

June 1, 2008 by Steve Brandon



Get Ready to Suffer

1 Peter 4:1-6

1. Suffering Brings Sanctification (verse 1).
2. Sanctification Brings Suffering (verses 2-4).
3. Trust the Judgment (verse 5).
4. Trust the Gospel (verse 6).

Life is all about preparation. When a soldier goes off to fight in a war, he doesn't go unprepared. There are months and years of training. Soldiers are taught how to dress in their military attire. They are instructed in the proper handling of a gun. Soldiers are trained in operating the machinery that they are responsible for during a crisis and are ingrained with the requirement of submitting to their superiors. Before deployment, there are specific instructions given about the situation surrounding the current environment, and what they might expect. Life is all about preparation.

Long before a surgeon takes the scalpel and makes an incision upon another human being, there have been years and years of training. Courses are taken on chemistry and biology and anatomy and physiology. Long hours of surgical observations take place. Practice is performed on cadavers or on other artificial substances. There is a particular focus upon the surgery at hand. Before the actual surgery, there are preparations to be made. The patient needs to be prepped. The instruments need to be sterilized. The surgeon and assistants need to put on their surgical gear. Life is all about preparation.

Long before a professional athlete steps on the playing surface for a game, there has been much preparation. The golfer has spent countless hours at the driving range, hitting ball after ball after ball. The basketball player has spent many hours in the gymnasium, shooting shot after shot after shot. The football player has spent many hours in the weight room, pumping iron. The baseball player has spent many hours in the cage hitting baseballs coming out the JUGS machine. Before the actual game, there has been much conditioning. There has been coaching regarding the particular strategy of the game ahead of them. There has been travel. The uniforms have been put on and the shoes have been laced. Life is all about preparation.

The Christian life is no different. We who are following Jesus Christ are in constant preparation. Our ultimate goal in life is to stand before God, blameless in Jesus Christ on that day. In many ways, God is all about preparing you for that day.

As we come to our text this morning in 1 Peter, the instruction from Peter's pen is clear. He wants you to prepare to live the Christian life. Particularly, he wants for you to prepare to suffer. Or, as I have entitled my message this morning, "Get Ready to Suffer." Let's read what Peter has to say to us.

1 Peter 4:1-6

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, 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. 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, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign [you]; but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 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.

The main thought of this entire section of Scriptures comes in verse 1, "Since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose." Or, you might say it this way, "arm yourself for suffering." This word here, "arm yourselves," is a military term that carries a very clear image.

It's the image of a soldier getting ready for battle. He girds his loins with a large belt, which would carry the equipment of war. Upon this belt there would be loops to carry swords and ropes and rations and whatever else was needed for the fight. He placed across his upper torso the breastplate. It needed to be light in weight for ease of movement. Yet, strong enough to withstand the blows that would come upon him. He placed his feet in his boots, with spikes upon the end of them, to give him a secure footing in their warfare. He took up his shield. In Peter's day, some shields were long and rectangular, extending from knees to chin, behind which a soldier was able to kneel to be entirely away from enemy fire. Other shields were circular and small, which allowed for the deflection enemy swords coming upon them, while fighting. He took up his helmet, which was made of strong material to protect against the blows and arrows of the enemy. The shell of the helmet was often cast from bronze or iron alloy. Inside was padding for comfort. It had a chinstrap for security and often had a visor that would come down to protect the eyes. He took up his sword -- His offense weapon. These came in various shapes and sizes, but all swords were intended to kill and destroy the enemy. [\[1\]](#)

This is the imagery that would have come to Peter's listeners as they heard that they were to "arm themselves for suffering." See, the

Christian life is a war. It's a war against the world, the flesh and the devil. It's a war against the unbelievers in this world, who would thwart your best intentions. It's a war against the lust of your flesh that seeks its own satisfaction in the material world, without desire for God. It's a war against the "flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph. 6:17). Peter described it such in 1 Peter 2:11, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."

In this case, the battle to prepare for is the battle against suffering. What is particularly interesting here about Peter's words is that he isn't instructing us to avoid the suffering or to resist it. Rather, we are to arm ourselves to fight the fight of faith through the suffering. I say this, because suffering will come upon each and every one of us. "Man is born to trouble, as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). If you aren't suffering now, you will suffer. It may be soon, like next week. It may be years from now. But, be assured, that the suffering is coming.

