door of opportunity is still open. Forgiveness is still available and national tragedy is still avoidable if we're wise enough to accept it. But alas, I fear that we don't want forgiveness, I fear that what we want, as a nation, is even more of what we've got now. I fear that what we want, as a nation, is not repentance from sin, but freedom to sin, and along with it the ability to silence the voices of those who don't agree, through the perversion of our Constitution and the corrupting of our law enforcement agencies.

King Solomon wrote that there is nothing new under the sun, that which has been is that which will be. At the time of this epistle of Peter, the Roman culture had degraded into a brutal and moral cesspool, and all it needed was an Emperor who was willing to legalize brutality and persecution and the people immediately jumped on board with enthusiasm. In like manner, I fear that the general mindset of this great country of ours is very similar to that of the first century Roman Empire. And all we need is a little tweaking of our Constitution, and some readjusting of our laws, which is well underway already, and this once great and benevolent country could quickly become the same brutal cesspool as early Egypt, or Assyria, or Babylon, or first century Rome. Human nature does not change, and that which has been is that which will be. (Ecc 1:9) Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people. (Pr 14:34)

While we're discussing the situation of our country and its many ailments, like the financial debt that is so monumental that it can never be stopped, let alone repaid, and the current economic recession that as of this particular study shows no real sign of recovery, it is nevertheless the astonishingly rapid decline in the national tolerance of virtues and morality that is the most troubling to me. Because it's our failures of morality that will ultimately unleash the devastations of economic collapse, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and every sort of troubling woe that face our blessed and precious country. What a monumental tragedy it would be to throw away so great a treasure simply for the sake of indulging our petty lusts.

Now I'm not naïve enough to think that my country used to be entirely moral. All one has to do is a little study to realize that human nature is what it is. But what's changing so very noticeably is the willingness to tolerate the residual voices of those who call for repentance and obedience to God. Neither our country, nor the world in general, wants to hear this message. It didn't want to hear it 2000 years ago when Jesus came preaching it. It didn't want to hear it for the thousand years before that, when the prophets of old came preaching it. It didn't want to hear it during the days of Noah before the flood. And it doesn't want to hear it now, so there's no real surprise here.

But, what's most noticeable now however, is that it's actively taking all of the preliminary steps that are required to legally abolish it by force of law, in this country and worldwide, in the very near future. As we speak, those things that have always been accepted as good and virtuous, are now being cleverly relabeled as evil and bigoted. And the things that have always been known and accepted as evil and perverted, are now being called good and acceptable. (Isa 5:20-25) And if the world gets its way, (and eventually it will) then the force of law will be brought to bear upon those who believe the Bible to be the divine word of God, and advocate obedience to it. If you think this isn't really happening then you're blissfully ignorant of what's going on right under your nose. And once the laws are sufficiently in place, the people will embrace it with the same brutal and heartless enthusiasm as Rome did in the first century. (2Tim 3:1-5)

Peter and the other Apostles didn't write these epistles for no reason. The saints who read them were already suffering these persecutions themselves, and they saw it inevitably escalating even more. The handwriting was on the wall to all who were willing to see it, and though it couldn't be avoided, it could be explained, and the saints could be warned and informed as to how to respond and how to behave as it unfolded. I encourage and exhort all those who have an ear to hear, to pay very close attention to the words and teachings of the holy scriptures regarding the signs of the times in which we live, and the appropriate expectations we should hold, and the preparations and actions that we're taught in this epistle. Who knows but what these words were meant not just for those first century Christians, but also for just such a time as this? So, let's examine those verses now:

### Verses 1-6:

*1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4 In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; 5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.*

1 Peter 4:1-6 (NASB)

After having just told us in the preceding verses that Jesus Christ has suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, Peter goes on to say that just as Christ has suffered in the flesh, **now we are to arm ourselves also with that very same purpose.** Most of us sit in comfort and safety as we read these words of Peter, but they were written to people who were about to experience horrific persecutions. Those who read these words would get the opportunity to put them into effect very shortly in their own lives, including Peter himself. This was far more than a theology lesson, this was spiritual survival training for the chosen of God. For many believers around the world this is exactly what they are experiencing right now, and if the signs of the times are any indication, it's going to escalate.

Peter wrote to these dear precious saints that they should arm themselves, that is make themselves mentally ready for the distinct possibility of suffering persecutions even unto death, just as our Lord Jesus had done. Peter goes on to say "because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." The wording of this sentence makes it a little difficult to interpret because the first half of the sentence says "because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin," which seems to indicate physical death, which indeed is the cessation of sin, and for this reason should be looked upon as a blessing and not a loss.

