

12. Learning to Live and Suffer for Christ

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand what the suffering and death of Christ means for each one of us as Christians. We saw that because of His suffering for us that we can count it a privilege when we suffer for the sake of Christ. We are going to see that Peter went on to explain what it means to learn to live for Christ and do the will of God on this earth. That will cause those who are not yet Christians to speak evil of us because they want to continue to live to satisfy their evil desires. As a result, we are to be prepared to suffer for Christ.

In 1 Peter 4:1-2 we read, “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” In our last topic, we were reminded that Christ suffered for us in the flesh. We saw why Christ was willing to suffer for us. Based on what He did for us, we see the way that we are called to respond. The word that is translated “arm” comes from the word that means “*to take weapons such as are used for warfare.*” Another form of this word is used in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 where we read, “For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Here, we see that we arm ourselves with the weapons of God for spiritual conflict.

However, that conflict is not like a physical conflict. Instead, we see that we are to arm ourselves with the same mind. The word that is translated “mind” means “*the same thinking, understanding or attitude that Christ had.*” The word that is translated “mind” is only used one other place in the New Testament. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” In this verse, the word is translated “intents.” This reminds us that we are to arm ourselves with the same mind or attitude that Christ had as He suffered and died for our sins. This verse also shows us that our weapon is the Word of God.

The greatest way that we could suffer would be to be put to death for our faith in Christ. That was the way that Christ suffered for us. However, to suffer in that way also means that we have ceased from sin because we will be free from sin for all eternity. Here, we are reminded that even to die for Christ only means that we will never sin again. When we arm ourselves with this understanding, it will also be our desire to live a different life. Our goal will be to enjoy the freedom that we have in Christ. In order to enjoy that freedom, we live with a new purpose in life. Instead of living to satisfy the lusts of the flesh of men, we will live to do the will of God. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” This verse says that the will of God is to serve one another through love. It is through doing the will of God that we experience what true freedom is in our lives.

We are reminded of what our lives were like before we placed our faith in Christ. In 1 Peter 4:3 we read, “For we *have spent* enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.” Most of the people to whom Peter was writing probably became Christians as adults. As such individuals looked back at their lives before they came to Christ, they were glad that they no longer had to live as they had lived before they knew Christ.

Peter went on to describe what life was like before those people became Christians. The word that is translated “lewdness” means “*outrageous and shameless participation in sensual sin.*” The word that is translated “lusts” means “*a desire for what is forbidden.*” These activities are often accompanied by drunkenness. The word translated “revelries” has the thought of drinking and partying late into the night with the sins that go along with such wild parties. “Abominable idolatries” speak about all of the sins that go along with idol worship. Here, we see that Peter understood the background of many of those who had become Christians and also gives a description of the lives of many people today who are not yet Christians. Romans 6:21 says, “What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is death.*” Here, we see that the things we did before we came to Christ now make us ashamed.

We also see how former companions in sinful living react when people become Christians and Christ changes their lives. 1 Peter 4:4-6 says, “In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with *them* in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of *you*. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” When people are living to satisfy their sinful lusts, they think people are strange when their lives are changed by Christ.

The word that is translated “strange” means “*to be surprised, astonished or shocked by one whose life is changed.*” 1 Peter 4:12-13 says, “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” Instead of being shocked or surprised when we suffer for Christ, we are to rejoice for the opportunity to share in the sufferings of Christ.

In contrast, the people who are not Christians are shocked and surprised when we do not join them in their sinful living, especially since we were formerly a part of those who lived that lifestyle. They cannot understand why we do not want to continue joining them in their sinful living. The word that is translated “dissipation” means “*a life devoted to sinful living.*” One of the two other places this word is used in the New Testament is Ephesians 5:18 where we read, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” Here, we see that instead of joining others in their sinful living we are to be filled with the Spirit. When we are filled with the Spirit, we will speak and live boldly for Christ. This is the part that people that are not Christians cannot understand as they observe our lives. As a result, that is why they speak evil of us.

However, the day will come when they will have to give an account to God for the lives that they have lived if they do not repent and place their faith in Christ. Revelation 20:12-13 says, “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.” Each person that has failed to repent and place his or her faith in Christ will give an account at this final judgment. Those who have not repented will not have their names in the Book of Life. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Here, we see that each of those persons will experience eternal judgment in the lake of fire.

In contrast, those who had the Gospel preached to them and placed their faith in Christ will have a very different future. Even though Christians have experienced physical death like those who have rejected Christ, for the Christians it is only physical death. That physical death is also the result of sin. Romans 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned--.” However, each Christian has received spiritual life. Christ told Nicodemus in John 3:5-7, “Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.”’” Here, we see that spiritual birth is necessary.

Ephesians 2:1 says, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” There is a great reward for all those who have received spiritual life. Ephesians 2:4-7 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Throughout eternity, we will experience the exceeding riches that Christ has provided for us by His kindness.

That eternal reward is described in Hebrews 12:22-24 where we read, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.” As we help our physical and spiritual children understand the reward that we have because we have placed our faith in Christ, any suffering that we experience on this earth will seem like nothing. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to live and suffer for Christ.