

## “Strangers and Exiles”

January 24, 2016

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*1 Peter 1:1–7 (ESV)*

<sup>1</sup> *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,*

*To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:*

*May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

<sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>*

Recently, I’ve talked a bit about the need to tell others about Jesus. If you share the gospel—the good news of who Jesus is and what he’s done—with other people, and they become interested in Christianity, it’s natural for them to ask, “What’s it like to be a Christian?” It’s one thing to know facts about Jesus and the Bible, but it’s another thing to be a Christian. So if people are considering the Christian faith, they may want to know what it’s like to be a Christian. They probably want to know what to expect if they put their trust in Jesus.

If you’re a Christian, how would you answer that question—“What is it like to be a Christian?”? How would answer these questions? “What do you do? How do you live? What’s the best part of being a Christian? What’s the hardest part about being a Christian?” If you’re not yet a Christian, you may want to know what an inside look at Christianity is like.

We’ve now spent four months looking at the major events in the history told in the Bible. Over the last two weeks, we’ve looked at the central events in all of the Bible, in Christianity, and human history: the death and resurrection of Jesus. After Jesus rose from the grave, he appeared to his disciples. He gave them the “Great Commission,” to go into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the one name of the Father and of the Son and of the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Holy Spirit, and teaching them all that Jesus taught (Matt. 28:18-20). In Luke's Gospel, Jesus says, "that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). He also tell his disciples, "You are witnesses" (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). Then he ascended into heaven, where he presented himself as an offering for sin to the Father, and where he acts as our great High Priest, pleading for us and making intercession for us. Jesus also poured out the Holy Spirit on the church, to empower Christians individually and corporately. And now Christians find themselves living in the time between Jesus' first and second comings, in a time when the kingdom of God is here, but isn't here fully. And we're given the task of telling others about the King and how to enter into the kingdom and live as a citizen.

Though I could spend time talking about the ascension, and what happens in the book of Acts, I'm going to leave that for another time. I'm doing that because I may preach through the book of Acts soon, either on Sunday mornings or Sunday nights. So this morning I want to focus on what it's like to live as a Christian. I'm going to do that by focusing on 1 Peter, which is a great book of the Bible that doesn't always get the attention that it deserves.

I'm going to talk about a few things this morning. First, I'll try to answer the question, "Who and what is a Christian?" Second, I'll talk a bit about how we should live. And, third, I'll talk about suffering and trials.

So, let's begin with the question, "Who is a Christian?" Or, "What is a Christian?" Let's look at the beginning of Peter's letter.

<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Peter wrote this letter roughly thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection. And he wrote the letter to a number of Christians in cities in the Roman Empire, in what is now known as Turkey. Many of these Christians would be Gentiles, which shows that people of all backgrounds and ethnicities became part of the people of God. But Peter gives them an interesting title. He calls them "elect exiles." "Elect" means they were chosen by God. This word is often used of Israel in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> It's often used in the New Testament to refer to Christians.<sup>3</sup> Christians are

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<sup>2</sup> Deut 4:37; 7:6-8; 10:15; 14:2; Isa 44:1; 41:8-9; 43:20; 45:4; 65:9, 15, 22; Ezek 20:5.

people God chose before the foundation of the world to be adopted as his children, through faith in Jesus Christ, whose death on the cross paid for their sins, and whose resurrection promises eternal life. Christians have received the Holy Spirit, who lives in them and who guarantees their final and ultimate salvation (Eph. 1:3-14).

Some Christians get very nervous when they read about predestination in the Bible, but it's clear that God chooses some people to be his children. According to the book of Revelation, there are some people whose names were written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; 17:8). Paul, in his letter to the Romans, writes,

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified (Rom. 8:29-30).

In other words, God had in mind certain people, and he decided that they would be "saved." So God made sure that the gospel message came to those people, and they believed, and were justified, or made right in his eyes. And those people are becoming more like Jesus, and one day, when Jesus returns, they will be glorified, which means they will have resurrected bodies that can never die, and they will no longer struggle with sin.

