

**Letters From A Fisherman**  
**Week 16**  
**1 Peter 4:1-6**  
**“Suffering (Part 3) - Preparing For Battle”**

**Introduction**

**Love The LORD your God with ALL your heart, with ALL your soul, with ALL your mind, and with ALL your strength.**
**Mark 12:30** (emphasis added)

In his book “Improving Your Serve” published in 1993, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers a poem that has haunted my very steps throughout my entire ministry. I am reminded of it time and again and each time I feel that same “*gut punch*” of conviction that I felt the first time I read it. The poem is entitled “*Three Dollars Worth of God*”, and it reads:

*“I would like to buy \$3 worth of God please,  
 not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,  
 but just enough to equal a warm cup of milk, or a snooze in the sunshine.  
 I don’t want enough of Him to make me love someone of a different race,  
 or pick beets with a migrant.  
 I want ecstasy, not transformation;  
 I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth.  
 I want a pound of The Eternal in a paper sack.  
 I would like to buy \$3 worth of God.”*

Powerful, is it not? But sadly that is what a lot of so-called “Christians” really want out of their relationship with God. They want enough of Him to escape the flames of hell, but not enough to feel the fire of The Holy Spirit. They want to feel His security, but not be held so tightly by Him that they cannot have their own way. They want His protection and provision, but they do not want Him as their priority. In short, they’re ok with a Savior, just not a LORD.

Well, while that may very well be what the religious masses desire, it is *not* Christianity. Christianity is a radical following of Christ. It is *forsaking* all, in order to *gain* it all. Jesus basically taught that if we did not want Him more than everything, then we could not have Him at all. That isn’t exactly popular doctrine, but its truth nonetheless.

**Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wants to follow after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it.**
**Matthew 16:24-25**

This message of radical Christianity was exactly what Simon Peter was conveying to those under Nero’s persecution. If we are to serve Christ, then we must determine, steel ourselves, if you will, to faithfully follow Him come what may. This journey is not for those who would turn back at the first sign of trouble. No, it is for those who have come to the realization that knowing Christ is worth everything, even suffering and sacrifice. You won’t hear the televangelists preach this, because these are not the kind of people they are trying to reach. Those who have chosen to draw close to the Savior can spot these phonies from miles away. So when these charlatans are looking for a flock to fleece, they avoid the radical Christian, who loves The LORD with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, for those are not a part of the false teacher’s “demographic”, shall we say.

As Peter continues his teaching on the suffering servant of Christ, he reminds us all of just what is at stake, namely; eternity. For there is coming a day of judgement when the sheep will be separated from the goats (**Matthew 25:31-46**), and those who are the true followers of Christ will shine in the light of His glory. Three dollar's worth of God is not going to get you very far on that day, my friends. So let us be about the business of following Christ with our whole heart. Or as Peter himself might say, let us be *Suited Up, Separated Out*, so that we will be able to stand *Spotless In Glory*, before The Throne on the day of judgement. Please allow me to explain.

### **Suited Up (vs. 1)**

**Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourself also with the same understanding — because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin...**

**1 Peter 4:1**

The words that Peter used translated “arm yourself” in the CSB is “*holpizo hymeis*” in the Greek and it speaks of a soldier putting on his armor for battle, much like the Apostle Paul speaks of in **Ephesians 6**. The Christian needs to come to the understanding that when a decision is made to follow Christ, then spiritual warfare is the inevitable conclusion. So we must develop a “*battle mentality*”, if we are to be effective against the devil’s schemes. Our LORD and Commander was not immune to suffering upon this battlefield, so why would we expect to be any different?

Sacrifice and suffering are part of the job description of the Believer. Sadly, many fall away from the faith at the mere mention of conflict. Just as stadiums are filled with fair weather fans, sadly, many churches today are filled with “fair weather believers”. Jesus spoke of those who would easily get discouraged and fall away in His parable of the sower.

