

To Arms  
I Peter 4:1-6

Next Sunday is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. To begin today's message I would like to show a short video about Richard Wurmbrand who was held prisoner for 14 years in a Romanian prison for preaching the gospel. Some of the images portrayed in this reenactment are graphic but it shows what he and countless others have endured for the sake and in the name of Christ. This is an excerpt of a full length movie that Voice of Martyrs will be releasing next spring.

[Video clip]

If you listened carefully to what he said you would have heard something very important. It is something we must all seriously consider. The truth of it is revealed in the crucible of suffering.

“There are those who believe in God and those who just as sincerely believe that they believe. Now I had to ask myself if I believed in God.”

There are those who with every fiber have a strong faith in God that sustains them in times of severe testing. Their theme song may be [The Solid Rock](#).

When darkness veils His lovely face,  
I rest on His unchanging grace;  
In every high and stormy gale,  
My anchor holds within the veil.  
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand,  
All other ground is sinking sand.

And then there are those who claim to have faith in God that wavers the first sign of trouble.  
Which are you?

Now we come then to our passage in I Peter 4:1-6 where I invite you to turn today. This letter was written to believers in a part of Asia Minor, what is

now modern Turkey, who were experiencing persecution for their faith. Peter's words aren't meant to frighten them, but to instill courage and hope so that they would endure their persecution. In the passage we are looking at today Peter helps us know how to face tribulation and through it how to grow in Christ.

In war, a rallying cry was heard throughout the camp when under attack – TO ARMS. It is a summons to engage in active hostilities. No matter what the soldiers were doing, it meant to stop everything and arm themselves for battle. That's what Peter is doing here. He is rousing these believers on to prepare for what is to come. He gives five important pieces the believer should be armed with for whatever trials or persecution he or she faces. They are different from the armor Paul tells us to put on in Ephesians 6 but they are no less important. In both cases we are to take up arms to stand against the enemy. The word “arms” is a military term, a call to action.

Many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world already know what it is like to face persecution. If you go to the Voice of Martyrs website you can find the names and faces of those imprisoned for their faith. If you have their app on your phone you can get the information about a country to pray for each day. We list one each day in our prayer sheet where Christianity is suppressed. The political landscape of our own country is changing and it may be that someday we may experience the same kind of persecution. There have already been lawsuits brought against Christian business owners. What's next?

We are called to arms. So how do we prepare ourselves by what Peter has to say? Let's look at five ways to arm ourselves.

The first is to learn from Christ's attitude.

I. LEARN FROM CHRIST'S ATTITUDE –  
v. 1

Remember that anytime we read a “therefore” we have to see what it’s there for. It always points back to something previous. Keep in mind that in the original texts there were no verses or chapters. This is a letter. In all the letters I have received none were broken up in chapters and verses. Somewhere along the way translators thought it might be a good idea to include them. So as we read verse 1 we are able to see what Peter was looking back at. “Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body.” What verse in the previous passage looks at Christ’s suffering? Look at verse 18.

Peter is once again pointing us to the ultimate example of One who has suffered unjustly. He was betrayed, badgered, brutally beaten, and crucified. Verse 1 says He suffered in the flesh. He suffered in the body. Don’t let anyone ever try to convince you that Christ didn’t suffer physically. It says “He suffered in His body.” I think that every blow He received and every drop of blood that flowed from His body He was thinking of us. He did it to make a way for us to come to God.

I Peter 2:21-22 tells us that through His suffering He became our example to follow and in it He did not sin.

“Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.”

So when we come back to our passage we can see what Peter meant. When we consider what Christ endured in His suffering and didn’t sin Peter gives us the first piece of armor. I believe His example in how He suffered is the foundational piece we should arm ourselves with. Without it we won’t be able to stand. Our efforts to stay strong will waver, because it will be attempted in our own strength. Hebrews 12:3

The first piece is to arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ when He suffered unjustly.

