

# *Truth for Today*

## *The Bible Explained*

---

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 15 March 2020

**No.:** T1137

**Speaker:** Peter Ollerhead

---

## **Peter's First Epistle**

### **Chapter 4**

Greetings and welcome to **Truth for Today**, where we are continuing with our study of Peter's first epistle by looking at chapter four. We actually began this series twelve months ago when we considered in the first recording Peter the fisherman of Galilee, in addition to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus. The following two programmes dealt with chapters one and two. Last week we took up Peter's letter again, when my colleague Brian Donaldson took us through the third chapter. Next week, if the Lord so wills, Paul Thompson will conclude our study by focusing our attention on chapter five, which leaves me to deal with the fourth chapter today.

Brian finished his talk, on chapter three, with a description of the Lord's victory over death when He rose from the grave, as the closing words of chapter three inform us:

“...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to him.”

I read that from the **English Standard Version of the Bible**, which is the translation I shall be using throughout this talk. To see the Lord exalted in heaven is indeed a wonderful place for us to begin today. It must certainly have lifted the hearts of the oppressed believers to whom Peter was writing, because they had now no need to fear anyone, for they belonged to the Victor of Calvary. Likewise each of us, at this very moment, can fix our thoughts on Christ in glory and keep this precious truth in our hearts as we proceed.

The opening verses of chapter four make an important tactical point for our daily living as Christians. As I read the first two verses, notice the word “therefore” in verse one:

“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.”

As the “therefore” makes clear there are implications for those who believe in Jesus. Many, many, years ago, when I was a schoolboy, I was walking home talking to a grammar school girl, who was telling me about an essay she had been set for her homework, the title of which was “Privileges bring Responsibilities.” Those few minutes of conversation were probably the first tutorial I ever received. It must have had a great effect, for I still remember the subject! We need to apply this lesson to our lives because Peter, Paul and all the apostles insist that belief in God, with all its blessings and privileges, call for the response of a godly walk through this world, a walk that matches our beliefs. As Peter tells us we must “... so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.” Paul says the same in 2 Corinthians 5, when he writes that we might no longer live for ourselves but for Him who for our sakes died and was raised.

If we are not to live controlled by human passions, but rather by the will of God, you may well ask, "What is meant by human passions?" Peter quickly answers this in verse three when he writes that the Christian should not be living in a sensual way, noted for drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties and lawless idolatry. I would judge that this type of life style must have marked some of those to whom he was writing before they became Christians.

Verse four brings in the life style of a believer as a testimony to their fellow citizens, because of their changed habits and I emphasise "changed habits" for, as I have just suggested, many of Peter's Christian friends were converted from such a life of debauchery as verse four mentions. No wonder their erstwhile friends vilified them as the verse records:

"With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you: but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

There seems to be less recognition, in Christianity today, of the traditional enemies of a spiritual life which are the world, the flesh and the devil. Peter concentrates upon the second of these, namely the "flesh". He desires the best for his Christian friends, which is life in the Spirit, as we shall see in a few minutes. The response by some is still one of astonishment when Christians refuse to join in binge drinking, or participate in "happy hours" at the local pub, or in other ways that involve pandering to the pleasures of the flesh. We must be careful always to maintain an attitude which is socially responsible and scripturally correct. I have no doubt that the prodigal son of Luke 15 was very popular with the citizens of the far country when he wasted his money on reckless living. Before he could return to the comforts of the family home, he had to repent.

According to verse four, reckless and fleshly living has to be accounted for before God's judgment seat, as does more gross evil such as child pornography and murder. Any thought of divine judgment is repugnant to many people and is a prospect that we, in our modern world, have learned to ignore. Even those who have had their sins forgiven and so will no longer come under the wrath of God will have their service and actions weighed by the Lord Jesus at His judgment seat.

We must now move on to consider verses 7 to 9:

"The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling."

Please notice another "therefore" in the short passage I have just read. Peter has been reminding his readers (and may I say that we are included) that the end has drawn near. This remains true even though two thousand years have passed since Peter wrote this letter. A favourite expositor on Scripture has commented:

"All things then were quite ready for judgment at the very start of the epoch in which we are living, and it is only the longsuffering of God which holds the judgment back as Peter's second epistle tells us."

The "therefore" that I referred to a moment or so ago, brings to our notice the ethical implications of the Lord's return and the coming judgment. We are not to enter into an irresponsible frenzy of careless living, rather are we to exercise self-control and engage in prayer. This latter action of prayer is surely an index of our faith. We can go through the motions of an outward corporate religious life yet I would suggest that unless we truly have faith in the Lord then we will find it easy to lapse into a prayerless existence.

Another feature that should mark us in the last days, according to verse 8, is love. This is not the love that the Beatles and others have sung about over the years. Quite often that love is fleeting and existing only until trials descend upon us, or the madness of a moment has passed. What Peter is asking for when he writes "...love one another earnestly" is an act of will. This is different from the love of a mother for her children, where love is generated by the relationship. Peter's request that the Christians should love one another is, in essence, not an emotion or sentimental reaction, rather is it a determined intent leading to action. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 describes Christian love in action.