But then the last half of the sentence says "so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." This phrase makes it obvious that Peter is speaking about people who are still alive in the flesh but who have spiritually died to sin, so that their remaining life in their flesh and blood bodies is lived no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. So either way, whether one has physically died, or spiritually died, either way the believers have died to sin so that they may live evermore according to the will of God. Peter drives this thought home in verse three where he says "for the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desires of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries." In other words Peter tells them this is how you used to live also, and you've had plenty of time in your life for that already, so now all of that is to be put to death, so that the remainder of your life might be lived according to the will of God, even though the rest of the world still urges and entices you to continue in these same old practices.

In verse four Peter acknowledges that they will have difficulty with their former friends and neighbors and probably family members who will be quite surprised that they no longer wish to continue in these things, and they'll undoubtedly take offense at your new "holier than thou" attitude as they will perceive it. And they'll be quick to remind you that you used to do all these things yourself. They'll most certainly accuse you of hypocrisy because of your new attitudes, and unless you have truly died to these former sins, and permanently ceased from them, then they'll be correct in their allegations, and the good name of Jesus Christ will be maligned. Therefore between the temptations of the fallen flesh, and the tauntings of our old friends and neighbors and relatives, the Christian is exhorted and admonished to actively participate in the practice of putting to death the old deeds of the flesh and living their lives according to the will and the glory of God. Because all who live in these old excesses of dissipation will eventually give an account to Him who is ready, at any moment, to judge the living and the dead.

Peter goes on in verse six to declare "for the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God." This is

another one of those places where one has to be careful how they interpret what they're reading. When Peter says that the gospel has been preached to those who are dead, he by no means is saying that the gospel was preached to dead people. If he were saying this it would contradict everything we know and understand about the gospel. Peter has been talking about persecution unto death. He's talking about Christ Jesus suffering and dying. It had been over 40 years since Christ's crucifixion and ascension. The gospel had been preached to the far reaches of civilization, and countless thousands had believed and already passed away, many probably by martyrdom, and still Christ hadn't yet returned. It is these whom Peter is referring to, those who had heard the gospel, believed in Christ, and had already passed away in the flesh, but are nonetheless alive forevermore in the spirit, according to the will of God. Therefore the saints need not fear the death of their flesh bodies, because it is the will of God that all of His elect will live forevermore with Him regardless of whether they're still alive or have passed away when He returns. This is the point Peter is making. Not to fear the death of the flesh because in reality it is actually gain, in as much as it permanently releases the saints from their struggles with sin, as the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:21.

### **Verses 7-11:**

*7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 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.*

1 Peter 4:7-11 (NASB)

Peter says that the end of all things is near. By that he means the consummation, the fulfillment of all the promises of God regarding rewards and punishments for mankind. As we said earlier, the attitude of "imminence" permeates all the writings of New Testament scriptures. Peter and the saints were living everyday in the hope of Christ's soon return for His own. And, although its been nearly two thousand years, we are still living today in that same state of expectancy of His imminent catching us away to be with Him forevermore. (1Ths 4:16-17) This anticipation of imminency leaves us no room for foolish behaviors or laxness of holiness and spiritual preparation and readiness. When the trumpet sounds, and the archangel's voice is heard calling us up into the clouds of the air to be with the Lord, we will certainly never forget where we were or what we were doing at that glorious moment. Will we have to be ashamed if someone asks us what we were doing at that moment? I sincerely hope we will not. But the only way to be sure is to be always ready and expectant, living in perfect obedience to the will of God, so that we won't have to be ashamed.

And this is what Peter means by being of sound judgement and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Our prayers will be effectual when we are living in righteousness and praying in accordance with His will. When our lives veer off onto worldly pursuits and worldly interests, then our prayers veer off accordingly, and they aren't necessarily in accordance with His will for our lives. So we are admonished to exercise sound judgement and stay sober (that is clear minded) so our prayers will be effectual and Godly.