We as Christians are to be prepared to suffer unjustly, but as we do keep the example of Christ firmly fixed in your mind’s eye.

We are to have the same attitude as Christ. The KJV uses the word “mind”, and the NASB uses the word “purpose”. The Message reads that we are to “learn to think like Him.” Whereas the Amplified Bible adds some context to the suffering when it says “arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose (patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God).”

Back in I Peter 2:20 Peter says that when we suffer for doing what is right we please God. Again, Christ is our example. In Philippians 2, Paul also says that we are to have the same attitude of Christ as he goes on to explain the great humility Christ exhibited. Added to what Peter has to say, patient humility is an essential attitude when enduring unjust suffering, like Christ.

“With the same determination and care with which a soldier puts on his armor, Christians are to adopt Christ’s attitude.” write Walvoord and Zuck.

John MacArthur adds that arming ourselves in this way is a key to obedience. When we have the mind of Christ we willingly obey His Word.

Philippians 2:8

That’s how we arm ourselves, with the mind of Christ.

Now Peter continues in verse 1 by saying that “he who has suffered in the body is done with sin.”

Here’s what I think he means. When we suffer unjustly for our faith, suffering is a way of straightening out our priorities. It helps us to be laser focused with a faith that is strong and genuine.

When an athlete prepares for competition, he or she puts away unhealthy practices to prepare and

compete well. That's what suffering can do. We put away our sin. Hebrews 12:1 says we throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us, to run with perseverance the race that is before us, that race which can include suffering.

The KJV uses the word "ceased". If the word was in the active voice it would mean that we have stopped sinning, but that won't happen until we reach heaven. The word is instead in the passive voice meaning that we have been released from the power sin, not the presence of sin. Sin no longer has a hold on us. The chains of sin have been broken and we are set free. In the light of suffering sinful practices lose their desire. Oh, they are still there but armed with the attitude of Christ and the empowering, indwelling Spirit we are able to resist the devil who will flee from us. Galatians 5:16 "Walk in the Spirit and you won't fulfill the desires of the flesh."

Persecution is the means by which we become more like Christ.

It comes down to what I call the great commitment. We know the great commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love others as ourselves.

We know the great commission which is to go make disciples.

The great commitment is found in Luke 9:23 "But He said to them all, if any man will come after Me let Him take up his cross and follow Me."

The great commitment is to die to self and our desires, to put aside our will in order to follow Christ. If we are going to arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ then we must die to self.

In his book *One Hundred Meditations*, Richard Wurmbrand wrote after spending 14 years in prison "I have accepted this proposal, Christians are meant to have the same vocation as their King, that of cross-bearers. It is this conscience of a high calling

and of partnership with Jesus which brings gladness in tribulations, which makes Christians enter prisons for their faith with the joy of a bridegroom entering the bridal room."

A few weeks ago when we dealt with the subject of baptism in verse 21, I mentioned that baptism is more than just an outward expression of an inward experience. It's more than just a public testimony of our faith in Christ as you identify with His death, burial, and resurrection in the baptismal waters. Baptism also means that you have made a break with sin. You are committing yourself to a life of obedience. So when Peter says that the believer is done with sin, if you have trusted God enough to suffer for His sake, for doing what is right, you have made a break with sin. It shows that you are serious about your practice of godliness. If we are done with sin, we have left all to follow Christ.

That brings us to our second point in verse 2 with which we are to arm ourselves.

First, arm yourself by learning from Christ's attitude. Christ was obedient in His suffering. Second, arm yourself by living for God's will.

## II. LIVE FOR GOD'S WILL – v. 2

When we have the mind of Christ firmly implanted then according to verse 2 the result is that we will no longer live the rest of our time here living for the flesh in terms of gratifying the sinful nature.

When we read Romans 6 we come to understand that when we trust Christ we have died to sin, it no longer has a choke hold on us.

Romans 6:6-14

Galatians 2:20

Romans 12:1

Instead of living for self and the sin we were entangled in, we are to live for doing God's will. If we aren't doing God's will then we are disobeying and disobedience is sin.