And this morning, I want to help to prepare you for that day. The soldier doesn't begin his training the night before he goes off to war. The surgeon doesn't begin to read up on his surgery the hour before the surgery takes place. The athlete doesn't begin training the morning of the big game. Suffering is the same way. You don't begin to prepare for suffering when you are forced with suffering.

In the day of trial a treatise on the sovereignty of God won't be of much help. In the day of trial, a treatise on the goodness of God won't be of much help. In the day of trial, a treatise on God's purpose in suffering won't be of much help. But, years of reflection upon these subjects will be of immense help to you in that day. My aim this morning is to help prepare you for the season of suffering that will come upon your life.

It's not by avoiding the suffering, rather, it's being prepared for it. Children are taught, "If you clothes catch fire, stop, drop, and roll." In California, children are taught, "Drop, cover, and hold on." to prepare for the coming earthquakes. Children have tornado drills in school to help prepare them for the day that their lives are in danger. This morning I want to help prepare you for suffering, because, this is Peter's aim in the text before me.

Peter says, "Get Ready to Suffer." Or, to use his words, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose." Our purpose in life is to follow after Jesus. It is no doubt that Christ suffered in the flesh. Peter has said this before. "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18). Also, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Peter 2:24). In our text this morning, Peter says, we are to "arm ourselves also with the same purpose." He was the stone that was rejected. We are the living stones that follow after Him (2:4).

Several times in 1 Peter, he gives us a purpose for our lives, and every time, it has to do with suffering. Consider the following texts carefully. "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). The purpose of our life is to suffer. Again, Peter writes, "not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9). The purpose of our life is to respond rightly to the evil and insult that comes upon us, thereby suffering rightly. In the same way, here in chapter 4, verse 1, we see the same thing. "Arm yourself also with the same purpose." The idea here is to get your mind ready for the trial that is coming. Just as Jesus suffered, the purpose of our life is to suffer as well. We have been called to this.

It's a strange thought for us American Christians. We live in such a land of ease, that it's almost beyond our comprehension that we have been called to suffer. And yet, it can't be clearer that what Peter has said. Get ready for suffering. Paul couldn't have been clearer than he was in Philippians 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

Here at Rock Valley Bible Church, we love the grace of God. We love to hear of God's gifts to us. We love to rejoice in how God gives us faith and how God opens our eyes to see Him. Here in Philippians 1:29, Paul says that not only has God given us faith to believe in Him, but, he has also given suffering to us, almost as if it's a gift. It has been given to you to believe. It has been given to you to suffer. Indeed, suffering is a gift. This leads me to my first point, ...

1. Suffering Brings Sanctification (verse 1).

This point comes from the last half of verse 1, "because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin."

Like last week, this is a problem verse. It is very difficult to know for sure exactly what Peter is saying by these words. Some say that Peter is here speaking of Jesus as the one who suffered in the flesh. Now that He is alive in the spirit (3:18), He "has ceased from sin." The difficulty with interpreting these words this way is that it seems to imply that Jesus did sin, but now His sinful activity has stopped. Which, we know isn't really true.

Others say that Peter is speaking here of us, as we suffer in the flesh, we cease from sin. The obvious difficulty with this interpretation is that those who suffer in the flesh are hardly sinless. Many times suffering can bring on our sinfulness. Furthermore, after suffering, Christians continue in sin.

And so, I'm not quite sure as to exactly what these words mean. However, if I need to fall anywhere, I would fall toward the interpretation that Peter is talking about Christians. I say this because verse 2 is addressing Christians with seemingly little break from verse 1. We are to live, "no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." And so, in verse 1, I believe that Peter's talking about the principle that I have identified in my first point, "Suffering Brings Sanctification," which I will expand upon during this point. Now, whether or not this was Peter's intention in this text (which it may not be), the principle is still true: Suffering Brings Sanctification. Let me give you a few Biblical example of this, and then I want to illustrate it.