Peter writes about that same idea in verses 3 through 5:

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The Father caused us to be born again, to be recreated, to a living hope. Our future resurrection is made possible through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. And the inheritance that we will receive cannot die, cannot be defiled, and cannot fade. It is kept and guarded for God's children, ready to be received on the day when Jesus returns. This is what Jesus says, in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." No one comes to Jesus except the ones the Father draws to him. The ones who are drawn to Jesus will be raised to new life.

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<sup>3</sup> Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; Rev. 17:14.

Let me say this about being born again. Later in chapter 1, in verse 23, Peter says that Christians were “born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” Then he says, in verse 24, “And this word is the good news that was preached to you.” The good news, the gospel, comes from the prophet Isaiah, who promised that God would restore his people, that he would forgive them of their sins, and that he would recreate the world to be a “new heavens and earth.” Peter quotes a bit of Isaiah 40 (vv. 6, 8) in verses 24-25 to say that God’s word is eternal. It “remains forever.” We are surrounded by all kinds of “words.” We are bombarded by all kinds of messages. But the only one that can cause someone to be born again is the word of God. When God causes someone to be born again, he doesn’t do that apart from his word. God’s word and the new birth go together.

Now, of course, we don’t know who God has chosen to be his children. Someone who seems to have put their trust in Jesus could turn away from the faith and prove that they never were a Christian in the first place (1 John 2:19). The worst person you know may one day repent of his or her sins and come to Jesus and follow him. We don’t know. So we try to tell everyone about Jesus and persuade them to put their trust in him.

Peter also calls Christians “exiles.” The Greek word can also be translated as “stranger,” or “resident alien,” or “sojourner.” Peter didn’t mean that these Christians were literally exiles, forced out of their homeland. There have been different times in history when God’s people have been exiles, like when the Jews were exiled in Babylon. But Peter calls them exiles because they aren’t in their true home. The world *as it is* is not our home. Our true home is with God, and one day our true home will be this world *as it should be*. So we can say that now our true home is in heaven, but ultimately it will be on a refined earth, one with no sin, where God dwells with his people.

Part of the reason this world isn’t our home is because Christians don’t really fit in. Christianity is contrary to the surrounding or prevailing culture. Christians have different priorities and different values. Most people live life as if they were king; Christians realize that their King is Jesus. Many people live as if this life is all there is; Christians live this life in light of eternity. Christians have different views on money, sex, and many other important issues in life. I’ll talk more about this as we go.

Later in chapter 1, Peter also describes Christians as children (v. 14). In chapter 2, he uses a number of terms to refer to them. He describes Christians as “living stones” who “are being

built up as a spiritual house” (v. 5). This means that the church is the temple of God, and each Christian is a vital part of that temple. God’s people are his sanctuary, his holy place. Peter also says that Christians are a “holy priesthood” (v. 5). In v. 9, he writes,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Those terms—“chosen race”, “royal priesthood,” “holy nation,” “people for his own possession”—come from Exodus 19:4-6. In that passage, God tells Moses what he should say to the Israelites after they were brought out of slavery in Egypt:

<sup>4</sup> You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

God’s purpose all along has been for his people to be a royal priests, or priests of the king, who are set apart as his treasured possession. The whole earth is God’s, but he wants his people to represent him. That’s what priests do. They intercede between God and others. They pray for others. They speak God’s word to others. They offer up worship to God. You might even say this is Peter’s version of the Great Commission, his way of saying, “Be witnesses to Jesus, tell others about him, pray that they would know him, and, if they are born again, teach them how to follow Jesus.” And that’s what Christians do. We tell others about God’s excellencies. We share with others the word of God. We pray for others, that God would save them. And we offer up worship to God.

In 1 Peter 2:11-12, Peter once again calls Christians “exiles.” He writes,

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

And that gets us to the second point I want to make: how we live as Christians. How do Christians live? What are they supposed to do? Other than act as priests of the King, we see here that Christians are supposed to “abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against [their] souls.” So Christians are born again, but they still have sinful desires that need to be

denied or fought against. Peter also says that Christians should keep their conduct honorable “among the Gentiles.” That means that Gentiles who become Christians are no longer regarded as Gentiles. They are part of the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Christians are supposed to do “good deeds” that non-Christians recognize and can’t deny, even if they think Christians are “evildoers.” That’s interesting: non-Christians will think Christians are wrong, but they’ll have to recognize that Christians do good deeds.