**And the one sown on rocky ground — this is one who hears The Word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root and is short lived. When distress or persecution comes because of The Word, immediately he falls away.**

**Matthew 13:20-21**

Wouldn't it be better if preachers warned their congregants up front that there is difficulty in following Christ? I believe so. At least then, people would be aware of what they were signing up for! Sometimes I think that in order to have greater conversion numbers, a lot of preachers water down the truth about the sacrifice that is necessary to follow Christ. But at what cost? What difference are we really making if our converts haven't really been converted in the first place? **Rest assured, if you go around saying that you love Jesus, then sooner or later, you will get the opportunity to prove it.** There is a cost for being a disciple. And we must put on our armor and take on the warrior's attitude, if we are to even survive the first skirmish!

Peter goes on to say that **“the one who has suffered in the flesh is finished with sin.”** This verse has been interpreted in many ways. Some say that it speaks of those who have been martyred for the faith, because they are no longer a part of this wicked world, so sin no longer has any effect on them. After all, when we are saved, we are delivered from sin's penalty, power, and ultimately sin's presence, when we are finally in heaven. And while these things are true, I personally do not believe that is what Peter is speaking of in this instance.

I believe that what he is trying to convey is that those who have developed the warrior's mentality, those who would be willing to lay down their lives to follow after Christ, these are the ones that have truly been converted. They have left their sinful ways in the rearview mirror, so to speak, because when The Spirit transforms your way of thinking, then your way of living undergoes a change as well. Simply put, you cannot do the things you used to do, because your nature has been changed to despise your former way of life. I once heard a preacher say, “If your religion hasn't changed you, then you'd best change your religion.” That is spot on!

To be willing to lay down one's life for Christ is proof positive that something has been changed deep within you. For it is not natural to run towards danger, but rather to run away. Our flesh is geared toward self-gratification *not* self-sacrifice. But when The Spirit gains control over us then we are ready to face the battle with our armor strapped on tightly. Those first century Christians certainly did not shirk their duty when Nero's persecution came barreling down upon them. They didn't back down. They *doubled* down! And this is why our faith is still alive and well some two thousand years later. Those Christians were "suited up". And we need to be as well. For I truly believe that deadly persecution is about to make a serious comeback in our country. It is already ramping up all over the world. So why would we expect an exemption from the devil's attacks? Better suit up friends, if you plan on being part of the victory celebration at the end. Don't allow the suffering to choke out your faith. Nothing in this world is worth losing your soul (**Matthew 16:26**). So get suited up and expect not to be popular. You may lose some friends, but you'll have "*The Friend*" that stays closer than a brother" (**Proverbs 18:24**).

### **Separated Out (vs. 2-4)**

**...in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God's will. For there has already been enough time spent in doing what the Gentiles choose to do: carrying on in unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you don't join them in the same flood of wild living — and they slander you. 1 Peter 4:2-4**

I love how Peter says this! He basically tells us that we have wasted enough time living for ourselves, so now we ought to spend the rest of our lives doing something that matters; namely, living for Christ! To be a Follower of Christ is to be separated out from among this world's wickedness. The flesh lives to gratify self, the Believer lives to glorify God. These two mindsets are diametrically opposed to one another (**Galatians 5:17**). This is what Christ meant when He said anyone who would choose to follow Him must first "deny themselves".

Needless to say, if you have been running with the world's crowd and then suddenly decide to follow Jesus, you are going to alienate some people! Unless you were raised in a convent, you know exactly what it means to have sinners make fun of you for your life's choices as a Believer. Their choices are unrestrained, as Peter says. And therefore, to voluntarily allow the so-called "restraints" of The Spirit to control our lives is a foreign concept to a non-believer. What they do not comprehend is that we are actually happier in our walk with God, and no longer even desire the filthiness of our former way of living. We have been set apart in order to be clean vessels for God's holy purposes (**2 Timothy 2:21**).

