

Pastor Cliff Davis

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Date: 17 December 2010

Preacher: Cliff Davis

- [0 : 00] Attended Grace in the late 70s and early 80s as students at Cedarville College. And that was back when it was a college, before they ever thought of becoming a university.
- And I appreciated their presence so much and their thirst for the scriptures. And I had the privilege of officiating at their wedding up in Wilmington, Delaware.
- And that was when? The late 70s? 1982. Okay. And now they are anticipating the arrival of their first grandchild.
- That makes this preacher feel older and older. For the last 16 years, I believe it is, Cliff has been the pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Mount Zion, Illinois.
- Boy. And I am just eager to hear what the Lord has laid on his heart. And I know you will appreciate it as well. So thank you for being here, Cliff and Cindy.
- [1 : 06] And the Lord bless you. Well, before I open God's word with you, I want to go through a few little preliminaries. I'll just tell you right off the start that I'm scared to death.
- I've been pastoring in ministry like 20 years, but this is like home. And I consider Marv my spiritual mentor more than anybody else. And I'm not normally this scared.
- But he's already told you a little bit about when my wife and I first attended here when we were at college. And I'm probably not real good at staying behind this microphone, so that may wind up messing up your audio recording.
- But I like to roam a little bit. So hopefully when I get in God's word, I may roam. And if that messes up that part, so, you know, we'll just have to deal with that. But your church is actually very much an extension of our church.
- You may not realize it, but we're kind of a church plant, even though the church was there before I came. But we very much are like this church. We share a lot of the same idiosyncrasies, which I remember from back when we came here.
- [2 : 08] I don't know how they've changed over the years. But one of the unique things that our church does, which is something that your church does, is that you entertain comments and questions after a service. And we've done that for years at our church.
- So certainly you were invited to share with me what you agree with or disagree with, or you would seek further clarification about. You're welcome to do that. My history, my understanding of the way it usually works is because you really don't know me, you probably won't say a whole lot.
- I'd love for you to prove me wrong. But when people come and fill in for me at my church, they usually entertain questions and comments. But because nobody really has that relationship established, people are usually pretty quiet.
- But I'm letting you know right up front, if you would like to share at the end, you're more than welcome to do that. Your church also gave me the first opportunity to ever speak. Not in this setting, because I would have been too afraid.
- But I remember back when I was here, probably around 1980 or so, and one of the adult classes was a contemporary Christian issues class. And I think they were working through a Christianity Today.

[3 : 14] They would work through different issues, pick out a topic, and deal with it. And I don't remember who was in charge of that class, but he was going to miss a week. And I was asked if I would fill in that particular week.

And then, based upon that, I was able to teach the teens. And we went through the book of Ecclesiastes, which is, hands down, the book I've taught more than any other book in Scripture.

In fact, I don't believe I've ever taught any book twice other than Ecclesiastes. I've taught Ecclesiastes, I think, four times on different occasions. And it's very appropriate every ten years, simply because it has to do with the meaning of life.

So I love to teach Ecclesiastes. And I taught it first to the teen group here in the early 1980s. One of the ways, one last introductory remark, I think, one of the ways that we used to describe Grace Bible Church back in the day when I came here, when we'd meet other people, and I need to roam, when we'd meet other people, and they found out that we went to Grace, or they went to Grace, and they would be like, well, when did you go to Grace?

And I would be like, well, I was at Grace from about Romans 3 to Romans 8. And they would be like, oh, well, I was at Grace, and they would tell me what chapters in Romans they were at Grace.

[4 : 30] And I don't remember exactly when I left off. I know I was here for 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. And I think I was here through 8, although I listened to different audio messages from Romans 8, so I'm not sure if I was here in person, or if Romans 8 was actually after I left.

But that's how we described being here at Grace. What I'm going to bring to you this morning is out of 1 Peter, which is where our church has been for the last 10 months.

It's kind of difficult, because I teach like your pastor teaches, it's kind of difficult to come up with a one-time message and put it in some kind of a context that makes any kind of sense at all.

But I'll do the best that I can to bring you up to speed in the book of 1 Peter, and then we'll actually do a little bit more in-depth in 1 Peter 4, is where we will wind up being.

I really didn't know that I would be speaking here until about 8 days before I left to go to Delaware, so I didn't have time to come up with something special for you guys. So really what I'm going to do is pretty much share with you the last message I shared at our church before I left on vacation and tried to give it some sort of a context.

[5 : 39] Let me open in a word of prayer, and then we'll get started. God our Father, I do thank you for this opportunity to meet together with fellow believers, and I thank you that we can celebrate the common bond that we have in Christ, and it's a common bond that we share not only when I'm traveling here, but when any of us go anywhere, we meet other Christians, and we automatically have so much in common in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, a common salvation and faith, and all that we celebrate to be called your sons and daughters.

I pray now that as we look into your word, that it would be a blessing, it would be challenging, it would be good for instruction and correction, and it's in Christ's name I pray.

