

FULFILLED CHRISTIAN LIVING IN A PAGAN WORLD
"Part II: Overcoming Wrong Reactions To Godless Suffering"
(1 Peter 1:10-2:10)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) In the current, February issue of Moody Monthly, an article appears entitled, "How To Split Your Church!" The ten steps given to destroy any congregation are: "(1) focus only on your own desires; (2) listen to every criticism (gossip); (3) focus on your pastor's weaknesses, not his strengths; (4) speak the truth or practice love, but never combine the two; (5) store grievances for future use; (6) forgive only those who ask you to (and only if they deserve it); (7) hide your own sins behind harsh attitudes; (8) use (home) prayer (group meetings) to unite discontented people and spread inappropriate information; (9) do whatever it takes to win, and (10) remember that you are on a mission from God; declare that you are taking divisive steps because God told you to." The author, Robert Moeller, an ordained pastor and full-time author, relates his experiences to verify these ten steps.

Interestingly, all of them arise from misconceptions as to the function of a church, or from ideas taken from the world or the world of secular business as to what is expected of a CHURCH! That can upset the godly believer!

(2) Robert Moeller illustrates this in his introductory remarks. He tells that once a church split over something a newcomer to a church brought for a church pot luck. The newcomer brought a jello salad with Cool Whip on top. Upset at the use of artificial whipped cream, the lady in charge of serving merely dumped the salad down the garbage disposal, saying, "You're new to this church. You'll soon learn we use only real whipped cream around here, not Cool Whip!" **The battle over real versus artificial foods, natural foods versus processed foods that we find in the secular world was used of Satan to split a church and end its local witness! Isn't that tragic?!**

(3) We face similar pressures. For years, people have said that they would really rather not attend our Annual Meetings because of things that are said or done in them that are discouraging! Recently a believer whose life has been affected by demonic music went through a real trial over it. Problems with alcohol or tobacco addiction are common among believers, and overeating is almost an accepted, fashionable "sin" to kid about! **These facts can be upsetting!**

When we see paganism affecting Christian behavior and thinking, we can get really worked up about it! SHOULD WE?!

***Need:** "When I see the wickedness of our pagan world, and know it affects even Christian behavior, I get so **UPSET** that I can hardly **STAND** it! I know that I should live righteously, but what does that mean under these conditions? Shouldn't I fight such wickedness?!"*

- I. **The Apostle Peter daily lived with the knowledge that pagans would crucify him for his Christian faith, Jn. 21:15-19. Peter also saw fellow believers to whom he wrote 1 Peter facing persecution for their faith from paganism, Ry. St. Bible, KJV, p. 1757.**
- II. **Knowing of the way the believer's deep sense of righteousness could entrap him into reacting to evil sinnfully, Peter gave an extended admonition to suffering saints in 1 Pet. 1:10-2:10:**
 - A. Peter informed unjustly persecuted believers that their persecution was the highest calling in God's plan for believers in **history!**
 1. The great and godly Old Testament prophets wrote about Christ's sufferings and glory to follow, but they didn't understand how Messiah could both suffer and be glorified. Accordingly, they intently examined the writings the Holy Spirit had caused them to pen to understand it all, 1 Peter 1:10a, 11.
 2. It was revealed to these men that these puzzling writings were for later believers who would need them for encouragement when they suffered before glorification like Messiah, 1:10, 12a, b!
 3. In fact, this suffering-before-glory Messianic motif as it is duplicated in persecuted Christians is so marvelous that the angels go out of their usual line of sight just to glimpse this program at work in our experiences, v. 12c, cf. The Gr. N.T., U.B.S., p. 792; A & G, A Gr.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., p. 624.
 - B. In view of this astounding fact, instead of wallowing in a defeatist attitude, persecuted believers must appreciate their uncomfortable situation as humanity's highest calling, 1:13a. (The KJV's "gird up the loins of your mind" is a Jewish expression, roughly being equal to our "Get with it" phrase!)
 - C. More specifically, Peter directs us to counter a wrong response to unjust suffering as follows (1 Peter 1:13b-2:10):
 1. Item One - Instead of excessive reactions to evil, believers must remain self-possessed under all conditions, 1 Pet. 1:13b.
 2. Item Two - Instead of quitting a godly walk in frustration, we are to hope completely for Christ's coming, 1 Pet. 1:13c.

