

Suffering Innocently-1 Peter 3:13-4:6

In 1 Peter 2:19-20, Peter draws a distinction between suffering innocently and suffering deservedly because of sin. It finds favor with God if a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly, but there is no credit from God when it is from wrongdoing. Peter then went on to give the perfect example of that in Jesus. Jesus suffered for us, giving us an example to follow. Peter borrows from Isaiah 53:4-9 to explain why Jesus found it necessary to suffer in this way. We are all like sheep who have strayed away from God to do our own thing. The problem is that sheep are helpless without a shepherd. They must have a shepherd to save them from harm, and to provide for them. Therefore it was absolutely necessary that Jesus save us and lead us back to the Good Shepherd. In the same way, we are to view the people in the world around us as lost sheep who need a Shepherd. We are willing to put up with abuse, insults, and suffering in order to win some for Christ, the Good Shepherd. In John 10:14, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know my own sheep, and my own know me"

The problem of suffering despite doing what is right, now becomes the subject of sustained attention in 1 Peter 3:13-4:6. Peter asked a rhetorical question in v.13 similar to the one Paul asked in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Does that mean you are bulletproof, or that you have a guaranteed "get out of trouble pass"? No, actually just the opposite may happen. At the time of Peter's writing, Nero was beginning a time of an unprecedented persecution against Christians. They were almost guaranteed some beatings, imprisonment, and even martyrdom. Therefore, Peter was meaning that they would be blessed spiritually for their sacrifice.

A New Badge of Divine Honor

In 1 Peter 3:14, Peter told his audience of Christians not to fear suffering because God would use it to bless them. In the New Covenant that Jesus introduced, suffering is not a disgrace but a badge of divine honor. The New Testament ascriptions of honor and status are revolutionary to mankind because they challenge conventional expectations and values. Instead of acknowledging wealth and political power, Jesus and His disciples honored the humble, the persecuted, and the despised. Suffering was seen as a spiritual privilege for believers. Paul's defense of his apostleship in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 defies all human logic. Paul said of his critics, "Do they claim to be servants of Christ? I far more so; in labors, imprisonments, beatings, dangers, lashes, stonings, etc." It sounds as if Paul is quite proud to wear these sufferings as his "badge of honor". Actually, he was just drawing an obvious distinction between his true ministry suffering for Christ, and their bogus ministry boasting about their worldly accomplishments. All the N.T. authors thought very highly of suffering for the Lord, as James 5:10-11 says, "As an example of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke for the Lord. Behold, we count them blessed who endured." Paul said in Romans 8:17, "if we suffer with Christ in order that we may also be glorified with Him." I think Paul looked at it as all a part of the same package. If we share all the benefits of salvation with Him, and expect to share in His

resurrection and eternal life, then we can certainly now for a little while share in the same type of innocent sufferings that He went through for us.

Apologetics

At the end of 1 Peter 3:14, Peter quoted Isa. 8 that we should not fear our persecutors, but only have a reverential fear of God. Instead of fearing men, we should “sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts”. This is the idea of honoring Christ as holy, and the sinless agent of our redemption. Since our confidence is in Him, we are always ready to defend Him. Therefore Peter said to “always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” concerning Christ. The Greek word we translate as a defense is “apologia” which is the word we get apology from. In Greek it means a formal defense against charges, but the apostles used it in the Bible to describe their ability to answer all questions about Jesus.

We can now maintain a state of preparedness for a response to any questions by simply knowing two stories—our own story, and the basic gospel story. All of us can tell our story of the difference Jesus has made in our own life, and we can combine our story with the gospel. Like all of the human race, we fall short of the standard of God, and therefore need help when it comes to the righteousness that God requires. God in His love has provided what we need in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ who died for our sins. We appropriate the atoning work of Jesus into our own life by faith. By faith we believe in Jesus as the sole means of our salvation. When we add that to our own story, we have the defense that Peter was commanding his audience to prepare.

In 1 Peter 3:16, Peter adds another element that is important to our defense to the world around us. That additional defense is keeping a good conscience. Many call that lifestyle evangelism, because when people are witnesses to our good citizenship and godly lifestyle, they are drawn to it. If Peter’s audience keeps this “good conscience”, in time the tables will be turned on those who slander them, and they will be put to shame.

Peter takes the opportunity yet again in v.18 to put a positive light on suffering by using Jesus as an example. As bad as it looked on the day He was crucified, a very positive thing came out of Christ’s suffering on the cross. Sins were atoned for “once for all”, in order that Jesus might reconcile us to God. Innocent suffering for a positive purpose is a difficult concept, especially for those who are in the midst of the painful experience, but praise God that He took His own medicine, so to speak. God Himself took on the flesh so He could suffer innocently to redeem all who would come to Him in faith to receive their pardon.

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