

15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? 19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

The theme of this entire letter to these christians scattered across a broad region is suffering, inflicted by the world, that is undeserved.

You'll recall that Nero has burned down Rome, and needing a scapegoat has shifted blame to the christians. They were despised and mis-trusted in the first place, and after the burning of Rome, open persecution broke out.

A quick review; Chapter 1 verse 6, *“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while if necessary you have been distressed by various trials.”* In vs. 7 he says the trials are to prove your faith which is worth more than gold. More precious than gold.

In chapter 2 he uses that language that I have fallen back on over and over.

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

We are aliens and strangers in this world. We are not part of this world. That message to modern christians is flat. Foreign. For over 200 years we have been a good fit in our society. In fact christians were the architects of our society and if anything, it was sinners who were aliens and strangers. Outcasts.

But in my lifetime, that has done a complete reversal.

I've been enjoying the current dust up of men in powerful places who used that power to mis-treat women. I am amused because of the lack of category. These guys have to go. But there's no such thing as sin. Sin is banished from our language, so the accusers are painting themselves into a corner.

Any sex, of any description, between any two people so-inclined, regardless of gender or any other considerations, is OK. That's OK to do, there's no such thing as sin. No right, no wrong. But if one party, years later says, no, in fact it wasn't consensual. It was forced and I didn't want to be a party to it, then it's sin. But there's no such thing as sin so we'll say taboo.

Our secular culture is hopelessly confused because they want to punish something that's obviously wrong, while maintaining that there is nothing that is really wrong. Sin is banished as a category, but somehow we need to banish these sinners, but leave other sinners alone.

There's all this latent rage and witch hunts, and it's amusing, so far, but what happens when like Nero did 1950 years ago, the rage gets re-focused at the christians. The people who say, there are in fact categories defined in a book, written by God, that are always sin.

We need to be reminded, now more than ever, that we are aliens and strangers in this world. I enjoy the euphemism that we should look at ourselves as *enemy combatants in hostile territory*.

Already there are stories, daily, of open hostility from the world religion of secularism against any form or symbol that represents or reminds this world that christianity ever had any voice at all in the public discussion.

On tuesday this week there was a story from France. A statue of the Pope is OK, but only if the pope is not holding a cross. No tolerance for the cross. Also on Tuesday, the state church of Sweden revises all references of God in the male gender. Thus wiping out the trinity because, well, a Son is . . . oops . . . male.

On Thursday, a christian pre-school in Bethesda Maryland is called unchristian because it has decided the wee ones should have some sort of "age appropriate christian education" included in the preschool time. The secular parents have gone crazy over this, and actually accused the hosting church of acting in an unchristian manner for having the audacity to enforce any form of christian education.

And that in a little tiny nutshell is what I see in our future. The secular world, ruled by Satan, will define what is and isn't "christian" and the accusations coming at real christians are that they aren't behaving within the secular community's definition of christian.

The secular world's Jesus would never do that, because they've reinvented a Jesus that was OK with everything the secular world dreams up to do. How dare we point to narrow old beliefs in a narrow old book and label them sin. Jesus would never do that. He loves everybody.

But perhaps even Jesus wouldn't allow young female aids to be forced into unspeakable things by wicked powerful old men.

I hope you don't think this is just a rambling rant. I'm trying to point out that more and more in this culture, we who believe that this book is the written, revealed truth of God, and that it in fact does define in crystal clear terms something called sin, we who believe *that* are hopelessly out of step.

Secular culture is a religion, and you either get in step with what they believe, like the church in Sweden that sweeps away the Son of God because He's, obviously, a He, or you are at war with the culture.

How very telling that a man, 1950 some years ago said, we are strangers and aliens in this world. Out of step. Out of place. And not surprisingly, if we choose to be obedient and not simply let that sleeping dog lie, we will find ourselves in direct conflict with this world.

And it's all very confusing because the secular culture's response is,

you're not acting like a christian. A christian as defined by . . . us.

Notice again, in our little review, exactly what I've just been talking about. Peter is like an echo in the room; 11 *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.* 12 *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, **so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers,** they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

The world comes at us, and they slander us as evildoers. People who hold to a definition of sin, not our definition, but revealed by God, in a book that we claim has authority over mankind, people who do that, are in fact, according to this secularistic religion . . . evildoers.

There's nothing new under the sun. Peter says it almost 2000 years ago, and it's getting thrown at us . . . this week.

In chapter 3 Peter tells us how we are to react to direct conflict with the world; 8 *To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;* 9 *not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead;*

Make up your mind that the world is going to mistreat you, and as best you can, respond with harmony if possible, sympathy, always, since they are just dupes of Satan and don't realize they're doing Satan's bidding, just as we once were. We treat them like brothers, we are kindhearted to them, and we are humble.

The next part is hardest of all. *not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead*

the world, when these battle lines are drawn and we are standing outside of the world's definition of 'christian', is going to hurl insults at us and inflict evil upon us. That is normal. That's why Peter says "*do not be surprised at the fiery trial*".