3. Item Three - Instead of reacting to evil by discarding obedience in our methods, we must resist the pressure to conform to a worldly, defensive reaction to persecution and remain righteous in our way of conduct, 1 Pet. 1:14-15 (s.v. *anastrophay*, Ibid., *A Gr.-Eng. Lex.*, p. 61; Ibid., *Gr. N.T.*)
4. Item Four - Instead of assuming a hands on mentality when unjust issues arise, we must respect God's sovereign, impartial judgment of all parties involved, recalling that we ourselves stand greatly forgiven for sin, 1 Peter 1:17-21!
5. Item Five - Instead of overlooking what damages we might produce on others in our zeal, we must fervently love fellow Christians, 1 Peter 1:22-25.
6. Item Six - Instead of overlooking what Scripture provides during the persecution crisis out of our heat over the injustice, we must deeply desire its input as an infant does milk, 2:1-3.
7. Item Seven - Instead of becoming cantankerous, we reflect our lofty calling by showing forth the praises of our Lord who saved us and placed us into this great calling, 1 Peter 2:4-10.

Application: *When tempted to "froth over" in righteous anger at unjust persecution, (1) if we haven't done so, believe on Christ for salvation from sin to qualify for an amazing calling involving persecution, 1 Pet. 1:7,18-19; Jn. 3:16. (2) As a believer, lean on the indwelling Holy Spirit for behavior and thinking control, Gal. 5:16-23. (3) Thus equipped, (a) instead of reacting to unjust persecution or evil by losing our level bearing, disobeying God in how we react to sin, not respecting God's sovereign judgment, not caring how we hurt other believers, and thus overlooking Scripture input and ending up complaining, (b) realize that unjust suffering is the highest calling God has given His saints in human history, and "get with the program " as taught in 1 Peter 1:13-2:10 and outlined in the notes above!*

Lesson: *The Christian is in danger of getting so bothered at evil pressures against him that he himself sins in how he reacts to them! God calls believers to counter that temptation by focusing on the amazing role that his persecution thus plays in God's eternal plan!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the lesson . . .)

(1) When I attended Bible College, we took one day out of the year to pause for a "Prayer and Praise" day. One of the activities of that day was handing out Evangelical leaflets printed by the school to the neighborhood there in Portland, Oregon.

One of the students at the time was Fred W. Demara. Fred is the author of the book which has been made into the movie, "The Great Impostor" starring Tony Curtis. He's made a lot of money on royalties from the movie, most of which he has poured into several rescue missions he started.

Fred went about handing out tracts on one of these special days and experienced an irate homeowner spitting on his sweater. Fred responded, "I deserve what you just did to me, because I'm a sinner! But here, take and read this tract about someone who was spit on for you and me who didn't deserve it!"

The man came under such conviction for what he had done that he later sobbed in his home. His wife wrote out a \$10.00 and sent it with this note:

"Today, a big fat man in a tan sweater from your school came handing out religious literature. My husband was angry, and he spit on the man's sweater. The fat man told hubby to take a tract that told of one being spit on who didn't deserve it like he did. After the fat man left, my husband sobbed and sobbed, he felt so bad! Here's a check to cover costs to clean the sweater. We really feel bad, and 'sorry if it caused any trouble."

How do we react to evil in society? Should we get all flustered over it? Thank God that Fred W. Demara responded with the grace that Jesus did to leave the powerful testimony that he did. Suffering is an assignment, and Fred's assignment there superseded any movie contract or any other exploit he had accomplished in being a famous impostor! Like Fred, we need to "get with the program" instead of losing our cool!