I played a fair amount of basketball in High school and college. In High school we had a coach. In college I played on intramural teams with no coach. In High school the coach told us what plays to run and if we decided to go and showboat doing our own thing it was a fast trip to the bench. We had to play according to his will. In college without a coach you just went and did your own thing. Each player on the court was his own coach.

If we want to endure, during times of suffering we must follow the will of God. Peter mentioned that back in chapter 3.  
3:15-17

It may not be God's will for you to suffer, but Peter says if you do, it's better to suffer for doing what is right than suffering for doing what is wrong.

The bottom line is that God's will should be the determining factor that guides your life every day, even during times of unjust suffering.

I have shared this before but it bears repeating for those who haven't heard it.

I have never chewed tobacco and don't plan to, but what happened to me in school forever sealed the decision for me. Although there was that one time when I was counseling a friend and I were going to be the coaches for the all-star softball game. We decided to play it up and be big league managers so we went to the camp kitchen and asked for some celery. During the game we had big wads of celery in our cheek. Celery has that stringy stuff I like to call nature's dental floss. It was nasty.

But there I was back in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Like many of you back in the day, you got a Gideon New Testament in High school. I carried mine in my back pocket and if I had time during study hall I would take it out and read. One day without provocation a senior came up and pelted me with his wad of chewing tobacco.

Are we willing to suffer for doing the will of God?

In this letter alone Peter identifies seven things that are the will of God.

1. 2:15 – do good
2. 2:17 – act toward others with respect
3. 2:17 – revere God
4. 3:17 – be prepared to suffer for doing good
5. 4:1 – be finished with sin
6. 4:2 – reject evil human desires
7. 4:3 – reject the shameful actions of the unsaved

Paul says in I Thessalonians 4:3 that God's will is our sanctification, growing in our faith, becoming more like Christ in character, becoming holy.

Don't live for evil human desires, live for God's will. Now you may be thinking you're off the hook because you haven't committed any of the big sins. You haven't murdered anyone or robbed a bank. Remember that any sin, is still sin in God's eyes. Our evil human desires may be gossip, fear, anger, unforgiveness, hatred, bitterness, revenge, fear or anxiety. Is it starting to get uncomfortable? Seek to do God's will, not follow sinful desires.

Learn from Christ's attitude.

Live for God's will.

Third, leave your past life.

### III. LEAVE YOUR PAST LIFE – v. 3-4

While verse 2 looks at life from today going forward, verse 3 looks at our past life. In essence, Peter is saying that you had your fill of sin in the past before you were saved, so it's time to be done with it. Time is chronological here speaking about what you did in the past and in the perfect tense he is saying that our past is a closed book, you should be done with those things.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul says something similar when referring to the past ungodly lifestyle that they practiced. "And that is what some of you

were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” I Corinthians 6:11

Because of their new life in Christ they had made a break with sin. Like them, the churches in Asia Minor had a past life of sinful practices. It means we have had more than enough time to get our fill of sin, to sow our wild oats through deliberate longing. Notice the list of past sins they were no longer to have a part in or things they used to do.

1. Debauchery or lasciviousness – The NLT translates the word immorality. It means unrestrained, unbridled immoral behavior; an excessive indulgence in sensual pleasure. (Romans 1:21-32)
2. Lust – This is a strong desire of any kind for what is evil. It’s not just immoral behavior, but a lust for anything like power, money, or possessions. Writing to Timothy Paul says that such lust will plunge a person to ruin and destruction (I Timothy 6:9). Jude 18 says that in the end times people will follow their own ungodly desires.
3. Drunkenness – This literally means ‘wine bubbling up’ and refers to habitual intoxication. Solomon speaks about the guy who wakes up from his drunken stupor looking for another drink (Proverbs 23:29-35).
4. Orgies or reveling or carousing – This refers to wild group parties where anything goes. During pagan idol worship people gave up all restraint in the name of religion and worship to do whatever they wanted because they believed their gods approved of it. It was in excess and explicit.
5. Drinking parties – These are parties that are just for the purpose of drinking and getting drunk. A recent frat party turned into a crime scene when a young man died from alcohol poisoning.

