

Freedom to Suffer

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[0 : 0 0] As Christians, it's not difficult to see that we're slowly but surely becoming marginalized in our culture. And you can see this in the way ministers are looked at, the way churches are looked at, the way Christians are perceived.

In fact, even just a couple hundred years ago, the pastors in the neighborhood or in the city used to be the most educated people in the city or the town. And the theology, the study of theology used to be considered the loftiest of all academic disciplines.

But that's clearly not the case now. And in fact, the pastors are not so well regarded and those who follow Christianity, follow Christ, historic Christianity are considered regressive. And in this kind of environment where Christians are seen as gullible at best and perhaps bigoted at worst, how are we supposed to live?

And how are we supposed to be witnessing in this kind of context? And that's precisely the question that 1 Peter 3, verses 8 to 22 answers for us. And here he teaches us that we are to be suffering witnesses for Christ because Christ is the suffering Savior for us.

So I think he does this by going through ways in which we're supposed to suffer. And the first thing he tells us that we're supposed to suffer for one another as believers.

[1 : 2 3] And the second thing he tells us that we are to suffer at the hands of others, non-believers. And then the last thing he tells us to motivate us and give us hope in the midst of our suffering, he tells us that Christ also suffered at the hands of others.

So first look with me at verse 8. It says, Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

So if you recall, we've gone through a series of, kind of a mini-series within a series of 1 Peter. Each sermon entitled Freedom to Be Something. So freedom to be subject to human institutions.

Freedom to submit and sacrifice in the husband and wife relationship. And now here also a freedom to suffer. And it's all in the same vein.

The reason that Peter gives is the same. The command to suffer is grounded in the fact that we don't suffer at the hands of others because they deserve it. Because they deserve that honor and they have that control or power over us.

[2 : 2 8] Not because of that, but because we are submitted people to God as believers. And in the way we honor God, we suffer at the hands of others. So it's along that vein and as a summary to the believers that are listening to this or that are reading this.

So Peter is saying this verse 8 as a summary statement to all believers. Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

And this is important for our witness in the world because the way we live with one another is an important part of witness. Because the world is watching. They watch how we relate.

They watch how we talk to one another. They watch how we serve one another. And that becomes, again, a part of our witness to the world. And if you look at this list in verse 8, usually if you have modern writers writing a list of things.

Let's say the list of things that you took with you when you moved. Let's say I took my wife, my kids, and my computer, my guitars, and my, I don't know, my socks or whatever.

[3 : 30] You list the things that are most important in the beginning and you list the things that are least important in the end. In the Bible times when people wrote, they actually list things in kind of a sandwich structure.

So the most important thing you don't list first. You actually list it in the middle. And then the less important things are listed on the outside. And so here you kind of see that structure.

It's a chiastic structure where finally all of you have unity of mind. That's the first thing. And at the end, it's a humble mind. So those two things correspond. And then in the middle, in the sympathy.

And then next, a tender heart. So those two things also correspond. And in the middle is brotherly love, which sums all of that up. So that's the thing that commands it. And I think what he means here is the first is unity of mind.

So it's, and that I don't think means uniformity, right? That we need to have the same opinion, identical opinions about everything that we think, the politics or religion or theology. Rather, I think it's a call to disposition to be sensitive and to be discerning toward the beliefs, toward the minds of others.

[4 : 35] And that's why the corresponding item is humble mind. We need to have, and humble mind, it's literally, it means lowly mind, base mind.

And that used to be a derogatory term in the ancient world. But Christians have transformed that and used humility as a virtue. In fact, they said that humility is the source of all virtues.

And that's because of the example of Christ. Because he lived a life of humility, of humbling himself to his father, even though he was equal with the father, he was God. And so that kind of humility, have that kind of mind with one another.

That's what Peter's calling us to as believers. And then, not just in our thinking, but also in our feeling. Have sympathy. That means to feel with, right? To have a tender heart, to be compassionate toward one another.

That's how we're supposed to relate to one another, in our feeling. And all of that, in a wonderful way, gets summarized in brotherly love. And I've mentioned this before, but this is significant, right?

[5 : 40] Because brotherly love is not like the love that you have for your friends. Or even like the love that you have for your spouse. Because you've got to choose whom you marry.

And you've got to choose whom you be friends with. But you don't get to choose whom your brothers and sisters are, right? Because that's not your choice. But rather, it's the fact that you have the same father that makes them your brothers and sisters.

