

Three Encouragers as I Suffer for My Faith

1 Peter 4:1-6 (text)

7 February 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

When I was 29, Annette & I lived in a student hostel in Germany where I did one year of postgraduate studies. In *our* wing of that hostel, we were about nine students of whom only three of us were Christians. Of the non-Christians, there was at least one who fiercely opposed us. He was a young man who was studying History and International Politics. One evening, when Annette & I had shared with him our faith in Christ, he reacted very sharply, saying, “I don’t like Christ!” “What good thing has Christ ever done for this world!?” “Look at all the battles and wars which European Christian groups have fought against each other – and all in Christ’s Name!”

Well, from that moment on, for the next six months, this young man would always look at us as if we were the great pest! And we could not avoid bumping into him either, for we shared with him that hostel-wing’s communal kitchen and bathroom.

And so, Annette & I had to constantly “suffer” – even just a little bit – for our faith!

Well, boys & girls (brothers & sisters), perhaps you, too, have at times suffered for your faith in Christ! Perhaps some of you are, at this time, facing opposition at school or at work, from school/workmates who think you are weird! After all, sooner or later, every Christian will undergo some kind of suffering for his faith – whether it’s *persecution* at the hands of a dictator and a militant extremist, or whether it’s mocking or laughter or bullying at school, or at university; or apprehension and mocking from colleagues at your work!

Well, for the previous two chapters in 1 Peter (chapters 2 & 3), Peter has exhorted Christians to keep on doing good to those who ostracise or persecute them.

But here, in our text, Peter does two things:

- **Firstly**, in v.1, he exhorts & urges Christians – yes, you & me – to arm ourselves; yes, to take up our spiritual weapons, because a Christian’s struggle is first of all not *physical* (is not so much that frowning unbelieving mate or the bullying of an atheist boss), but our struggle is ultimately *spiritual* – it’s the *evil one* working *in/through* that unbelieving mate and that bullying boss! And so, because the devil is behind our bullying, we must take up *spiritual* weapons and *spiritual* protection-gear to help us in our suffering for the Gospel.¹

¹ A war in which...

- the *truth* of God’s word will be your/my belt – that is: we will not water down the Gospel message;
- The next piece of our armour is *the assurance that we are right with God*. Yes, this righteousness will do the work of a breastplate or bulletproof vest;
- Our next piece of armour is the *readiness to tell people about the Gospel of peace*. Yes, that will be the eager boots on our feet;
- Next comes our *unwavering faith in God Triune*. This faith will act as our shield;
- Then there’s our salvation; yes, the *sure knowledge that we have been saved* will be our helmet;
- Then, *God’s Word* will be our sword which, by its message, will stop some of our enemies, yet convict others of their need for Christ;

Well, that's the first thing Peter does: exhorting you/me to put on our spiritual armour as we suffer mocking, bullying or persecution!

- Here's the **second** thing Peter does: In all 6 verses of our text, he gives us three encouragers as we keep on arming ourselves with our spiritual armour! And it's these three encouragers that form the three main points of our sermon...

- Time is Short
- Judgement Day
- Christ-like Obedience

Time is Short (v.3-4)

My brother & sister, most of Peter's first readers were new Christians who, only a short time before, still lived the pagan lifestyle of unrestrained pleasure-seeking and gross immorality – a lifestyle in which people drank wine and beer for the sole purpose of getting drunk; and getting lost in sexual immorality!

So, to these new Christians Peter says (in v.3), "***For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles...***"² Yes, "***...you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do...***"³

So, the time that's left is short. Now you have to live on God's terms and for His glory! Well, it was the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, who gave this beautiful illustration...

One springtime, a duck was flying with his friends northward across Europe. During the flight, he came down in a barnyard where there were tame ducks. He enjoyed some of their corn. He stayed for an hour, and then for a day. One week passed, and before he knew it, a month had gone by. He loved the good food, so he stayed all summer long!

One autumn day, when the same wild ducks were winging their way southward again, they passed overhead, and the duck on the ground heard their cries. He was filled with a strange thrill and joy, and he desired to fly with them once again. But when he flapped his wings to rise up in the air to go join his old friends, he found that the easy lifestyle he had lived had made him so heavy that he could not rise higher than the roof of the barn! So, he dropped back again into the barnyard, content to just stay in that easy lifestyle. From then on, every spring and autumn when he heard the wild ducks honking, his eyes would gleam for a moment, and he would begin flapping his wings. However, finally the day came when the wild ducks flew

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- and, lastly, we will fight this spiritual battle in constant prayerful communication with our great Commander in Chief – our Lord Jesus!¹ I mean, does not v.1 of our text say that we should take up our spiritual armour with the same purpose¹ (or attitude.¹ mind,¹ and resolve¹) as Christ? Yes, only constant prayer & studying of Scripture will keep us in the same mind as our Lord!