It also brings us to our verses this morning. Peter has been giving a

survival-in-a-hostile-world briefing. It's all over this letter, and we spent a good 3 weeks in chapter 4 vss. 7 - 14. Maybe it was longer, I've lost track.

But this morning Peter says something interesting that seems out of place.

15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;

Don't suffer for things that we expect the world to react against. Things that are in fact evil. Things that it is proper for the world to inflict suffering against. We heartily agree with the world that murderers and thieves and evildoers should suffer for those things.

We also agree with the world that someone who calls themselves a christian and abuses some level of power to force themselves on women, should suffer harm from this world. It's the same idea.

A most interesting little collection of words. murderer? God forbid! Thief, perhaps a little less awkward. If the world has taken everything away and your family is hungry, you might be tempted to resort to this. Hopefully not. The brothers who still *have* are exhorted to share with those with nothing. But it's less impossible than murder.

Evildoers. The world will slander us and say this is what we are. Peter says, don't let it be true. Our book defines God's view of who is, and who is not an evildoer. Never be an evildoer by this book's definition. But if the world calls you that and you're innocent, there's no guilt borne from this book, don't worry about it.

The world isn't thinking right. We expect that. They can and will call us evildoers. They've redefined what they consider an 'evildoer' according to their agendas. Don't let it be true according to what this book says.

And then the final word, and it's most interesting, because vs. 16 clearly defines 2 camps. *16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.*

The construction there clearly separates Christian from the categories in vs. 15. Murderers. Thieves. Evildoers. In 1st John chapter one, the apostle says don't tell me you're a Christian if these things are your lifestyle. 1:6 *If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;*

So we're pretty comfortable with murderers and thieves and evildoers as a category. We're separated from that. But the next word fascinates me.

*15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a **troublesome meddler**;*

It's only used one time in the new testament, so I don't want to be dogmatic, but in classical Greek, in uses outside the new testament, this word describes a political agitator.

Oh! That makes it a lot more interesting. Because there's a whole section of evangelicalism in America that thinks they're going to make the world a better, friendlier place for them to dwell in, by using politics.

Should Christians be in politics? Yes! The entire California legislature is collapsing in on itself because of powerful men pushing young girls into closets and doing unspeakably evil things.

Yes, we need to permeate this society and be the salt that restrains the rotting flesh of this world. Jesus told the church at Philadelphia, I'm giving you an open door. We should go through any door open to us and be that influence for righteousness and holiness that our culture desperately needs.

But we don't overthrow the government. We aren't subversives.

It's almost a little bit sad and perhaps a rebuke, that our government has for many years, recruited agents into the FBI from the Mormon church. Why? Because they are taught to not be subversives of the government.

This American government, like Peter and Paul's, which ultimately killed them, is in place by the sovereignty of God, and we are not to agitate to overthrow it.

We support it by any door that God chooses to open to us, and when those doors are slammed in our face, we quietly and humbly, back away. We always pray for our leaders. No matter what.

But know this, the Kingdom of God will never be realized on this earth until the King Himself returns and sets it up. Meanwhile we are not agitators. Christians do not agitate to overthrow the government. Foolish to agitate against the government that God has sovereignly placed. That's not your business.

If you follow what I've just said to its logical conclusion, we'd be paying taxes to the Queen of England. Right. So we'll leave it at that. I'll default to Ecclesiastes 3. *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:*

God will punish this government in His season. He doesn't need you to overthrow it.

A troublesome meddler doesn't have to be only in the realm of politics. Jesus said, Happy are the peacemakers. Blessed are the peacemakers. A troublesome meddler is polar opposite to a peacemaker.

Then Peter says; vs. 16 *but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.*

Christian was still a new term. It was a name of derision invented by the world. Christian was meant by the world to be a slur. Not so different from racial slurs that our generation has distanced itself from.

So, in 64 AD to call someone a christian, a *little christ*, was meant to be a slur just as demeaning as people in our generation using the term nigger. It demeans. It diminishes and separates. It makes that person feel like a non-person. A class distinction. A person of less value. We rightfully abhor those terms now. All of that was working in the first

century when you hurled the slur at someone, christian.

Peter reacts to that. The world means it as a slur. Peter says, it is not a slur. *but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.* The early church embraced the word.

When the world separates you and calls you derisive names, because of Christ, that distinction glorifies God. You should glorify God that the world has recognized you and the distinctiveness that causes them to label you with a slur, is in fact the very distinction that Jesus talks about in the Beatitudes.

Peters progression here from being a non-peacemaker to being considered a human slur is a perfect parallel to Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matt. 5:

9 *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

10 *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

So, let's follow the logical progression here, because it becomes important in the difficult portion that follows.

Christians were being persecuted, mis-treated, solely for the reason that they were distinctively . . . other.

Christ, and their belief in and love for Him, has caused a group of people (we are still in this group) to be a new ethnos. Remember that in chapter 2. 9 *But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that*

you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

We are a chosen race. Ethnos. Ethnicity. There are 16,800 distinct ethnic groups in the world. Make that 16,801. Peter says we are a new race. A chosen race. A people group set apart from the rest of the world, by God Himself. A chosen race. The church embraced the world's slur. Christian.