That famous passage at the beginning of James' epistle starts this way, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials" (James 1:2). What a strange statement. Why in the world would we consider the trials that come upon our lives with joy? It has to do with the effect that those trials will have upon our lives. James continued, "Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:3-4). In other words, James is

telling us that the trials that come into our life have the result that they make us "perfect and complete." That has to do with our sanctification.

James says, "Trials bring perfection." Peter says, "Suffering brings sanctification. Let's here from Paul. He says, in Romans 5:3, "We ... exult in our tribulations." Again, what a strange thing to say? Why would anybody exult in tribulations? Paul explains in the following verses, "We ... exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4). This is the same message that James brought. We can rejoice in the day of our trials, because of what we know that our trials produce. They produce perseverance. They produce proven character. They produce hope. Again, these are sanctifying effects! Or, to put it like I did, "Suffering Brings Sanctification."

Consider the words of the Psalmist. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word" (Psalm 119:67). The Psalmist is describing his life before the affliction came. It was characterized by drifting away from God. But, now that the affliction has come, it has had a sanctifying work upon his life. Particularly, now he keeps God's word, whereas He didn't before.

A few verses later, we see a similar point being made, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Psalm 119:71). Here the Psalmist affirms the benefits of the afflictions that came upon him. Certainly, it wasn't so much that they were so enjoyable. Rather, it was that the effect of what they produces was beneficial. They led him into an experiential knowledge of God's word that never existed before in his life.

Suffering brings sanctification. You ask, "Why is this so?" Why does suffering bring sanctification? At this point, let me mention that suffering doesn't always bring sanctification. There are times when those in trials become bitter and not better. And yet, there are many times that sanctification comes through suffering. But "Why?" you ask. The key to answer that question is that suffering strips away our comfort. We can so easily cling to the things of the world. But, when the things of the world are taken away from us, we have no where else to turn, but to the Lord. And as we do, we are less prone to sin.

As a pastor, I have had opportunity to see godly people go through the trials of life. I have often been on the encouraging end of hearing their testimony of the trial upon their life. Most often the testimony comes at the end of their trials. They say that their trial was so difficult, that they sought the Lord with greater fervor than ever before. They spent their days in constant prayer to God for help. They searched the Scriptures for any help in those days. They fasted in an effort to seek after God. And God was faithful to them. They have been able to affirm Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." And as they have looked back upon those times, they have expressed words of praise for the sanctifying work that such trials have brought upon our lives.

In this way, suffering acts a bit like discipline. "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" (Hebrews 12:11). It's often at the back end of the suffering that people realize the progress that has been made in their sanctification. That's what Peter said in chapter 5, verse 10, ... "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." It's after you have suffered that God will bring you into perfection, which is the principle of "Suffering Brings Sanctification."

Yvonne and I experienced a great illustration of how this takes place in our younger days. Yvonne, was attending U. C. L. A. I was attending seminary in Los Angeles. Part of my practical ministry was on the campus of U. C. L. A., where we met. Now, U. C. L. A. isn't exactly the most moral of schools. In fact, it's a very worldly school. It's the sort of place where student are bombarded with worldly influences all around them every day.

However, there on the campus of U. C. L. A. was a very strong college ministry based out of the church we were attending. Every Friday evening, there were about 100 college students who met for Bible Study. They had a great heart to worship the Lord and learn from God's Word. The spiritual vitality of that ministry was top notch. It was a very encouraging place to be.

Now, after our experience at U. C. L. A., we had the privilege of being involved in some college ministry on Christian campuses. The spiritual vitality and hunger for God's word and ministry was noticeably much less. Certainly, there were some exceptions. But, for the most part, we found many of the students on the Christian campuses to be apathetic toward their faith. Oh, many of them were busy in Christian activity. But, their hunger for the Word and for the Lord's people was demonstrably less than what we experienced at U. C. L. A.

You say, "What was the difference between the students at the secular university and at the Christian college?" The difference was that those at U. C. L. A. were suffering. Every day was a battle for them. Living in the dorms was a battle ground, with coed floors and drinking parties taking place with great regularity. In the classroom, they had to keep on constant alert for the worldly philosophy that was surrounding them. Their fellow classmates would urge them on in sinful ways.