Christianity isn’t just about not doing the “bad things.” It’s also about doing “good things.” But we don’t do “good things” in order to get a reward. We certainly don’t do good things in order to earn salvation, or earn a relationship with God. We do good things because we are becoming more like God. Look at 1 Peter 1:13-16:

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

What Peter is saying is that Christians should become more like their Father. God is holy. He is morally pure. And Christians should be, too. Peter doesn’t say, “Be holy and you’ll be acceptable to God,” or “Be holy, and you’ll go to heaven.” No, a few verses later he says that Christians were ransomed by the sacrificial death of Jesus (vv. 18-19). But we should be holy because God is holy.

Some people think Christianity is all about rules and not swearing and drinking and doing drugs. Now, I think there are good reasons why we shouldn’t do things like drugs, or get drunk, or use words that are destructive. And, in 1 Peter 4:3, Peter writes, “For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.” So there is truth to the idea that Christianity forbids certain activities.

But Christianity is more than just not doing the bad things. It’s about a relationship with God. When we’re adopted by the Father, we should become more like him, and we should become more like our older brother, Jesus. Consider what the apostle Paul writes, in Ephesians 4:32-5:2:

<sup>32</sup> Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

<sup>5:1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Paul says, be more forgiving and gracious and loving, because God forgave you and Jesus loved you and gave himself up for you.

Peter says, at the beginning of chapter 2, “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.” God isn’t malicious or deceptive or a hypocrite or envious or slanderous, so his children shouldn’t be, either.

Christians are not only supposed to imitate God, but they are also supposed to build their whole lives on Jesus. This is what Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:4-7:

<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious,  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, the spiritual house. The cornerstone is the most important stone. It gives a building its shape. The cornerstone determines what the walls will look like. Christians build their lives on Jesus. Their lives align with Jesus. It’s not the other way around. Jesus doesn’t fit into our lives. We must fit into his plans and his ways. We must also come to see that he is precious. He is more valuable than anything else. To be a Christian is to imitate God and to build one’s life on Jesus.

What else do Christians do? Here’s one interesting passage from chapter 2, beginning in verse 13:

<sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Christians are supposed to submit to authority. They are to be subject to every human institution *for the Lord’s sake*. Peter lived in Roman Empire, and he wrote to people living there, too. And the emperor at the time was Nero (he reigned from AD 54-68). He was a horrible person.

Suetonius, a Roman historian, writes that Nero “entertained an incestuous passion for his mother,”<sup>4</sup> whom he eventually killed. He was responsible for killing two of his wives. He had at least two male lovers.<sup>5</sup> And, after a fire that destroyed a good portion of Rome in the year 64, he persecuted Christians. Peter tells his audience, “Honor the emperor.”

Now, the reason I bring this up is that we have often made an idol of politics and political power. Many Christians assume that the American government should be on our side. But nowhere has God promised us that we will have political power. God doesn’t tell his people to use power to advance their agenda, or the kingdom of God. Instead, we should live lives that are pleasing to God, become more like him, don’t do the sinful things that non-Christians do, and do “good deeds.” Part of being exiles in this world means we shouldn’t be aligned with one political party, or one politician. It’s okay to vote and to support certain policies, but we should never confuse the kingdom of God with a country or a political party. If we become too aligned with any political power, we won’t be able to criticize that power when it’s doing things that are contrary to God’s will and design. Russell Moore, a theologian and a Christian who addresses ethical and political issues in the public square, says that Christians should be a “prophetic minority.”<sup>6</sup> By prophetic, he simply means that we should speak truth to power. By minority, he means that Christians are usually in the minority and therefore lacking in political clout. We have to remember that we are a counter-cultural people. We should be able to speak truth to powers on both sides of the political aisle, but we shouldn’t expect to bring about change in the world through power.

