

Chico Alliance Church

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“Persecuted but Happy”

Review

Live godly in and ungodly world or live differently because you are different.

What have we learned so far?

- I. **Realize your new heritage as specially chosen children of God 1:3-12**
- II. **Live out your heritage as God’s specially chosen children 1:13-5:11**
 - F. **Practice godly behavior in an ungodly world 2:12**
 1. **Citizens godly behavior toward governmental authority 2:13-17**
 2. **Servants godly behavior toward masters 2:18-24**
 3. **Jesus’ example of sacrificial service to others**
 4. **Wives godly behavior toward husbands 3:1-6**
 5. **Husbands godly behavior toward wives 3:7**
 6. **Everyone’s godly behavior toward each other 3:8-12**
 7. **Everyone’s godly behavior toward persecutors.**

Peter’s entire letter unveils two essentials when it comes to suffering. How should I think?

How should I act? I call them anchors and actions when facing persecution. Do I need to worry about

persecution in America? The persecution of Christians around the world has been evident for some time.

The fact that believers may escape The Great Tribulation by a pretribulation rapture of Christians will not exempt you from possible severe tribulations before that time. You will never convince the Christian Syrians that they are not in a great tribulation if not THE great tribulation where those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ will suffer extreme persecution and execution by beheading. The possibility of persecution and suffering and even martyrdom in America for embrace Jesus Christ has become more probable in recent years.

We just recently observed a graphic demonstration how serious things could become when students were shot in the head for claiming to be Christian. Persecution to the point of martyrdom runs all through church history. It is naïve to think that God will shield us from all persecution. Jesus pretty much guaranteed it.

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33 (ESV)

Large portions of Scripture provide the necessary information to endure such persecution. The entire book of Hebrews was written to encourage followers of Jesus not to go back to Judaism because of ill treatment by the Jews. EVERY Christian should be prepared to face suffering from any number of sources. Peter wrote to a people who faced such suffering and were probably going to face much more as the Roman emperor became increasingly hostile toward Christians. Peter presented a number of anchors and actions throughout his letter to these followers of Jesus. We have explored some of them. Today we visit more.

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 1 Peter 3:13-16 (NASB)

Following Peter’s admonition to bless even those who treat you badly, he continued to focus on the benefits of such godly behavior in the face of suffering. Peter’s admonition to do the right thing in the face of wrong treatment began with a general observation. Generally, doing good returns good.

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 1 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

Generally people do not return bad for good especially if we are a serious advocate for good behavior. People generally still appreciate good deeds and heroic actions. However in our culture things appear to be changing. There is a reason for the saying “No good deed goes unpunished.” So how should we respond when our good deeds meet with disapproval and even rebuke? Peter reminded them that negative response to our good behavior is possible and perhaps probable..
even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.

The “even” if carries the idea of a strong possibility. He started this section with an “anchor” -- realize you are “blessed”. This word means to be fortunate, happy, well off. The Beatitudes (Matt 5) use this term; “blessed are the poor”

(makarios) has a "full-orbed" meaning – i.e. being blessed from God literally extending Himself and His benefits (i.e. as He confers what He deems eternally valuable).

"Blessed" (by definition) is not something restricted nor constricted by the temporal. Hence God's blessing is distinct from mere human "happiness" (what is based on outward happenings) – surpassing the world's provisions or what can be produced by self.

Much of the time we take a negative outlook on anything that creates discomfort. It is difficult to take a positive look at a negative circumstance. Peter joins Paul and James in admonishing us to have a positive outlook on negative circumstances.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. James 1:2-3 (NASB)

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; Romans 5:3 (NASB)

This is only possible when we strive for an eternal perspective and look at the end game rather than the current gloom.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28 (NASB)

Many opt to endure the trauma of surgery by focusing on the benefits that lifesaving surgery promises to provide. Endure present pain for ultimate pleasure. Suffering for the sake of Christ brings internal health. The ability to face such discomfort requires an anchor in eternity. This is not the only “anchor” Peter provides in his letter. At some time in the future we will bring them all together. Having provided a solid anchor concerning the benefits of suffering for doing right, Peter next called for specific action. Peter directs three specific actions in the face of persecution; two negative, one positive.

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, 1 Peter 3:14 (NASB)

1. Do not fear their fear

The word translated fear is “phobos” from which we get our English term phobia. Don’t be terrorized by their fearful actions. I think the NASB chose a good word to translate the thought here. Don’t shy away from their intimidating actions. Fear flows out of a thinking process. We often react emotionally to what we perceive harmful.

Fear is a tangible involuntary emotional reaction to a perceived or actual threat to my well-being that is either present or potential that necessitates some sort of intentional response.

It starts in the mind. Once the mind determines something to bring possible harm or discomfort the mind triggers certain chemical reactions that stir emotions intended to confront the perceived danger. I have seen my grandchildren enter into harmful situation without fear because the mind does not even consider danger.

Jump into the water, ride a wagon down a steep hill, run out into the parking lot without looking. Children need to have instruction about dangers in life.

