

"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, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*." 1 Peter 4:1-6, NAS95.

In our previous text Peter exhorted the believers as a reminder that Christ suffered once and only once for all of those who would be his people. Christ the just one died for the unjust to make them his people. Christ did not die for all the unjust people in the world, he died particularly for the unjust who will be the justified ones in Christ as a result of repentance and faith which are the results of being born again unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now Peter is again stressing the fact that the people of God need to have an expectation of suffering at the hands of the unjust because Christ suffered.

It should be the expectation of every true believer that there may be times when suffering for Christ will be the normal daily experience for us.

In our communities we are not pursued for baptizing believers for example.

In the Ukraine during the days of the Soviet Union it was illegal to baptize believers under a certain age. It was obvious that the system believed they could win the hearts and minds of the youth and prevent them from acknowledging their faith as they grew older. I have had the opportunity to preach the gospel in Ukraine for three summers. While there I met pastors and others who suffered under the soviet regime. One of the most striking stories was about a pastor who had publicly baptized some new converts and was put in prison for doing so. His congregation did their best to communicate with him and never during his imprisonment considered him anything less than their pastor.

When he was released, there were new converts to be baptized. The first thing he did

was to accompany them to the nearest river and hold a baptism service and he was promptly arrested again. This occurred a number of times until things in Ukraine became more tolerant towards Christians. Baptism is a significant part of the conversion of a new believer in the Baptist church in Ukraine. I have had the opportunity to participate in the baptism of twenty believers in the Dnieper River alongside Pastor Yevtuschenko in the city of Cherkassi. When asked to give testimony concerning their conversion, Ukrainians say “when I repented and believed”, and then proceed to explain the change in their lives when they came to understand the gospel.

Peter is reminding us that persecution and suffering for Christ is waiting for us whether we experience it daily or not. Christ died to have a people who would be obedient to his calling and we exist to preach the gospel. Suffering has and will continue to exist when it comes to preaching the gospel.

But Peter is giving encouragement to the believers. Christ suffered, you will suffer, it all has a purpose. So we are to arm ourselves with the same purpose. One usually takes up arms willingly. So we are to choose to suffer when it is necessary for the preaching of the gospel. Jesus willingly suffered and died. We are to have the same purpose.

Now this willing purpose, this mindset helps us to live for Christ as we should as we should. Christ the just one died for us, the unjust. He made us his. We are empowered by him and enabled by him through the power of the Holy Spirit to do what we should to live for the glory of Christ.

Christ died for us when we suffering in our sinful nature. What were we suffering?

We were dead in our trespasses and sins we were helpless to overcome sin and we were separated from God. Now, as Peter says we have ceased from sin.

Lets clarify this statement. Peter is not saying that we are sinless. As he continues he is saying that we can live differently than we did before we were Christ's. We no longer suffer in the flesh-in the body- trying to battle sin without any hope of accomplishment. Christ suffered in the flesh, we were crucified with him, we can live in the victory of the resurrection. We can and will do better than before.

One of the ways we accomplish this is to be armed to suffer for the sake of righteousness. Each time we trust God to do what we know is right before God we are demonstrating a break with our sin, with the things that Peter goes on to list as examples in verse three. Remember, our daily struggle against sin is not just a matter of being enabled and empowered to do what is right but is rooted in believing the promises of God that these things can be done that we can, as the Puritans were fond of saying, “mortify the flesh” or as Paul wrote, “beat our members into submission.”

It is really a matter of trusting God. There are no works for God even the work of overcoming sin without faith. Without out faith it is impossible to please God.

Vs 2 says “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.”

How do we know the will of God? First it comes from God’s word. They had the Old Testament scriptures and the teaching of the Apostles and it also comes from the marvelous work of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit convicting us concerning our sin and ever increasing our knowledge of Christ as we are taught the Scriptures. Every time you do what is right and especially when you suffer for it, it is proof that you are different, that you have been changed by Christ. It proves that you have renounced the old man and have put on the new and that should be our desire, a once and for all purpose, to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ-the purpose of Christ for us. Peter wrote earlier in the letter “we were sprinkled unto obedience.”

