

XXXIV. I Peter in Biblical Perspective

The Elect in Exile

“Arm Yourself”

I Peter 4:1–6

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We will be looking at I Peter 4:1–6 for the next couple of studies but I’m going to start by reading the section we just finished. I Peter 3:18–22, 4:1–2 says [18] *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, [19] in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, [20] because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. [21] Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, [22] who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.* (Remember that when this was written it wasn’t written with divisions of chapters and verses. It was a letter.)

[4:1] 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.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

We are at a mile marker in this travel log written by Peter. When I started in ministry my first congregation was in Miami, Florida for three wonderful years. After that we went to Charlotte, North Carolina for 17 years and then here in Birmingham, Alabama going on 20 years. When we were in Miami about twice a year we would travel by car north up four states and back and we kind of had the travel log down pat. We knew what to look for, what we were going to pass on the way and what roads to take. It took pretty much took all day for us to travel from Charlotte to Jacksonville, Florida with our three kids and a dog. Then this wonderful travel log moment came as we would leave Jacksonville which was a sign that is still there today that says Miami 305 miles. On the one hand it was unbelievably discouraging but on the other hand I knew where I was and I was half way there, on my way home.

Peter has pastorally laid out the travel log of the Christian life. He uses language like ‘you’re pilgrims, wanderers, sojourners, pilgrimage, exile’ and that so affected one of the forbearers of the faith whose name was John Bunyan. I love to read through his works whenever I can and one of his works is Pilgrim’s Progress. This epistle of I Peter highly influenced what Bunyan wrote because of the language Peter uses and Bunyan saw how Peter was giving us the Christian life.

Peter was borrowing from Old Testament imagery of the covenant people of God who were under the bondage of slavery, liberated as they were walking through the wilderness for 40 years and then to the Promised Land. That becomes a glorious picture, not through Moses but through Jesus, of how we are liberated from the bondage of sin in a broken world as we are on a pilgrimage with a message, ministry and mission until we get to a new heavens and a new earth, as he is laying out the Christian life for us step by step.

Peter starts by giving us our identity. Who are you? You are an elect exile. You are an elect for that's your identity by the grace of God in Jesus Christ through the love of Christ because Christ has gone to the cross to save you from your sins. He gave you His Spirit and brought you to Himself. He is doing a work in you and is preparing a place for you for you are the elect of God secured by the sovereign love of God in Christ. Your identity has nothing to do with your previous life. I had multiple sinful addictions in my life and thankfully that is not who I am. He gives you 13 identifiable Gospel blessings of who you are in Christ starting in I Peter 1:3 all the way through I Peter 3:12, before you ever know what you do for Christ. You are not who you are by what you were before you were converted nor after you are converted. You are who you are because of what Christ did for you on the cross and doing in you by His Spirit.

Then Peter tells you what you are to do for Christ as exiles, as wanderers. You are not just wandering around for you are on a mission, with a message and a ministry. Peter gives you five Gospel commands in your travel log of the Christian life as you are moving along in your pilgrimage to the Promised Land of the new heavens and new earth. Now that we are coming to a sixth Gospel command I would like to remind you of the first five.

The first Gospel command that was given in I Peter 1 was the personal pursuit of pervasive holiness in life. Remember this is not what you do to be saved but because you are saved. What does Jesus want me to say, be and do in my life? Peter told us to be holy as I (Christ) am holy. So we are to be holy in all that we do.

The second Gospel command was to have a sincere and heart-felt love for one another. You are not on this journey alone. We need each other.

The third Gospel command is a cultivation of an appetite for God's Word preached, read, memorized and sung. You can't know what is holy unless you know the Word of God. Long for the Word of God preached.

The fourth Gospel command was a lifestyle of obedience stimulating praise to God. Do you see how these Gospel commands work together? As you know and learn the Word of God you want to embrace it and keep that which He has called you to. Your desire to obedience will stimulate praise to God in the lives of those who are looking on – believers and unbelievers.

The fifth Gospel command was being in subjection to every human institution silencing the ignorance of foolishness. This is a very challenging dynamic for this calls for subjection in a marriage, in a family, in the body of Christ, to those in authority over you, etc. Now it is always limited for if the authorities cause you to transgress God's Word then you must obey God rather than man but you don't start out looking at the loop holes. I start with a heart of subjection out of confidence to the supremacy of King Jesus who is ruling over all things and causing all things to work together for good.

After Peter gives these Gospel blessings and Gospel commands he then takes almost half of the epistle to talk about Christian suffering. This is not Christians who suffer in a broken world but Christian suffering that is suffering for Christ's sake, for righteousness sake. He starts this section off in I Peter 3:13 which says *[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?* And there are a lot of people who want to harm you. In fact, unless God intervenes they will want to harm you for living this life.