In the past, too often conservatives tried to align Jesus with patriotism and the Republican Party. I think we’re beginning to see that while it’s fine to be pleased to be an American and to vote for Republican candidates, Christianity is often at odds with American values, and Republicans, like Democrats, often support things that are contrary to the kingdom of God. We have also seen liberals who try to make it seem as though Christianity isn’t really that different from progressive views. They try to align Jesus with evolving views on sexuality, for example. But this move, too, forgets that Christianity is counter-cultural.

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<sup>4</sup> C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *Suetonius: The Lives of the Twelve Caesars; An English Translation, Augmented with the Biographies of Contemporary Statesmen, Orators, Poets, and Other Associates*, ed. Alexander Thomson (Medford, MA: Gebbie & Co., 1889), chapter 28.

<sup>5</sup> Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 86.

<sup>6</sup> Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2015), 29.



From the beginning, Christianity was counter-cultural. Obviously, Christians had counter-cultural religious views. There were all kinds of gods in the Greco-Roman world, and it was always acceptable to add one more god to the pantheon. But Christians said that there is only one God, and Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to him. In the Roman Empire, religion and public affairs were often combined. But Christians couldn't participate in the public worship of other gods. This put them at odds with the surrounding culture.

In the Roman Empire, infanticide and exposure of infants (that is, leaving them outside, exposing them to the elements) was legal. Cicero (106-43 BC), a Roman philosopher and statesman, justified the legality of infanticide by appealing to an ancient Roman law that said, "deformed infants shall be killed." Seneca, another Roman philosopher and statesman, said, "We drown children who at birth are weakly and abnormal."<sup>7</sup> From the beginning, Christians said such a practice was evil. The *Diache*, which was a summary of early Christian teaching written at the end of the first century AD, says, "thou shalt not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten."<sup>8</sup> Not only were Christians opposed to these practices, but a number of Christians took in children who were abandoned. (Eventually, Valentinian, a Roman emperor, banned infanticide and exposure in the year 374.) Christians were also against the gladiatorial games, which featured slaves or prisoners fighting to the death. Christians were against such things because God made all humans in his image (Gen. 1:26-27) and it is wrong to murder (Exod. 20:13).

Christians were also counter-cultural in the Roman Empire because they were against sex outside of marriage. They also were against homosexual activity. In the Roman Empire, there were all kinds of sexual practices contrary to God's design. Many of the emperors had all kinds of sexual relationships ranging from incest to homosexuality. Yet Christians maintained that sex was designed for marriage, which is the only legitimate context for sex (Exod. 20:14; 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 13-20). So Christians had counter-cultural views on sex.

But Christians also had counter-cultural views regarding women. Christianity actually presented a much higher view of women than the typical Greco-Roman view. Women in the

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<sup>7</sup> Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, 49. The Cicero reference is *De Legibus* 3.8. The Seneca reference is *De Ira* 1.15.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., "The Lord's Teaching through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations," in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, vol. 7, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 377.

Roman Empire didn't have nearly as many rights as men did. Wives were considered the property of their husbands. But Christians believed that women were equal in worth to men (Gen. 1:26-28; Gal. 3:28), and that they, too, would inherit all the blessings that come with being a "son of God" (Gal. 3:28-29). In Christianity, women were taught and they had roles to play in ministry.

Christians were also for helping the poor and sick, which was not something that the Romans cared about. And in Christianity, there was no room for divisions based on skin color, ethnicity, or class. All who are in Christ are one (Gal. 3:28). These views were certainly counter-cultural.

Just yesterday I listened to a sermon given by Tim Keller.<sup>9</sup> He said that some of these views—such as a concern for the poor, and favorable views of women, and ethnic diversity—are typically considered "liberal" concerns, while other views—such as Christianity's views on sex and abortion and the exclusivity of Jesus—are typically considered "conservative" views. His point was that Christianity doesn't fit into either category neatly. That was true in the Roman Empire, and it's still true. Christianity still has particular views on sex, marriage, abortion, and infanticide, as well as care for the poor, the orphan, the widow, respect for women, and a denunciation of racism and classicism. The values of the kingdom of God never align perfectly with the values of the world. We must not change the values of Christianity in order to fit what others believe and do.