Amen. I'll be reading probably mostly out of the English Standard Version Bible just so you can figure out how closely I compare to the version of the Bible that you happen to be using.

1 Peter, as many of you know, was a book written by Peter. 1 Peter, as many of you know, it's generally the consensus is it was written in the 60s, so roughly 30 years after Christ's death, burial, resurrection, ascension into heaven, and in this same decade, Peter will lose his life.

Church tradition has that he was crucified upside down by the Emperor Nero. So it's written in the 60s, and the theme of this book is how believers are to deal with suffering.

[6 : 58] How are they to deal with trials, difficulties, particularly unjust suffering, when you've done everything right and life still doesn't work like you would expect it to work.

And Peter wants to offer hope and encouragement to these believers, and he tells us exactly that. If you'll turn to the very end of the letter, chapter 5 and verse 12, he kind of summarizes his whole point in writing this letter.

He says in chapter 5 and verse 12, By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in it. The way that believers are encouraged in suffering is by the grace of God. To stand firm in God's grace is always equal to whatever our circumstance may present before us.

Whatever our trials are, whatever our sufferings are, God's grace is always sufficient to meet us in our weakness. To meet us in our sufferings and our trials. He then gives us this introduction.

[8 : 04] It's like the outside of an envelope. Sometimes if you receive a personal letter, and it's not simply something that you're going to pitch in the garbage, but if it's a personal letter, if you're like me, I probably discern a little bit who it's from before I open it by looking at the return address or looking at the postmark to get some sense of what might be contained in the letter.

And so in the first chapter, in those first two verses, you have Peter's introduction to the letter that he writes, and it goes like this. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for the sprinkling with His blood, may grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Peter writes as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he doesn't have to go into a long explanation as defending his apostleship. Everybody understands that he is an apostle, a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That was true also in the courtyard when he was accused of being one of Jesus' followers. A disciple, and he denied three times. Peter was restored to ministry by Jesus, and he's widely recognized as the Lord's apostle.

Now Paul, who was an apostle born out of due time, oftentimes had to defend his apostleship. Look, I was called by the Lord Jesus Christ. I was appointed an apostle by him, and he had to defend that.

[9 : 36] Peter didn't, and so he merely introduces himself as an apostle, and then he introduces the recipients. And he describes them as exiles of the dispersion.

Now there are two possibilities as to who these exiles are. The first opinion, and this was the prevailing opinion, although there's always been at least these two, it's never been unanimous at any given point in time, but the first opinion, at least up through the Reformation, was that these were Jewish believers.

They're called exiles of the dispersion, and you know from Old Testament Scripture that one of the things that God told his people is if you don't walk in my commandments, if you don't follow me wholeheartedly, I will disperse you among the nations.

And then the prophets also spoke of a time that God would not only disperse among the nations, but he would gather back. And at least in some sense, we've seen that gathering back in Israel, at least the skeleton without the life, without the spirit of Israel being gathered back into the promised land.

So that was the prevailing opinion, at least up through the Reformation. After the Reformation, it's probably tipped more to that these believers to whom Peter is writing is a mixture of Gentiles and Jewish believers.

[10 : 51] And that Peter is taking a very Jewish concept, he calls them dispersed believers, they've been scattered, which was a term associated with Jewish theology, but he's saying, you know, it's also true of Gentile believers.

They're scattered too. Because no matter where you are as a believer, in some sense, you're in the minority. You're walking out of step with everybody else.

You don't fit in. You're not recognized as one of the rest of those that live in the world. Your priorities are different. Your values are different. You know, you recognized me immediately when I came in here.

I'm not a regular attendee here. Most of you don't remember me. And even those of you that were here back in 1980 when I was here, it's like, well, you've changed a lot. And probably you have too.

But I'm recognized as somebody who's an outsider. Well, in some sense, that's what believers are to be. We're outsiders. We don't quite fit in. And so Peter addresses them as outsiders.

[11 : 53] I'm actually going to take the opinion, and you're free to disagree with me, but I think Peter is addressing not only Jewish believers, but also Gentile believers. I think it's a mixture. And one of the reasons why I think that is because of some of the internal evidence within the letter that suggests it's not merely Jewish believers.

Let me give you a sample of that. If you will look at chapter 1 and verse 14. Chapter 1 and verse 14, Peter writes these words, Now, Jewish believers were accused of, in their ignorance, they crucified the Messiah.

But their lifestyle, what was handed down to them, their theology, it wasn't an ignorant theology. They'd been given much. They had the tradition that Paul writes about in Romans. Theirs is the covenants and the promises and all that God had given Israel.

But these people that Paul writes to, he talks about, you used to be controlled and lived in such a way that it was just a lifestyle of former ignorance and you were controlled by your passions.

Verse 15, But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all of your conduct. Since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. And if you call on him as father, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with the perishable things, such as silver or gold.

[13 : 31] Now, there are other indications in the letter that would suggest to me that these are not merely Jewish believers, they are Gentile believers, who are now grafted in, in some sense, into this olive tree of blessing and they're enjoying God's favor in a very gracious way that has brought them salvation through Israel's unbelief.

