

Some unbelievers have the attitude, “*Those Christians – they’re a miserable bunch... they don’t even know how to live...*” And I understand how they come to that opinion because some folk (who profess to being Christians), are:

- sad;
- some are cranky; and for some
- when they go to church, it’s just a mechanical going through the motions; and
- there doesn’t seem to be any joy in their life...

And so, an unbeliever sees a few examples of this, and they compare it to the ‘fun’ they think they’re having, and they go, “You don’t know how to live”...

But the exact opposite is true... Jesus said:

John 10:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.**

But it’s not until we start thinking the same way that Jesus does, that we can understand this... You see, over the last few months, we’ve been hearing about how the Christian life involves suffering and torment. And not just normal suffering (that randomly strikes anyone {no matter what walk of life}) – Disciples of Jesus often suffer, simply because we follow Jesus, and the world doesn’t like it.

When Peter wrote this, he was living in Rome, where he was **daily** witnessing, the horrendous atrocities that Nero was doing to Christians. And the churches he was writing to, were living in the Roman Empire, and the persecutions of Nero, were extending out into these areas as well.

And persecution continues today. *A couple of weeks ago, I shared with you, an article from a secular newspaper, that quoted a 2019 report commissioned by the British Foreign Secretary. And it revealed that **80% of all religious persecution** in the world today, is copped by Christians.ⁱ*

So, how can we talk about having a great life / a full life / an abundant life, when there's all this suffering, simply because we follow Christ???

Well, some preachers have a very shallow view on that (of what a full life / abundant life is), and they preach a prosperity gospel, and they tell us that “God wants you to be rich”, and they preach health; wealth; a long life...

But the full life that Jesus lived/preached, isn't about health; wealth; and a long life – it's about being **spiritually** alive.

Righto: Right from the first verse, Peter starts talking about “the flesh”. And I think I just need to clarify something, to save any of us from getting confused:

When we read the Bible, we understand (don't we?), that it wasn't all written by the same person. We call it “The word of God”, because it's all been inspired by the one Holy Spirit, but different books of the Bible were written by different people. And different people use their words differently...

Alright so, we've studied a few of Paul's letters (in the past), And when Paul talks about “the flesh” (sarx), he's talking about our sinful nature. But in **this** letter, when **Peter** talks

about “the flesh”, he’s talking about the physical life that we have (and our physical bodies), as opposed to the bodies that we’ll have when we’re raised from the dead.

And when Christians suffer persecution, it’s the **flesh** that suffers. You think about it:

- Imprisonment;
- torture;
- starvation;
- deprivation;
- confiscation;
- enslavement;
- execution

It’s our earthly life/bodies that suffer. And Peter urges the readers of this letter, that when they encounter persecution, and when they suffer in the flesh, to arm themselves in the same way of thinking as Christ did...

Alright, suffering in this physical life, only makes sense, when we process it with the attitude of Christ... You see, our normal human way of thinking, would avoid suffering at all costs – It’s about:

- self-preservation;
- safety; and dare I say it
- “comfort”.

It’s sad, but it’s true isn’t it? – many of us are just looking for a comfortable life... (how shallow is that)

And if your priority is comfort; safety; self-preservation, then being a disciple of Jesus, is not for you. And that’s why, when we’re born again, we leave behind our human way of thinking, and we arm ourselves, with the mind of Christ.

We arm ourselves to understand that our physical, earthly life is expendable, but in Christ, we are made spiritually alive, and that's eternal..

Now, when suffering comes, sometimes, we tend to ask the question, "What did I do to deserve this?"

Alright, that way of thinking, is based on the premise, that "God will only ever bless me", and so "If I'm suffering, it's because I've done something wrong, or because I don't have enough faith."

And I've heard some Christians tell other Christians "The fact that you're suffering, is because there's some sin in your life that you need to confess; or because you don't have enough faith."

... What a nonsense. The arrogance to pronounce such a judgment.

Did you know that suffering is actually good for us?

Now, some of you will think I've gone crazy.

Peter says something strange here: V1 for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin

Hmmm

Throughout history, there's been times when religious people have had a practice of self-flagellation, where they whip themselves and punish themselves, in the hope that it'll show God that they're sorry for their sins, or they're punishing themselves for their sin... I don't think that's what Peter's talking about...

The simple act of suffering, doesn't stop me from sinning. In fact, when some people suffer, they get **more** cranky/demanding, and curse and swear, but you see, that's not being armed with the mind of Christ...

But I want you to remember, Peter's specifically talking about the persecution they're suffering, because they're faithful to Jesus. You see, at **one** time, they were conformed to the sinful world.