So, when these students came into a safe place at Bible Study, they didn't want to leave. They wanted to be nowhere else! They wanted to be with the people of God. They were hungry for any kind of help that could be given to them for the battle they would fight the next day. Psalm 84:10 was their constant cry, "A day in your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness." Why were those students so passionate for the Lord? Because of the constant hardships that they were facing.

And now, think about the students at the Christian colleges we have witnessed. They had gobs of Christian friends. They had Christian professors. They had Bible classes. They had chapel several times each week. They had their churches and ministries. Life was easy for these students. Life was a blessing for these students. They knew very little trouble and difficulty. And what was the fruit? Lukewarmness.

Now, at this point, I'm not saying that Christian colleges are bad. There is a great blessing to be surrounded by Christians and by God's word all of the time. I don't want to discourage any of you children from going to a Christian school. It's a wonderful opportunity to learn much and a wonderful environment. But, you simply need to be aware of the dangers that surround such an environment. When life is easy, your passion for God isn't so necessary for your life. But, when life is hard, you will have no other choice, but to lean upon Him for your life. Such

dependence will deepen your faith. Or, as I have put it: suffering produces sanctification.

When you are surrounded by the world in a difficult environment and have a hunger for God, it will have a great sanctifying effect upon your life. I don't think that it's an accident that Daniel walked with so much integrity in his life. He was ripped out of his comfortable country and placed into the Babylonian brainwashing school system (Dan. 1). To survive, all he could do was turn to God. And God did a great work in His heart, that he could walk with integrity through the various challenges and temptations that were all around him. I believe that his power came from the sanctifying effects that his suffering had upon his life.

2. Sanctification Brings Suffering (verses 2-4).

Now, again, this isn't true in every circumstance, but it is a general principle that's often observed. The principle is stated in verses 2-4. I want for you to consider these verses. But before you do, I have an assignment for you. I want for you to see if you can detect how it is that suffering comes about because of your sanctification.

1 Peter 4:2-4

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. 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. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you.

Do you see it? The sanctification comes in verses 2-3. And the suffering comes in verse 4. And the suffering comes precisely because of your sanctification.

Now, in these verses, Peter paints a very unique situation. His readers were predominately Gentiles, who were converted out of a very sinful environment. (Though, certainly, this isn't all of his readers. He's writing to believers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. It's a large region. And certainly, there are some Jews in the mix, who will happen to read this letter, who have been raised in a law-abiding, moral environment. But, they are probably a minority of readers.)

The majority of his readers were fully engaged in the pagan culture before they came to Christ. Peter instructs his readers to abandon those sins that so characterized them previously, "The time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles" (verse 3). In other words, "Your days of gross sin are over. There is no need to return to any of those things any longer."

The sins that Peter lists in verse 3 are particularly terrible sins. You might easily identify these sins as the sins of college students. I know that I was surrounded by these things in college. (Which gives you every reason to go to a Christian college to avoid the filth of the world.) Let's look ever so briefly at this list of sins.

Sensuality (or debauchery or lewdness) - This word describes the person who has no moral constraint. He has no constraint regarding either sexual sin or physical violence.

Lusts (or passions) - This word describes the person who is governed by his desires, be they sexual or otherwise.

Drunkenness - This word describes those who get intoxicated through alcoholic beverages.

Carousing (or orgies or revelries) - The idea here is one of partying in the public square.

Drinking parties (or carousing) - This is talking about the gathering together to join in drinking large amounts of alcohol with large amounts of people.

Abominable idolatries (or lawless idolatry or detestable idolatry) - This is describing flat out sinful idolatry. Some believe that Peter's words here are so strong that the lawlessness referred to with these words are even against the civil regulations of the Roman world.

These are awful sins of which those of Peter's day were heartily engaged, until they heard the saving message of Christ. At that point, they made a break with these sins! They became followers of Jesus Christ. Now Peter says to them, "Don't ever go back to any of that stuff. You have spent enough time in those things. You don't need to indulge yourself in such pleasures any longer. You are finished with that." Or, as verse 2 says, "live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." Peter is saying, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life. You no longer ought to live that way. Christ has redeemed you from your sins. Abstain from the fleshly lusts which wage war against your soul. Don't live after the pleasures of the world."

