

# Living a Holy Life under Persecution

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Preacher: Brady Owens

[ 0 : 00 ] All right, so let's open to 1 Peter, 1 Peter chapter 4. We are moving right along through here.

Peter is helping these churches understand how they are to live in a time in which they're being persecuted. He's preparing them for that.

And so every part of this helps us in some way live the Christian life, even in some of the most difficult situations and circumstances.

So let's see here at the beginning of chapter 4, verse 1 through 6, what he has to say to us today by way of the Holy Spirit. He says this, he says, 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. So as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God.

[ 1 : 06 ] 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.

With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery. And they malign you.

But they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 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.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We pray that you would make it clear to us, that we would understand it, that you would illuminate our minds, so that we might live the way you've called us to, that we might trust you, that we might lean upon you, and that you might get all the glory in Christ's name.

Amen. So my dad used to say to me all the time, he said, there are two places you are always going to behave, church and school. And if I hear you've done otherwise, you'll answer to me.

[ 2 : 20 ] And of course, I always thought to myself, well, what about all the other places? I said that one time. He said, I'll be with you everywhere. I was like, Dad, you're creepy, you know. But, you know, it was fine and dandy, but, like, the problem is, is that when I go to school and church, there's other people there.

You know what I'm saying? It's one thing to say that I need to behave, but what about all these other people that are there? Because, you know, my friend, when we were at school and it was quite tempting to do what he did, and he yelled some terrible thing to the principal, and I just fell in line.

When I get home, my dad had told me, you get one pop at school, you're going to get two at home. Well, that was true. He was true to his word. And I'm like, Dad, listen, I know I need to do the right thing, but when you got all these other people doing the wrong thing, it's kind of hard to do the right thing.

How much more would it be hard to do the right thing when the people doing the wrong thing are doing the wrong thing towards us, and they want us to stop doing the right thing.

You know, that's really what persecution is aimed at, wanting us to leave off doing the right things so that they don't have to deal with their conscience because the right thing is playing out in front of them.

[ 3 : 42 ] Peter is basically saying to these Christians, it's hard to live righteously. It's hard to live wholly when you're being persecuted, but that's what he's telling us to do in this passage, and he gives us some truths that I think will help us as we fight in that battle.

Matter of fact, I see three truths. The first is we need to understand how to think like Christ. We need to understand how to avoid our old life, and we need to understand how God changes people. The first one is how to think like Christ. It's there in verse 1 and 2, and there's a command in this passage, and the command is to arm yourselves with the same way of thinking as Jesus Christ. The same way as of thinking. Now, what is this thinking of Jesus Christ? What is he talking about? Well, the first verse begins with the fact that since Christ suffered in the flesh, and so I think that what he's doing is he's connecting back to chapter 3, verse 18, when he says, 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.

So, it was Christ's mind to give himself freely for his people. It was Christ's mind for the righteous to die for the unrighteous.

[ 5 : 19 ] It was Christ's mind to give himself as a sacrifice. And so, he's telling us to arm ourselves with the mind of Christ.

And what's interesting is that this word, to arm yourselves, is a word of great urgency. It's an urgency that would be spoken in the military.

And I tried to think of a way to describe this, and the best I had was a story that my dad told me. When he was in Vietnam, it was one night, and they had this bunker, and several of them were down.

It was a couple of steps down, kind of put into the ground, and they were all in the bunker asleep, probably about five of them. And my dad was the only one awake, and in the middle of the night, he hears this, thump, thump, thump.

And what happened is that somebody had thrown a grenade down into the bunker, and it bumped steps as it came down, but my dad heard and saw and yelled, Grenade!

[ 6 : 21 ] And everybody woke up, threw their mattresses up, and hid behind the mattresses. But it was that word of urgency to say something to move people to action. Peter is saying, arm yourselves.

Persecution is coming. Do not gently walk into this. This is not a stroll by the meadow. This is not a Sunday afternoon fishing in the river. This is arm yourselves with the thinking of Christ.

And that command is built on a foundation here in this passage, and it's a little difficult to see. He says this. He says, whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

So in other words, he wants you to arm yourselves with the same way that Christ is thinking, so he knows that you're going to then suffer in the flesh for Christ's sake.

And then he says that if you do suffer in the flesh, you've ceased from sin. Now, that's not a terribly clear translation. Here is a better way of saying that.

[ 7 : 29 ] Whoever suffers in the flesh has already been set free from sin. It's a passive. And so what's happened here is that if Christ has set you free from sin, then you will gladly suffer for him.