We have been blessed to be in about a 200 year bubble in this country where God has intervened with Gospel awakenings and revivals but the majority report over these last 2,000 years is when Christians confess and conform to Christ the world doesn't give you a parade. They come after your livelihood. They ostracize, mock and attack your life. In 2018 and

average of 11 Christians a day were put to death by governments simply because they were Christians.

Introducing suffering is a big deal for Peter because he had to learn this the hard way. The big deal is that every true Christian who by God's grace is intentionally living for God's glory will at some time to some degree in some manner will suffer for Christ's sake. Peter took seriously what Jesus said because he knows He was telling the truth. Jesus said 'if they persecuted Me how much more will they persecute you' (John 15:20). Jesus also said 'in Me you have peace, in the world you have tribulation, take courage for I have overcome the world' (John 16:33). Peter heard Jesus give a double benediction on suffering in Matthew 5:11–12 which says [11] "*Blessed are you when (not if) others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" This is suffering for Christ's sake.

Peter will deal with this subject of Christian suffering from I Peter 3:13 all the way to I Peter 5:11 and 28 times he will use the word suffering, for Christ's sake. He will also help you get your eyes off of the suffering by putting your eyes on Jesus who suffered for you and 18 times he will refer to the suffering of Christ. Now Christ didn't suffer because of His sins, for He suffered because of our sins – the Righteous for the unrighteous. His suffering was unique – it was once and for all. His suffering actually atoned for sins but His suffering is the reason why I suffer for it is the call to suffering and He becomes the example. We need to remember that Christ's suffering is the foundation (why I suffer), the formation (learning how to suffer) and the motivation for Christian suffering for we gladly suffer for Him who suffered for us.

Paul and the other Apostles taught about this suffering as well. Paul said 'all who would live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' (II Timothy 3:12). That is an unbelievable statement of clarity. He also said 'it has been granted to you to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake' (Philippians 1:29). Many of us quote a verse written by Paul that sometimes is quoted a little bit out of context and that is Philippians 4:13 which says [13] *I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.* This is what the baseball player may say about his 450 foot homerun or what the business man says about his business success.

Philippians 4:13 was written in the context of Paul saying it was granted for him to suffer and then he says he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. That is why Latimore can say to Ridley as they are being burned at the stake one October morning in 1556, 'Be of good courage master Ridley by God's grace today he shall strengthen us and we shall light a candle for Christ that shall never be put out. We can do this by the strength that God shall supply.' All of the Apostles knew this because they looked to Christ and saw what He had done and how it was done.

Now Peter is ready to give us his sixth Gospel command. Before I read this I want you to know that I love the chapter and verse divisions in the Bible because it's a good way for me to find things but sometimes when they made the division in certain places I'm not sure why they did it at a certain place and this is one of those places. I'm not sure why you would make a chapter division when the first word in the chapter is 'therefore.' Therefore tells you that what is about to be said is connected to what was said before it. At the end of I Peter 3 he has just talked about Christ's suffering and then I Peter 4:1 says [1] *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.*

The sixth Gospel command is arm yourself with the mind of Christ to endure the spiritual warfare of suffering for Christ as you live for Christ in this world. When Peter uses the term 'arm yourself' it is military language and you are in spiritual warfare here. If you are living for Jesus you will always be spiritual warfare. Praise God the war has been won but you still have battles. The illustration I like to use is when the men got on those cliffs at Normandy because the enemy was toast but there is still going to casualties. When Jesus rose from the grave Satan, sin, death, hell was all done for He has defeated all His enemies and ours but we have to go hedge row by hedge row, nation by nation with this glorious message of the Gospel. When we bring this message we will be under attack because even though Satan has been defeated he has not yet been destroyed. The evil empire will always strike back and when it does it's called spiritual warfare.

When you are suffering for Christ's sake the first step is to arm yourself. The Marine Corp Re-con says 'lock and load.' Peter is saying get ready. How do you arm yourself? You arm yourself for suffering in the flesh as Christ suffered in the flesh by finding out how Jesus viewed it. If you are going to suffer for Christ as you live for Christ you need to arm yourself with the mind of Christ. Having introduced you to Christian suffering and then to Christ's suffering, then he tells us what we learn from Christ. Learn how to approach suffering in the flesh by looking at how Christ suffered and you begin with how Christ viewed suffering. This was the big lesson Peter was learning because he did not have a theology of suffering nor a theology of Christ's suffering.