Peter says "above all" keep fervent in your love for one another, because a loving attitude covers a multitude of unavoidable sins and offences that inevitably transpire between those who maintain close relationships for long periods of time. Sooner or later someone will offend you, and sooner or later you will offend someone else, and these offences are from sins of pride, selfishness, greed or other acts of the flesh that we all fall into on occasion, but they need not become an issue when love abounds in the heart, because we are quick to forgive those whom we love. Having said this, nevertheless, an apology by the offending party to the one offended goes a long way, and quickly puts all hurt and offence forever behind. True Godly love doesn't hold grudges or seek revenge. If we don't want Christ to endlessly cycle through all those sins we've committed against Him, then we better not think we can do this with those who've sinned against us.

In Matthew chapter 18, the Lord gives us a parable that teaches us that to whatever degree that we forgive others, to that same degree the Lord will forgive us. He who refuses to forgive others will find that forgiveness for himself is equally as illusive, even though he might think differently. (Mat 18:21-35)

In verses 9-11 Peter speaks of hospitality and spiritual service. As each has received a spiritual gift for the building up of the body of Christ, they are to use that gift to the best of their ability, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. Even though Peter is speaking overall about impending persecutions, He's still affirming that for the Christian, a godly lifestyle and obedience to the word of God is the unwavering mandate to every believer. Persecutions do not abolish, diminish, or relieve the Christians of their heavenly orders and divine purpose to glorify God by their holy and obedient lives. In fact if anything it amplifies it, because it is under such situations as these that Christ is most glorified and the saints most blessed for their faithfulness.

In feast or in famine, in health or on sickness, in freedom or in prison, Christians are called to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11-14) This is the universal theme that runs through the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation, and Peter is making that clear in this epistle to the dear saints who are facing severe persecutions. We will do well to pay close attention to Peter's exhortations in this epistle, because if the end of all things was near then, how much closer must it be today?

Our Lord severely rebuked the Pharisees for their inability to discern the signs of His coming and thus recognizing Him when He arrived. He told them they could look at the sky and predict the weather but they couldn't read and understand their holy scriptures sufficiently to recognize their long awaited Messiah when He was standing right in front of them. Let us not be ignorant of the prophetic scriptures concerning the second coming of our precious Redeemer and likewise find ourselves being rebuked for our laziness of study and apathy of heart. May we be living in constant and imminent expectancy just as Peter and the first century saints.

#### **Verses 12-16:**

*12 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; 13 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. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.*

1 Peter 4:12-16 (NASB)

Peter just keeps on hammering this point of impending persecution. Here he tells them not to be surprised at the fiery ordeal among them. The words fiery ordeal aren't specific, but they surely can't mean anything good. And he says that it comes upon them for their testing, not for their sinful behaviors. This is a testing with a goal of purification and authentication, and when completed leaves the saints strengthened in their faith and ever more certain of the Lord's protection of that faith and the eternal security of their salvation. (Ch1, vv. 4-5)

Peter tells us not to be ashamed when we are reviled for being called Christians, but rather to consider ourselves blessed, because in so much as we participate in the sufferings of Christ our Lord, we will likewise partake in His glory at His return. But, he sternly warns us not to be guilty of evil doings, like murder, or thievery, or diverse evils, or even as troublesome meddlers in other peoples business, but instead to glorify God in the name of Jesus Christ by our exemplary behaviors. Righteousness under fire might be a name applied to this epistle of Peter. And if we're having difficulty maintaining a righteous life now, how do we suppose we'll do when righteousness will bring us into fiery ordeals and persecutions? Honestly, I hope I never have to find out, but that looks unlikely considering the signs of the times.

#### **Verses 17-19:**

*17 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? 18 And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? 19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.*

1 Peter 4:17-19 (NASB)

Peter had just said that the end, that is the consummation, of all things was at hand, and now continues that thought with the statement that it is time for judgement to begin with the household of God. This is the purging and testing judgement of the church to separate the true from the false, and nothing does that quite like the fiery ordeals of persecutions. This is not wrath from God poured out onto His church that Peter's describing, this is the testing and purifying that precedes His catching her away to be with Himself for eternity. The Lord allows the periodic testing and purging of the church to keep her holy, and this is much to her own benefit, both corporately and individually.

Under times of relative peace and economic security the church rolls swell to overflowing with curiosity seekers and "would be" Christians. These are those unregenerate masses that Jesus described in His parable of the sower and the seed as recorded in the gospels. They'll hang around as long as it serves their own interests and costs them nothing, because they enjoy the fellowship and comradery, and they might even think it earns them entry into heaven. There's no signs of regeneration in them, and they don't like serious preaching or systematic bible studies, or prayer meetings, but they'll always show up at the dinners and picnics and church business meetings. They'll volunteer for various services to make themselves feel like a part of the church, as long as it doesn't involve anything related to bible study or prayer.

