

Exiles of the Dispersion Pt 4

As we continue in 1 Peter Chapter 4, the Apostle continues to contrast the way of the world vs. those of us who are "followers of the way" as believers were called in the first century before they were called "Christians". He contrasts the choice between a life of sin, leading to spiritual death vs. dying to self which leads to eternal life. He charges us with modeling God's grace to a graceless and hopeless world. Then he finishes by telling us that we should consider ourselves honored to be sharing in His suffering.

1. Choose Life or Death

4:1-6

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 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.

We have a choice as to how to live our lives. Even if we don't consciously make a choice, we still have made a choice. We can choose to give in and live the way this world live in which case we are dead in sin or;

We can choose to live in Christ, in which case we are dead to sin.

Our suffering is a daily reminder of the fact that we live in the footsteps of Jesus suffered for our sake.

When we chose to live for Christ, it baffles the minds of those who do not follow the way of life. They think they are living it up and having fun and they can't understand why we don't want to live that way. Because of that they are going to attack you because you make them look bad and they have to find a way to tear you down to their level. To them it doesn't compute that we would choose to live lives that to them are boring and seemingly bland. There has to be something wrong with us and so they attack us because we are "uppity" or "holier than thou". They resent us for that.

I used to run a recovery group that I called "Victors in Christ". Many of these people were dead to their families and loved ones because of their repeated behaviors while using. While in their addiction, in their minds, they were partying and having fun. They were "high", "getting buzzed", "mellowing out" and other words that described how they felt while they were using. Never mind that they were destroying their lives and those of the people around them.

In the 12-step community you are required to have a sponsor, someone who has been where you are and has gone through what you have and can help you when you are tempted to use.

In addition to a sponsor, I required them to get a sober mentor. This mentor is someone who does not struggle with addictions but knows how to have a good time.

The problem with most recovering users is that they associate their using with the good times and have no idea how to have a good time apart from using.

We are all in spiritual recovery and need to learn how to live abundant lives that are filled with joy in the spirit amid our suffering.

We need to learn how to live in the spirit.

2. Stewards of God's Grace

7-11

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.

Live in such a way that your sins won't hinder your prayers.

Love in such a way that even when you screw up people will give you grace because of the way that you live your life overall and the love that you show to others. Love God above all and your sins will be forgiven.

Be hospitable because you love others above yourselves. Last Sunday Sam talked about the EGR's in your life. Realize that at one point in your life you were the EGR person and God didn't give up on you.

- Love them despite the way that they challenge you.
- Love them despite the fact that they take up your time asking for advice and then do the exact opposite of what you discussed.
- Love them even when they are constantly needy and bring very little to the relationship.
- Love them even when they are awkward and do and say all the wrong things.
- Love them when they betray you.
- Love them when they attack you.

Use your gifts to serve others so that through your actions, God will be glorified. Serve others as your reasonable act of worship. Don't just worship Him with your songs, worship Him with your service to others.

3. Suffering As a Christian

13-17

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?

In this world we will have trouble. In the "here" of the "here and the not yet" of the kingdom of God there will be suffering. Let that suffering come as a result of the fact that you are walking with Christ. Let Satan attack you because you are a threat to him. We will all experience "power encounters" because we serve the living God. This should not surprise us. In fact, we should rejoice that we are considered worthy of suffering for His name's sake. No matter how you are attacked, God will be with you every step of the way and it will serve to reveal His glory.

Let your walk with the Lord be your defense. Let yourself be judged by your obedience to the Gospel.

Don't complain about it. Don't be ashamed of it. Don't try to avoid it. Realize that it was for this that you were called, to share in His suffering. In sharing in His suffering, you will also get to share in His glory.

Peter then goes on to paraphrase Proverbs 31:11

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.

Conclusion

We all suffer while we live in this shell of flesh.

- Will we suffer and gain life or we will we suffer and earn judgment and death?
- Will we choose to live like resident aliens or will we accept the ways of this world and give in to them?

- Will we be witnesses of God's grace, or a reflection of the sinful beliefs of the kingdom of age?
- Will we embrace our suffering as a sign that we are deemed to be like Jesus, or will we complain and get mad at God for the pain we are suffering?

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord, come what may!