Peter even rejected Christ's suffering. In Matthew 16:13–23 says [13] *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." [15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" [16] Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [20] Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

[21] From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. [22] And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." [23] But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Peter pronounces a malediction on Jesus' sermon point that He will go to Jerusalem to be killed and will be raised on the third day. Peter got a great theology of exaltation in Matthew 16:16–19 but Peter wanted nothing to do with the theology of humiliation but Christ is about to teach him and show him. Peter has learned his lessons well and that is why he refers to Christian suffering 28 times and 18 times he brings us to the sufferings of Christ. To know how to view suffering we have to view it through the mind of Christ. How do you view the mind of Christ, as the will of God or as an intrusion? Suffering is God's appointment for there is something He is doing in it. Jesus shows us how to endure suffering by how we look at suffering with a Christian mind.

Now you can have a Christian mind and articulate every point about Christian suffering but it still not get to your heart, but you can't have a heart that embraces suffering without it first getting to your mind. You can stop it at the mind where it never gets to your heart but you can't have it in the heart without first coming to the mind. Paul said this in Philippians 2:5–8, *[5] Have this **mind** among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* Then God exalted Him.

Peter had a theology of exaltation that rejected suffering. Jesus showed us the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Jesus showed us the theology of suffering that leads to exaltation. After Paul gives us the majesty of the Gospel in Romans 1 through 11 he then says in Romans 12:1–2, *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice (be ready to suffer), holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* Our minds need to be transformed and changed and that's why we need to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ.

Why should we do this? Peter gives us four reasons or four motivations. In I Peter 4:1 he says whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. Our first motivation is so that we can cease from sin. What does this mean? There are three interpretations of this. One commentator says that the 'whoever' (cease from sin) refers to Jesus. Some say no that's believers who having suffered in the flesh have ceased from sin. Before I get to the third interpretation I want to tell you why I don't think the first two I've given you aren't true.

Whenever you come to difficult passages that are hard to understand there are three things I'd like for you to remember. One, the Bible cannot contradict itself so whatever it means cannot be contradictory with the whole counsel of God. The Bible doesn't say God has truths it says God has truth. It stands in harmony so it can't be contradictory. Two, you have to give credence to the content – what are the words actually saying? Take the time to find out the content of what you're trying to understand. Thirdly, find out what the immediate context and the ultimate context in Scripture is.

When you take these three things and examine this I Peter 4:1 verse I don't think that 'whoever' means Jesus because it's a broad term when it says '*whoever has* suffered in the flesh.' One reason I also know it's not Jesus is because Jesus never ceased from sin because He never sinned to begin with. I think the text is referring to someone who has suffered in the flesh that at one time had sin but now in some sense has ceased from sin. Two, I don't think it's referring to the believer because I don't think the Bible teaches sinless perfection on this side of eternity. In fact in I John it says that if we say we haven't sinned we're liars. So I don't think those who appeal to this for sinless perfection that there is some crisis of suffering where you'll end up being sinlessly perfect the rest of your time here. That is not how the Bible teaches and it can't contradict itself. This verse also doesn't say 'ceased from sins' plural. It is 'ceased from sin.'

Here is what I think Peter is saying. In the midst of enduring suffering for Christ's sake you are making a declaration that the dominion and reign of sin has been broken in your life. You still have sin living in your but you no longer live under its dominion. When the world says to you to give up this truth of Christ or this will happen to you then you say let it happen because

if they take your life then praise the Lord they have just promoted you, because you have a different King. That King is Jesus. It's not the will of the world but the will of God that becomes your heart and God has broken the power of sin. This is what Peter is referring to in this I Peter 4:1 verse.

First of all, to have a life and heart for Christ that is willing to suffer you have to have a mind for Christ. In the mind for Christ you know that in the encounter and endurance of suffering for Christ we have to opportunity to declare and affirm before a watching world and to ourselves that sin has no more dominion. I was born a sinner and that's why I sin. Now that I have been born again sin no longer reigns in our mortal bodies. In other words, Peter is saying what Paul is saying in Romans 6:14–15 which says *[14] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. [15] What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*

I still have an old man living in me which is a principle of sin but I am no longer under the power of sin. Its dominion has been broken and because it has been broken Christ is my identity and not any of my past sins. I'm not a gambling Christian or a fornicating Christian or a lazy Christian for those things may have been true of me in my past but I have been forgiven and they have been broken. Now do those things come back when my heart is not focused on Christ by way of my mind? Yes but my identity now is Christ and suffering will be a part of my life in Christ. Suffering for Christ sake shows the world that sin no longer has dominion in my life.

Secondly, I have a definitive witness, for no longer does sin reign. We not only have a declaration of who is King in our life, Jesus and not sin, but we have a definitive break from sin – no longer.

Thirdly, we no longer have the mind of the world and we reject the will of the world. The time is past for the Christian of orgies, carousing, drinking parties, etc. There is a definitive break with the mind of the world, for in Christ there is a new way of life. I'm not throwing a drinking party to tell someone about Jesus but I'll show up to one to tell you about Jesus, nor will I want any longer the carousing or double entendre jokes. I do have an old man within that keeps wanting to come back to the things of the world but the dominion has been broken, the break has been declared and now the will of the world of human passions and appetites have been rejected.