Salvation has been extended to the Gentiles. And yet they're still scattered across the Roman Empire. They're still not widely accepted. There are still all kinds of rumors going around about these Christians, this new sect, that they drink blood, that they're incestuous.

And probably the most prevalent charge against Christians that Peter addresses in his letter, the most prevalent charge against Christians is that they're seditious. They don't conform to government standards.

They're trying to overthrow the government. They're not good for Rome. And so one of the things Peter actually addresses in his letter is that as believers, you're to submit to government. That that charge is not true.

We're to be good citizens. We're to be model citizens, though we only recognize Jesus as Lord. And it's out of our recognition of Jesus as Lord that we can be good citizens.

[14 : 51] Well, having said all of this, Peter then, in chapter 1, begins extolling the greatness of God's salvation. So in chapter 1, you've got God's magnificent salvation, our inheritance.

Let me read a little bit of that for you in chapter 1, in verse 3. This is out of the New King James now. It's the Bible that I actually brought with me. Chapter 1, verse 3.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

And then verse 6 kind of introduces a theme, a thread that will continue throughout the entire letter. Verse 6. In this salvation, in this inheritance, in all that God has accomplished, in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.

Peter is going to address that while God's salvation is great, this inheritance is unmatched, we ourselves are preserved until its completion. And yet in spite of all that, where do these trials come from?

[16 : 18] Where does the hardship come from? Where does the suffering come from? And Peter addresses that a little bit in verse 6, that we can rejoice in the midst of it. Because we know our faith is being tested and purified, and being demonstrated as genuine.

Therefore, our response to all this is in verse 13, where Peter writes, therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And then, the main concept, or the main thought in verse 13, the main instruction is this, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you. That's what Peter wants these believers to do.

Set your hope on the finish line. Set your hope on the fact that God isn't done with it yet. He's still in the midst of purifying your faith.

Of conforming you to the image of your Son. Set your hope on that, that what God has started, God is going to finish. And don't be disrupted by the fact, Peter will say later in chapter 5, don't be surprised by trials and sufferings.

[17 : 32] As though some strange thing were happening to you. If we expect to share in Christ's glory, why would we find it surprising that we share in His hardship? The servant is not greater than his master.

So, Peter is addressing all this, and he wants our response to be that which is described in verse 13. C.S. Lewis said, and I didn't re-look it up to know exactly what he said, but it was along the lines of, the Christians that are most effective right here and now are the Christians that are most tuned in to what God is planning for the future.

I kind of grew up with the saying that a Christian could be so heavenly minded he's no earthly good. You've probably heard that too. But really, the Bible doesn't teach that. It's impossible to be so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good.

If you're heavenly minded, that's the very incentive to be earthly, caught up in what is good for the earth. The problem in Christianity so much as I see it, at least one of the problems is, that the church has lost sight of the kingdom.

Of when it's all said and done. When salvation is brought to its fulfillment and culmination. We've lost sight of that. We've lost sight of our sense of urgency that we're to have.

[18 : 45] That there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned. And people are caught up with their own little lives and nobody wants to tread on anybody else's feelings. And your own thoughts about spirituality is very hard in our culture.

And so we're no longer future minded and it's handicapped our present ministry. Now in the video series that was shown in Sunday School, the speaker referred to the passage in 2 Peter, which is actually a passage I intended to look at as well this morning.

So turning your Bible over to 2 Peter, and I want you to see this connection again between being heavenly minded and the effect that it is meant to have in the present moment.

In 2 Peter chapter 3. And it's kind of an extended passage, but if I remember my roots, I would say that I would just have to read the whole thing because I think that's what Marv used to do when I was here.

In fact, he would always say, start at this verse and he'd look a while and he'd be like, well... And he'd keep backing up and he'd keep backing up. You know what? Actually, just by way of a sidetrack, one of the things that Grace Bible Church taught me back in the day, which it was a completely unique church experience that I had, is it taught me context is everything.

[20 : 05] Context is everything. And I maintain that 90 plus percent of all things Christians disagree about and think that really there's no answer to is solved by context. If you understand what came before and he keeps reading what Miles Coverdale said about scripture, that great interpretive principle, we've used that as well.

It's absolutely true. And so a lot of times when somebody wants to talk to me about some disagreement or some doctrinal distinctive, what they really want is a two-minute answer to something that would take hours and hours.

And you can't do it. It takes too much time. But having said all that, look at 2 Peter chapter 3 and I want you to see the connection between being heavenly minded and the effect it has on our present moment.

Chapter 3 verse 1. Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, knowing this first, that scoffers will come in the last days walking according to their own lusts and saying, where is the promise of his coming?

For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation. For this they willfully forget that by the word of God the heavens were of old and the earth standing out of water and in the water by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

[21 : 35] But the heavens and the earth which now exist are kept in store by the same word reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat. Both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness? In light of the fact that we know how the story ends, in light of the fact that we know God has a plan and a purpose for every day, in light of the fact that we know he has an agenda that he is working through and the goal he is working toward, in light of that, what kind of people ought we to be?