Our suffering for him doesn't set us free from sin, but because sin has no mastery over us anymore, because you have to think of sin like a principle or like a rule or law of life that sin controls us.

It's a tyrant, right? And so when we've been set free from that sin, we then have this ability to suffer for the sake of Christ.

Well, the results of that just go right along with that. It's like it takes it and keeps it going because it gives us unto this end there in verse 2 where it says, No longer for human passions, but for the will of God.

In other words, having the mind of Christ should result in you and I craving and longing and desiring to live according to God's will.

[ 8 : 44 ] There should be, because Christ has saved me, a growing, increasing desire to live the way God says and not what I think.

To live the way that God says, not the way I'm instinctually tempted to act. I need to live in such a way that it obeys him and follows his commands.

Well, imagine how you would respond if you were fired from your job in a truly unjust way.

Your boss wanted you to do something illegal and because you refused to do what was wrong, you were fired for it. Okay, that's the scenario.

Now, think about your response. Would you complain about this guy to your family? Would you seek to try to get even by exposing some of his secret sins to the world?

[ 9 : 57 ] Would you plaster his shame on Facebook? Would you lie awake at night thinking about how to get even? Would you seek out some way to express your anger and frustration?

Would you lie awake and visualize his death? Would you sit and sulk for hours and cry and bemoan what is it you're going to do now and worry about what's going to happen here in the future? Beloved, these are perfectly natural, instinctual ways of reacting for someone who is headed to hell. That is not how Christians ought to act.

But we do because we're still growing and there's still a sinful nature in us. But the goal is to move from responding in those ways to responding in the ways that God has told us in his word.

And so if we're going to live wholly under persecution in a God-honoring way, we've got to adopt the mind of Christ that willingly suffers and fights against our sin.

[ 11 : 18 ] And this is hard because when we suffer, we feel like we have a right to complain. We feel like we have a right to be angry. But when we came to Christ, we gave up that right because he says that he is the Lord and he's the one who gets vengeance, not us.

And so we find ourselves in the middle of suffering, in the middle of a persecuting moment, and it's only natural to respond instinctually.

It's a knee-jerk thing. It comes to us naturally and that's what he's working in us to do is to remove from us that because he didn't call us to live instinctually.

He called us to live wholly. When he set us free from sin, he was setting us free from living instinctually so that we could live in righteousness.

So how do we get this mind of Christ? How are we to have this mind of Christ? Well, I mean, it's very simple. We study Christ. We spend time with Christ and we grow in our affections for Christ.

[ 12 : 27 ] And I was trying to figure out, well, how could I say this without going back over things we've gone over time and time again? Like you need to pray. You need to read your Bible. You need to be into the preaching of the word. You need to be in small group Bible studies.

You need to try to listen to what you're seeing here and obey these things. Like there is no other way. There's not like a shortcut and there's no pill to take, right? And so I was trying to figure out, well, think about this.

How would you become a master craftsman? Whether it's painting, whether it's woodworking, whether it's building houses, whether it's whatever it is. How do you become a master craftsman of something?

A lot of exercising, practicing, doing, and time. Getting the mind of Christ takes time and work.

And you gotta be in his word to do it. The problem that I see is that there are many people who think that they're believers who are really not and they keep acting on instinct and that ought to be a clue right there that there's something not right in their heart.

[ 13 : 36 ] If that's who you are, if you find yourself being that person, then let me say to you, repent of your sin. Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ because he can set you free from the tyranny of the instinct so that you can live in a holy way.

The second truth that we need to understand is how to avoid your old life. You see that in verses three through five. How to avoid your old life.

You'll remember he says there that for the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do. He's basically saying, listen, you once were like this.

This is where you came from. This is what your life was like. You were like the Gentiles and you lived in sensuality, passions, drunkenness.

What are all these words? I mean, I'm not gonna, I'll tell you what they mean, but I'm not gonna spend just a lot of time because I think you kind of get the idea. You know, living sensually is acting in unbridled lust.

[ 14 : 41 ] Passions are desires for immorality. Drunkenness is excessive consumption or being controlled by alcohol. The word orgies is a weird word. It comes from the festivals of Dionysus.

And here's one old scholar, the way he describes this, okay? A nocturnal and riotous procession of half-drunken and frolicsome fellows who after supper parade through the streets with torches and music in honor of Bacchus or some other deity and sing and play before the houses of their male and female friends.

In other words, to try to entice them to join them. It's just Mardi Gras, okay? That's all it is. The drinking parties, the lawless idolatry, that's what this is.

