



Part 12

Armed With The Mind Of Christ

1 Peter 4:1-6

In his first epistle the Apostle Peter seeks to instruct his readers concerning their identity in Christ so that they may live faithfully in a world in which they ultimately do not belong.

In the previous section Peter explains that suffering – even to the point of death – is not a sign of weakness or failure. Now he encourages his readers to arm themselves with same attitude or way of thinking as that of Jesus. Specifically, believers must arm themselves with the mind of Christ in terms of how they understand their various sufferings.

Christians who are willing to suffer loss for the sake of Christ have gone to war against sin. They have, in essence, declared that they are through with sin (v. 1). And because of this they stand apart from the world. Their fight against sin makes them stand out to the point that they become objects of derision (v. 4). But the holiness of Christians serves as an indictment against the very ones who malign them. God is just and not even death can change his vindication of the righteous who heard and believed the gospel during their lives (v. 6).

Main Idea: Because Christians will be persecuted in this world they must arm themselves with Christ's attitude toward suffering.

Getting a grip on the central imperative:

“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh...”

- Referring back to the previous section, Peter mentions the suffering of Christ for the sake of sinners. Here however, he points out that Christ's suffering includes both its central redemptive concern (covering the sins of God's people) and a pattern of living for the redeemed.

“...arm yourselves...”

- This clause had typically military applications. It could refer to a soldier arming himself for battle. Elsewhere, the Scriptures liken the Christian life to the life of a warrior (Rom 6:13; 13:12; 2 Cor 6:7; 10:4; Eph 6:11-17; 1 Thess 5:8).

“...with the same way of thinking.”

- Peter is exhorting his readers to take on “arm themselves” with the same way of thinking as Christ in terms of how they face their suffering in this world.

1. Armed with the mind of Christ to fight sin.

Vv. 1-2

“Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” (vs. 1c)

- Vs. 1b – The military language (“arm yourself”) indicates that courage and grit are needed for the Christian life. This is particularly true in light of the various sufferings that will come our way for the sake of Christ.

- Vs. 1c – In these words Peter is *not* stating that physical suffering is a mystical pathway to sinless perfection. His meaning is quite simple: When Christians, armed with the mind of Christ, become willing to suffer for the sake of righteousness they demonstrate that sin no longer rules them. So the clause “ceased from sin” is not to be understood in a wooden literal sense. Rather it is to be understood in terms of resolve. A willingness to suffer for faithfulness to Christ demonstrates that sin’s ruling power has been broken.
- Suffering is not the goal of the Christian life nor is it something that should be sought after. However, anyone desiring to follow Christ in this sinful world will suffer from one degree to another. Therefore, suffering, while not the goal of the Christian life will often serve as an indication that one is pursuing holiness.

2. Armed with the mind of Christ to stand alone.

Vv. 3-4

“With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.” (vs. 4)

- Vs. 3 – Peter tells his readers that prior to their conversion they spent enough time in unrighteousness. The clause “what the Gentiles want” in verse 3 is in juxtaposition to “the will of God” in verse 2. The will of God and the will of this pagan world cannot be reconciled. They will always be in direct conflict.
- Vs. 4 – The pagans of the first century viewed Christians as killjoys who took pleasure in making sure no one experienced pleasure. Those first century Christians typically abstained from the forms of entertainment that we so popular among the Romans of the day – the theater because of the sexual themes and the gladiatorial games because of the gratuitous violence and death. But not only that, these Christians also condemned all sex outside the confines of marriage, drunkenness, theft, lying, revenge seeking, and theft. It’s interesting that the apostles never criticized these Christians as being legalistic because they abstained from these ungodly entertainments.
- As one New Testament scholar puts it:
 These attitudes toward contemporary Roman customs and morals, combined with the Christian’s refusal to burn incense to the emperor – a gesture of civic gratitude intended to assure the well-being of the empire – earned Christians the reputation of being haters of humanity and traitors to the Roman way of life.

3. Armed with the mind of Christ to face the judgment without fear.

Vv. 5-6

“But they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” (vs. 5)

- Peter means to encourage his readers with these words. All of the sufferings and abuse endured by Christians for the sake of Jesus is not an indication that God has forsaken them. He is the righteous Judge who is returning to judge the living and the dead. That means that not even death can guard the unrighteous from the justice of God. Among other things, this promise releases Christians from the desire for vengeance. Whatever justice must be exercised will be done by God who judges all things with perfection.
- Some have confused verse 6 to mean that there will be a chance of postmortem conversion; that is repentance and faith granted after death to those who had refused Christ in life. But this is not the meaning of Peter’s words. He is referring to those who heard the gospel proclaimed and believed during their life but are now dead. The opponents of Christianity would point to the deaths of Christians as an indication of failure or defeat (“They die like everyone else!”). But Peter’s point is that even though they are “judged in the flesh” like everyone else (i.e. they died) they have received an eternal reward of life in the presence of God which began the moment they died.