



# THE BEREIA PAGE

*“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11*

## The Word and Growth

Both testaments emphasize that God’s word is the final authority for life (see Moses’ exhortation to the Israelites in Deut 4.1-2; 12.32 and Paul’s exhortation to Timothy in 2 Tim 4.2).

But their concern for staying true to the word involved more than protection against false ways. They saw the word as necessary for spiritual growth. So, the priority after Pentecost was to urge ongoing devotion (Luke used a present tense verb) to the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2.42). The solution to doctrinal and ethical problems at Ephesus was to keep teaching the word (1 Tim 4.6; 2 Tim 2.15). The word was also considered vital for the churches in Asia Minor for coping with persecution (1 Pet 4.8-11).

We are not surprised, then, that NT writers, like their OT predecessors, told God’s people to be sure to pass on the word to later generations (2 Tim 2.2; Deut 6.6-9).

Their emphasis reminds us that the Christian way is a taught faith. If we hope others will believe in Christ, live for Christ, and grow in Christ, we must keep on teaching the word.

- Adapted from my sermon, “Things We Should Believe” - to read the entire outline, click [here](#).

## Strangers and Exiles (3)

David Anguish

Among the challenges before us in a world that no longer provides the “surrounding ‘Christian’ culture to prop [the church] up and mold its young,”<sup>1</sup> (see part 2) is where to find counsel for coping with our new reality. Mentors who did not have the experience cannot pass on wisdom learned from it.

Yes, that’s a generalization. Some of our forbears did face unfair treatment because of their faith, and we can also learn from disciples in societies that have long been unaccommodating to believers. But how helpful would it be to have access to instruction from one who lived in a hostile culture, especially if that guide is God-breathed (2 Tim 3.16-17)?

Parts of different New Testament books—as well as some extra-biblical writings—can help, but the writing that in its entirety may be most useful for the task is 1 Peter.<sup>2</sup>

### “If Anyone Suffers as a Christian . . .”

Suffering is a prominent theme in 1 Peter. In 105 verses, the words for “suffer” (the verb *paschō* [πάσχω] and noun *pathēma* [πάθημα]) appear 16 times, more than in any other book. Out of 42 New Testament occurrences of the verb, 12 are in 1 Peter. Of the remaining books, only Luke (6), Acts (5), Matthew (4), Hebrews (4), and Mark (3), all much longer writings, use it more than once. Ten books never use it.

How Peter used “suffering” is more important than the number of occurrences, however. With the exception of a passing reference to the prophetic predictions of Christ’s sufferings (*pathēma*) in 1.11, Peter’s use of the words is concentrated in the 58 verses from 2.19 to 5.10—after part 1 of the book prepares for it with a review of the blessings of the salvation they had received and a call to holiness (1.3-2.10).<sup>3</sup>

Why were they suffering? They were “elect exiles . . . in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1.1), second generation believers (1.8-9) who, politically, were members of

## Worth Considering

“Ludicrous as it seemed to many, the early Christians made no attempt to disguise the fact that they claimed for a crucified man the uniquely highest place in the cosmos. Not surprisingly, they were often regarded as a dangerously subversive movement.” — Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 97

“One of the best ways Christians can witness to people today, both to the active enemies and to the far greater number of the ignorant and the indifferent, is simply to inform them objectively of what it is that Christians believe.”

“There is great superficiality in today’s evangelical world. Many Bible-believing Christians share the contemporary taste for self-gratification, emotionalism, and anti-intellectualism.” - Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Loving God with All Your Mind: Thinking as a Christian in the Postmodern World*, rev. ed. (Crossway Books, 2003), 51, 69

“... do not under-estimate the role you may play in clearing the obstacles in someone’s spiritual journey. A seed sown here, a light shone there may be all that is needed to move someone one step further. The truth is that sometimes the more sophisticated we get in our study and understanding of apologetics, the more often we miss the moment and the impact.” — Ravi Zacharias, “An Apologetic for Apologetics,” in Zacharias, ed., *Beyond Opinion: Living the Faith We Defend* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), xvii

an unsanctioned religious group. Considered suspect socially, they were, by virtue of both cultural custom and choices necessitated by their conviction, excluded and hounded.

Peter was not being rhetorical, then, when he said they were “strangers and exiles” (1 Pet 2.11 CSB). Their neighbors expressed surprise at ideas and behaviors they thought strange. Righteousness and doing good would not spare the Christians from the slander, ostracism, and persecution of a hostile world. But they were to remain composed and resist the inclination to retaliate (2.21-25; 3.13-17; 4.1-19; 5.6-11).

## Why We Need Peter’s Perspective

Why stress Peter’s emphasis on suffering? First, because the idea is prominent in 1 Peter. But, more importantly, because the letter’s understanding of suffering differs from the one we may have. Since we have not generally experienced the displacement (or dissonance) of being “strangers and exiles,” let alone the hardships it brings, when we speak of suffering we mean things like the debilitation that comes with age, dealing with an accident or calamity, or a grave illness. In a society more like Peter’s, we will need a new perspective on suffering. Learning his view can help us begin to form it.

His view can also help us become more realistic about our new world and what it will mean to be disciples in it. Beginning to internalize Peter’s matter-of-fact perspective on the suffering that accompanied alienation will help us begin to prepare ourselves and equip the younger believers we are mentoring to face the challenges of faithful service in a culture that not only does not prop up our faith, but becomes hostile to it.

Coming to terms with Peter’s view of suffering, then, is an important step for Christians to take as we aim to endure without shame and continue to glorify God (1 Pet 4.16).

*www.davidanguish.com*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas & William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Expanded 25th Anniversary Ed. (Abingdon Press, 2014), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Hurtado, whose analysis I noted in part 1, referenced several documents designed to respond to the challenge of a hostile culture, including 1 Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and post-New Testament writings, notably Justin’s *1 Apology* and the anonymous *Epistle to Diognetus*. See his *Why On Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 2016 (Marquette University Press, 2016), 61-69.

<sup>3</sup> I plan to look at the value of this section’s ideas in part 4.

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