

EXCELLING IN SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

1 Peter 3:9-4:6

Intro: It is one of the most ironic truths of the gospel. After Jesus in his famous mountain message spoke of the wonderful fruit of a disciple's life--merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, he shocks us by saying that folks who live like that can expect to pay a price!!!

“Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. (Matthew 5:11)

With the Lord it was axiomatic that the life of a disciple would include opposition and persecution.

How can a Christian cope when he is mistreated by others not for doing what is wrong, but for doing what is right? Should he defend himself? Should he compromise? Should he fight back?

In 1 Pet. 3:13-4:6 Peter tells the Christian how to deal with mistreatment by others. If you a Christian, living as God wants you to live, you will need to know how to handle opposition for standing for the truth!

WHY CHRISTIANS MAY BE PERSECUTED

Peter, in a similar way has made frequent references to the fact that Christians will suffer. In the summary verse of 1 Pet. 2:12 there is the implication that Christians would suffer--that they would be "slandered as evil doers". In chapter one Peter spoke of how they would be distressed by various trials that tested their faith. But why? Why should those who seek to live by the will of God be persecuted?

They are persecuted because they have repented of sin!

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

When one becomes a Christians there are some things he quits practicing!

Aselgeia—lasciviousness; excesses; sensuality; lasciviousness; wantonness or lewdness that expresses itself in indecent speech (Like telling dirty jokes) or speaking to another with suggestive thoughts that lead to immoral acts; in indecent actions (petting on dates, dancing, immodest dress); indecent thoughts (use of pornographic literature & videos, fantasizing about being immoral with someone)

Lusts--sinful passions or desires of various kinds (desire for acceptance that leads to compromise, or for wealth that leads to putting the kingdom second to work, or pleasure, etc.)

Excess of wine--drunkenness, debauchery, sottiness

Revellings--carousing, wild partying, loud music, etc.

Banquetings--drinking bouts, social drinking

Abominable idolatries--criminal, unlawful idolatries, participation in false religion

Peter describes this repentance like this: For he who has suffered in the flesh has "ceased from sin...living not for the lusts of men but rather for the will of God!" (v. 1-2)

The people of world are surprised by the Christian's unwillingness to go along with the crowd!

Christians do not "run" with those kinds of people!

Excess of riot--excess of dissipation, the word riot is the same one describing the younger son of Luke 15 who wasted his substance in "riotous living", prodigality in its true sense. Literally "to drive away" referring to the wastefulness of the young boy. Young folks, if you truly want to waste life spend it on the things Peter hears mentions!

And they "malign" us. What do you do when people make fun of your faith? When they mock you or criticize you? You may be ostracized, discriminated against. What does a Christian do?

HOW THE CHRISTIANS HANDLES PERSECUTION

Make sure you are being persecuted for the right reason and finds a blessing in it!

And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. (1 Peter 3:13-14)

Generally we should not be persecuted for doing right! But if we are persecuted for doing right, we should look for the blessing in it!

Do not be intimidated by persecutors but sanctify Christ as Lord!

And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, (1 Peter 3:14-15)

It's easy to loose courage when evil doers are in the majority or when we teach an unpopular message. We become intimidated by the sheer number of people who advocate a different viewpoint or lifestyle. We may fear what they might say or do.

Consecrate your heart to him; make up your mind that you are going to do what He says regardless of the consequences. Either we make Jesus lord or we make the people we run with lord.

Be ready to give an answer.

always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (1 Pet. 3:15)

When we are challenged, be ready to give a reason for what you believe!

An "apologetic" of our faith. A defense.

Christians need to act out of the courage of their convictions; and those convictions should rest upon "thus saith the Lord". Tell people what you believe with "meekness" (with a calm spirit) and in "fear" (respect for God and men as well as the seriousness of the situation).

Keep a good conscience.

and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:16)

Don't give your enemy a club with which to beat you over the head. Practice what you preach! How can we persuade others to do what we have not done ourselves! It is by consistent righteousness that we can win the lost!

Nothing ruins our example quicker than to lash out in anger and bitterness at those who "get to us". Don't become what is world is!

Remember what Jesus endured for you & arm yourself to be like Him!

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; (1 Peter 3:18)

It is interesting to remember that Jesus warned His disciples about the persecution they would face. They could only respond, "Lord, here are two swords". They had physical weapons but they were not armed in the most important way. They had not armed themselves spiritually. Peter reminds us of what the Lord endured.

Died for sins once for all, the most extreme persecution.

The just for the unjust--it was not fair.

That he might bring us to God.

Put to death in the flesh and made alive in the spirit!

And now exalted over all!

One day we will stand before Jesus to give an account of how you've lived. Its going to be hard to face Jesus and say, "I was afraid they would disapprove or ridicule or make fun of me. Or, I was afraid they would hurt me. Or, I was afraid they would exclude me." There is no one in the world who was treated more unfairly than Jesus. There is no one in the world who made fun of, who was mocked and ridiculed more than Jesus. There is no pain that men can inflict upon you that would be greater than the writhing pain of the nails that pierced his hands and feet.

Now make up your mind to be like him!

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, (1 Peter 4:1)

God will give victory to all those who overcome persecution. We can share in Christ's victory over sin.

Put your faith in the justice of God to recompense both good and evil men.

but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (1 Peter 4:5)

In this the Christian can find comfort that his cause will go before the great tribunal of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will be saved; and the persecutors will give account to the Almighty!

Conclusion: We may never know what the future may hold for us. We may not see some kind of wholesale persecution of Christians like the Christians Peter writes to experienced. Regrettably I fear we may falter in the face of far less severe opposition. Let us determine to be faithful even when it may be painful to do so and respond to it like Peter teaches us in these practical verses.