But holy people, people committed to a conduct that is pleasing to our Lord and Savior. If we're struggling in the here and now, it's because we've lost sight of God's finish.

[22 : 57] We've lost sight of where God is going with this thing. It's impossible to be so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good. We need to be more heavenly minded so that we can be more good on the earth.

Alright, having said all that, go back to 1 Peter 2 for just a moment. In chapter 1, Peter extols the greatness of God's salvation. In chapter 2, he commends Jesus as the stone.

For the believer, he's the cornerstone on which our life is built. So it's another doctrinal passage in the first part of chapter 2 where Jesus is the stone and that stone will either be the one that you build your life upon or that stone will destroy you.

And believers are to have a particular response to this teaching and that response is submission. So from chapter 2 verse 11 through chapter 3 verse 12, the theme, the thread that runs throughout that entire segment of scripture is the theme of submission.

Ultimately, all submission is to God. because for you to do anything that God calls you to do requires that you are trusting Him. So it starts off with this general principle of submission.

[24 : 10] All believers are to submit to ruling authorities. And then he talks about servants submitting to their masters. Even their difficult masters. They have no recourse.

They have no rights. And even when their masters treat them unjustly, they are to submit. And Jesus is given as an example to them in verse 21 chapter 2.

For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in His steps. Then thirdly, in chapter 3, Peter tells wives to submit to their own husbands.

And then he tells husbands to honor their wives. And he doesn't use the word submit, but submission is actually behind the command because for a husband to honor his wife requires him to submit to God's authority.

So you've got those four types of submission in that particular segment of verses. Peter, what we found at our church going through 1 Peter, we have found that Peter has certain particular values that he keeps going back to though he doesn't name them and list them.

[25 : 20] Here's 1, 2, 3. But Peter has certain values that kind of motivate everything that he says. Just like in America, we have a certain way of life and we tend to think very independently and we tend to think of my own rights and my own person and we've kind of lost sight of the group working together for a greater good.

It's all about personal rights. And so Peter, I think, is addressing the people that are kind of caught up. It would be easy to be caught up in what about me? What about my rights? What about when people treat me and it's not fair?

And Peter, he says, there's three things we always need to remember. And I think, like I said, I think this comes up through Peter's first letter time and time again. Number one is this, more important than my own rights is it's important for me to show myself to be a servant of Christ.

It's just more important. I'm Christ's servant. So, do my rights maybe get trampled on? Maybe they do. But if I show myself to be Christ's servant, I've accomplished what I really need to accomplish.

Number two, it's more important to remove obstacles to the gospel. Let me give you a reference for that. Look at chapter 2 and verse 12. By the way, let me give you a reference for it's important to show yourself to be a servant of Christ.

[26 : 38] In chapter 2 and verse 16. In 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 16, Peter says, as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as servants of God.

He wants us to see ourselves as we're servants of God. You may be free in Christ, but you're still a servant of God. And then, we're not to present any obstacle to the gospel. That would be chapter 2 and verse 12.

Let me go back to verse 11. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, Gentiles there is used as a term for the unbelieving, the pagans.

Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Now, again, I'm really limited as to how much I can say in the little bit of time that I have. It's taken us ten months to get, we're in chapter 4 at my church, and I'm trying to do as much as I can in one message, but my understanding is the day of visitation that's referred to in verse 12 is not a day of judgment, it's a day where God may visit an unbelieving Gentile with his mercy.

[27 : 58] Jesus refers, I believe it's in Luke's gospel, about how Messiah came to them and they didn't recognize him on their day of visitation. It was a day when God had visited Israel with the culmination of his plan of grace and salvation and mercy and they didn't even recognize him.

Well, believers are to live such lives that when God may visit an unbelieving person in his mercy that they can't point to us and say, yeah, well I know somebody that calls himself a Christian and let me tell you, they're anything but.

They're not what your Bible says a Christian is. So what we are to be motivated by is to live our lives in such a way that we do not present an obstacle to an unbeliever coming to Christ.

And then the third value that Peter keeps going back to time and time again is that we are to recognize no matter what the situation or circumstance God is in control. God is sovereign.

This is still his world. In fact, I thought about maybe at the end of the service if I have time, there's two songs I remember from Grace Bible Church, probably as much as any, that we would sing time and time again, and everybody loved him at least back then, and it was This is My Father's World.

[29 : 14] We would sing This is My Father's World, and I love that song. And then another song we would sing a lot is Am I a Soldier of the Cross? And This is My Father's World tells me, you know what, God's not done with his world yet.

Right is still going to triumph in the end. When it's all said and done, we will see that God's plan was best. And so we can trust him in that. And so our responses are to be motivated by those three things.

I'm his servant, I am not to present any obstacle to the gospel, and I can trust God's providence. This is My Father's World. A good reference for that would be chapter 3 and verse 12.

We're quoting from the Psalms, Peter says, For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

God knows, God sees, God hears. He may not answer according to my timetable, but he knows, and he hears, and he sees, and I can trust him in that.