² NASB

³ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Pe 4:3). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

*overhead uttering their cries, but he paid no attention. In fact, he failed to hear them at all.*⁴

My brother & sister, is it perhaps so that, as Christians who live in the relative freedom and ease of the Western lifestyle, some of us have feasted for too long on the pleasant fare this world has to offer? Have we perhaps forgotten that the time past was enough? Do we remember that we are still far from home – not yet at our destination? Do we still remember that, although we live *in* this world, we are not *of* this world? Are we perhaps like those churchgoers who are so enamoured with the pleasures of this world that they're no longer even thinking of the delights of heaven and of the Son of God who saved us at an enormous cost?

Perhaps someone says, "But, pastor, *we* don't go to parties where there's unrestrained drinking and immorality!"

Granted, you & I may not *physically* be present at such parties!

But, young people, are you perhaps *in your spirit* present at such parties by what you watch on television; by what you see in theatres; and by what you choose to watch on the Internet!

Young men, it's especially for you that sensuality is a prevalent issue!

Peter says it's time to clean the house!

Yes, v.3 of text says as much as, "Enough already!" "Put sin in your rear-view mirror!"

Indeed, if you & I are really in awe of Christ, we will arm ourselves with the same mind/thinking as our Lord Jesus, which means we will flee from the lures and sinful attractions of this world, and seek to honour God by what we say & how we live!

Boys & girls (young people), surely your mates will be surprised & shocked that you don't want to participate with them in God-dishonouring things! And, surely, they will heap abuse on you (malign you)! But what's new!? Through all the ages this has always happened when true Christians said no to participating in God-dishonouring things! And one only has to use Google to see the shocking words & phrases some unbelievers have posted about Christians – words too vulgar to repeat!⁵

But one Christian has explained how he simply *had* to leave what he called his "B.C. Group" (his Before-Christ Group).

He said he had to leave that group, because all they did together was drink to the point of drunkenness or take drugs until they were high. And he did not leave them because he hated them. No, he still misses them! But he had to break with them. Yet, he longs for the day that they, too, will receive Jesus as their Saviour! This man said that he often talked with them about Christ, but they never changed. So, he had to restrict his time with them because he knew his own weaknesses – that he himself could easily be tempted to (again) drink and do drugs.⁶

Well, what this man describes is true of thousands of Christians who simply had to break with their old friends even though they still liked those old friends and prayed for them!

⁴ My adaptation of Kierkegaard (apud Helm, D.R. 2008. 1 & 2 Peter and Jude: sharing Christ's sufferings. [In: Hughes, R.K. ed. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, Ill : Crossway Books. p.131])

⁵ It seems the real sharp and vulgar critique by non-Christians, which I was able to Google in the past, can now only be viewed if one is prepared to open an account (when so prompted). However, it's still possible to view the web pages with not-so-sharp critique, e.g. <https://churchanswers.com/blog/what-do-non-christians-really-think-of-us/>

⁶ Cf. McKnight, S. (1996). [1 Peter](#) (p. 234). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Well, this was point 1 – the first of three encouragers: “Time is Short.” If you say you love Christ, then stop living as if you’re of this world! Break with sin! Live a holy life even if it means you’ll be teased, mocked or bullied! Time is short!
Here’s the second encourager...

Judgement Day (v.5-6)

Those who abuse⁷ Christians when Christians don’t want to live like they – such people might *seem* to have the upper hand for the time being. But the last word is with God – on Judgement Day!

You say, “Judgement Day!?” “Really?” “Will there really be such a thing as Judgement Day?”

Well, it’s true: In our day & age, many people don’t want to hear of Judgement Day. Even some *churchgoers* have downplayed God’s judgement. Here is what they typically say: “Long ago, when we grew up, the preachers placed great emphasis on hell, the devil and judgement.” “But now, we’re so glad that all we are permitted to talk about is love. Love is all that matters now!”⁸

My brother & sister, granted, it would be wrong if ministers were to *only* preach hell and damnation without preaching about God’s grace. However, the *extreme opposite* is equally wrong, i.e., to only preach love! And is that perhaps where we are today? Has the church perhaps adopted the mindset of the secular world in which judgement hardly holds out any threat? I mean, is it not so that, in the legal systems of many a Western country, a good lawyer seems able to get anyone off the hook – even a murderer!?

But look, whatever human beings might say and do in human courts, Judgement Day is (and will always be) a healthy threat – and a real one, too!

Why?

Well, because look, does not the threat of ultimate judgement *derive from an appreciation of the holiness of God!*?⁹

I mean, does not the Bible tell us that God is holy (cannot tolerate sin), and that He judges righteously and impartially!? Yes, did not Peter say in the very first chapter of this letter, “***Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear***”!?¹⁰

And does not v. 5 of our text say that *God is already prepared to judge the living and the dead*?¹¹

See?

A time is coming when history will stop, and God will intervene to judge the world!

Those who are still alive at that time will face God – but so, too (as v.6 says), will those who have died before that time, because their dead bodies will be raised up and reunited with their souls so that they, too, could answer for themselves before God!

