

The ultimate example of righteous suffering is Jesus Christ. He suffered at the hands of sinful men although he himself knew no sin. He was made sin for us and suffered as the Righteous One for the unrighteous. But behind that suffering was a purpose, to bring us to God. Jesus also looked beyond His suffering. He endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2).

There is also more to our suffering, when that suffering is a righteous suffering. Though we should pray for and can enjoy peace (1 Tim 2:2), we live in a fallen world. Suffering because of righteousness may indeed come upon us. It is to our benefit to look behind suffering to see its purposes and beyond suffering to what God has planned for us.

1. **Righteous suffering, properly considered, equips the believer (4:1).**

a. *The call to “arm” ourselves with the same attitude that Jesus had*

“Attitude” may also be translated “way of thinking” (ESV) or “insight”. “Arm yourselves” means to equip yourselves with something, and specifically can mean “equip with a weapon.” The Word became flesh in order to suffer and die. His “way of thinking”, with which we are to arm ourselves, included sinless obedience to the Father. He endured the cross because he saw the purpose in it. This attitude toward suffering “arms” us for spiritual battle.

b. *The accomplishment of righteous suffering*

There are two suggested interpretations for the phrase including “done with sin” or having “ceased with sin”. (1) “The one who suffered” refers to the believer, who has suffered because of righteousness. “Ceased with sin” is understood to mean that they have stopped sinning. The sense then is that whoever suffers righteously, instead of doing evil, proves his faithfulness, that he will not sin. (The suggestion that it refers to death introduces a helpless moot point.) (2) “The one who suffered” refers primarily to Christ and secondarily to believers who are in Christ. “To cease with sin” refers to the fact that Christ’s death put an end to the power of sin. By union with Christ in His death, the believer has died also to sin and is free from it (Rom 6:7). Sin no longer has any authority over us and we should therefore live in a way that recognizes this truth.

Believers should not have a defeatist attitude, that sin is inevitable. Jesus suffered in the flesh and did not sin, but in fact released us from the bondage of sin.

2. **Righteous suffering in the believer conforms to God’s will (4:2-5).**

The main thought of verse 2 is that the believer should now be oriented to doing the will of God. The next verse focuses on the thought that the time spent as an unbeliever doing evil should now be behind us. These thoughts may relate to the overarching theme of righteous suffering in the follow ways.

a. *Observing Christ and holding out through suffering strengthens us to abstain from the sinfulness which had had its full in our lives (4:2-3).*

The list of sins (v 3) emphasize unrestrained evil. There was enough of such unrestrained sinful living in the past. We do not need to continue in it. Choosing right over wrong to the point of suffering tends to set our resolve against further sin and demonstrates the work of God in our hearts. Such unrestrained living was also a total waste of time from an eternal perspective. Now it is time to pursue eternal values (e.g., righteous, faith, peace and love).

b. *Holding out through suffering leads to an alienation from sinners (4:4).*

A righteous life will draw the attention of many around us and many will hate it. A believer's life condemns the heathen and they respond defensively and contemptuously. Cf. John 3:20. There is pressure from the world to conform (cf. Rom 12:1-2). The world will think that the believer who resists conformity is crazy (cf. Mk 3:21). They will heap abuse or blaspheme not only the individual believer (“you” has been added in many translations), but also believers in general, God and the Christian faith. Those who desire to “fit in” will be challenged and need to fix their eyes on Jesus who suffered righteously, freeing us also to be able to do right.

c. *Holding out through suffering will mark us as those who escape the judgment which sinners will face (4:5).*

Those who malign believers and God, do not realize that they will have to give account to God and will be judged. That “they” will give account implies that the believer will not. In Christ there is no condemnation for the believer (Rom 8:1). Though the judgment of the ungodly vindicates the believer, remember to have compassion toward the lost. Fearful judgment awaits them (Heb 9:27; 10:31).

3. **Righteous suffering will have its ultimate fruit in believers (4:6).**

A careful reading is necessary to arrive at a proper interpretation. “Preached” is in a past tense and rules out any current preaching including to the dead. A literal rendering of the second half shows a contrast similar to the earlier verses. It should probably be understood as saying that believers who had been martyred after responding to the gospel, may have been judged by men while living (or from a carnal perspective) but are truly living because of God’s work in the spiritual realm.

It is important to look behind suffering to see its purpose and beyond suffering to see the ultimate results. Christ suffered unto death righteously, purposefully and victoriously. Keep this in mind to equip us to live for God and not pursue evil desires. There will be eternal reward and vindication.