He had a blood/alcohol content of .48.

6. Abominable idolatries – This is the worship of false gods such as Dionysius and Bacchus the god of wine.

These were all part of their former lives, their past which they were to leave behind.

The difficulty comes in trying to maintain friendships with the people we used to hang around for the purpose of witnessing to them about the change that has been made through Christ.

Verse 4 then adds that those who are still in that lifestyle think it’s strange that you would give all that up, that you don’t “plunge” or immerse yourself in the same wicked things they are doing. They don’t see anything wrong with it and think you are out of your mind because you won’t participate. As a result they verbally abuse you, they mock you. The word for abuse in the Greek is our word blaspheme. It’s more than just poking fun at you for not joining them. They actually slander you and speak evil of you. Walvoord and Zuck state that “a changed life provokes hostility from those who reject the gospel.”

We could probably conclude that if they say that kind of stuff about you, they weren’t really your friends to begin with.

Peter’s silent advice is not to cave in to the pressure just to avoid ridicule and suffering.

Have we left the past?

#### IV. LAY ASIDE VENGEANCE – v. 5

Romans 12:17-21

If you have a sibling chances are they provoked you in some way that resulted in your retaliating. Invariably who was the one who got caught? You did and your sibling got off the hook because Mom didn’t see it happen.



Sometimes we can think that God is too slow to avenge us when we are suffering for doing good. Or we can think He didn't see what happened to us. We might even conclude that His lack of immediate action means He doesn't care. But coupled with Romans 12, verse 5 tells us that God's justice will prevail. Those who cause your suffering will one day have to deal with God and His judgment. They will have to give an account of their evil deeds towards you. They will have to face the One who is ready to judge. When the Judge says it's sentencing time, there will be no delays, no appeals, no hung juries, no reduced sentences. The God who sees all and knows all will judge fairly and accurately.

And notice something important at the end of the verse. Not even death will hide them from God's judgment. He judges the living and the dead. Hebrews 9:27 "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."

No one will escape His judgment. Lay aside vengeance so that God can bring His judgment.

There is one final thing found in verse 6 that we can arm ourselves with. Latch hold of your victory.

#### V. LATCH HOLD OF YOUR VICTORY – v. 6

There are a number of different views about this verse. Let me give you the two main ones. The first is that Peter is saying the gospel was preached to those who were dead giving them a second chance at salvation. The second is that Peter is speaking about those who heard and believed the gospel to be true but were now dead. The word "now" is not in the Greek but is inserted to clarify that the preaching did not occur after they had died but before. Let's once again be clear that no one has another opportunity at salvation once they have died. Those who had died had heard the gospel and believed. While they were dead in the body their souls lived with Christ and they shared in His glory (Romans 8:17).

Non-Christians may judge a Christian now based on human standards because they don't understand what it means to live a godly life by giving up things they once used to do, especially only to suffer persecution for it. Just like that guard at the end of the short video about Richard Wurmbrand he didn't understand why he continued to pray knowing it would result in more persecution. Just as the world misunderstood Christ, it will also misunderstand us. We are called to remain faithful. Even though the world may persecute us, the Christian will ultimately be victorious because of his faith in Christ. One day we will be with Christ.

Let me close with one final passage, a word of victory for every Christian, especially for those who suffer for their faith, wondering if the persecution is worth staying strong. It's a reminder to us to arm ourselves.

II Corinthians 4:16-18

Our passage today is a call to be ready for the battle remembering that the battle is not ours, but the Lords and in Him there is victory.

Learn from Christ's attitude

Live for God's will

Leave your past life

Lay aside vengeance

Latch hold of your victory

If we arm ourselves with these, we are ready for whatever might come our way.