

- Facing injustice

How does the Christian face injustice?

1. Fearlessness

1. **Fearlessness.** Christians are not to tremble before their persecutors! *'Even if you suffer on account of righteousness, you are blessed! And do not fear them at all, and do not be disturbed'*¹. This is obviously something that means a lot to God. His prophets and apostles are constantly making this point. 'Do not be afraid of what they are afraid of', said Isaiah². Men and women around us live in fear of one kind or another. But the Christian is to be unmoved by the kind of things that trouble others – and unmoved when they themselves persecute us and try to make us afraid. Peter asks us to maintain total calmness. We are not to be in the slightest bit disturbed by the threats of the world.

¹ 3:14

² Isaiah 8:12

- Unmoved by those things that trouble others

- Persecution

2. Renewed dedication

2. **Renewed dedication.** Not only do we remain unafraid in the midst of slander and threats, we give ourselves to renewed zeal for God. Peter says: *'But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord...'*¹.

¹ 3:15a

- Pressing on

A negative is followed by a positive: 'Do not fear . . . sanctify Christ'. The Christian always goes beyond mere negatives! We are not simply restraining ourselves; we are pressing on to positive dedication and consecration to God.

- Christ has total rights to rule, guide, change and direct

To 'sanctify Christ as Lord' means that in our thinking, our attitudes, our behaviour, we regard Christ as the One who has total rights over our lives to rule, to guide, to change, to direct. Amidst troubling opposition Peter asks them to restrain fear but – more positively – to look to Jesus to be the King of their lives moment-by-moment and day-by-day.

- 'In their hearts'

They are to sanctify Christ as Lord 'in their hearts'. They do so truly, conscientiously, not as a matter of pretence or mere words. When the Christian fears displeasing God it delivers him from other kinds of fear. One thinks of the fearlessness of Daniel amidst a den of lions¹. 'The LORD is my helper', says the Christian, 'I will not fear what people can do to me'; 'God is my refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble'².

¹ Daniel 3:6

² see Psalm 62

3. Readiness

3. **Readiness.** The Christian is not to be fearful but he or she is to be ready to speak to those who are oppressors. Peter says: *'But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord, being always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to say something about the hope that is in you. But do it with meekness and reverence'*¹.

¹ 3:15

- Blessing and vindication

Peter takes it for granted that the Christians are gripped by an expectation concerning the future. They have a hope within them, Peter says. They know that God will bless them and vindicate them any time He likes, maybe in this world, maybe after this world at the judgement-throne of Christ. When it will come is uncertain; that it will come is sure. The Christian knows that God can step in and rescue him at any moment.

- Fearlessness seen by others

Peter also takes it for granted that this expectation of God's future rewards and vindication will be obvious to others who observe the Christian. He takes it for granted that others will see how fearless the Christian is, how much he or she is expecting God

to intervene in his situation, how certain he is that he need feel no guilt or timidity when others treat him badly.

• Neighbours will ask what it is that gives such confident expectation

• Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone and everyone who asks

• It is because I have come to have a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ

So Peter knows that there will be times when neighbours ask us about what it is that gives us such confident expectation. ‘You don’t seem to be troubled by the way people treat you’, they will say. ‘You seem to be expecting that God is going to bless you, and you don’t seem to be disturbed at all at the persecutions you are facing’

At that point Peter wants his people to be ready, always prepared to give an answer to anyone and everyone who asks them to say something about the hope that is in them. ‘Well, the reason is’, the Christian will say, ‘because I have come to have a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that He is alive. I have experienced His power in my life. I talk to Him. He talks to me. You know, He died for the sins of the world, and then God raised Him from the dead. The reason I am expecting God to bless me is that He has intervened in my life so many times before; I am expecting Him to bless me again. The Bible has many promises about what God is going to do in the future story of the world...’. And the conversation continues! But Peter says, make sure it is ‘with meekness and reverence’. Don’t act in a superior way to the other person.

4. Peace of conscience

4. Peace of conscience. He says: ‘And keep a good conscience, so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame’¹. It will do little good speaking of how we expect God to bless us if we are living with a guilty conscience. We have to keep our life clean in the sight of others so that they are not in a position to slander us.

1 3:16

5. Christians must be sure they suffer for good reasons not bad

5. Christians must be sure they suffer for good reasons not bad. This follows from what Peter has just said. He adds: ‘For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong’¹. We should not fear suffering too much; but we fear suffering for the wrong reason! God may want us to suffer – in order to further His kingdom and because it is our contribution to what He is doing in the world. But, says Peter, let us make sure it is for God that we are suffering and not for our own sinfulness or foolishness.

1 3:17



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