Now, I want to talk about the last part of the Christian life that Peter brings up. And that is suffering. We're told up front that part of becoming a Christian means following the way of Jesus. And we know that Jesus suffered. If he suffered, so will his followers.

Peter tells us that we will face "various trials." In 1 Peter 1:7, he says that we receive these trials, "so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." What are those trials? It seems that in Peter's day, the trials consisted mainly of being "slandered" and "reviled" and "insulted." In fact, this was and is rather common. In the first two or three centuries of Christianity, pagan Romans would accuse Christians of being atheists because they didn't have idols. They were accused of cannibalism—perhaps because Jesus himself spoke, metaphorically, of eating his flesh and drinking his blood (John 6:53-54).

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<sup>9</sup> "The Gospel, the Church and the World," November 5, 2015.

Christians were also accused of immoral sexual behavior at their gatherings. We know this from a second-century Christian named Athenagoras, who refuted those charges.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, in our day, many people don't understand Christianity. Our faith is increasingly misunderstood and mocked. None of this should surprise us, because we have been warned about such things in Scripture.

Peter mentions suffering and being insulted in two passages. First, let's look at 1 Peter 3:13-17:

<sup>13</sup> Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Notice that the suffering here is being slandered and reviled. When this happens, we must not retaliate. We must instead give reasons for why we believe. We treat people who mock us with gentleness and respect. And above all, we honor Christ the Lord in our hearts.

Then look at 1 Peter 4:12-16:

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Again, we see that the trial includes being insulted. But the sufferings for some Christians went far beyond insults. In the Roman Empire, some Christians died for the faith. That's true of Peter and Paul and many others. And some Christians today die for their faith. Many more are harassed, beaten, threatened, and suffer the loss of property.

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<sup>10</sup> *Legatio*, or "A Plea for the Christians." This refutation is written, "To the Emperors Marcus Aurelius Anoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, conquerors of Armenia and Sarmatia, and more than all, philosophers."

Yet Peter says that we should rejoice if we suffer, because we're sharing in Christ's sufferings. If we suffer for the cause of Christ—if someone mocks our faith—it's proof that we're following Jesus.

And, of course, Jesus is the one who truly suffered. Look at 1 Peter 2:21-25:

<sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Jesus was the true stranger and exile who left his home. He is the one who suffered the most in order to bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18). When he was insulted and reviled, he didn't retaliate with insults. When he was beaten and flogged, he didn't fight back. And he did that to bear our sins on the "tree" that is the cross.

Of course, Jesus rose from the grave after his sufferings. And after this life of being an exile, of not fitting into this world, and of possible sufferings, our spirits will be with God in heaven until the day when we are resurrected to eternal life in the new creation. Toward the end of Peter's letter, in chapter 5, verses 10-11, he writes,

<sup>10</sup> And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup> To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

If you are a Christian, you are an elect exile, a stranger, a sojourner, a royal priest, a living stone in the house that God is building on the cornerstone of Christ. You have this life to declare the excellencies of God to others who don't know Jesus yet. You have this life to become more and more like Jesus. You have this life to follow Jesus.

If you are not a Christian, I would love to talk to you about becoming one. But consider what I have said today. Christianity is about being a child of God. It's about being transformed into a new type of person. It's about receiving an inheritance from God as a gift. It involves some suffering. It means being a bit of a misfit, someone who doesn't quite fit into the prevailing culture of the day. But think about it this way: The winds of the world's culture blow this way and that, and today's progressive trends are tomorrows regressive embarrassments. What's

relevant today will be out of style tomorrow. But if you want to be truly relevant, eternally relevant, you need to be informed by an eternal message. In the words of Simone Weil, “To be always relevant, you have to say things which are eternal.”<sup>11</sup>

“All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
but the word of the Lord remains forever” (1 Pet. 1:24-25, quoting Isa. 40:6, 8).

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<sup>11</sup> I found this quote in D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 476. Carson takes the quote from Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), 63.