So sometimes siblings don't really get along very well, right? And often that's the case. The siblings don't get along very well. But you still live with each other. You suffer each other.

I mean, that's kind of what's intended here. Is to have brotherly love, right? So as Christians, and I think this is true. If you look back at your own experience, this was certainly true of me.

Like my best friends in college were believers. And one of them was like a heavyset African-American woman from Brooklyn.

[6 : 42] One of them was a really like six feet something tall football player from California. And another one was like, I mean, these were my best friends in college.

Not because we had anything in common. In fact, I don't think we had anything in common. Like, I mean, except for Christ, right? We had the same Heavenly Father. They were my brothers and sisters, right?

And that's exactly how we're supposed to love one another. You know what, we're not here because we necessarily like all of us, like each other more than anybody else out there in terms of personality or interests or hobbies.

Anything like that. No, but because we have the same God, same Father. We're family by virtue of that reality. And that's why we're supposed to have brotherly love. And that's such a tender thing that I cherish about the biblical injunctions.

It tells us to love in a brotherly way. And that's exactly how we witness to the watching world. John 13, 35, it says, By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

[7 : 45] And there is, so that's one way in which we're supposed to suffer as witnesses. We suffer one another, right? We suffer for one another. And that's a part of our witness to the world.

And there's yet another way we're supposed to be suffering witnesses for Christ. And that's by suffering at the hands of others as well. Not just for one another, but also others outside. From non-believers.

Look at verse 9. It says, Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless. For to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

So, because he's speaking of evil and reviling, we know that he's making a transition from addressing believers, the community of believers, to unbelievers who might revile us, who might speak evil of us.

And even in this context, he tells us, when they curse you, bless them. Pray for them, right? When they say a bad thing about you, return a good word to them.

[8 : 43] In fact, offer the good word, good news of Jesus Christ to them, right? That's the kind of relationship we're called to be in with unbelievers. And it's really nothing more than an application of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 44, where he says, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, right?

And Christians in Peter's day were particularly well acquainted with this. Because if you look at some of the history books and look at the ways in which the pagan authors accused Christians or maligned Christians, they spoke of them as people who are incestuous because they were married to one another, but then they also called one another brother and sister, right?

So they thought that they were incestuous and they actually wrote about this. They also accused Christians of being cannibals because they spoke of eating the body and blood of Christ, right?

So, I mean, it's funny, but like people who are outside, right, wouldn't have any way of verifying it. So they kind of just kind of took off, these rumors spread, and Christians were really maligned. And one of the most important ways in which they were maligned is that because they refused to worship the pagan gods that Greek society, the Roman Empire was really built on.

And the people in the Roman Empire believed that if you don't appease these gods, you're going to have bad things happen to you, bad things happen to your society and country. So because of that, Christians were also despised because they said, you are putting your personal interests ahead of the interest of society, empire.

[10 : 13] And so Christians were despised for that reason. So they were familiar with name-calling and persecution. Yet Peter tells them, do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless.

For this, to this you are called that you may obtain a blessing. And why should we do this? And the reason that he gives is, for to this you are called, right?

And we talked about this earlier in 1 Peter, where it says in chapter 1, verses 14 to 19, God says, If you call on him as a father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you are ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with the perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

So the call that he's talking about is that the Father, Holy God called us. He redeemed us, ransomed us with the precious blood of Christ, so that we are now called to be holy because our Father is holy.

And because you belong to God now, this is what you're called to. Even when you're reviled, you cannot stoop to their level and engage in profane acts and be unholy in your dealing with others.

[11 : 30] No, rather you are to bless them rather than cursing them, right? And Peter knows that this is a difficult command, so he gives us yet another reason.

And he tries to motivate us. He says, Because if you do this, you're going to obtain a blessing. And that's reassuring. And then he goes on to quote from Psalm 34, 12 to 16.

That's in verse 10 to 12, so you can follow along there. For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.

Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. This is almost a word for word quotation of Psalm 34, 12 to 16.

[12 : 29] But what's very interesting is that he leaves out one part of a verse, of the last verse, Psalm 34, 16. Because it is supposed to end by saying this.

It says, The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. Right? But he leaves that out. So why is Peter leaving that out?

And I think that's very intentional, because he knows that the time for the judgment of the ungodly is not yet. It's not now. Right? So right now is not a time of divine vengeance.