Depending upon the leadership, and the type of emphasis they place on the truth of scriptures, this will continue until the church is literally overwhelmed with unregenerate members. This is especially so when the church thinks its sole purpose is evangelism rather than a beautiful balance of holiness, truth, and evangelism, and abandons all else as simply a distraction from their commission. These churches eventually become literally unregenerate congregations of myopic robots, programmed to mindlessly follow the latest evangelism scheme and program that's handed down to them from their leaders. Anything and everything except evangelism is believed to be a waste of church time and resources, and any serious debates over theological truths are labeled divisive distractions.

The road back to a balanced agenda of sound theology, holiness of life, and appropriate evangelism is a difficult one for churches that have fallen into this pit, because they truly think they have it right, and view those who wish to reestablish a healthy biblical balance as troublemakers. The problem is greatly compounded by the fact that most are unregenerate and have no Holy Spirit leading or longings for the divine truths, and certainly don't want their pastors to start preaching on repentance from sin, obedience to God, and holiness of life. Evangelism requires none of these, just follow the latest program and keep on living just as you like, this is the perfect atmosphere for unregenerate cultural Christians to thrive and prosper and feel good about themselves, without having to deal with sin and righteousness and truth. And if someone comes along and suggests that the churches emphasis is perhaps a little out of balance then just accuse that person of being anti-evangelistic and kick them to the curb, because we can't waste precious time on useless polemics.

Now I've inserted this forgoing scenario as one example of why the Lord must periodically send the fiery ordeals of testing upon His churches. There are many other situations that occur in the churches, and Revelation chapters 2 and 3 discuss some these in more detail. Churches will inevitably degenerate and stray from the truth. False teachers and liberal agendas always find their way in and will destroy the testimony of a church if not purged out. And it is the Lord's mercy and the churches benefit that these ordeals are sent so that the genuine church doesn't get completely lost in this massive religious system that professes to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. (Tit 1:16)

Peter sees the coming days under the reign of Nero as just such a purging event, and so he's preparing the saints for what's coming, and explaining what's happening, so they won't think it's God's wrath that they're suffering but understand that it's His holy cleansing fire. And this knowledge has everything to do with their confidence of faith and their willingness to suffer for the name of Christ their Lord and Savior. Anyone with discernment will be hard pressed to deny that the signs of these present times surely suggest that one of those purging cycles is on the horizon. And God knows the church seems to need it. That entity we call Christianity has digressed into some gigantic amorphous blob that accommodates any and every deviant group and sect. It seems to accept every group that wishes to join and the idea that there are mandatory theological distinctives has all but dissolved. Groups with diametrically opposing, and mutually exclusive theological beliefs are all welcome to be a part. (i.e. Catholic and Protestant) *(If one is right the other must be wrong)*

We know that our God doesn't send us trials and testings just to amuse Himself, or to watch us squirm. That's not why He had His own Son suffer and die on that brutal cross. Like Peter exclaimed, God forbid that such a thing would happen to you Lord. Peter didn't understand the full scope of what was happening, so he considered it unthinkable that the Son of God would be put to death by sinful mankind. And I assure you that in that same situation every one of us would have thought the same thing. But time answered Peter's questions, and the mercy, and wisdom and righteousness of God was eventually made manifest. If we're suffering, or being tested, it's because God has a very good reason for it, and while it may or may not be immediately obvious as to why it's happening, it will nonetheless work out for the eventual good of all those who love God and are called according to His purpose, just like the crucifixion of Jesus. (Rm 8:28)

And if such a purging and testing is necessary for the saints of God, and it is, as Peter says, with much difficulty that the righteous are saved, then what in the world will become of the godless and the sinners? A rhetorical question I'm sure, because Peter knows exactly what's in store for such as those. He's using this comparison to illustrate that whatever the saints might be called upon to endure for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ, it is nothing at all when compared to the wrath of God's judgement upon those who would not accept the love of the truth so as to be saved, but rather loved their unrighteousness and sensual pleasures.

Peter finishes this thought with the words: *19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.* If we believe that our God loves us with an unfailing love, and that He has only our best interest at heart, then regardless of the circumstances we might find ourselves in, we will confidently entrust our eternal souls into the hands of a faithful Creator, whom we unwaveringly trust to do with us whatever is right and righteous and loving. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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