[30 : 16] All right. In the middle of chapter 3, the theme changes from submission to suffering, and in chapter 3, Peter very straightforwardly addresses the possibility that Christians may suffer, believers may suffer, unjustly.

So, in chapter 3 and verse 13, Peter writes, Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? For even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.

And then skip down to verse 17, For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. And again, he points to Jesus as our example.

So that in chapter 3, in the first part of verse 18, Peter writes, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

Sometimes suffering happens and there's no good explanation. In fact, it defies explanation. Because you've honored Christ and you have shown yourself to be his servant, and you're not presenting an obstacle to the gospel, and you are trusting him, and the valley is still dark, and it's still difficult, and you still have more questions than you have answers.

[31 : 34] Well, Peter points to Jesus, look, he suffered also for sins, but what was his reason for doing so? He tells us in verse 18 that he might bring us to God. We spent a week on that at our church.

It was one of our gospel messages where most of scripture is addressed to the church, it's addressed to believers. But on that particular Sunday, we spent a time where we just talked about, why do we need to be brought to God?

How is it that we got away from God? Originally created in his image, originally created to walk with him and know him, and yet we're estranged from him by our own sinful choices.

And now we're wandering and looking for meaning and significance and fulfillment in all variety of ways and relationships and what we do and the titles we get for ourselves and our education and our assets.

We look for some way to get significance when what we really need is to be brought to God. And only Christ can bring you to God. And he suffered that he might bring us to God.

[32 : 37] A message that's embraced and received by faith. Repentance and faith. Now in chapter four is actually the little bit of time that I have left is where I want to spend the balance of my time.

In chapter four, Peter continues to advance Jesus as the believer's example. people. In chapter three, one way that you could look at it is Peter said, look, you need to do this because it's good for those who are still outside of the kingdom of God that still don't know Christ as savior.

Don't be an obstacle to them. You need to live a holy life. You need to guard your conduct because it's good for the outsiders. But now in chapter four he says, but you know what?

It's also good for you. It's not just good for them. It's good for you because it gives you an opportunity to commit yourself to certain truths and to remove yourself from the way that you used to live, which was an ugly sinful way of living and commit yourself to Christ.

It looks like this in chapter four in verse one. verse one.

[34 : 12] It's good for us to live a certain way because it demonstrates our break with sin.

And it demonstrates our commitment, our dedication to Christ as Lord and as Savior. He tells us right in that first verse to arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.

It's a military term. It's a military concept. One of the concepts that Paul tends to use in his epistles is he says, put on Christ, clothe yourselves with Christ. And the imagery there is like you're getting dressed to go out.

You prepare yourself. You wear certain clothes. And if it's cold, if it's winter time, you make sure that you've got a coat or a cloak. But you put on something. And that's the image that Paul typically uses. But that's not the image Peter uses.

Peter doesn't say, put on the same thinking like you're putting on a garment. He says, arm yourselves with the same type of thinking. In other words, it's going to be difficult. It's going to be a battle here.

[35 : 36] my effectiveness as a Christian, my advancement as a Christian, is largely determined by what I think. My ineffectiveness, your ineffectiveness, is largely determined by what you think.

Do you guard your thoughts? Are you careful what you think? Is your thinking controlled by your circumstances and your difficulties? Or is your thinking controlled by God's promises and God's word?

I can't remember who said it first and I really didn't have it in my notes so I'm guessing. But I want to say at least at some point Warren Wiersbe said something along the lines of either your circumstances will tell you what is true about God or God will tell you what is true about your circumstances.

For many people, their view of God is determined by their circumstances. circumstances. I can't believe in God because here's my difficulties, here's my questions, here's my hardships and they use that to define God.

And scripture has it in reverse. No, you start with scripture and let him shed light on your circumstances. We don't name men at our church so he's got me a little disrupted. I feel like I'm in a We don't name that here.

[36 : 53] I've largely built a lot of my ministry certainly my counseling ministry on the verses in Romans 12, 1 and 2 and verse 2 in Romans 12 reads and you're probably familiar with it though different versions render it different ways.

The English Standard Version says do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

You've got to guard your thoughts. You've got to guard your thinking. You've got to renew your mind because we live in a culture that says this is what you need to think. This is how you need to interpret life circumstances.

This is what you need to think about spirituality and about eternity whether it even exists. And we need to come back to scripture and renew our minds to what God says is true.

It's to be the same way of thinking as Christ. So we thought at our church what did Christ think? How did Christ approach unjust suffering?

[37 : 57] What was Christ thinking that enabled him to endure the jeers and the revilings and the mock trials? What was it that enabled him to endure the beatings and the scourgings?

And Pilate saying I find no fault with this man I'll just beat him to a bloody pulp. And then the crucifixion. What is Christ thinking that enables him to maintain who he is through all of that?

And I would suggest to you Christ knew what his aim was. He knew what his goal was. He knew what his purpose was. And nothing would deter him from that. Do you remember those three principles that Peter interweaves throughout his letter?

