

Clear-Minded and Self-Controlled

There are several places in the Scriptures that teach us how to live the Christian life successfully over the long haul. This passage is one of them. Peter, who probably is in his 60s, is instructing a small group of Christians in Asia Minor on how to deal with the fear and oppression in their lives. This advice is most useful to us as we encounter a hostile world around us.

I Peter 4:1-19

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, **2** so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. **3** For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. **4** With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; **5** but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. **6** For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. **9** Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. **10** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: **11** whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Suffering as a Christian

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. **14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. **16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. **17** For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18** And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

In this text Peter gives us three primary guidelines for how to abound in the Christian life over the long haul.

I. We must make a decisive break with the ways of the world (vv. 1-6)

In each of these paragraphs, Peter gives us a theological reality, followed by an ethical inference. In this paragraph, the theological reality is found in verse 1a, namely, that Christ has suffered in the flesh. Since He has suffered in the flesh and has successfully overcome the ways of the world, the ethical implication is that we too must flee from sin (vv. 1b-6). Let us notice two reasons why we must flee from the ways of the world:

A. The world is opposing us (vv. 3-4)

The world seeks to lure you into its destructive ways, and when you do not conform, the world becomes hostile towards you. We must understand that the only way to deal with worldly ways is to stand against them.

B. The world will be held accountable (vv. 5-6)

Notice in this text that even death will not allow any to escape: “...they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” Jesus reaffirms this in John

5:28-29.

II. We must set our eyes on eternity (vv. 7-11)

Paul also teaches this in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and in Colossians 3:1-4.

The theological reality is that the end is near (v. 7a) and the ethical implication is that we must live for God (v. 7b-11).

We live for God in two directions:

A. In our relationship with Him (v. 7b)

Notice that when we are contemplating the end of time, we become “self-controlled and sober minded” and notice that this is for the purpose of an effective prayer life.

B. In our relationships with each other (vv. 8-11)

The heavenly minded saint is imminently practical, for when we contemplate the end of time we become more loving toward each other:

-We cover each other’s petty sins (v. 8)

Obviously Peter is not saying that we do not confront each other when our sins tend to hurt us or others, but he is saying that we cover each other’s sins when it merely offends us. Instead of storing up in our minds petty things, we dump them out because our love covers a multitude of our brothers’ and sisters’ sins.

-We show hospitality to one another (v. 9)

-We steward our gifts for service to other people (vv. 10-11)

III. We must deal with our persecutions (vv. 12-19)

The theological reality is given in verse 12: persecution of godly people is inevitable. We find this taught also in John 15:20 and 16:33, in the ministry of Jesus, and in Acts 14:22 and 2 Timothy 3:12, in the teaching of Apostle Paul.

The ethical implication of this reality is that we must persevere and abound in our sufferings (vv. 13-19).

A. We must rejoice in our sufferings (v. 13)

Notice that we rejoice now because we share in Christ’s sufferings, but we shall also rejoice later, “when his glory is revealed.”

B. We glorify the Lord (vv.14-16)

Notice that this was the case with the early disciples (Acts 5:41, 16:25, Hebrews 10:34).

C. We entrust Him with our lives (vv. 17-19)

Peter is here saying that the judgment that begins with our persecutions continues in the judgment of the world. One can see this hinted at in Ezekiel 9:1-6 and in Malachi 3:1-4.

We notice in 1 Peter 2:23 that it is the Lord Jesus Himself who has entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly; we as well must entrust ourselves into His hands. Jesus gave us the perfect example when He was dying on the cross and He said in prayer to His Father: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46).

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it hard to make a decisive break with the ways of the world, as Peter describes in verse 3 and 4? Why is it essential to our Christian life that we do so?

2. Why is the imminent return of Christ so important to believers? How ought Christ's promised return affect our relationships with brothers and sisters in the Church?

3. How can we be more heavenly-minded?

4. Why is persecution inevitable for the believer?

5. What are Peter's instructions in verses 12-19 for how we must handle our persecutions?

Going Deeper

1. In what areas of your life do you need to make a more decisive break with the ways of the world?

2. Of Peter's instructions on how to handle persecution, which is the most helpful to you? Why?