

The Christian in a Hostile World How the Christian responds to persecution #2

Intro: In our last lesson we looked at Peter's exhortation to the Christians as to how they should respond to persecution or suffering. His advice was very practical and direct.

Recognize that doing what is right always brings God's blessing, even if it also brings suffering.

Do not be intimidated by persecutors, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.

Be ready to give an answer.

Keep a good conscience.

Now let's consider the second half of this paragraph where Peter gives two more exhortations and further explanation.

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

Once more Peter urges disciples to consider the example of their Savior, Jesus Christ and His suffering. He reminds the Lord's disciples of what Jesus had endured for their sake.

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;

Jesus experienced the most extreme persecution, dying for our sins. His death was not deserved. He was just; but He died for the unjust. He suffered and died to save others: i.e. "that he might bring us to God."

Yet vindicated by God: "though put to death in the flesh," he was "made alive in the spirit" Jesus' innocence was vindicated by His resurrection from the dead and by His ascension to the right hand of God to rule over His kingdom.

Thus after a brief hiatus on the salvation of Noah, Peter returns to his remarks about Jesus:

....who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. (1 Pet. 3:18, 22)

Because Jesus was willing to suffer the sake of others, God exalted Him to His high position.

He urges them to make up their 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 Pet. 4:1)

It is interesting to remember that before his death, Jesus warned His disciples about the persecutions they would face. They could only respond, "Lord, here are two swords". They

missed the point. They had physical weapons; but they were not well armed in the most important way. They had not armed themselves spiritually with prayer and watchfulness against temptation.

Peter did not want his readers to make that mistake. He urges them to arm themselves spiritually with the same purpose with which the Lord lived His life. He determined to do the Father's will and to face whatever the consequences might be to bring about the blessing of others.

So we also must do.

But as we suffer for others, we should:

Remember why persecution is inevitable for the morally upright.

Peter's readers were being persecuted because they had repented of the sinful life they used to live.

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.

The Christians Peter writes to were previously engaged in the typical sins of the Greco-Roman culture.

Sensuality lasciviousness; wantonness or lewdness

Lusts--sinful passions or desires of various kinds

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

These words might describe those in our day who participate in the modern night club, bar scene, or house party that features drinking and sensual conduct..

But now they had repented, determined to spend the remainder of their lives in accord with God's will rather than pursuing the lusts (desires) of their fellow-Gentiles.

With their conversion to Christ came a clean break from the former way of life.

They no longer "ran" with the sinful crowd in the same excess of dissipation. It is the same word that described the younger son of Luke 15 who wasted his substance in "riotous living", prodigality in its true sense.

(Young folks, if you truly want to waste life, spend it on the things Peter hears mentions!)

The people of the unbelieving world were surprised by their unwillingness to continuing running with them in these sins and maligned them.

Their conversion was not without cost. That's why Jesus said, "Count the cost."

Are you surprised when people make fun of your faith? When they mock you or criticize you?

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

Peter reminds his readers that all acts of hostility against the people of God will at last have their day of reckoning.

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

Our Lord will return one day "with flaming fire rendering vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel." (2 Thes. 1:7ff) They will be repaid for all the suffering they have inflicted upon others. And there will be no escape for any evil person, whether dead or alive.

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; but the persecutors will give account to the Almighty in a just judgment!

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

Conclusion: Peter's words have an immense practical value no matter in what culture we live. The causes and consequences of suffering are still the same. We too must have the same response.

Recognize that living right always brings blessing from God.

Do not be afraid of men; but treat the Lord Christ as holy in your hearts.

Be ready to give an answer.

Keep a good conscience.

Consider the sufferings of Jesus and their outcome and determine to be like Him.

Put faith in the justice of God

I don't want you to become a Christian without counting the costs. But I also want to stress that the reward far exceeds the cost.