We lived with enough sin in our past. Now is the time to say enough is enough. Again, this is not about being sinless but it is about desiring and striving to war against sin as we learned earlier in Peter’s letter. It is about fearing when our lives appear to be no different now than when we were apart from Christ.

Arm yourself with the purpose of God.

Vs. 3 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, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

Peter is saying there is no need for any of this or whatever your particular sinful

Those days were sufficient enough for sin. Today is the day to live armed with the purpose of God. There is no room in your life for the sins of the past. There is no room for all of that time to be wasted as it was in your past. Today is the day to break with the past. Today is the day to arm yourself with the purpose of God and move forward. Today is the day to put on once and for all the new man Christ has made you. There are no excuses for delays. O I just need a little more time to work out this problem. No. Arm the mindset and begin now to work it out with the purpose of glorifying Christ, not waiting to attempt to glorify Christ once you have worked it out.

God is glorified in the process and the results.

As we pursue this purpose for God's glory Peter instructs us:

v.4 ¶ In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*

The world in general, your friends and even family members who are not Christ's own will not understand your determination to pursue Christ-likeness. To them it will be a sacrifice for nothing. In their eyes you will be the fool. But be encouraged because the Scripture defines the true fool,

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. Ps. 14:1
Ec 10:3 Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone *that* he is a fool.

People, friends and even family will slander you and malign you because you will not run with them in these excessive behaviors. So what is the answer? Take it like Jesus did. No slander for slander, no evil for evil. Take every slap in the face whether physical or with words, take every piercing in the side whether physical or with words.

There is no excuse for engaging in what you know to be wrong behavior to please the fools, no matter who they are.

I have known too many Christians who fall apart because of their families who are lost. They do so much to appease the fools that their witness for Christ is practically obliterated. They get so involved in the mess of these fools that it hurts their own

growth in Christ. We have sinned enough already. Remove yourself from it if need be

And do not stop trusting God and his promises.

v.5 but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

Now none of us should be finding any joy in the fact that those who malign us will be held accountable and will face the wrath and final judgement of God. But we also must rest in the fact that this is a promise of comfort for us. Accept the suffering as Christ did and be vindicated by God.

So many times we want to have justice now. We want to see accountability now. We want some sense of relief from the burden now.

But we are called to suffer for Christ's sake and again we need to trust in the promises of God without the God get them attitude.

God will judge all who have mistreated his people and all who have heard the gospel.

Remember we are suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Whether they are alive or dead at the time of final judgement they will be judged by Christ. We must always remember that it is Christ, who as the God-man came to earth suffered, and rose again and was exalted by the Father to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. All will be judged by Christ. We are to pursue arming ourselves with the purpose of God, Christ will take on the judgement of the fools.

v.6 For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God.*

Peter gives us another wonderful assurance in vs. 6.

The gospel has been preached to save men from the judgment of God.

We unequivocally know this. There should be no doubt in the heart of a truly converted person that we have heard the gospel and that we are saved from the sin that would condemn us at the judgement throne of Christ. We have the knowledge that even though we were dead in our trespasses and sins that Christ died for us, the just for the unjust, the godly for the ungodly. Yes there is a judgement in the flesh even for

believers. We must die. That is judgement. God said to Adam, eat and you will surely die, that included physical death. In the flesh we are all still the sons of Adam by physical inheritance but we are the adopted sons of God spiritually. It does not matter that our bodies die. Actually we should rejoice that they will and therefore find comfort in the fact of the resurrection and a glorified body for the rest of eternity that will never suffer anything ever again.

Those who died in Noah's day during the time he preached the truth of God are dead but alive in spirit and will be judged on the last day at the resurrection of the dead. It is the will of God that all of humanity that dies, still lives in spirit and will be capable of being judged at the last judgement.

