

Suffering – How to Think and How to Act

Hook - What is your metaphor for life? A journey? A play? A party? A battle? Our metaphor colors how we think, act and life. Our metaphor colors our eternal destiny.

Mary Poppins – Mr. Banks “life's a looming battle to be faced and fought.”

Biblical metaphors for life – a race, a battle, a journey

Expect to Suffer – it is part of life for all men, and especially for Christians
Evaluate the True Cost of Following Christ – hard in the short term, glorious in eternity

How to Think and How to Act

Exclude Unnecessary Suffering – suffer for Christ and not for sin

Book – 1 Peter 4:12-19

Look

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V12 – Verse one spoke of having the mind of Christ regarding suffering, including the expectation that in this world, suffering is inevitable. In this verse Peter again admonished his readers to not consider suffering unusual or foreign but to consider it a normal part of earthly existence.

Not only is it a normal part of earthly existence, but it is even more a part of Christian existence. We live in a sinful world, the inhabitants of which, human and angelic, are in open rebellion against their Creator and Lord. The universe functions with Him as the center; since He is God, how could it be any other way. Nonetheless we insist that we are the center, either individually or corporately. These positions cannot be reconciled, and so we hopelessly fight against the One who gives us life.

A few people known as Christians have surrendered to their Maker and are being transformed from people against God to people for Him. While we still resist the work of His Spirit in our lives because our habits and thoughts are inclined towards rebellion, we are gradually being transformed into becoming like Him. Those who oppose God, seeing our transformation, logically consider believers in Christ as traitors to their cause. Therefore they oppose and even persecute us.

Some may object that mankind is not rebelling against God but rather actively seeking Him, as is evidenced by the many religions on earth. Indeed, few people, if asked, would say or even believe that they are “anti-God”. In truth, the very fact that our lives focus primarily on ourselves is proof positive that we oppose God. Every morsel of indignation at a perceived slight, every groundswell of envy or pride, and every idle sin, no matter how hidden from others or unnoticed by ourselves, is caused by and is evidence of this rebellion. We can't perceive it for the same reason that a fish cannot perceive water; it is a fundamental condition of our existence.

The presence of so many religions on earth demonstrates that mankind feels a need for something greater than himself, but provides no evidence that man is seeking God. Except for Christianity, most religions teach that the human race is inherently good and that almost everyone will experience some form of “salvation” after death. The existence of such religions may just as easily prove that man is creative in his attempts to glorify and worship himself.

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V13 – For these same reasons Christ suffered. Since His suffering resulted in unspeakable glory, so shall ours. As a result, we shall have joy unspeakable (Matthew 5:11-12). It is a lifetime honor to be counted worthy to share in Jesus Christ's sufferings (Acts 5:41, 16:22-25).

V14 – If Christians are traitors to the human cause, they are likely to be reviled (ὀνειδίζω *oneidizō* - *upbraid, reproach, spoken evil of*) by other humans. Such reproach, however, when rightly considered by the devoted believer, is a source of joy. Why? Because the Spirit of God rests in great measure upon such people, and those in close communion with Him will know it. The moment that the evildoer is maligning God's people is the very moment that, unbeknownst to him, he is glorifying God.

We see this played out in political arena. No recent American president would want a campaign endorsement from Vladimir Putin or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. No serious political figure would embrace a recommendation from the Zeta drug cartel or the American Communist party. Having people perceived as evil speak well of you is a political liability. Contrariwise, having evil people speak evil of you is a political strength. Neither Churchill nor Roosevelt objected much to criticism from Hitler or Stalin.

Similarly, man is evil. As a result, the venom spewed by evil men on God and His people can have no other effect than to glorify Him (and them) in the long run.

VV 15-16 – It is vital that if believers are reviled, they receive that treatment for their good behavior, not wicked. Unjust suffering nobly borne by the children of God blesses the sufferer and might help bring the one causing the suffering to repentance.

To be a busybody (ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος *allogriepiskopos*) suggests being involved in things in which an individual believer has no business. This Greek word is only found here in the New Testament. Thayer's lexicon suggests that Peter is referring "to those who, with holy but intemperate zeal, meddle with the affairs of the Gentiles – whether public or private, civil or sacred – in order to make them conform to the Christian standard."

A big danger into which people fell in the first century Roman Empire was anti-government activity. The 60s were an unstable time:

1. Nero (54 to 68 AD) grew increasingly insane.
2. War against the Parthians.
3. The Great Fire of Rome (64 AD).
4. The Jewish rebellion (66-70 AD).
5. The infamous "year of four emperors (69 AD)".
6. Violent storms and earthquakes

Jesus never opposed the Jewish or the Roman authorities, because His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), yet He was persecuted and martyred. Christians would suffer because of their beliefs and practices, and ultimately for their faith in Him (John 15:18, 1 John 3:13). Peter did not want they persecuted because they opposed the government. Only persecution for the name and cause of Christ would result in glory to the Father. This does not mean that Christians cannot be involved in government and the political process, but it does mean that Christianity cannot devolve into primarily a political rather than a life-encompassing matter.

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V17 – Judgment must come and will come to man. Jesus took the weight of punishment on Himself at the cross; a very difficult thing. Those who reject Jesus have no hope of receiving the just wages of their sin.

V18 – Those who are children of God and strive honestly for righteousness are saved, but only at great cost. "With difficulty ... whispers of Paul's teaching "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22)." Jesus told His followers of hardships they would face (Luke 9:22-27).

Those who do not strive for such have no source of salvation.

V19 – Therefore, people must know God and do good. When suffering comes, and it will, our faithful Creator will keep their souls safe in His eternal hands.

Took

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Verdict – What do you want them to DO as a result of the truths they have just received?

Closing Prayer