And so, here’s the encouraging message our text is giving:

⁷ Tease, mock, bully or persecute

⁸ My adaptation of the example given by McKnight, S. (1996). [1 Peter](#) (pp. 223–234). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

⁹ My adaptation of the words of McKnight (ibid)

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (1 Pe 1:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Also cf. Rm 2:11 ***For God does not show favoritism*** (NIV84).

¹¹ 1 Pt 4:5, “***...but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead***” (NASB).

Christian, are you totally “thrown” and flustered by what unbelievers say to you, and by how they tease, mock, bully or persecute you? Well, take heart, because there will be a final judgement!

My brother & sister, what the world thinks of Christians – well, ultimately, that does not matter!

And, however sad you/I may feel for those who have rejected Christ – yes, for those who are now mocking you and making you suffer for your faith – God will vindicate you (clear you of blame) and give you eternal life. But, as for those who persist in bullying and persecuting you, God will avenge them!

Well, so far re the Christian’s vindication on Judgement Day – the second encourager which our text holds out to Christians who are suffering teasing, mocking, bullying or persecution for their faith.

Here’s the third encourager...

Christ-like Obedience (v.1-2)

Boys & girls (Young people – My brother & sister), have schoolmates (have workmates & friends) ever teased or mocked you and made fun out of you (or even bullied you) because, as a person who *is living for the will of God*,¹² you didn’t want to chat what they chatted, and didn’t want to watch what they watched, and didn’t want to do financial business the way they do? Have they smirked & laughed at you (or even punched you) for that?

Well, then be encouraged, and rejoice like the apostles rejoiced when they got flogged because of their love for Christ!¹³ Yes, be encouraged, for if you are abused for your faith, you’re not alone, for they did that also to the very Son of God!

So, be encouraged, for if you were prepared to suffer abuse for not living for the lusts of human beings, but for the will of God (v.2), then it indicates that you are (as v.1 says) of the same mind as your Lord Jesus!

Here’s a further encouragement! If they abused you for not participating in their sinful ways, then (as v.1 says) it means you have *ceased from sin!*

Really? Does the fact that you have suffered for your faith – does this mean that you can now no longer sin?

¹² Cf. verse 2 ***Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God***” (NASB; emphasis mine).

¹³ Cf. e.g. Acts 5:40-41, ***His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.***

⁴¹ ***The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.***

Also cf. Acts 16:22-25, ***The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.***

²⁵ ***About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.***

No!

It simply means that anyone who suffers for Jesus, has somewhere along the line, made up his/her mind to stop from sinning!¹⁴ Yes, that such a person has given evidence (has proved) that he will (as Rm 6:12 says) *not let sin reign in his mortal body so that he obeys its evil desires.*¹⁵

See the encouragement? If, because of your faithfulness to Christ, you are enduring abuse from people, then that tells that you have come a long way in your walk with Christ!

I mean, remember how the three-year-old Christian child once answered when his mother asked, “Johnny, what do you think: Can Jesus’ new body with which He rose from the dead – can that beautiful & glorified body ever die again?” Well, even three-year-old Johnny knew the answer: “No, Mummy,” said he, “that new & beautiful body of Jesus can never ever again die!”

My brother & sister (boys & girls), see why the Bible tells us that just as Christ’s glorified body *cannot die again*, so will everyone who has been raised with Christ (everyone who *really* loves Christ) no longer let sin be his/her boss!?¹⁶

See, again, the encouragement for everyone who steadfastly endures mocking & bullying because he lives for the will of God!? The very fact that you are able to endure that suffering, says that, by God’s grace, you have come a long way in your walk with God! Perhaps someone will say, “But, pastor, you make *suffering for God* such a beautiful thing!” “But, pastor, have you forgotten whereto Jesus’ suffering led Him?” “Those who hate Him *killed* Him!” “Jesus ended up *dead!*”

My brother & sister, that’s true. Many Christians have died (and are dying) for their faith! However, just as with their Lord Jesus, their killers *may have interpreted their death as evidence of their condemnation!*¹⁷ But in agreement with God’s standard of judgement, such sufferers will enjoy life eternal! Or have we forgotten that although Christ died at the hands of His killers, *He also rose again from the dead!*

And what does that say to us?

Does that not confirm that all who love Christ – even those who have suffered with Him – will live again, and eternally so!?

Is this an easy message to proclaim in the world today?

No, because many worldly people firmly believe that physical death is the end, and that when you’re dead you’re dead (zipped)!

But the Christian is the one who remembers what the Lord Himself once said, “***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.***”¹⁸

Boys & girls, brothers & sisters, what will encourage you & me as mates tease, mock, bully or persecute us?

¹⁴ My adaptation of the words of Helm (ibid:129)

¹⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Ro 6:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁶ Cf. Rm 6:9-12, “***For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.***”

¹¹ ***In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires***” (NIV84; emphasis mine).

¹⁷ Good point made by Marshall, I. H. (1991). [*1 Peter*](#) (1 Pe 4:1-7). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁸ [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Mt 10:28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Well, remember the three encouragers of our text:

- Time is Short
- Judgement Day
- Christ-like Obedience

God give you strength!

AMEN (2,666 words excluding footnotes)