- They **weren't** following Jesus;
- they **didn't** care if their manner of life pleased Him;
- They were quite happy to join in with all sorts of sinful behaviour;
- They weren't any different to anybody else...

And so they weren't persecuted, and they didn't suffer.

But something significant had changed in them... It was like they weren't the same person any more, and they weren't. They'd been born again. They'd repented of sin, and become **alive** in Christ. They were no longer conformed to the world. And their whole allegiance, had now **shifted** to Jesus.

They had left behind their old life of sin, and for **this** reason, they suffered. And their suffering, was **evidence** that they'd turned their back on sin – they were done with sin – that

wasn't to be what defined them anymore. And so their suffering was now proof that they were fair dinkum followers of Jesus...

And this is the main point of today's reading... All fair-dinkum disciples of Jesus, will be persecuted for their faith. Some Christians live with the constant threat of prison and death. Here in Australia, things aren't so severe, it might be more like:

- Mocking;
- Shaming;
- Targeted by anti-discrimination zealots because we won't embrace the ways of the sinful world;
- You may get excluded from a promotion at work, because there's certain ethical lines that you will not cross...

And when you suffer physically/torment (for the sake of Christ), that's a pretty good indicator that your faith is fair-dinkum.

Are you with me? You see, if I'm just dipping my toes in the water of Christianity, and "Yeah, I'll have some of that, but I'm not 'all in'", then I'm not likely to be willing to suffer for Jesus am I...

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus talked about the rocky soil, where the seed was sown, and it sprung up and got going, but it didn't have any root... And he said "That's those who fall away when the persecution comes."

But let's stand strong with Jesus (no matter what the cost), because we've died to sin...

And so Peter says, that we've spent enough time living in sin. And so for the rest of our physical lives, don't live for human lusts and desires, but let's live the rest of our physical lives, for the will of God.

Now, when you become a Christian, everything changes. What once used to be acceptable and normal, isn't any longer.

Jesus told us that there's 2 different paths/roads. There's a wide road that leads to destruction, and there's a lot of people on that road. But **Matthew 7:14 (ESV) 14 ... the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.**

Alright, there's 2 different gates/roads/crowds...

And you're going to discover, that when you become a Christian, it's going to become increasingly difficult to run with your old crowd.

Now, in the New Testament, when the Bible talks about "the Gentiles" and "the way of the Gentiles",,,, The **Gentiles** are the non-Jews. It is an ethnic thing (ἔθνω) (ethnōn), but it's not so much about 'race' – it's about the way the Gentiles were 'godless'. You see, the Jews had God's law, and they knew right from wrong / Good from evil... But for the

Gentiles (for the Godless), they were open to a plethora of sins...

And the Churches that Peter was writing to, they weren't Jews – they were Gentiles. And so God had done an enormous change in them. They used to run with the Gentiles (because they were Gentiles), but now they were running with their Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

And when Peter describes what's 'normal' in their Gentile past, he could very well be describing what's normal in Australia today. **living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.**

- 3 of those examples relate to sexual sin and lust and desire (**Sensuality; Passions** {lust and desire}; **Orgies**);
- 2 of those examples relate to excess of alcohol and substance abuse (**drunkenness; and drinking parties**)
Excuse the language, but in our colloquial, that's a 'piss-up'.
- And the 6th example, is **lawless idolatry** – it's about the rejection of God, and embracing 'other spiritual options'.

And isn't that the spitting image of what's normal in Australian culture???

For some of you, it will very well describe what a weekend entailed for you, before you became a Christian. It was normal for your mates; It was normal for you... And whether you enjoyed it or not, doesn't really matter – it's what you did to fit in.

But when you become a Christian, all of a sudden, you realise “I can't run with the same crowd any more, because I'm a different person.” And it's really important that we try to remain connected, because who's going to tell them the Gospel if we don't? But I can promise you, there's going to be a level of awkwardness there, because you're on different paths – you're on different roads, and so we'll probably find that we can't run with our old crowd.

In fact, you'll probably find that your old mates will be surprised that you don't join in with them in the stuff that they do and you used to do. And Peter says, they'll probably even malign you (run you down) – “What, are you too good for us now?”

When I was a student at Ag College, probably 90% of the students (even though many of them were under-age, lived to get drunk. B&S Balls were the go, because they had the extra added possibility that you might pick up a girl for the night. They'd pay their \$50 for a ticket which included as much grog as they could drink (The ticket would have to be a lot more now), they'd put on their suit, and go to the B&S...

And on Sunday they'd all come back to the dorms looking sick, their clothes muddy, torn and stained; and they'd say

“That was the best weekend! Can’t remember a thing. So it must’ve been good.”

But they couldn’t understand, why I wouldn’t be interested in that...