It is throwing caution to the wind. It's living what we want to do. It's YOLO. It's doing whatever comes to you in the moment naturally, instinctually, pleasure-seeking and running after that. What he's saying, he is not saying that Christians ought to be miserable, but he's saying there's something specific about these things because all of these things are gifts that have been corrupted.

[15:50] Sex and alcohol and all of these being with friends, these are gifts from God that have been corrupted by mankind and by the sin of our hearts so that they can no longer be something that can be used in any good when it's used in this way, these human passions.

And so Peter is telling them, you've got to remember from where you came from and then you've got to recognize this. Prepare for insults. Prepare for insults.

Because the old running buddies, they're going to be surprised when you do not join them in the flood of debauchery. And I thought to myself, if anybody understands the idea of flood, it'd be you folks.

Somebody in Arizona, they don't get the idea of flood. I mean, here we have an idea and a conception of flood. And if you can just imagine that it's not pushing water and trees downstream, but it's pushing debauchery.

Debauchery is all of these sins lumped in one big, huge category. If that river were just sin and immorality, when you won't join them, when you won't jump in your raft and jump on the river of their debauchery and go downstream with them, they malign you.

[17:14] They're surprised, he says. They're surprised. Why are they surprised? Because the unbeliever doesn't understand the heart change that has happened because of Christ.

And so because of that, they malign you. And here's the thing, that word malign is the same word from where we get the word blasphemy. They blaspheme your name, which is a type of judgment that they call down upon you.

And if you don't think that that happens today, then tell someone that you're not going to go to the so-called same-sex wedding and see what they call you. You've got to prepare your heart and recognize that they will malign you.

Maybe not all of them. Maybe not somebody personally, but certainly on a larger scale. And if you are not ready to face that, then you need to get ready to face that.

But the last thing is, he talks about waiting for judgment. He's saying, these people are going to face judgment. They will give an account to God.

[18:31] An account is a legal taxation term. You're going to pay what you owe. And this is the God who judges the living and the dead. And so we need to live holy lives.

We want to live holy lives under persecution. And one of the things we have to understand is how do we avoid our old life? We recognize that it is the old way that we've been saved from. It is going to bring insults and persecution.

But we're waiting for God to bring vindication. Because what happens is that we're trying to live the way we ought to live here and now. And we're thinking to ourselves, you know, listen, I've put everything into Christ and I've done this, but like, I don't see him coming just yet.

And is this the right thing to do? But let me tell you something. If you've put your whole heart into Christ, if you've followed him, if you've been saved by him, there is no going back to the old way. Once it's done, you've got to just keep going. When we bought our house in Port Lavaca, it needed a lot of work. And one of the things we were going to do to it was build a kitchen in between two walls that met at a 90 degree.

[19:41] One wall had a sliding glass door in it that was off of our bedroom that looked over the deck. And we had already taken and we had removed the deck and we had prepared the soil and we had dug out the piers and all this kind of stuff.

But we were still waiting on a few things and I get home from work one day and I walk in the backyard and there's my bedroom shining out to the world and there's my wife and my son. Standing between them was an eight foot long sliding glass door that they had just ripped out of the house. And I was like, I wasn't ready to do this just yet.

But once it's done, you can't put it back. Especially the way they tore it out. So you just got to go forward.

Right? And that's what we're saying here is that avoiding your old life means you've committed to Christ and you've walked away from the old life. You can't go back. If you're truly in Christ, if you're

truly one that he has saved, you're never going to be able to go back.

[ 20 : 52 ] And so you've got to prepare yourself by understanding the things that are going to happen, that the insults of the judgment of God are coming. And if you will understand that, then one of the things that that means you get to do is that every person who would insult you and stand in judgment over you saying that you're of no good, knowing that the judgment of God is coming upon them, should build into you some compassion.

because the kindness that you show them may be as close to heaven as they'll ever get. And with that kindness, you have an opportunity that perhaps through that, the Lord would open a door for you to share the gospel with them.

And maybe, just maybe, they might abandon that way of life too. So often, it's easy for us to look at people who are going to be judged by God and kind of write them off, but you know, it's the whole judgment of God that should make us have compassion and want to share the gospel.

And don't be fooled about judgment because it is coming. And I know that it's not always feels nice to think about judgment.

But the thing you have to remember is that judgment from God is not some amorphous thing. The one born in Bethlehem is the one who will do the judging.