That we're to show ourselves to be a servant of God? Christ consistently showed himself to be a servant of his father. We are not to present any obstacle to the gospel. Christ died to bring sinners to God.

Not an obstacle to the gospel. And we are to trust the providence of God. Christ died trusting the providence of God. Let me give you some examples of this. I'll read through these scriptures fairly quickly.

[39 : 06] In Luke chapter 9, Luke is an interesting gospel because so much of Luke is committed to really the last few weeks or maybe months of Jesus' life.

Already in Luke chapter 9, Jesus commits himself to go to Jerusalem to die. And so from Luke chapter 9 through the balance of the gospel of Luke, it's all committed with his death.

Though it talks about different healings along the way, teachings along the way, but by Luke chapter 9, Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die and it reads this way. Luke chapter 9 verse 51, When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. Jesus is going to die in Jerusalem. Jesus is going to endure all that unjust suffering in Jerusalem. But he goes to Jerusalem because he knows who he is, he knows what his goal is, what his purpose is, and he won't be swayed.

In Gethsemane, Jesus prayed these words in Luke's gospel, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. Jesus knew his aim.

[40 : 14] He knew his purpose. He knew why he came. And so he was determined to fulfill what God had brought him forth toward to die, to bring sinners to himself.

And so in the garden, though he doesn't want to die, as a man he doesn't want to die, he doesn't want to suffer. Nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done. And then on the cross, Jesus says these words, his last words, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And John's gospel reads, and having said this, he breathed his last. Jesus committed himself to his father's care, to his father's providence on the cross.

You see, Jesus didn't teach one thing and live another way. To some extent, I do. I'm not the perfect man. And so I can teach God's word and I can tell you to be holy, but I can tell you I'm not completely holy.

And if you ask my wife, she could give you examples, but we won't go there. But Jesus didn't teach things that he himself didn't live. Do you remember when Jesus taught his disciples and he said, don't fear those that can destroy the body.

[41 : 18] Fear him who can cast both body and soul into hell. Well, that's how Jesus lived. Fear in the sense, well, then Jesus goes on, let me backtrack, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples, you know, if you're going to fear, all right, the idea is if you're going to fear something, don't fear people talking bad about you.

Don't fear what the scuttlebutt is in the neighborhood or on the job, that you're, you know, a Christian gone wild, that you're somebody who lives by this other standard. No, don't fear that, fear God.

But yet, Jesus says, well, let me assure you that you're a far more value than a sparrow and not one of those falls to the ground apart from his father's notice. If you're going to fear, fear God.

But really, we're not to be in a fear relationship with God. He loves us as his children. But aren't we to live in honor of his name? And Peter, when he talks about us, he, God is our father, he says that we're to be obedient children.

I mean, we're his children. We're to be obedient to him. He loves us. Well, Jesus, he lived for his father's sake. He didn't fear what men could do to, fear what men could do to him.

[42 : 27] And men did some pretty awful things to him. And all four gospels record what men did to him. And the worst of it all, this is completely a sidetrack, I grew up in church, some of the churches I grew up in back in high school, you know, I remember typically once a year, probably before Easter, there would be a message about Christ's suffering.

And the emphasis of Christ's suffering was always on the physical agony. And they would describe the death of crucifixion in terms really that the Bible doesn't see fit to describe, though it may very well be true.

really what the Bible emphasizes in Christ's suffering was not the physical suffering, it was the humiliation. And it was the shame. That the Lord of glory, and that's something you will never be able to wrap your mind around, that the one who spoke the world into existence, that gives us life and breath, that Lord of glory was crucified on a cross.

The shame and the humiliation that we would be called the children of God. That's what the Bible emphasizes. So Jesus lived in fear of his Father, in honor and reverence of his Father's name.

So much so, that particularly in John's Gospel, and I'll give you one particular instance, but it's all the way through John's Gospel, in John chapter 8, Jesus says these words.

[43 : 49] John chapter 8, verse 28, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak, just as the Father taught me.

And He who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him. What one of us could say that?

I always do the things that are pleasing to Him. That is to be our goal. That is to be our aim. And to the extent that we fulfill that goal, and to the extent that we're concentrated on that aim, we cease from sinning.

Sinning is not a part of our life when we are fearing God, and when our aim is to please Him wholeheartedly. That's what Jesus did according to John's Gospel.

So, back in Peter, Peter adds, after saying that we need to think like Christ, he adds, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.

[44 : 51] And I've already suggested to you how that plays out. That is, if you are committed to fearing God and pleasing Him, in every aspect, you've ceased from sin. Now, in the context in Peter, it particularly has to do with unjust suffering.

You call yourself a Christian, you commit yourself to live a certain way, maybe you're not going to lie, maybe you're not going to do something unethical, maybe you have to make certain decisions that are going to bring some hardship into your life, but you're committed to do it.

And when the going gets tough, you make it your aim to please God. In that process of making those decisions, you've ceased from sin. You've removed yourself from sin.