There is a veil of good news here. Those who originally received this letter were engaged in deep sin, but now had found hope in the gospel of Christ. In Christ, all of these sins had been forgiven those in Peter's day. The same hope is found today. Any sinner who repents of his ways may find repentance at the cross of Christ. Such was true of many of those in the church of the New Testament era. To those in Corinth, Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. But, such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). This means that there is hope to be found for any sinner who repents of his ways.

At this point, I simply need to stop and ask you, what characterizes your life? Do any of these things characterize your life? They ought to be done away with. You ought to be finished with them. These things have no place among professing believers in Christ. The reason is really pretty simple. The Christian life is a life that pursues holiness. The Christian life is a life of pursuing righteousness. "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24). Christ died to redeem a people for Himself, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:14)

Peter's readers were predominately converted out of a sinful environment. And as they walked in holiness and purity, they faced some difficulties, which came with making such a clean break with their past. Verse 4 explains the difficulty, "In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you." Because you won't join in those sinful activities that you used to be involved in, they don't like it very much and they malign you. That is, they speak bad of you.

When Jesus came into the world, He was the Light. But, "men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). And you know what they did with the Light. They extinguished the Light by crucifying Him upon a cross. The same takes place when you live godly lives before unbelievers. As Jesus said, "everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:20). When you enter into a sinful environment, those engaged in sin will naturally assume that you will join with them in their folly. At the end of Romans 1, Paul speaks of those who are engaged in great wickedness. He talks of those who are "filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful" (Rom. 1:29-31). And then, he continues, "Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:32). In other words, sinners love company. Sinners love other sinners joining them in their sin. If you don't join them you may be in for some suffering! If you are walking in a righteous way, they will be surprised that you don't join with them.

Proverbs 10:23 says that "doing wickedness is like sport to a fool." And as you don't "run with them" in their excesses of sinfulness, they are surprised that you don't join with them in their folly. They are having fun, why wouldn't you join them and do the same? Their surprise may quickly turn into persecution. It may end up that they speak badly of you for doing so. In this way, sanctification can bring suffering.

Now, sanctification doesn't always bring suffering. It often brings a great blessing from God. But, there are times when it does bring suffering, as in the case of these readers. If you attend a public college and refuse to run with others in their sin, you may very well face suffering because of your righteous behavior. But, don't be discouraged. Don't worry about being maligned. Endure it, because that suffering will increase your sanctification.

Think about this suffering brings sanctification. Sanctification brings suffering. Suffering brings sanctification. Sanctification brings suffering. The cycle continues. If you are in a difficult environment and suffer as a result of your sanctification, you will be sanctified even more. You may then incur more suffering. But, this will increase your sanctification. So, don't fear. Don't dread. Rather, realize that God will work in your life through these things.

I can think of several Biblical examples of this. The first is **Joseph**. Potiphar entrusted his house to Joseph. He was in charge of everything that he owned. Soon, Potiphar's wife took notice of Joseph and said to him, "Lie with me" (Gen. 39:7). But, Joseph refused, calling it a "great evil and sin against God" (Gen. 39:9). Potiphar's wife continued the temptation. Genesis 39:10 says that "she spoke with Joseph day after day, [but] he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her." I'm sure that she was surprised that Joseph did not run with her in her sin. But, one day it happened. Joseph happened to be alone with her in the house, while all of the other hired hands were outside. "She caught him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me!' [So strong was the onslaught, that Joseph] left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside" (Gen. 39:12). At that point, she turned on him. As he showed his true colors to be a man of integrity, she maligned him. When her husband returned, she told him, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came into to me to make sport of me; and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside" (Gen 39:17-18). This led to much suffering. Joseph was hauled off to prison, where he was to remain for some 15 years or so. It came because of his sanctification.