The fools may laugh at us knowing we too can get sick, we can have an accident or suffer from a disease and think we are just crazy to allow ourselves to have missed out on so much fun when we had the opportunity. But there will be no laughing for them on that terrible day before Christ. Let them laugh and mock and scorn but do not let them just be puzzled. Preach the gospel. Give them a reason for the hope that is in you with gentleness and fear. Declare the glory of the risen Christ. Let them know that Christ died for sinners who are dead in their sin but gives life to sinners who repent and believe.

Let them know that there is a life that is filled with answers for the heartache, let them know that life in Christ is worth every moment of suffering that anyone can try to impose on your life because it was good enough for our Savior to suffer and that we are blessed by God when we do so for doing what is right in the sight of God. Let them know that there is joy in Christ which is unspeakable and undeniable. Let them know that God has called us to this suffering as part of the glory that waits for us and that we have missed out on nothing since Christ has saved us. We had all the sinning we needed before Christ was alive in us. Let them know how different it is to live in the spirit according to the will of God as it says in verse 7.

We lose nothing for living this way. We gain everything. Leaving behind the things

that were once that which condemned me to press on for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Do not be ashamed to say that your life as a whole was in one sense wasted until you met Christ. It is true that God in His sovereign purposes accomplished many things through you. You may have saved someone's life or helped them through a financial crisis or gave them some advice that truly helped them in some difficult time of life but none of these things could correct the badness of your heart toward God. None of these things could reconcile you to God, none of these things could bring you the life in the spirit that is the mark of a person who has been adopted by God and put in Christ to know the manifestations of His grace forever.

The most wicked person in the world may at one time do one of the kindest things imaginable but it has no bearing on their standing with God. Some of the nicest people I have known were not believers and some of the most mean spirited people I have known have claimed to be believers.

We are to arm ourselves with the purpose of God

During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900, insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining ninety-two students followed her to the firing squad. Today in the Word, February, 1989, p. 17.

In arming ourselves in God's purpose we will grow and mature.

A man found a cocoon of the emperor moth and took it home to watch it emerge. One day a small opening appeared, and for several hours the moth struggled but couldn't seem to force its body past a certain point.

Deciding something was wrong, the man took scissors and snipped the remaining bit of cocoon. The moth emerged easily, its body large and swollen, the wings small and shriveled.

He expected that in a few hours the wings would spread out in their natural beauty, but they did not. Instead of developing into a creature free to fly, the moth spent its life dragging around a swollen body and shriveled wings.

The constricting cocoon and the struggle necessary to pass through the tiny opening are God's way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings. The "merciful" snip was, in reality, cruel. Sometimes the struggle is exactly what we need. Beth Landers.

God's word has encouraged us to arm ourselves in the purpose of God.

To do so is not always the easiest way to walk among men. To do so may make us enemies and cause us to be seen as fools. It may cause us ridicule, it may cause us bodily harm or even death.

Yet, to arm ourselves in the purpose of God will cause us to know and love Christ more.

It will make us identify with his sufferings. It will increase our reliance upon the promises of God even when we cannot always clearly see His purpose.

To arm ourselves with the purpose of God many things as we have discussed can occur.

Our character and hope will mature. We will see more of the the power of Christ

We will see more of the glory of God. We will grow in faith and learn more about dependence on God. We will be able to comfort others in trouble

It Allows us to suffer for the cause of Christ and we realize that suffering can come because of another's sin and merely because we are members of a fallen race

We grow in discipline and understand more of the sovereignty of God

In arming ourselves in the purpose of God we can not only see but understand not just the facts but the whys of many things when we are Christ's.

Out of the Darkness
Out of the dark forbidding soil
The pure white lilies grow.
Out of the black and murky clouds,
Descends the stainless snow.
Out of the crawling earth-bound worm
A butterfly is born.
Out of the somber shrouded night,
Behold! A golden morn!
Out of the pain and stress of life,
The peace of God pours down.
Out of the nails -- the spear -- the cross,
Redemption -- and a crown!

Author Unknown.

"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, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*."
1 Peter 4:1-6, NAS95.