Rather, it's a time of divine patience. So it says in chapter 3, verse 9 of Peter, it says, The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some kind of slowness, but is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Right? Right? And that's the reality that we live in now, is that, yes, the kingdom has come, but it has not yet been fulfilled.

[13 : 28] And so we live in this kind of in-between age where we are going to suffer at the hands of others. The judgment of the wicked is not yet. Yet we have this hope to hold on to, and that's what Peter is referring to.

And of course, generally speaking, as believers, if we do good toward other people and speak well of other people, they're not going to be antagonistic or hate us.

Right? I mean, generally, if we're nice to people, they're nice back to us. And that's kind of what Peter's talking about in verse 13. He says, Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? So he knows that that's generally the case.

But Peter's also aware that sometimes even good deed and good speech will meet with hostility. Right? So he says, continues in verses 14 to 17. Right?

And sometimes we will be persecuted for righteousness' sake. And we talked about how doing good might lead to suffering in the context of our employment, in the context of our relationship in marriage, in the context of our relationship to human institution over the last three weeks.

[14 : 54] And so Peter's kind of continuing that train of thought. Yeah, we might suffer for doing good for society, for doing good for people. And when that happens, he wants us to remember to not fear.

Do not have fear in your hearts, he says, but he says, honor Christ as holy in your hearts. And those two things are directly related because if we have fear of people in our hearts, we're going to do what they want us to do.

We're not going to be able to honor Christ. But if we honor Christ as holy in our hearts and we deem what Christ demands of us more highly than what people demand of us or what people tell us to do, then we will be able to honor Christ as holy.

And so he reminds us in verse 12, the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous. He's watching us. And his ears are open to their prayers. So it's a picture of a God who is not aloof, right?

So he's not telling us, well, I put you in this world and if you follow me, you might suffer. And he's saying, well, just hang in there and then when you get back, when you come to me, then everything will be good. No, he's with us.

[15 : 56] He's intimately aware of what's going on. His eyes are open toward us. He's watching us and his ears are attentive. He's open to our prayers. But his face, it says, is set against those who do evil.

What a fearful thought as we think about. And that's the same thing. If we fear God, then we will not fear men in the same way.

If for, for, I've just went to the beach this week and she, and now, just first time, thanks to Lexi, I think she actually enjoyed the beach. And, and, and, and if she's, because she's seen the waves now and she's been in the big ocean, she's not going to be scared of going into a kiddie pool, which she actually used to be scared of, right?

In the same way, when we have encountered God and been in the presence of God, when we have, when we fear God, we're going to be able to honor Him rather than fearing what people will say of us or want of us.

And, and so this is how we're supposed to demonstrate our living hope, right? So He calls us to demonstrate our living hope. But He, God, Peter also calls us, and God calls us through Him also to defend our living hope, right?

[17 : 08] And you see this in verse 15. But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Yet do it with gentleness and respect, right? And making a defense is a legal, it's legal terminology. So it's the language of court.

So it's when you go into court and your attorney makes a defense for you, right? That's the kind of defense that's in mind here. And He says to be able to ready to make a defense. So if it's that kind of defense, it's not something that you do haphazardly, right?

I mean, if you go into court, the attorneys are extremely well prepared, right? They, I mean, they do their homework. They are, they know what to say. They know how, they know their case. They know how to defend their client, right?

In the same way for us, we ought to know the living hope that we have. We ought to live the living hope that we have and be so intimately familiar with it that we were able to defend it and give a case for it when people ask us, right?

[18 : 15] And notice how categorical and extensive this is because He says, always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

So always be prepared at any time, every day, when you're tired during the day and you're going, you're meeting someone on the street at night, when you're at home, we're talking and someone, an unwelcome neighbor comes to visit you, knocks on your door.

Any time of the day, any way, always be prepared and to anyone, not just to your closest friends, not just to your family, but to anyone who would ask, be ready to give a defense.

Always and to anyone, we have to be ready to make a defense. So then, in a way, then, as Christians, we live daily as those who are on trial.

We live as if we're in court, as if we're being watched, right? Because we know, because we know that if any opportunity that we have with people, any kind that we have with them can either draw them to God or repel them from God, right?

[19 : 28] And so we take those opportunities seriously and we're prepared to make a defense to anyone who comes, right? So what would this practically look like? So then if we're to demonstrate a living hope and to give a defense for a living hope, right?

And if I saw a good example of this, and I don't know if you guys follow things on social media at all, so one of the people that I follow on Twitter is Russell Moore.