Daniel is another example of this. Because of the integrity of **Daniel**, God blessed his life greatly, raising him into the upper echelons of leadership and authority of Babylon. Others who were under him were not too pleased with his position of authority. They made a plan to take him out. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly why they were hostile toward Daniel. But, surely it had something to do with his integrity. In Daniel 6, verse 4, we read that those who sought to bring him down, "could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him" (Dan. 6:4). And yet, think about what they said to each other, "We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God" (Dan. 6:5). And so, they tricked king Darius into signing into law an injunction stating that "any man who makes a petition to any god or man besides [the king] for thirty days, is to be cast into the lion's den" (Dan. 6:12). But, Daniel kept making his petitions to the Lord three times a day, just like he had always done. He was caught in the act of praying and thrown into the lion's den. Only the sovereignty of God protected him from death.

Daniel was maligned for his righteousness. He is a great illustration of the principle, "Sanctification Brings Suffering." It's not always the case you in every circumstance you will suffer because of your sanctification. However, if you make it your supreme desire to run after God's will, forsaking the lusts of the flesh, there will be conflicts with others, as your life convicts them of sin.

I want to close my message this morning with two quick admonitions. One comes in verse 5 and the other comes in verse 6. And suffering may very well be the case. And so when it comes, don't be surprised (see 1 Peter 4:12-16). Suffer as a Christian, and you will be blessed even in your suffering.

3. Trust the Judgment (verse 5).

If you encounter unjust suffering, suffer for doing what is right, your tendency will be to right it with all you might. "What! Why did you say those things against me? You know that I wouldn't do that to you! Why do you malign me, I'm only trying to do the good thing." Soon your questions may turn in to accusations. You may turn to the offensive and point out all of the wickedness of those who are opposing you.

But, Peter says, "Don't worry. You don't have to deal with them, I'll deal with them. ... They will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." They will account to God for all the injustice against you. So, you don't have to even the score, God will.

There is an amazing way that the ultimate judgment is able to diffuse your vindictive spirit toward others. When Paul said, "Do not be

overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21) His statements were grounded in the ultimate justice of God. A few verses earlier, he had quoted from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:35) "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." Knowing this will help your spirit and lead you to sanctification in the day of trouble.

You aren't in charge the evil that has come upon you. That's God's job. So don't worry about it. So don't try to bring justice.

From time to time, my wife and I leave our home for some form of activity. When we do, we usually leave our oldest daughter in charge of the home. It's difficult for her, because of the circumstances surrounding her situation. We give her all the responsibility and all the authority, but she has no power to exert the authority. When her brothers and sisters don't obey her, it's hard for her. She has no power to force them to obey. Such a situation can easily be a frustrating experience. At these times, she needs to trust that mom and dad will resolve the situation when they come home. And if she would trust this, it would help her sanctification greatly.

So also ought you to trust the judgment. In so doing, it will help sanctify you in your suffering.

4. Trust the Gospel (verse 6).

This is another one of those difficult verses here in this section. Some have used this verse to justify the view that people will have a second chance for salvation after they die. They take the text at face value and say, "The Gospel has for this purpose been preached, even to those who are dead." I don't believe that this is the best way to understand verse 6.

I believe that the best way to understand this that the Gospel was preached to them when they were alive. And they came to faith. But, because of the sin of Adam they have experienced death, but it's not over for them. They are alive in the spirit, just as Jesus is now alive in the spirit (3:18). They are now alive because they trusted the Gospel in this life.

Trusting the gospel will prepare you to suffer. It will give you hope. Peter began this epistle with a statement of the great hope that is set before us. We have expectations of a great inheritance, which is imperishable and undefiled and unfading, which is reserved in heaven for us (1:4). Such a hope has come to us entirely by a gift of God's grace. He is the one who caused us to be born again (1:3). He is the one who has done so through Christ (1:3). We merely await the treasure that He has in store for us. Trusting such things will give us great help in the day of trouble (1:6).

When Paul counseled some of his converts, he told them, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). His converts certainly knew of the glories that awaited them in heaven. But, it's a struggle in life until you get there. Just as Christian struggled through many dangers and snares during his journey to the Celestial City, so also will we face hardships until that day. But such is the message of the gospel. It isn't merely a message of a life of blessing and ease right now (though much blessing comes now). Rather, it's a message of hope to come. Our suffering is now, but our glory is later.

So, get ready to suffer.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 1, 2008 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] I found the following site helpful in coming up with much of the descriptions used in this paragraph:
<http://www.christianarsenal.com/FullArmour.htm>.