

FULFILLED CHRISTIAN LIVING IN A PAGAN WORLD

"Part IX: Power For Persecution Fatigue"

(1 Peter 3:17-4:6)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) To illustrate the need concerning handling the fatigue of incessant verbal persecution, and yet to protect confidences and to edify, here are **MERELY hypothetical cases** representing **a sensitive issue** where persecution has existed in the past **with no reference to actual events**:

(a) A married couple might come to see me. When they sit down in the office, they share the following criticism they receive from another **Christian!** The wife tearfully blurts out, "Every Sunday she tells us that Scripture says that if we're not for Christ, we're against Him. Since the public schools are not for Christ, but against Him, and since we send our children to **public** schools, we are **against Christ!** How can we stand her **harping** on this so much?"

(b) Another couple might arrive all upset at criticism they receive for sending their children to the **Christian** school! They report, "Someone tells us that we unbiblically withdraw the kids from unbelievers so that they will not be equipped to evangelize effectively as adults! What are we supposed to do about this constant input?!"

(c) A third case involves a parent telling me that they have been chided for **home** schooling their children! They stand condemned of depriving the children of "socialization development."

Like James Dobson does in his April 1991 issue of Focus on the Family ("Which School for Your Child?" p. 1-5), I merely present these three schooling options (in hypothetical cases) without condemning any one option! However, **MY POINT IS, delicate issues like this have been fodder for **continual** verbal attacks amongst **believers** -- and that's simply not right!**

Well, **HOW** do we **deal** with this?! How do we face **repeated** unjust verbal attacks or critiques on sensitive issues of conscience?!

(. . . We turn to the "Need" section of the message . . .)

Need: "I know I should handle unjust persecution at work (1 Pet. 2:18-25) or in my marriage (3:1-6,7), etc., but doing so carries quite a price tag! I'm drained from (a) facing ungodly critics and from (b) missing an easier life by compromising my stand! Any ideas?!"

- I. **Peter who knew he faced confrontation and agony through death by crucifixion for his faith (Jn. 21) told believers that God's will might include their suffering for righteousness, 1 Peter 3:17!**
- II. **He then revealed that Christ's sufferings achieved His bringing us to God that WE might live free from sin **THOUGH BEING PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, 1 Peter 3:17-18!****
- III. **Having stated these facts, Peter added insight on the MEANS for HOW we could AC HIEVE this suffering task, 3:18c-4:6.**
 - A. Though Jesus was put to death in the body, He was made alive "by the ' Spirit '", 1 Peter 3:18c, (B.K.C., N.T., p. 851)! Thus equipped, He entered heaven and sat enthroned above all evil, 3:22!
 - B. Having mentioned Christ's triumph over His persecutors, Peter then described a **former, similar triumph** wrought in Noah!
 1. The Spirit was the Power by which Christ preached **through Noah** to people in Noah's era, (1 Peter 3:19 with 4:6)!
 2. Many souls are now confined in death, awaiting judgment for rejecting Noah's witness during the **120 years** when he was building the ark, v. 19f; Gn. 6:3c! Only **8** people believed, v. 20!!
 3. So though he was persecuted for **120 years** of godly preaching and toilsome labor on his ark project, and though he saw **only 8** converts for it all, the Spirit's power kept Noah going throughout this arduous ministry, Gn. 6:3c in light of 1 Peter 3:19!
 - C. This fact gives encouragement to Peter's readers as follows:
 1. Their Christian baptism had yielded an association with Noah:
 - a. We know that Peter's readers were scattered Jews due to his use of the term *diaspora* describing them in 1 Peter 1:1, UBS Gr. N.T., p. 791; A.&G., A Gr.-Eng. Lex., p. 187.
 - b. They had fled persecution from countrymen in Palestine for being baptized as Christians, and this had saved them from God's judgment on Jerusalem predicted in Luke 19:42-44!

2. So just as Noah was physically preserved in the ark, Peter's persecuted fellow believers were similarly physically preserved from judgment in Palestine by being baptized, 1 Pet. 3:20-21.
- D. Accordingly, just like Christ at Calvary, and just like Noah during his 120 years of ministry, Peter's readers were to live in the Spirit's enabling to offset persecution fatigue for a godly stand, 1 Pet. 4:1-6!
1. Peter commands his readers to follow Christ and Noah by living in the Spirit's power to avoid sin while under persecution, 4:1-2.
 2. This lifestyle is free from a pre-salvation life of lustful ease, and seems odd to self-indulging, unsaved critics, 4:3-4.
 3. However, accountability to God as proved in the case of Noah's era shows that following this lifestyle is prudent, 1 Peter 4:5-6!

Application: According to Peter who faced being crucified for his faith, to handle the fatigue of facing evil persecution over time, we must let God's Spirit handle it through us as in Christ's sufferings and as in Noah's 120-year case! This takes (1) believing on Christ for salvation from sin to become indwelt by the Holy Spirit, John 3:16; Rom. 8:9. (2) As a believer, if we have no reserves left to face unjust critics, or if we desire to compromise our stand to enjoy some ease in life, we betray thereby our own efforts at work and a failure to be controlled by the Holy Spirit! That means that we need to (a) confess violating Gal. 5:16 by applying 1 Jn. 1:9 followed by (b) depending afresh on the Holy Spirit as a way of living, Gal. 5:16-23! (3) Once we see the will of God leading us to bear injustices from others, (a) recall the lesson about Noah's facing persecution for 120 years in 1 Peter 3:20 for hope that the Spirit of God can handle it THROUGH us! (b) Recall that the Lord through Noah accomplished this feat, 1 Peter 3:19 with 4:6! Accordingly, KEEP letting God do the toiling as we claim Matthew 11:28-30, and seek God's step - at - a - time guidance through Scripture on what to do in every event of our trials, cf. Hebrews 2:18; 4:15-16!

Lesson: Not only would we **PERSONALLY** suffer fatigue from facing human persecutors and turning down compromise's life of ease; God does not ask that we try to do so! God only requires that we rely on the Holy Spirit and let Him (a) face unjust critics and (b) say "no" to compromise's ease through us to overcome this fatigue!

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Dr. Hudson Armerding, former president of Wheaton College in Illinois, gave this testimony of a mental Satanic persecution experience he had while on a brief study leave in West Texas:

"After lunch one noon I was washing the dishes. All during the forenoon a disturbing memory had kept coming into my consciousness. It was a memory of something that had happened years before -- an act of disobedience for which I was terribly ashamed. I had been convicted about that sin, had confessed it, and had sought by God's grace to forsake it and put it away. Yet that morning repeatedly, the recollection of that experience kept coming back. It was like a constant accusation that would not cease . . . I was in agony of spirit because I knew the accusations were true . . . But as I was bending over the dishes, suddenly this word came just as clearly as if someone was in the room: "If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). I knew that a more accurate translation would read: ". . . **continues** to cleanse us from all sin." Immediately, tears mingled with the dishwater because the Lord Jesus in mercy and **through the Holy Spirit** had reminded me of the unchanging truth of his word of forgiveness on the basis of his atoning sacrifice. Thus God overcame the persecution of Satan that was calculated to imprison me in guilt and to challenge the deliverance wrought by the Lord." (Armerding, Leadership, p. 27)

Dr. Armerding, a **human being like us all, and a believer in Christ, has shared the route of victory over persecution pressures that tend to wear us down. We need to depend upon the Holy Spirit to bear the burden as we continually expose ourselves to the Word of God. This way, we can function indefinitely in the presence of ceaseless pressures by ungodly attacks to the contrary.**