What happens when that distinction isn't there. What happens when there's no evidence that separates you from the rest of this world, a christian, set apart, distinct.

What happens when the culture says we can't allow you to exist, we can no longer tolerate your distinctiveness, you have to jettison all this stuff that sets you apart from everybody else. And like the state church of Sweden, you do it. To save yourself the trouble of any pain this world might inflict, you jettison the Son of God because the reference is to a male gender?

This vs. 17, I have to say, is to me at least, one of the most frightening verses in all of the Bible.

17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

What does that mean? Well, the traditional evangelical take on that which I've heard all my life is the Paul thing. Christians are going to be subjected to this wood, hay, and stubble thing where all of our works that we did, good bad and otherwise, if it wasn't something Christ did through us by the Holy Spirit, well, that's wood hay and stubble, and it gets burnt up, but we're still OK, even if there isn't much gold and precious stones that survived the fire. We survive the fire because of Christ. We are in Him.

That's the 1 Corinthians 3 passage. ...*11 For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, 13 his workmanship will be evident, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will prove the quality of each man's work...*

My foundation is Christ. I'm in Him. All of my foolishness is burned up. Fruit that the Holy Spirit wrought using me as a pipeline; that survives. That's the gold, silver, precious stones.

Paul built a huge edifice on that foundation. God used Paul and the other apostles, to turn the ancient world upside down. Me, on the other hand, not so much. Still, when all the dross is burnt up, I am still a stone in that edifice Christ is building. He's the foundation, I'm one of the living stones.

But let me show you a scarier possibility. A "co-truth". I've been thinking of this more and more the last 10 years. Revelation 3. It should be familiar to you, because I've been there before. Many times.

*14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:
The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:*

15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

Here's the scary possibility and more and more I think this is what this verse is referencing. A large group of people, who identify in some way with christianity, but don't actually know the Saviour.

Giant metropolitan churches full of people who claim to be christians but who are indistinct from the world around them. It doesn't have to be large mega churches. I don't want to sound like I'm just picking on them.

I think America is littered with buildings with signboards in front that say first church of this or that, and there are people inside, but God isn't there. Dead churches, full of dead people, with signs out front that say something about Jesus.

What happens when the Lord comes in the air to begin the final judgement by calling His chosen people to join Him in the air, and all of those people in indistinct dead churches are left behind? *'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth*

That sort of sounds like what Peter's talking about. *17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

Laodicea would tell you all day long that they were part of the household of God. And Jesus says, I'm going to vomit that mess out of my mouth. Why? Because they are indistinct. Lukewarm. Not hot. Not cold. Indistinct. They looked just like the rest of the world.

There's also a sense in which what I've just said fits Peter's words exactly. Remember he began with *"The end of all things is at hand"*. The whole discussion has had this context of we're about to go into the future with Christ. Judgement on this world is the next thing.

He didn't see the 2000 year parenthesis while God is taking a people for His name out of every nation, every ethnos. Truly, the next thing on God's agenda when that is finished, is judgement.

And vs. 17 can be a literal reference. Jesus comes to call His church out of the world, and there's a large group of people with buildings and placards out front that say, 'household of God' on them, and they aren't real christians, and they are left behind.

The rapture is in a sense, the beginning of judgement. It's the demarcation point. The church age is over. The church is removed. Judgement begins. And frighteningly, a lot of folks that thought they

were christians, never had the personal one on one Holy Spirit indwelt relationship with Jesus.

They become this world wide religion we see in Revelation. A vast world ecumenical movement that somehow encompasses the whole world. And ultimately, those folks will be fooled into worshipping the beast. Scary stuff.

18 AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?

IF people who thought they were christian enough, didn't make it out of here, what about the rest. Judgement, on those who thought they were the household of God, but didn't know God, and judgement on the rest who simply hated and ignored God.

The words of Jesus, again, the sermon on the mount, seem to say exactly what I've just said; listen carefully . . .

13“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14“For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

15“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17“So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18“A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20“So then, you will know them by their fruits.

21“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE

LAWLESSNESS.'

And finally, a word of encouragement, at least for Peter's folks. vs. 19
Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

There is some safety . . . in suffering. There's safety in the fact that the world recognizes you're not them, you're separate from them, because of Christ, and that distinction causes them to make you suffer. That's a safe place.

So, then, what is our take away. Well, if it were 64 AD and the world was persecuting me because I was distinctively and obviously a christian, I'd have nothing to worry about. But it isn't.

So to answer our question I will default to two things Jesus just said in the passage from Matthew 7.

First, do you know Him? Intimately and personally? Paul is a little more direct in 2 Corinthians 13:5 *Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?*

And the second default would be again what Jesus just said in those verses. Fruit. Is there fruit. Distinctively christian fruit. Is God using you in some fashion to accomplish spiritual fruit that will last beyond this world?

It's a dangerous era when the world and the church are indistinct from each other. It was easier for Peter's folks to take comfort in the fact that they were under the gun precisely because they were Christians.