He's an ethicist and a professor at Boyce College, I think, which is a Christian college in Louisville, Kentucky. And he's kind of a public intellectual for Christians, and so he's often in the news outlets.

And there was a time when Donald Trump basically said really insulting things about him. He says, oh, he doesn't know what he's talking about or something or whatever.

And then someone, while Russell Moore was getting interviewed, they asked Russell Moore, so what do you think about this? I mean, they try to put people in, you know, start fights because that brings more viewers.

[20 : 31] And then Russell Moore instead said, you know, what he said about me is exactly true. I am a great sinner in need of great help, and that's exactly why Jesus Christ came to die for me.

And so he didn't defend himself. Rather, he defended the living hope that he has. He bore under that suffering. Even though he was maligned, he was reviled.

He didn't revile back. Instead, he blessed. And in doing so, he was able to give a credible witness of the living hope that he has. And so for us, if we find out that, for example, a neighbor's been gossiping about us or slandering us, instead of, you know, lashing out and slandering them back to our other neighbors, you know, we say, you know what, there might be some truth to what you're saying, and I need to become a better neighbor.

And say that, you know, and then talk about how this is exactly why you appreciate the grace of God, and that he saves us not because we deserve it, but because he loves us first. Right?

And maybe it's, and this is kind of, some of you guys are very familiar with this, but a couple of you guys at least went to Bowdoin College, where the Christian fellowship was kicked off campus because of their, because they subscribe to biblical sexual ethics, and which is wildly malign now, widely malign now in today's culture because they see it as, think of it as, the world sees it as regressive.

[22 : 00] And so because of that, the fellowship was kicked off campus, and they're not the only one. Many campus fellowships, Christian fellowships, have been kicked off, you know, public universities and private university campuses. And, and, and I, and many of them, actually, I don't know of any of them actually going into law, starting a lawsuit to sue the school, even though they probably could come up with a compelling case on the basis of the First Amendment, they refuse to do that.

And when I talk to people in those organizations, what they say is that they're refusing to take into court to, to sue the very people that they're called to witness to.

They're saying, God called us to witness to these people in colleges, these administrators, these students. Yeah, how can we then go and sue them for this, right? So, they're living this, this reality.

They're saying, they're being, they're suffering because of Christ. They're suffering for doing good, upholding God's vision for what is good in society. That's what they're doing and for that reason, they're getting kicked off campus, not being able to take advantage of school funds, facilities, yet they're doing that for the sake of credible witness.

They suffer so that they can be credible witnesses to the campuses that they're at. And, I don't mean to say that this means we should just be pushovers and get, you know, suffer everything, you know, let people take advantage of us whenever they want and be, just be people without backbones.

[23 : 28] Because if you look at the example of Apostle Paul, he frequently uses his Roman citizenship, right, to get his legal rights.

So, for example, when they imprison him without questioning and beat him without due process, he says, well, I'm a Roman citizen. And then the guards are like, oh, no, he's a Roman citizen. And then they get scared and they let him go, right?

So he, and at one point, he even appeals to Caesar on the ground that he has the right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar when he's not satisfied with the local judgments. So he does do that.

So there is a nuance there, but the same principle applies, I would say, because why is Paul doing that? Why is he using his legal rights to get an audience with Caesar and to get out of prison?

Because he does that so that he has a platform for witness. He does that so that he could advance the gospel, right? So that's the underlying motive. And that's exactly the same for us in our suffering, right?

[24 : 26] So we suffer, not in just any case, not just to get taken all over the place, but rather we suffer so that we could advance the gospel. So then when we're suffering at the hands of others, the question to ask is not, you know, can I win this case?

Or, you know, do I, what do I have to gain? Right? Those are not the questions we ask. Rather, the question we ask is what in this situation would most advance the gospel?

What in this, what action, what speech, what in this situation will make the living hope that we have in Christ more glorious than the other things that we can do? Right?

That's the criterion. It's not personal gain. It's not about selfishness. It's about what we can do or how we can be used of God in that situation. But, if you're honest with yourself, yes, as I also have to admit, is that suffering is difficult even when we deserve the suffering.

But if that's the case, then how can we suffer unjustly at the hands of others? And this is why Peter comes to his final exhortation and motivation verses 18 to 22.

[25 : 47] 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, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 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.

So this is probably really confusing for some of you guys. This is a notoriously difficult passage and let me just take a brief excursus to explain what's going on before I connect the logic of what Peter is trying to say.