Stranger danger, Mr. Yuck, Jumping off buildings, Climbing ladders, Playing with knives

Fear plays an important role. It functions as an early warning system. It alerts us to the need for some sort of response. Many people struggle with irrational fear; that is the mind considers something hurtful that isn't. We call these "phobias". A phobia is defined as an overwhelming and unreasonable fear of an object or situation that poses little real danger but provokes anxiety and avoidance.

Some people become completely paralyzed by these irrational fears. I was totally blown away when I uploaded a list of hundreds of actual phobias on line. <http://phobialist.com/>

In this case however, the reality is that the actions of those opposing them could actually be harmful. Peter calls them to focus on the benefits of suffering for the sake of Jesus.

Jesus said...

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28 (ESV)

He instructed them not be afraid of those who mistreat them. Along with reprogramming their thinking as to not trigger fear, he told them not to be agitated.

2. Don't be troubled

This term indicates something agitated that was once settled. To be upset, troubled, agitated, disturbed. This has to be a supernatural thing. It is nearly impossible not to react to persecution. I don't know about you but I get this shaking on the inside when dealing with conflict. It may not show on the outside but it distracts me. I am conscious of my need for some solid anchors that will enable me to better deal with negative situations. I don't even like to listen to talk radio when it gets contentions with a caller.

This was the reaction of the disciples when Jesus came walking on the water. It was Zacharias reaction to the appearance of the Angel Gabriel near the altar. It was Jesus' reaction at the prospect of the cross. It was the reaction of the disciples at the news of Jesus going away. The anchor in our thinking has to do with a focus on Jesus and eternity. Through a firm foundation of trust in Jesus, it is possible to face persecution without fear or agitation. There are other anchors that come into play here. Peter encouraged a positive response that would reinforce the ability to not fear or be agitated in the face of persecution.

3. Sanctify the Lord in your heart

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; having a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 1 Pet 3:15-16

This action calls for more extensive treatment than what we have time for today. We will address what it all means next week. I want to go back for a moment and explore the types of actions that often times results from the emotion of fear.

1. Fight

There may be times that God instills the courage to boldly face a threat and eliminate it. We find this repeatedly with Israel and their enemies. Other times we may expend a ton of fleshly energy trying to fight against God's purposes. The Five missionaries to the Auca Indians determined ahead of time not to protect

themselves in the event of an attack. After they lost their lives, the fact that they did not protect themselves when they could have, became the catalyst for the salvation of a whole tribe and stimulus for thousands of young people to commit their lives for foreign missions work.

It is important to determine what God desires when threats to our well-being emerge.

2. Flee

We naturally try to avoid threatening situations. God purposely puts us in uncomfortable situation for our growth. Running from situations because they feel uncomfortable or threatening could delay our growth. I would have liked to have avoided many of the subjects required to get a Master's Degree. I would feel anxious at the beginning of every semester looking over the required courses. God may in fact instruct us to flee a threatening situation. He told the Old Testament Joseph to flee the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife. He told Joseph to flee to Egypt at the threat of Herod against Jesus. God could have easily protected Jesus in Israel. Jesus would have loved to avoid the trauma of the cross and actually asked to, but thank God, He instead submitted to the Father's plan.

3. Freeze

There are times that fear paralyzes us. We don't run but we freeze. We do nothing. The thought of facing certain things paralyzes us. There are times when God does ask us to wait. It is never good to get out ahead of God. Failing to act at all is the same as running. Waiting can be an act of trust in God to direct the most effective moment to do something. In this case, the initial fearful emotion gives way to peace and boldness in the midst of the threat. Fear paralyzed the early followers of Jesus at the threats and imprisonment of the apostles. They prayed (one of the responses to fear).

In their prayer they asked for boldness to speak the truth in spite of the threats.

And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, Acts 4:29

God's Holy Spirit moved mightily among them and the Holy Spirit filled them all and enabled them all to act and boldly speak the word in spite of the threats

4. Fret

This common response is NEVER healthy. In fact, this response is probably the unhealthiest of responses because it continuously ravages the emotional system. It keeps us in a perpetual state of fear. It keeps the adrenaline flowing without an outlet or action. Paul instructed Philippians to STOP worrying or fretting. Rather than deal Biblically with the real or perceived threat, we allow it to occupy our thinking which continually stirs our emotions to the point of exhaustion. Such emotional exhaustion ends in depression and all manner of unhealthy thinking.

The question is, how do I manage this uncomfortable knot or shaking in the pit of my stomach? How do I prevent my mind from repeatedly rehearsing anxious thoughts that keep me in a perpetual state of impending doom and threat about so many things?

The fifth response guides all the rest. It is the response we will explore a bit more over the next few weeks.

5. Faith

By faith, I mean trust and obedience. In the midst of our fear, we affirm our trust in a faithful Creator and purpose to do what is right.

Just as David told Solomon,

"Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished. 1 Chronicles 28:20

The realization of and trusting in God's active loving and purposeful involvement in our life is the beginning of conquering fear. Are you afraid of persecution? Grab hold of this anchor. Realize that because of God's presence, I can actually find blessing in persecution. I can find spiritual blessing and benefit by acting godly in spite of opposition.