



This past week I did a deep dive into Christian persecution. I read several articles on the internet trying to distill the history of persecution of Christians. The persecution of the Church has been so widespread and horrible that it is pretty much impossible to summarize it in a few words. Persecution of Christians has happened since the Church began. It started with Stephen, and it continues until today. You will be stunned and confused if you do a simple Google search of

"Persecution of Christians" on Wikipedia. It almost seems that Christianity is synonymous with suffering. I don't think any other people of faith have suffered as much for their faith as Christians.

There is too much persecution even to digest what has happened to believers. The persecution became the worst during the reign of Diocletian in the Roman Empire (basically between 200 and 300 AD). It was so horrific that Believers ended up just throwing themselves into fires that were kindled to burn them alive before the Romans had their way with them. In reading all of this, I have come up with two observations: 1) Satan is determined to do anything to stamp out the Church, and 2) The Church is unique among all religions of history in how much it has suffered. Christians have been and are persecuted like adherents to no other world religion. Something is VERY DIFFERENT about the Christian Faith.

As we read 1 Peter, you may wonder how you are being persecuted. If you live in the United States, you live in a Christian historical anomaly. The freedom you have experienced and are experiencing is unusual and without precedent. The reality is that you are not suffering systematically, at least not yet. This doesn't mean that suffering is not on the way. Many of us do, however, experience individual suffering.

Some have unbelieving spouses. Some spouses will do anything to stop their believing spouse from coming to services. An unbelieving spouse might make you uncomfortable, make fun of you, or prohibit you from attending Church. This doesn't sound much like suffering to those that don't experience it, but it can make a person miserable. Although we don't endure much systemic suffering in American society, we need to realize it can change in a moment. Praise God; we're not dealing with this kind of persecution now. This is a word to us about what might come to us. This is a message also to all believers worldwide that are, in fact suffering unbelievably at present because they believe in Jesus. Peter tells us,

¹Therefore, 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, ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ 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.

Arm Yourselves with the Mind of Christ

Arm yourselves with the same way of thinking that Jesus had. This means how you feel about the whole idea of suffering. Do you believe that you are immune to suffering? To arm yourself means to PUT ON PROTECTION. And with what can you protect yourself? We can prepare for suffering by putting on an attitude that prepares us to endure suffering.

In 1 Corinthians 2:16, Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13 and tells all believers, "We have the mind of Christ." "having the mind of Christ" means that you participate and share in the plan, purpose, and perspective of Jesus. It means seeing things from His perspective.

¹³ These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. ¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. ¹⁶ For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" "But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:13-16)

Having the mind of Christ means we have an inside understanding of God's plan for the world: to bring order instead of chaos, to bring redemption instead of condemnation, and to reconcile all of humanity to Himself. It means understanding that God "seeks and saves the lost" (Luke 19:10) . It means that we have humility, compassion, and a love for one another that the world cannot understand.

To have the mind of Christ, one must first come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. After salvation, we come under the influence of the Holy Spirit, who indwells us, enlightens us, and empowers us with wisdom and the Mind of Christ. We have one discipline that we must follow: yielding ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and allowing Him to do transformative work in our lives. (Romans 12:1-2) That yielding is where we perform our part, making the hard choices to say "not my will but thine."

Holiness that Comes Through Suffering

Peter continues, *"for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,"*

When I enrolled in seminary, I hoped to have several questions answered that were a mystery to me. I wondered, "Why do Christians suffer, and why is there so much suffering in the world?" CS Lewis said that pain is something that demands our attention. When we are in pain, we are most attentive; we listen. Yes, God winks at us and whispers to us in our pleasures. He speaks to us in our minds, but **HE SHOUTS TO US IN OUR PAIN**. Suffering is God's megaphone to get our attention and wake up a deaf world.

In verse two, Peter tells us that suffering gets our attention and prompts us to no longer chase after the things that do not matter. It takes our attention off of the things that give us pleasure and gives us laser focus to look for the will of God and to follow it. Have you ever been so miserable that you just shouted to God, "Lord, I'm dying inside. I am miserable. Just tell me what you want of me so I can do it".

Peter reminds us of what we left behind.

³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ 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.