That's what Peter's talking about. He goes on to explain exactly that in verse two. Now, there are a few Bibles, I don't know if anybody here uses a New International Version or a New Living Translation, but those versions, for readability's sake, usually make verse one its own little sentence, and then verse two becomes a second sentence, but in the Greek it's not that way.

Verse one goes right into verse two, and verse two is a further explanation as to what he just said in verse one, so it would read like this. The end of verse one says, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, that is in your body, your natural self, no longer for human passions, but for the will of God.

[46 : 22] Look, if my time on this earth, I'm not living for human passions and desires, if I'm living for the will of God, I've ceased from sin, particularly in the areas as it has to relate to suffering.

And that's exactly what Peter means to talk about. What I'm going to do for you is I'm going to play for you an audio clip. I'm going to have the audio guy play a clip for you, and it's really interesting because it really wasn't planned for you, but it's really kind of unique in the sense that this audio clip, it's a message from D. James Kennedy, who was pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church down in Fort Lauderdale for all those years.

And it's a message, I think, from Moody Pastors' conference, probably in the 1970s. The quality of the audio is not terrific, but what he has to say is terrifically good.

But the interesting part is, it's actually a message that Marv gave to me 30 years ago. And I digitally recorded it, and I listened to it every so often because it's such a powerful message.

And at my church, when I was putting together this message, I thought this would be a great time for this five-minute audio clip, so that my people, and so that you as people, as God's people, will know exactly what it means if you commit yourself to pleasing God in spite of suffering, you've ceased from sin.

[47 : 41] D. James Kennedy is going to describe a meeting he had with Richard Wurmbrand. Richard Wurmbrand was a Romanian pastor under the Iron Curtain when communists, the Soviet Union, ruled.

He was imprisoned for his faith, he was tortured for his faith, he's since passed away, his book *Tortured for Christ* has been published in the millions of copies, I believe. But he's going to describe this situation about Richard Wurmbrand choosing to suffer for the name, and in doing so, he certainly has ceased from sin.

It's about five minutes long, I'll have you listen to it, and then I'll open the floor up for comments and questions. Everybody's not called to be an evangelist in the sense of Billy Graham, that sort of thing.

Everybody's not called to be an elder. Everybody's not called to be a teacher. Let there be a few teachers, James says, didaskalos, masters in the King James.

And there are a number of things that everyone is not called on to do. Everybody is not called to sing in a choir. But every Christian is called upon to read the Bible, to pray, to worship God, and many other things, including to witness for Christ.

[48 : 52] It took persecution to really create the evangelistic thrust of the early centuries. I was talking to Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, the Lutheran pastor that was captured by the Communists in one of the Eastern European countries.

And he spent 14 years in prison. He was tortured every other day. And I had dinner with him one time. He was speaking at our church. And he showed me a picture of three men that had just received sentences, 10 and 15 year sentences in Siberia for evangelizing.

You know, it's interesting, the Russian Constitution says that Christians have the freedom of worship. But atheism has the freedom to propagandize. It's illegal to propagandize, proselyte, or evangelize.

And that's, of course, the end of that road is very obvious. And I said, with penalties like that in these countries do many Christians witness.

And I'll never forget his response to that. This man who bears in his body the marks of hot irons and all sorts of other tortures. It was like sparks came out of his eyes.

[49 : 59] And he said, the Christians witness. He said, I never heard of a Christian that didn't witness. But it took persecution in Eastern Europe for the church to do that.

I wonder what it's going to take in America. I wonder what it's going to take. It took persecution in the early centuries. It took persecution there.

Whenever the church has been persecuted, it has been purged and has been cleansed. And people have witnessed for Jesus Christ. I'll never forget when this man the next day spoke in our church. We had just sung, How Great Thou Art.

It was Sunday evening. And he stood up to speak and he said, that was wonderful singing. That was a beautiful hymn. He said, but that's not the most beautiful hymn in the world. The most beautiful hymn is only sung on the other side of the iron curtain.

He said, when I was in prison in this great iron prison with a huge opening that went floor after floor after floor after floor and cells all around it. We used to hear somebody or another singing this hymn every night.

[51 : 07] You could hear it all night long. He said, now, you may not care for the words. And he said, I don't have much of a voice.

But he said, I think I'll sing it for you. And you know, the night before we'd had a fellowship for new members and he was there and we'd been laughing and joking. And I finally asked him to say a word.

And I'll never forget, he cut me right off at the knees. He said, you know, the Bible says that we should rejoice with them that rejoice and we should weep with them that weep. He said, I've heard a lot of laughing in America.

He said, but I've seen very little weeping with those that weep, with those that weep. And when he said that, he was sitting in a chair and there was about a 17-year-old girl seated on the floor next to him and she giggled.

And I'll never forget, he turned to this girl and he placed his hand on her shoulder. This man who had been crucified for four days, who had been placed in a little tiny room that was too big, too small to stand up in or lie down in and he'd been there for months and months and months and months.

