

LESSON 11
1 Peter 4:12-19

“Do you not know? Have you not heard?
The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth
Does not become weary or tired.
His understanding is inscrutable.
He gives strength to the weary,
and to him who lacks might He increases power.
Though youths grow weary and tired,
and vigorous young men stumble badly,
Yet those who wait for (hope in) the LORD
will gain new strength;
They will mount up with wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.”
(Isaiah 40:28-31)

Review your memory verses.

Memorize 1 Peter 4:19. Ask someone to help you learn it.

Read 1 Peter 4, carefully and prayerfully.

1. Look again at verses 7-11. How would you summarize what God's Word is telling us to do?

Re-read verses 12-19.

2. What main idea does Peter set forth here?

3. Think about how Peter has placed these two ideas, one following another. What does this suggest to you?

4. Read verses 12 and 13. We are told *not to do* something and are also told something *to do*. What are these two things?

5. Often we do find ourselves surprised when a “fiery ordeal” or “painful trial” pops up. (I do, do you?) What attitudes do we hold that set us up to be surprised?

6. Often we *do not* find ourselves rejoicing in fiery ordeals!
 - a. What is to be the source of our rejoicing? (See 1 Peter 1:3-6. Notice that verse 6 begins “In this you greatly rejoice.” See also John 16:33; Hebrews 12:2.)

 - b. What attitudes cause you to fail to rejoice in hard times?

 - c. Read the attached piece, “Man’s Selfishness Produces Bitter Harvest of Pain”
What do you learn about painful trials from your reading?

Read 1 Peter 4:17-18.

11. How does God's judgment relate to my suffering *as a Christian* (v. 16)?

12. 1 Peter 4:19 is one of the *most important* verses in 1 Peter (or anywhere else). According to this verse:

a. What are you to do?

b. When are you to do it?

c. What about God motivates you to do it?

13. *How* do we actually entrust our soul to God in the midst of suffering? (Think about it a bit.)

14. Put the message of verse 19 into your own words.

15. If you don't *entrust yourself to God* in suffering, what other reactions might you have?

16. Does 1 Peter 2:21-25 make you want to respond correctly to unjust suffering? Why?

17. Be alert for situations where you can use the principle of verse 19 in your life. *Choose*, by His power, to entrust yourself to God. List some examples where you have needed (or might need) this principle. In column 3, give yourself a ✓ or an *NI* (Needs Improvement).

| Circumstance | My Response | How'd I do (✓ or NI) |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------|
| | | |

Carolyn Roper
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MAN'S SELFISHNESS PRODUCES BITTER HARVEST OF PAIN

by David Roper, 1982

Bill Edelen in his column last week raised a good question, "Why should anyone have to suffer?" Why indeed? The question deserves an answer. In fact, it seems to me, it must be answered by Christians. It's the point at which Christianity most needs defending. If there's no answer to the problem of pain, you may have the most logical reason ever for becoming an atheist.

Pain is a fact of life. It seems that almost all forms of life experience it. Most creatures feel pain at birth, experience and inflict it throughout their lives and most often die in pain. Man seems to have the worst of it since he alone can understand the injustice of it all; he can perceive the problem. Yet, in the end, we are the chief of offenders, outdoing all other forms of life in inflicting pain on one another and lower forms of life. Human history, as many have observed, is largely a record of man's inhumanity to man.

Additionally, it seems that not only man but also the whole universe has gone haywire. How can we account for all the human suffering that results from so-called natural causes -- earthquake, famine, disease? Either there is nothing at all behind the universe, or whatever is, is not powerful enough to stop the pain, or far worse, doesn't care. That's the problem of pain stated in it's simplest form. Why does God, who is supposedly all-powerful and all-good, allow His creatures to suffer? Why do the innocent suffer? Why do the good die young? I'm not sure how well qualified I am to untie this knot. My arthritic knee has been kicking up again, and I have an assortment of other aches and pains but at the present time most things inwardly and outwardly are going extremely well. By comparison with many of my friends, my life today is relatively pain-free. However, having lived almost 50 years and kept my eyes open most of the time I've made one observation. All people, whether Christians or not, are going to suffer a great deal of discomfort at some time or another. The world is bad enough as it is but it becomes absolutely unbearable if we think that life is supposed to be good. It usually isn't. Somewhere along the line we have to come to terms with the fact of our pain and that of others, and why things are as they are. There are no easy answers and no one has the last word. But this I the way I see it.

First, it appears that God is not trying to run the world right. He could if he wished, and one of these days He will, but at the present time He's letting man go his own way, and the result is human suffering. Quite frankly, most of the problem of pain can be resolved at this point. It's our own fault; we inflict it on ourselves. As J.B. Phillips put it, "Evil is inherent in the risky gift of free will." Man as a free agent is capable of almost anything and this, in turn, causes suffering.

No one else is responsible for the wars in which thousands of innocent people are killed, children are burned beyond recognition or maimed for life. We have to bear the burden of justifying the greed and materialism that exploits others. How much pain has been caused by the ruthless pursuit of money or power? How many promising lives have been snuffed out by careless or drunken driving? How many children have been marred and emotionally scarred

for life because of our ruthless pursuit of personal pleasure -- a pursuit that keeps us randomly looking for satisfaction without regard to mates and children. Our cheating, lying, stealing and selfishness have produced a bitter harvest of suffering. We can hardly blame God for that.

You may well argue that man is not responsible for all pain. What of the suffering caused by disease or natural upheavals -- earthquake, storm and volcano? Even here, the element of human responsibility is involved. Have we the right to complain about the high incidence of cancer when money designated for cancer research is a mere drop in the bucket compared to the money spent on video games in the United States last year? We create the situations that leave us no time, money or energy for the pursuit of constructive ends. The same can be said for so-called natural disasters. A Japanese architecture professor reporting to the Japanese government on the San Francisco earthquake stated that "Dishonest mortar was responsible for nearly all earthquake damage in San Francisco." We can't get off the hook on that one. We may not be responsible for every catastrophe, but we certainly contribute heavily to human misery in the midst of it and do very little to alleviate it when it strikes.

It ought to be pointed out that the problem is greater than the simple effect of my cruelty to you. The matter is far more intricate. Human solidarity is something deeper than mere social unity. We are, in fact, an organic whole, a family unit. John Donne was right; no man is an island; we are diminished by one another. Each person participates in the accumulated evil of the race. Much of the pain we experience today is the legacy of the misdeeds of our predecessors. Think, for example, of the so-called "Black problem" in many parts of the world today. It's nothing more or less than the evils of the slave trade coming home to roost. It sobers one to think of what we may be doing to our own descendants.

I'll continue the discussion in another column, but I do want to draw one conclusion. If, in fact, we are responsible for much of the pain in this world it certainly wouldn't do for us to demand that God set everything right. God would have to judge justly, which is to say, He would have to judge across the board. He would have to put down cruel and ruthless tyrants everywhere, but He would also have to judge my petty tyranny. Perhaps my tongue would wither if I uttered some harsh rebuke that cut and hurt. Perhaps my foot would wither if I sped through a school zone. If God were merely just, where could I stand?

It recalls a conversation between Robinson Crusoe and his Man Friday. "Well," says Friday, "you say God is so strong, so great: Has He not as much strength, as much might as the devil?"

"Yes, yes," Crusoe says. "Friday, God is much stronger than the devil."

"But if God is much strong, much might as the devil, why God no kill the devil so make him no more do wicked?"

"You might as well ask," Crusoe answered reflectively, "Why does God not kill you and me when we do wicked things that offend?"

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