Peter lists the sins of the unregenerate. They are exactly as we would expect them to be: Sexual lusts and perversions running unchecked, drunkenness, and carousing (the Greek word speaks of loud and boisterous behavior in the streets), as well as what he calls "lawless idolatry". It seems that this world will worship anything, except The One Who is deserving of worship. I find it disgusting the way that celebrity, fame, and fortune are worshipped in our culture. We have become godless indeed, with nothing that even resembles basic morality, let alone holiness.

And when we do not run with the devil's crowd, then we become the object of their scorn and slander. The word Peter used is "*blasphemeo*", from which we get our word "*blaspheme*". For those who would live in unrestrained evil can only build themselves up and excuse their lewd behavior by making fun of those who would choose to be holy. Most of us have a first hand knowledge of what it means to be mocked by the devil's crowd. And if you do not, then simply become more vocal in your adoration of Christ, and you will soon learn firsthand of that which Peter has spoken. The world is only too happy for you to be a "silent Christian". But take a stand for the faith within you and watch how quickly their tolerance evaporates into veritable storm clouds of wrath.

But do not fear what these haters of decency can do to you. For just as we have already studied in this epistle, Christ is not defeated, and your victory has already been won. I am reminded here of the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his famous poem, "Christmas Bells" written on Christmas Day following two years of the bloody American Civil War:

*And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth." I said;  
"For hate is strong, and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men!"*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
God is not dead nor doth He sleep;  
The wrong shall fail, The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good will to men.*

*Christmas Bells 1863*

If you choose to follow Christ, you will have enemies in this world. But do not be afraid:

***I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world. John 16:33***

### **Spotless In Glory (vs. 5-6)**

***They will give an account to The One Who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. For this reason the gospel was also preached to those who are now dead, so that, although they might be judged in the flesh according to human standards, they might live in the spirit according to God's standards. 1 Peter 4:5-6***

The bad news for the persecutors of the righteous is that they will stand before Christ at the Great White Throne Judgement (**Revelation 20:11-15**). And they will give an account for each and every sin they have committed. It will be a day of great weeping for those who have despised the gift of grace that was offered at Calvary. I believe that even those who have been persecuted for their faith will be sorrowful, when they see the sentence of everlasting torment handed down to those who have lived in perpetual wickedness. As bad as we may have been treated by these tormentors, we do not long to see them in hell. But sadly, this is the path they have chosen.

***For we know The One Who has said, Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, and again, The LORD will judge His people. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of The Living God. Hebrews 10:30-31***

But to those who have faithfully endured, who have loved Christ even more than their own lives, the same will enter into their everlasting reward. Our victory is assured. And Peter reminds us that it is for this reason that the gospel has been given in the first place. So that lost sinners can come to repentance and find everlasting life. For it is not God's will that any should perish, and for this reason He has shown such great patience with them (**2 Peter 3:8-10**). Our God is merciful, and wants to see sinners saved. And if He is in us, then we long for the same as well. This is why we are called to return beauty for ugliness. We hope that those who despise us will see Christ in us and long for His mercy and grace.

Peter speaks of those who are “already dead”, but were given the gospel while they were living. This is no doubt a reference to those faithful Believers, who had perished at the hands of Nero’s persecution. They were judged (unfairly) in the courts of men and sentenced to death. But when they stand before the ultimate judge, He will grant them eternal life, for they have remained faithful even in the face of great suffering. Satan with all his schemes and accusations against us will ultimately fail.

**...The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have now come, because the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been thrown down. They conquered him by the blood of The Lamb and by the word of their testimony; for they did not love their lives to the point of death. Revelation 12:10a-11**

So hang on! It is going to be rough down here for a time, but joy comes in the morning! Prepare for the battle; *Suit Up*, and *Separate Out*, so that you may be able to *Stand Spotless in Glory!*

**Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up. Galatians 6:9**

**TRUTH!!!**