

• Everyone will face God's judgement

The Christian is willing to suffer. He has broken with sin. He denounces his past wickedness. Now he surprises and annoys his pagan neighbours^{□1}. But these pagan neighbours will stand before God in the judgement day and give an account to God of their hostility to Christians^{□2}. Everyone will face God's judgement; He will judge 'the living and the dead'.

□1 4:4

□2 4:5

1. The grace of God is always surprising

• The Christian's former friends – astonished then hostile

1. **The grace of God is always surprising; it surprises the Christians themselves and it vexes the ungodly.** Peter says '*In this matter they find it strange that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy; and so they slander you*'^{□1}. When a person comes to a personal knowledge of Jesus as Saviour, he or she becomes unwilling to join in with the pagan amusements of their onetime friends and colleagues. They now want to avoid pagan life with its immoralities, its drunkenness and its idolatry. The Christians' former friends are at first astonished, but soon their astonishment turns to hostility.

□1 4:4

• Slander and hostility

Christians find that the more they sincerely live for the honour of God, the more their devotion to God arouses bitterness and resentment. Slander is yet one more form of persecution that the Christian may have to face. There is plenty of evidence that Christians were accused of all sorts of vicious crimes. They were accused of being law-breakers, of believing deadly superstitions, of being magicians worthy of severe punishment. Peter himself writes from Rome where not long after he wrote this letter, Christians would be accused of causing the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64. The Christians refused to rush into the same wild living as their pagan neighbours. Hostility and slander were the result.

2. God's judgement day will be a reply to all injustices

• One day the record will be put straight

• The truth – motives, causes and circumstances

2. **Peter encourages the Christians with the thought that God's judgement day will be a reply to all injustices.** Those who abuse and insult Christians out of resentment and animosity will find that one day their injustices and slanders will be corrected. Peter says: '*They will give an account to the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead*'^{□1}.

□1 4:5

Christians may face slander now, but one day the record will be put straight. The **facts** will be exposed. The **truth** will come out. The **motives** will be revealed. One day we shall know why everyone did what he or she did. The **causes and circumstances** will be brought to light. We shall discover what sins arose from sincere mistakes and misunderstanding, and what slanders arose from hostility and a desire to interpret the other person in the worst possible light. Those who slander God's people will have to give an account of every idle word. The thoughts and secrets of their hearts will be exposed.

• Retribution and reward

Then **retribution and reward** will be allocated. The slanderer will in some way be repaid for what he or she has done. The Christian will be vindicated; every word spoken for Jesus shall be rewarded. Every piece of suffering endured for Jesus will receive compensation, in some way unknown to us.

3. The living and the dead

3. **God's judgement will involve 'the living' (those who are alive at the time of Jesus' coming) and 'the dead' (those who have died at the time of Jesus' coming).** Praise and blame, penalty or reward, will come to everyone. God will decide the eternal destiny of those who have ill-treated His people; He will make decisions concerning the honour and reward for His own people who have suffered for Jesus' sake.

Verse 6 follows on quite naturally from this point. God will judge the living and the dead, *'For this is why the gospel was preached also to the dead, that though in the flesh they might be condemned in the eyes of men and women, by the Spirit they will experience life, in accordance with the decision of God'*¹.

1 4:6

• *Even death will not stop heavenly reward coming to the persecuted Christian*

The point of the sentence is: **even death will not stop heavenly reward coming to the persecuted Christian**. God will allocate justice to those who are alive and also to those who have died, at the time of Jesus' coming. Verse 6 explains. Even death will not prevent the Christian from receiving his vindication.

• *Some Christians killed for their faith*

Some Christians known to Peter have died. But the gospel was preached to them during their lifetime. They may well have received rough treatment from their pagan acquaintances. Some (like Stephen) had been killed. In the eyes of the pagans they were thought to be full of superstition, as followers of a crucified Saviour. Their death seemed to be a kind of judgement upon them.

• *People who have heard the gospel but since that time have died*

Nothing in 1 Peter teaches that the gospel is preached to any human being after death. Peter does not say 'The gospel **is** preached to those who **have** died'. He says 'The gospel **was** preached to those who **are** dead'. It means that many people have had the gospel preached to them, but since that time have died. Their pagan neighbours thought that this meant they were just like everyone else – that the Christians' 'eternal life' had not prevented them from dying!

• *A day of vindicating recompense and reward is coming*

The Christians were facing the scoffing and slander of their pagan acquaintances. Peter says to his friends: you may find that your old friends are so astonished by the change that has taken place in your life that they start persecuting you. They may say 'What is the value of this "eternal life" you talk about? You die like everyone else!' But although slandered and condemned by men and women, these Christians will be raised to honour and glory. While in the weakness of a human nature our onetime friends may ridicule and condemn us, but God will have the last word. We Christians will be vindicated and recompensed for every word of slander we have endured. Christ had been preached to us and we have responded in faith and are committed to a new life of godliness, a life of separation from old habits. One day our slanderers will be rebuked; all who have lived for Jesus will be rewarded and will enjoy the resurrection life of Jesus for ever.



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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