

**FULFILLED CHRISTIAN LIVING IN A PAGAN WORLD**  
**"Part I: Handling Depression Over This Life's Paganism"**  
**(1 Peter 1:1-9)**

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) A Christian who works in the Torrington public school system recently met an unsaved colleague in a school hallway. She suddenly blurted out to him, "I just don't have to take it anymore! I just don't have to take this disrespect!!" **We suffer in a pagan world!**

(2) Wayne Richard's cousin, Reverend Ken Richard, recently returned from Brazil where he was inundated with spiritism, says that we have spiritism here -- particularly in Winsted and Bantam. Those little piles of rocks on peoples' yards are signals that the homeowners are into spiritism! **We suffer from a dark, pagan world!**

Evangelical **pastors accept it!** This thinking infiltrates our thinking from a godless value system and causes **suffering** for conscientious believers!

Each of these trials occurred this week to people I know! We live in a pagan world that **pressures us toward being depressed due to its influence upon us!**

Well, how do we live above the depression arising from **our pagan culture, even when its ideals have in part been adopted unwittingly by fellow Christians?!**

***Need:** "When I continually face the blatant paganism of this world at work or at play, and see its effects of slowing even Christians from personal spiritual progress, as a conscientious believer, I feel so whipped that I fight depression! How must I deal with such evil?!"*

- I. **The writer of 1 Peter daily lived with the awareness that he was going to die by crucifixion for his Christian faith at the hands of pagans, 1 Peter 1:1a with John 21:15-19. He also saw that the Christians to whom he wrote faced a pagan society that challenged their spiritual progress, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, p. 1757.**
- II. **Yet, in spite of this humanly depressing awareness, Peter spoke of rejoicing "with joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Peter 1:8c!**
- III. **The cause for Peter's handling depression over the pagan evil surrounding Christians is revealed in 1 Peter 1:1-9 as follows:**
  - A. Peter wrote to Christians whom Peter called the "*diaspora*," a term used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament used in Jesus' day to describe the Babylonian dispersion of Jews among the Gentiles, Arndt & Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 187. Peter uses this term to picture Christian Jews who were persecuted unto leaving Palestine for their faith in Christ, J. D. Pentecost, 1975.
  - B. These believers, in spite of persecution, were nevertheless directed by God to live obediently to the Lord, 1 Peter 1:1-2.
    1. Many state that verse 2 teaches an election of God for people to believe in the Gospel to be saved by the blood of Christ.
    2. However, the "*diaspora*" here are chosen to be "sprinkled by the blood of Christ," a technical expression to Christian Jews that reminded them of Moses' sprinkling of Israel in Exodus 24:8. There the ritual pictured the need for the people to obey God as a way of life! (Ex. 24:7)
    3. Accordingly, I believe that, keeping with the context of the whole book and the context of its intended readers of Christian Jewish heritage, Peter taught that these believers were chosen by God to live obediently before their heavenly Father in a pagan world!
  - C. Just **how** they were to live this way in spite of the distracting trials caused by pagan influences is displayed in 1 Pet. 1:3-9:
    1. Peter redirected his readers' focus to their coming eternal compensations for sufferings due to paganism, 1 Pet. 1:3-4.
      - a. He announced that the believer has been spiritually born anew unto a new hope by proof of Christ's resurrection from the dead, 1 Peter 1:3. This subject reminded Peter's readers of the new birth promise found in Ezekiel 36:26-27!
      - b. Accordingly, to compensate for the loss of family inheritances due to persecution, Peter told his readers of their incorruptible heavenly inheritances that would not fade away, 1 Pet. 1:4b.

- c. In fact, the believer is being spiritually preserved by God's power so that he **will** inherit his heavenly estate, a work of God we know better as eternal security, 1 Peter 1:5!
2. With this blessing as a focus, the believer can afford to rejoice regardless of his being persecuted, 1 Peter 1:6.
3. **Also, the process of his having to trust God with the trials toward gaining this inheritance is invaluable ; the process matures him so that besides having a great estate, the believer will also be gloriously mature to the glory of God, 1 Peter 1:7. Focusing on this wealth of personhood besides gaining an estate causes us joy unspeakable and full of God's glory, 1 Peter 1:8-9!**

***Application: To deal with the depressing wickedness of this pagan world, (1) believe on Christ for salvation from sin and gain an eternal inheritance, John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3-4. (2) Then as a believer, obey God's Word (1 Pet. 1:2) to enjoy His blessings. (3) When the pagan world bothers us through even its effects on believers, fight off depression by (a) focusing on God's compensation to come for each trial to be joyful in Christ (Rev. 21-22; (b) then, realize that the very experience of having to focus this way produces a quality faith that will one day abound to God's glory in terms of personal maturity! (c) We then increase in our joy proportionate to the trials we face, for God uses each trial for eternal blessing with absolute efficiency!***

***Lesson: God's grace (a) not only promises eternal compensation for what tangibles it costs believers for standing for righteousness in this life, but (b) God also uses the trials themselves as a refiner's fire to build a much more valuable faith as we anticipate that remuneration! (c) Thus, the more severe his trials from this pagan world, the more unspeakably joyful may the informed believer become!***

**Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)**

(1) When the great missionary, Hudson Taylor, opened the door of China to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Chinese people who responded to the truth had a tendency to mix Jesus up with their other gods. So steeped were they into polytheism that they put Jesus up on the shelf in their thinking with all of the other gods.

(2) Then, the fragile Chinese Church came under great stress as the door to China closed through the communist takeover. For decades of intense suffering and the Maoist cleansing of the late sixties, the believers in China went through the fire. At the time we didn't know why! Why the fire to a people so steeped in idolatry and just barely coming to Christ?

(3) We have a tangible evidence of the answer to that 'why' today:

(a) Mr. and Mrs. Ray and Mabel Hawkswell of New Jersey who handle the mail of a missionary family we support sent us this framed inking of a passage in the Mandarin tongue. It was given to the missionaries by a Chinese friend, and it quotes Psalm 96:1-6. Let me quote Psalm 96:4-5: "For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens."

(b) As a result of the communist takeover in China, religion in general came under intense persecution by the communists. The total result was the weeding out of false, impotent idolatries and the survival of genuine Christianity! The fact that this Chinese believer would quote this passage that exalts the God of Scripture **as opposed to all other gods** is the result of the great suffering that Chinese believers experienced the last 30 years! When we look at this writing today, we see the handiwork of God on the heart of one who has been through the refiner's fire and who has come a very long, long way from his polytheistic Chinese background. With the missionaries who received this work, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

**May we rejoice with that same unspeakable joy even when bearing up under the pressures of paganistic America, for God is using every bit of the evil as a catalyst to mature us!**