Verse 9 also mentions "hospitality" which might seem to us, in the twenty-first century, a subject that does not concern us greatly. Travel back two thousand years, however, to a world bereft of hotels and travel lodges, then we can appreciate the importance to visitors of a loving welcome. In Peter's time the church usually met in someone's home, which was not always a simple task, yet the Apostle Peter asked that this should be done without grumbling. For us, today, we should never be shy of welcoming strangers, even to the point of offering accommodation, always supposing that we remain vigilant against those who might have bad or corrupt intentions. Before we move on to consider further responsibilities of the Christian, can I welcome any who have just tuned in, and inform you that you are listening to **Truth for Today**, where we are reading the fourth chapter of Peter's first letter. I am just about to read verses 10 and 11 using the English Standard version of the Bible:

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one whom speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

The topic taken up by these two verses is Christian service, especially within the church to fellow believers. None of us can claim to have no gift to use in the Lord's service. As another has written: "It may be a gift of speaking, of music, of the ability to visit people. It may be a craft or skill which may be used in the practical service of the Church, for there is no gift which cannot be placed at the service of Christ." I ask a direct question. How am I serving the Lord? What is the nature of my service for Him? All our service, whatever the gift employed, is to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that no flesh shall glory in His presence. As Peter considers this he breaks out into a doxology, as does the Apostle Paul in his letters. Let us pause now to share together these thoughts of the everlasting greatness and majestic glory of Jesus of Nazareth, the Victor of Calvary. It is a very great privilege to follow and serve the Lord Jesus in the days of His rejection. As the time allocated to our study is limited we must quickly turn our attention to the next three verses:

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

Peter now returns to the theme of suffering for the faith, which he had mentioned earlier in his letter. The Apostle was warning his friends against being complacent, for it would seem as if a wave of persecution and distress was about to be manifested. In its very directness the warning would not be welcome news, as no one likes to suffer pain or unpopularity, yet this is what Peter is predicting. In the UK, at the present time, we do not have to face violent hostility. We must recognise, however, that fellow-believers in other parts of the world are suffering loss of employment, beatings, imprisonment and even death for announcing that they love the Lord Jesus. It is easy for us to slip into the comfort zone of regarding our experience of Christianity as

the norm, meaning we would feel it strange if persecution arose. According to chapter 4 of Peter's first letter and verse 12 it was to be an accepted feature of the Christian testimony.

At the same time, we must be clear that the suffering that Peter is highlighting in these verses is because they were Christians. If we have been ostracised by our neighbours or work colleagues, owing to our bad temper or awkwardness we cannot seek solace in these verses. The reward of being "...blessed with the Spirit of glory resting upon us" is for those who have been insulted for the name of Christ. Our opinions and actions, whether involving economics, sport, politics or any other social activity, can lead to arguments, insults and even violence, but that is not suffering as a Christian, as verses 15 and 16 make clear:

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name."

Paul urges Timothy to have the same attitude in his last letter, chapter 1 and verses 8 and 9. Though we have no time to read the passage, Timothy was told to share in the sufferings of the Gospel.

I hope you noticed the reference in verse 16 of our passage that Peter wanted those to whom he was writing to "...suffer as a Christian." This is the third and last time in the New Testament that the word "Christian" appears. It is now an accepted designation, though then it was less widely used compared with "saints", "disciples" and "people of the Way." We must remember when Peter wrote about suffering as a Christian that a fierce fire storm of tyrannical oppression was about to envelop the Christians in Rome. Blameless and innocent they might be, yet they would have to bear beatings, harrowing distress and even crucifixion, all because they refused to deny the Name of Jesus. Even Peter, who once denied knowing the Lord, would shortly be martyred as a Christian.

At this point I wish to review verse 14 to emphasise the point made there that persecution is the pathway to glory. According to that verse, when a person suffers for the Lord, the presence of glory rests upon him. This is an amazing statement for apparently, and I am no Greek scholar so I am repeating what a scholar has written, the phrase literally means "the Spirit of the Glory, even the Spirit of God is resting with refreshing power upon you." On various occasions in the Old Testament, the glory of the Lord would abide on objects or people. This was known as the Shekinah. I would judge that Peter is introducing the thought that something of the lustre of that Shekinah glory rests upon the person enduring the fierce torment of persecution. We get something of that glory in Acts chapter 6 and verse 15, where it says of Stephen who was on trial for his life that "...his face was like the face of an angel." Later on, while he was being stoned to death, Stephen was given a glimpse of the glory of God.

We have now reached the final three verses of our chapter:

"For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God, and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good."

We have already spoken about judgment, so I emphasise again this judgment in verse 17 is not punishment for the believer's sins, as that has been dealt with at the cross. The judgment that begins at the household of God is for the purifying of His house. A hymn writer has caught the measure of this:

“If through the deep waters He cause us to go,  
The rivers of grief shall not overflow;  
And He will be with us in troubles to bless,  
And sanctify to us our deepest distress.

If through fiery trials our pathway should lie,  
His grace all-sufficient shall be our supply;  
The flame shall not hurt us; His only design  
Is the dross to consume and the gold to refine.”

Author R. Keene

We must not miss, however, the sting in the tail of verse 17, when Peter asks the question about what will become of the ungodly and the sinner. This is a serious matter that involves all who ignore God’s offer of salvation. The Bible is very clear, as Hebrews chapter nine verses 27 and 28 say:

“And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”

Peter in his time, and all we at **Truth for Today** now, would desire that you accept the salvation that is in Jesus.

To finish I would just centre our attention on the word “entrust” in the last verse of our passage, where the Apostle urges us to entrust our souls to a faithful Creator. He prefaces this plea with the word “therefore”, which refers us back to the thought of “judgment.” If the judgment is nigh then it behoves Christians to commit themselves to their faithful Creator. This word “commit” has the meaning of leaving something that is precious to us in the care of someone we trust. One every day example is depositing our money with a bank or building society. The best example for us, however, is that of the Lord Jesus when on the cross, He exclaimed, “Father into your hands I commit my spirit.” We could follow no greater example, so let us commit ourselves and our families, in faith, to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus.

Thank you for listening to this **Truth for Today** talk number T1137 entitled chapter four of Peter’s first letter.

May the Lord’s blessing be upon us all.

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.