[52 : 16] He never saw a human face, heard a human voice. He said the only way that he knew that he wasn't in hell is because once a day there was a cup of water placed there. He forgot all of the prayers for the beatings and the drugs that he'd ever learned.

He forgot all the scripture he'd ever learned. He finally forgot the Lord's prayer. All he could remember was our Father. And finally he came to the place where he said, Father, from here on you'll just have to listen to the beating of a loving heart.

He turned to this young lady who had giggled in typical American superficial fashion, so ignorant we are of what's going on in the world today. And he said, young lady, when you were just an infant with 50 pound chains on my ankles, I prayed all night long for you and for others in America.

And she stopped her giggling. And that next night he said, I want to sing this hymn for you. Now forget this tall gray-haired man singing this hymn which he said he used to hear all night long being sung by different people who would waft up through the floors of this great iron prison in Eastern Europe.

He said, it goes like this. Oh! Oh! Oh! It took persecution in Europe.

[53 : 48] I wonder what it will take in America. The person that commits themselves to serving Christ and pleasing him as servant has ceased from sin.

And that's a demonstration, a really living example of what that passage means in a way that I wouldn't be able to tell you from my own personal life. Comments or questions? Comments? Okay, great.

In chapter 3 of Peter, chapter 3, verse 12. Okay. It says, in my Bible it means, the Lord is watching his children listening to their prayers, but the Lord's face is hard against those who do evil.

What does it mean, hard against those who do evil? Does that mean now? Later? Later? Does that mean they're not as happy as they seem to be doing these evil things now?

I don't think from their vantage point, for those that are doing evil, I don't know that they have this sense or awareness that the Lord's face is set against them, or that life is even difficult. But I think what Peter's assuring his Christian readers of, his believing readers of, is the Lord's face is set against them.

[55 : 09] They're coming to a day of judgment, and it will be a hard day of judgment. The Lord's face is set against them, and in a negative way. A good example of that, and I would commend to you really, I can't really read the whole passage, but if you were to read Psalm 73, Psalm 73 is a particularly good psalm where the writer of the psalm, Asaph, basically says, not only, Asaph says, I'm righteous.

I've lived a righteous life, my hands are pure, I've tried to live honorably before God, and yet, I find life difficult. And Asaph says, I look at the wicked, and not only is life good for the wicked, it's getting better every day.

Every day I look at the wicked, it gets better, and they lay their gray head down in peace. And Asaph's like, I don't understand this. And then he goes to the house of God, which for an Old Testament Israelite, the closest he could get to God was to go to the temple, to go to the house of God.

And he went to the house of God, and God revealed to him the true predicament of the wicked. And actually, Asaph sees that, no, the Lord has put them on a slippery place.

They're in a place of destruction. I looked at them and saw that they were in a place of ease and comfort, and I would sure like to be in that place. And the Lord shows, no, they're in a slippery place.

[56 : 33] Because you know what? They're trusting their ease and their comfort and their wealth and their friends and on and on. And it's the last place in the world you want to be. The safest place to be is right where God has called you to be.

Even if it's a dark place. You know, Isaiah talks about it's better to walk hand in hand. Something along the lines of it's better to walk hand in hand with God than light your own fire. You know, when you get in a difficult spot, what you want to do is you want to come up with your own solutions.

And you'll listen to somebody that may tell you a solution that you find very pleasing. But God ultimately says, you know what? It's most important just walk hand in hand with me. You may not understand, but just trust me. Just trust me.

So I think that's kind of the same type of a reference. He's just assuring his readers, God hears your prayers. He knows your plight. He knows your predicament. And his face is set against those who are harming you.

His face is set against Pilate and the Roman rulers and the chief priests and the scribes that persecuted the believers. His face is set against them, though it doesn't look like it at the moment.

[57 : 39] And we're just to trust in that counsel. Good question. Somebody else? Yep.

Oh, you want to do the mic thing? I remember back in the day, I remember one time there were hung mics and then later he had this gun mic.

And he would point, do you remember that? He had a gun mic and he kind of pointed it at you. I just missed your comment. I write it down. The view of circumstances, view of God, what was the second?

You will either allow your circumstances to tell you what is true about God or you will allow God to tell you what is true about circumstances. I'm pretty sure Warren Wiersbe said that at some point, though I don't know that it originated with him.

I certainly don't want to take credit for something that witty. Anybody else? If you'll indulge me then, let's sing a cappella in your hymnal.

[58 : 40] This is my father's world. It's number 143 in your hymnal. I think a cappella singing, we do all kinds of singing at our church. We're not a non-instrumental church, but once in a while it's fun.

So let's everybody stand and we'll sing just the first and the last verse of 143, This is My Father's World, and this will be our closing. This is my father's world And to my listening ears, All nature sings and round me rings The music of the spheres.

This is my father's world. I rest me in the thought Of rocks and trees, Of skies and seas, His hands the wonders wrought.

This is my father's world. Oh, let me ne'er forget That though the wrong seems God is the ruler yet This is my father's world The battle is not done Jesus who died Shall be satisfied And earth and heaven be one You're dismissed.

I think