Peter tells us that we spent enough time living the life of an unbeliever. When we did that, we were walking in lewdness (which means: ignorance, foolishness, viciousness, and lascivious behavior). Our focus was on me, me, and me, and what feels good to me, me, and me. It might have involved drunkenness, partying, sex before marriage, and worship of other "idols." Remember that idols can be boys, girls, music, course talk, etc. Idols are what our flesh long after. They are anything or anyone that comes between us and a relationship with God. Peter then points out in verse four that the people you used to run with will be your most prominent critics.

v.4 I remember facing persecution from my friends after I got saved. They made fun of me for my devotion to the Lord. I had a close friend who had been my closest friend in grammar and Junior High School. When we had all gone off to college, he used to ask

my other friends, "Is Faber still majoring in Jesus?" He was mocking me and making a joke out of me. It didn't feel good to hear these things. Ironically, as we grew older and got into our mid-fifties we both ended up in Grimes County. After my dad died in 2009, this friend asked if he could come work in my office with me. His life was empty and he didn't know how to fill it back up. It was interesting because he felt safe with me. He knew that I had something that he desperately needed. He had mocked me when we were young, but now he longed for what I had. He sensed something solid and real in me.

I continued to love him and to openly share the gospel with him. Even after suffering multiple seizures from alcoholism, he refused to believe that God loved him. I drove him to West Texas to a clinic to dry out. I had to let him sip on a wine bottle all the way there to keep from going into detox seizures. I put a wrist band on him that said, "God" loves you: He always has, He always will". On the way to rehab he sat up in the back seat and asked me, "How did this ever happen to me?" I told him, "This happened one choice at a time". His wife paid \$30,000 to send him to that rehab center, but when he got home, within two weeks he was back drinking all day long.

In the next couple of months that followed, he drank continuously. When the time came around to go to his son's graduation, he was too drunk to even go. I went. I was there. I took the son and his mother to dinner to celebrate the graduation. When I returned to see my friend, the wrist band was gone and he was hopeless. Not wanting to see the end, his wife left. Within a week, in a drunken stupor he staggered through his home, and he fell into the corner of a piece of furniture. He hemorrhaged into his brain. He was dead. THAT IS WHAT THE FUN AND GAMES OF THE WORLD HAVE TO OFFER. My friend's problems were not caused by drinking. They were caused by rejecting the love of Christ to forgive everything that he had ever done. He submitted himself to fleshly desires for temporary euphoria and relief. His drinking was caused by not loving himself. He hated himself for the disaster that his life had become. I've told you this story so you will get a clear picture of a life of "dissipation". That means a life wasted.

v.5 There is judgment coming though. Before folks get all excited about that, we must remember that judgment (the purifying work) begins at the household of faith. It begins with us. (v.17) This is not talking about judgment as to going to heaven or hell. Jesus took that judgment for you and me on the cross. This is talking about the pruning and disciplinary work that God does in our lives. He deals with us with respect to the kind of lives that we are living. God is at work purifying us, but He sees us through the blood of Jesus. So we're righteous before Him. That's what I call the standing v. temporary state of our walk. As for the "dead", that is the dead in Christ and they will be judged for their rejection. Such are those who choose to be apart from God in this life. And their judgment will be that God will honor their request and He will grant them an eternity apart from Him. That is eternal separation.

V.6 We talked about this on Sunday when I mentioned the rich man and Lazarus. In that story, the rich man had rejected God and the poor beggar Lazarus had been faithful. In this "waiting room" (sheol, paradise, Abraham's bosom), one side was a place of comfort and the other side was a place of torment. Jesus opened the way for us to go to heaven. Those who died in faith were comforted, and those who died rejecting God were in torment. Jesus went and preached the gospel to the dead and took those from paradise, and He took them to heaven with Him.

The main idea for this teaching tonight is that we will endure suffering as believers. This shouldn't come as a surprise to us because we are told that we will share in Christ's suffering. For Americans, political suffering and societal suffering are not something that we have to endure at present. No doubt this will inevitably come. Of course, we should do what we can politically to avoid it, but we shouldn't be surprised when it comes. We are told how to handle it when it does happen, and that is to have the "mind of Christ". This mainly means seeing things from God's perspective which is something we can only do through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, revealing to us the workings and mysteries of God.

We shouldn't be surprised when the world hates us because the manner in which we live our lives is certain to convict the world around us. With their conviction will come anger and hostility. We will be called hate-filled because we choose to follow the truths of God's Word. Let us have the mind of Christ. Let us speak the truth, but always in love. Let us endure because that is what we are called to do. We don't need to go looking for suffering. It will come to us. But if we have eternal perspective, we will realize that in our suffering we become stronger.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1)

Let us stay focused. Let us never be double-minded.

Let us pray.