

Does Physical Suffering End Sinning?

[1 Peter 4:1-2](#)

1 Peter, Day 18

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.

- 1 Peter 4:1-2, ESV

My family sometimes enjoys playing The Game of Life. One of the things you face in The Game of Life are options, choices with consequences. At the beginning, you can choose to go to college or start working right out of high school. Later, you can make the choice to go back to school and get more education. You get to choose which house to buy, whether to focus on family or career, etc. Some choices are not in the game. You can't just choose to be a rock star or a professional athlete in your career-selection choice. You can't choose to develop superpowers either.

When we come to a really difficult Bible verse, like 1 Peter 4:1-2, you have to decide what it most likely means, and you have options. Last time, we looked at the difficult passage at the end of 1 Peter 3, and we talked about some methods we need to use to interpret challenging texts in the Bible. Today, we're digging a little deeper into the same approach as we turn from the end of chapter 3 to the beginning of chapter 4. Why? Because if the end of 1 Peter 3 is tricky to interpret, I think the opening of chapter 4 is even more difficult.

In terms of understanding the meaning of the passage, the New Testament doesn't get much trickier than the end of 1 Peter 3 and the beginning of 1 Peter 4. So it seems wise to discuss further how we handle difficult passages, especially since (unlike the end of 1 Peter 3), I'm not really sure what 1 Peter 4:1-2 really means.

Why am I not sure? Because sometimes you can follow all of the guidelines for correct interpretation and still have several possible alternatives left for the meaning of a passage. So, to follow our rules from last time, we need to consider the context and begin with what's clear. Here's what we can see clearly in 1 Peter 4:1-2, especially given the context of the letter and the surrounding verses:

1. We're being instructed in how to be strong in the face of suffering.
2. We're being directed to follow the example of Christ, who remained strong and faithful to God when He was called to suffer.
3. From what follows in verses 3-4, it's clear that Peter wants to encourage us to resist temptation and worldliness.
4. It's also clear that remaining strong and resisting temptation and worldliness while we're suffering involves the right kind of thinking, since we are to arm ourselves with the same way of thinking that Christ had.

So, then, what does Peter mean when he says, "*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.*"

Following our established guidelines, Peter can't mean something which violates established biblical teaching or contradicts the rest of Scripture. So, we need to eliminate the impossible: Physical suffering doesn't free

you from ever sinning again. Even physical suffering that comes to us as persecution for the name of Christ doesn't free us from ever committing sin.

We have the example of Peter himself to prove this: Peter had been imprisoned and beaten for preaching Christ in the Temple. Yet, later, at Antioch, Paul had to confront Peter publicly to his face for his hypocrisy, according to Galatians 2:11-14. Peter had physically suffered for Christ and yet still sinned. Paul also had suffered for Christ repeatedly, and yet in 1 Timothy 1:15, he could still refer to himself as the chief of sinners.

So, what does Peter mean? I see four possible options:

1. He could be referring to Christ's suffering in the flesh on the cross, and encouraging us to remember that Christ has ceased to have anything to do with sin. That seems unlikely, because Jesus never sinned, and this seems to be talking about a sinner who ceases from sin.
2. He could be talking about someone who dies, for when believers die we cease from sin, but that seems unlikely because he then talks about how such a person lives the rest of his time in the flesh, not for human passions but for the will of God.
3. He could mean that, if we consider the fact that once we die, we will cease from sin, that will encourage us while we are still living to live for God's will (which is of eternal value) and not for human passions (which are temporary and fleeting). It just requires reading the word translated "for" as really meaning "that." - *"arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, [that] whoever has suffered in the flesh [died] 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."*
4. "Ceased from sin" doesn't mean completely stop sinning but just "cease living for sin, like the world." So, Peter is talking about a fundamental shift in how we live, but not a complete absence of sin from the life of a believer.

Options 3 and 4 are both possibilities. Option 3 seems more likely to me, but it does require reading one word slightly differently, as "that" instead of "for." In the end, both of those options are biblical, true things to know and believe, so it's not 100% critical that we make a decision between the two. Perhaps the ambiguity is helpful, so we keep both of those truths in mind.