I Peter 4:2 says *[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.* No longer will we live to eat, drink, for sex, for power, for work etc. but we live for Christ. Therefore we eat to live for Christ. Our work is unto the Lord and not our power or possessions. Sex is now a gift from God to initiate, recreate and procreate in marriage. A marriage is a man and woman. The world says you're a bigot if you believe this about marriage so you say 'do what you will with me for I believe in the will of God.' The mind of the world is self-gratification, self-absorption, self-reliance, self-promotion and self-exaltation but we say 'no' to that because we want the will of God for our lives.

So the fourth one is that we embrace the 'will of God' in our lives. As we do that the world will see a changed life for Christ and this leads me to Peter's sixth command.

The takeaway is the sixth command that Peter gives us and that is a divine summons to intentionally cultivate the mind of Christ to embrace the inevitable sufferings for Christ by suffering like Christ. You can cultivate the mind of Christ and it not get to your heart but you can't have a heart that is willing to suffer without first having Christ's mind. I know no shortcuts on this. I know this will be unpopular with many of you. You can't have a desire for the mind of Christ and treat the preaching, reading or memorizing of the Word as if it's an add-on in life. The mind of Christ is in the Word of God. The will of God is in the Word of God. The precept

will of God you can't know unless you study His Word to show yourself approved. It just can't be done.

So if you obey this sixth command you elevate the priority of preaching, the primacy of the Word and prayer in your life, for the Word and prayer are absolutely crucial to cultivate the mind for Christ. When you cultivate the mind for Christ you see suffering as a declaration of who is King, Jesus, you see a definitive break with the world, you see a rejection of the mind of the world of unbelief and human appetites that all point to idolatry and you are now wanting the will of God. The mind of Christ is what brings you through this process.

Jesus in the midst of suffering delighted to do the will of His Father. John 4:34 says [34] *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work."* Where was the greatest suffering of Jesus? It was at the cross and as He contemplated the cross in the garden His blood vessels were bursting and He also sweat blood as He prayed to His Father (Luke 22:44). As He anticipated in His sanctified humanity what it was going to be for the cup of suffering of all of hell for all of the sins of all of His people to fall upon Him as He takes their place and as God His Father separates from Him He says in Matthew 27:46, [46] *"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"* that is, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* For on the cross He is no longer 'Me' but Harry and you and that suffering is coming to Him.

What is His mindset? Jesus says in Matthew 26:39, [39] *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."* We don't seek suffering but when it comes how do we view it? We view it with the mind of Jesus. Manifest not the will of the world but manifest the will of God in the midst of your suffering. Jesus did this for you and if you have never come to Him please this day come. He took your place so that your place would be with Him and He is preparing a place for you. If you have come to Him do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that comes to you. Look at it through the mind of Christ which will allow you to respond with the heart of Christ and tell the world that sin no longer reigns but Christ by His grace reigns in me. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Take a few moments in silent prayer. You have heard my invitation and if you haven't yet come to Christ please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and we would be happy to pray with you personally and confidentially. Today, perhaps you want to be ready to suffer for Christ and maybe you're in the middle of suffering for Him at a job or in a relationship and it's for righteousness sake and not because of your sin or those doing evil and so you need to pray with someone. Please call us we'll be happy to pray with you. We are always here to help you cultivate a heart for Christ by having the mind of Christ that you might live for Christ. When the world brings its assault you will use it as a platform for Christ. O Lord, let us always be ready to give an account of the hope within us, with gentleness, conviction, courage and compassion for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

FIVE GOSPEL COMMANDS/AXIOMS FOR "ELECT EXILES"—DIVINE SUMMONS

1. Personal pursuit of a pervasive holiness in life.
2. Sincere and heart-felt love for one another.
3. Cultivation of an appetite for God's Word.
4. A lifestyle of obedience stimulating praise to God.
5. Subjection to every human institution silencing the ignorance of foolishness.

CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

Every true Christian, who by God's grace is intentionally living for God's glory, will at some time to some degree suffer for Christ's sake.

CHRISTIAN SUFFERING AND THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

The sufferings of Christ are the Foundation, the Formation, and the Motivation for Christian suffering.

GOSPEL COMMAND #6

Arm yourself with the mind of Christ to endure the spiritual warfare of suffering for Christ as you live for Christ in this world.

FOUR CONNECTED REASONS AND MOTIVATIONS

1. Cease from sin
2. Definitive witness
3. Reject the will of the world
4. Embrace the "Will of God"

LIFE TAKEAWAY

A Divine Summons to intentionally cultivate the mind of Christ to embrace the inevitable sufferings for Christ by suffering like Christ.