And see, if you look at verse 18, it says that Christ, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, so this is before, after his death on the cross in the flesh, but before his bodily resurrection because he says he was alive in the spirit, right?

So in that intervening time between his death and resurrection, Christ, it says, went to and proclaimed to the spirits in prison because they formerly did not obey when God's patience waited in the days of Noah.

So the days of Noah is the clue here. If you go to Genesis 6, 1 to 3, it says this, it says, when man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive and they took as their wives any they chose.

[27 : 20] Then the Lord said, my spirit shall not abide in man forever for he is flesh. His days shall be 120 years. The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also afterward when the sons of God came into the daughters of man and they bore children to them.

These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. So nearly all Jewish rabbis and scholars throughout the ages understood these spirits in prison as the angels of God or the sons of God, the angels who left their proper station and had conjugal relations basically with human woman.

And in doing so were punished by God and put in prison. And this is kind of you see this similar verse in Jude 6 it says the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority but left their proper dwelling God has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.

So I think that's what he's referring to here and there's a few other ways you can understand this and if you want to know about those I'd be happy to tell you afterward so come up and ask me.

But the word angel when it's used in plural without specifying that it's I mean word spirit when it's in the plural without specifying that it's human spirit it almost always throughout the Bible refers to angelic beings so spirits.

[28 : 49] And secondly also the phrase of imprisonment the language of imprisonment is not used for a place that humans go to but it is used of a place that angels go to as described in Revelation 27 2 Peter 2 4 Jude 6 so those are the reasons why I think that this is the best interpretation I don't think that means that this is happening all over the place now I mean this seems to have been once in a history of humanity kind of event where God decisively put an end to it and punished those angelic beings and so the reason why Peter's mentioning this is that at the time Noah was building the ark he was ridiculed right because he's saying you're a fool there's no flood coming why are you building this ark right and he lived a righteous life in contrast to everybody else in his generation and because of that he was maligned as well but Noah who was maligned just like the believers were being maligned in Peter's day was ultimately vindicated right he and his family alone survived the flood and they were vindicated by

God himself and that's why Peter's mentioning Noah here he's saying that you know what just like Noah who though maligned later was vindicated believers nowadays though you suffer now though you are maligned now by unbelievers you will be eventually vindicated is what he's saying and and and even more significant than the example of Noah of course is the example of Christ and that's that's the ultimate example that he gives as a true source because it says verse 18 for Christ also suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God and then Christ suffered also in our place so we're not the only one suffering our Lord and King and Savior also suffered and then if you look at what happened in verse 22 it says Christ has now gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels authorities and powers having been subjected to him now this is an even more comforting even more comforting than Noah's vindication because Christ now has all authority everything has been subjected to him even though he was humbled to the point of death even death on a cross

Christ the righteous one suffering at the hands of the unrighteous and he suffers so that we might be saved and that's why I would say it's very easy I think in our context we live in an egalitarian society and everybody is all about getting our rights so we want we don't I mean as good citizens we don't expect to be treated better than other people we don't expect preferential treatment but we do expect equal treatment so when we feel like we're cheated we want treated fairly then we protest because we expect to be treated equally but I think this passage teaches us that while it might be quintessentially American to insist on our rights it is quintessentially Christian to give up our rights for the sake of others and this it says and that's exactly what

Christ did for us if you look at his example in Philippians 2 even though he was in the very nature God he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but rather he humbled himself by taking the very nature of a servant and humbled himself to a point of death in obedience even death upon a cross so if that's what Christ did and that's the basis for Paul's command in Philippians therefore consider others interests better than yourselves so as Christians we're not supposed to just think their interest as important as my interest we're supposed to consider other people's interests better than our own higher than our own and that's what we're called to and if and that's because that's exactly what Christ did for us he didn't have to die he's the only person that ever lived that didn't have to die didn't have to pay for sin didn't have to suffer yet he suffered for us yet he died for our sins so we can be reconciled to God our father so if then our savior and our king humbled himself in that way unjustly suffered in that way for the sake of bringing us to him restoring us to God then can we as his lowly servants not suffer in the same way in order to be a credible witness so we can help restore others to God as well

I think that's a very difficult task so I think it's only fitting that we conclude at this time by praying together that God would help us with this so if you look at your worship guide God ■■■ God it's only got this■■■■ to Gottes something is my hope make sure and Matthew