And for some of you, that probably was your way of life, and you fitted right on in, but now your mates don’t understand why that’s not you any more...

For some people, it’s all about hooking up with a partner for a good time for a night.

For some, it’s the drugs:

- Marijuana;
- Speed;
- MDMA;

Some use drugs to escape; Some use it to open up their minds to what they think are spiritual awakenings.

For some, it’s about seeking spiritual enlightenment from anywhere but Jesus. They’ll get into:

- New Age stuff;
- Yoga;
- Tai Chi
- Maybe they might get into crystals; or
- Meditation;
- Raki
- Transcendental meditation;

And essentially, a lot of the ‘Eastern religions’, have at their heart, (and this is what the appeal of them is), (and I’m sorry to those who will tell me that this is an oversimplification), but when you boil it down, it’s about “lose yourself, so you can then connect with your greater self, and essentially you’ll discover that you’re god.”

Alright, so all ‘godless paths’ aren’t exactly the same – For some, it’ll be about:

- Grog;
- Sex;
- Spiritualism...

But Peter says:

⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

There’s an old song that says, “*I say there is no heaven, but I pray there is no hell.*”. Sorry. Judgment day **is** coming.

But, what does it mean to say that God is going to judge the living and the dead

Well, I think it carries 2 meanings, and they’re both true:

The first is the obvious. When Jesus returns, He will gather to Himself, all those who are still living, and the dead will be raised. The righteous (DOJ) will be raised to eternal life,

while those who rejected Jesus, will be raised to judgment. Alright, so the living and the dead will be both be brought for judgment.

But in the context of where Peter has said this, I reckon there's a second way he wants us to understand this – The living and the dead, are the spiritually alive, and spiritually dead...

In the paragraph immediately before this 3:18, he says that Jesus has been made **alive** in the spirit. In the Greek, it's a form of the word "Zoe" (life) and "Pneuma" (Spirit)... And up 'til now, in this paragraph, he hasn't used the word "Zoe" for "life" – he's been using other words to describe live/live/alive/way of life... That is until now.

God is going to judge "living" and "dead" (Zoe and Nekros) (It doesn't even have the word "the" in there) God is going to judge "living" and "dead". It's similar to when Jesus described the time of judgment – separating the sheep from the goats... Here, He'll be separating the Spiritually Live from the Spiritually Dead.

⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead (how is the Gospel preached to the dead? Well, it's not preached to the physically dead – there's no point to that – it's too late. The Gospel is preached to:

- The Spiritually dead;
- those who don't yet know Jesus;
- those who are on the broad road that leads to death and destruction;
- the Godless – to the Spiritually dead

because God's desire is for them to be saved...

⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

Alright, Peter was explaining to them, why the Gospel was taken to the Gentiles. You would think that they had fallen so far away from God – they were so:

- godless;
- immoral;
- filled with debauchery;
- rejected God, they would embrace any other Spiritual alternative that was the flavour of the day...

Why would the Gospel be preached to them? And we could ask the same question today, “Why would the Gospel be preached to a land like Australia, that has so overwhelmingly rejected Jesus???”

Well the evidence is obvious – The way people live; The way they reject Christ; the way they malign Christians, sure, they are spiritually dead,,. But if the Gospel is preached to them, there’s a chance they might turn their hearts to God, and live in the Spirit.

And there’s every hope for them, because that’s what’s happened to us. If we were to be judged by our acts, we’re doomed. But in Jesus Christ, we are born again, to a new Spiritual life. And now we live in the Spirit. We mightn’t be able to run with the same crowd we used to... But man, it’s

good to truly live, and to be spiritually alive. And I **love** it, that I can run with you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, in this new life, that God has called us to together.

Let's Pray:

Heavenly Father,

We thank You,

that just as you raised Jesus from the dead,

and made Him spiritually alive,

that through Him,

You take us (who were at one time, spiritually dead),

and You make us alive in the Spirit...

Lord Jesus,

we ask that You would help us to run in Your ways,

instead of running with the crowd we used to run with.

Lord,

You have called us away from our old sinful life,

to this new life in the Spirit,

which is a life of righteousness,

and a life totally devoted to You.

Lord, when others would malign us,

because we don't any longer do what is normal to a sinful world,

- give us strength;
- give us integrity; and

- give us hearts of love

(like You have a heart of love),

that we would pray for those who malign us,

and that we would be bold enough to share the Gospel with them.

And we do that now.

We pray for those who don't know You (spiritually Dead),

that by Your Holy Spirit,

You would draw them to faith,

that they too, would live by the Spirit.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/christmas-is-the-season-of-hope-for-persecuted-christians/news-story/75440d05f0116211a667a937be19351e>