[ 22 : 50 ] in John chapter 5, verse 22, Jesus says, for the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son. And in Matthew 16, 27, he says, Jesus says again, for the Son of Man is going to come with his angels and the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

Jesus, gentle, meek, and mild is the one who will sit on the throne judging the living and the dead. And the one who judges is also the one in whom we have our only hope.

So whether you're a Christian and you've got people in your life that you know they're going to be falling under the judgment of God, show them that compassion, share the gospel with them, or maybe you're not a Christian, you need to understand judgment is coming and Jesus is the only hope.

The third truth is to think about how God changes people. This comes from verse 6. He says, 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.

You've got to start here with that centerpiece where he's talking about the gospel being preached. And he says that the gospel is going to be preached to those who are dead and by that I believe he means those who are spiritually dead.

[ 24 : 22 ] You preach the gospel to those who are spiritually dead, they're dead in their sins, they hear the gospel and that's vital because somebody who is still in their sins, somebody who's not a Christian cannot become a Christian apart from the gospel.

They don't become a Christian because they see flowers and trees. They don't become a Christian because they see rainbows and waterfalls. They become a Christian because they hear the message of the good news that God in his love has sent his son into this world to take our punishment that our sin deserves.

That's how someone is saved. There needs to be this preaching of the gospel because without that no one gets saved. But then he goes and he gives us the reason, right?

The gospel is preached for a reason and this is a little bit like two sides of the same coin. You'll notice he says that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

Now if you were to look at the original language, those two phrases line up almost word for word in kind of a parallel fashion the way Peter wrote this and it's like that two sides of one coin because you're getting rid of one thing to have another.

[ 25 : 32 ] And he says he's preaching the gospel so that though this happens to them, they also have this. though they're judged by the world because the world is going to malign us, the world is going to blaspheme us when a person has the gospel preached to them they become a person who's a target and who is a cherished child at the same time.

They're a person who is judged by the world and yet at the same time the gospel helps them to live by the spirit the way that God lives. So the gospel is preached a person's heart is changed.

He sends us to go and preach. He commands us to go and preach and that heart changes so that even though now they're going to be judged by the world they're going to live to God.

You can think about Paul the apostle. Paul the apostle who was a betrayer of the brethren, right? I mean he was persecuting the church himself.

And yet Christ saved him. And even in that salvation he wrote to the Corinthians he says it's a little matter for me to be judged by you.

[ 26 : 49 ] He's being judged the way the world judges by the Corinthians themselves and yet he lives by the power of the spirit the way that the Lord would have to live. I think about David how David was so enthralled with who God is that he danced undignified before the Lord and when his wife confronted him and criticized him he looked at her and he said I will dance even more undignified than that.

Why? Because he is rebellious? No, but because he recognizes that because of what God has done and the change that God has wrought in us what men say about us doesn't count as much as what the spirit does in us as he changes us.

So how is it that God changes us? He changes us by the preaching of the word and by the spirit using that to truly convert us to truly convert us which means that in a moment as we hear the preaching of the word and we feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit that we repent of our sins and we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and everybody who says that they're a Christian has a moment in time when that happened.

You might have been so young that it sort of fades into a season of life and you can't remember the day and the hour but that's okay. You don't have to remember the day and the hour. The most important question is not when were you saved but the most important question is are you saved today?

Are you in this moment repenting and running from your sin because of what Christ has done upon the cross and are you trusting in him fully? Trusting in his life, his death and his resurrection to count for you?

[ 28 : 31 ] because if that's where your hope is today then you are his and if that is not where your hope is then what's keeping you from it?

So I would say to you Christians to examine your heart to ask the Lord for clarity. You know when I got to college and I had read several different things I spent some time because I was not saved until I got to college but I had lived a Christian life up to that time and it was a hard thing to sit there and think to myself that in September September 22nd had I died I would have busted hell wide open because I was not fully trusting in the Lord in what he had done for me and on Sunday the 23rd all of a sudden it just came super clear don't be afraid to examine that's what Paul tells the Corinthians in 2nd Corinthians 13 test yourselves to see if you are in the faith it's a good thing to do and so I encourage you to examine your heart because you see there's going to be there's going to become persecution at some point and even lost people even people who are not even Christian they may suffer and go through some kind of persecution and they may even look at us and say listen it's no big deal you can get through it but here's the thing it's not about getting through persecution and being able to look back and say

I made it through that tough time it's about going through persecution and being able to say I'm doing this all for the glory of Christ and a lost person can never do that you need to know how God changes people so that we know that we've been changed and are you ready are you ready to face these things let's pray together again