

Romans (40): The Spirit of Adoption

In the passage that we are studying, which is Romans 8:12-17, we read of the future glorification of Christians when they will realize all that God has made them to be and receive all that God has promised them to have. The apostle shows that it is the Christian's experience of suffering in this life that gives way to his glorification in the age to come. Just as our Lord was appointed to suffer when He came into this fallen world, similarly, when we became Christians God called us to suffer also. Just as Jesus first bore His crown of thorns and then afterward His crown of glory, so we are to bear our cross after Him and one day we will most certainly enter into His glory which God has promised that we will share with His Son. Glorification is our destiny, if we are indeed God's children. We have become His children through adoption, when He had given us the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption. One day our status as children of God will be seen and realized when we are transformed into the glorified children of God.

Let us read once again **Romans 8:12-17**.

¹²So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

In this paragraph of Holy Scripture we have already considered the following:

- I. Our Sanctification is essential to our Salvation (8:12f).**
- II. The manner and means of our sanctification is through the Holy Spirit (8:13).**

True Christians put to death the sinful actions of this body. In other words, Christians struggle in this life against living sinfully, as God has defined it, through the power of the Holy Spirit who has been given to each of them. This is the way that the Holy Spirit leads all of the sons of God—true Christians, as we read in Romans 8:14.

Today, we will begin by exploring further the truth of Romans 8:14, in which we read that...

- III. "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Rom. 8:14)**

The Holy Spirit leads God's children to fight against sin. The way that one can be assured he is a child of God is if he is being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fight against sinning against God.

Christians are in a life-long struggle against sin. This is a battle against sin in themselves and also against sin in the fallen world in which they live. God has placed into their hearts a love for righteousness and a hatred for sin, and there can be no peace between the two. Christians are locked in this life-long struggle from which there is no respite. But it will end one day, when sin will be no more but only righteousness will be present in the age to come. Christians are assured that when that day arrives, that new existence will be enjoyed by them.

In verse 13 we saw how the ones who "by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body" will live." This "life" refers to the blessing of enjoying the life that God bestows in this time but it also speaks of our

future life, the everlasting life that we will inherit. “Putting to death the misdeeds of the body through the power of the Spirit will bring eschatological life.”¹ But lest anyone wrongly think that it is by their own works that they enjoy or will inherit these blessings, verse 14 speaks of the believer’s passive “leading” by the Holy Spirit. “All who are led by the Spirit of God” conveys the idea that the Holy Spirit is in control of the Christian; Christians are passively led by the Holy Spirit. This is not “led” in the sense of “guiding” but rather in the sense that the direction or tendency of one’s whole life is governed by the Spirit.

The leading of the Spirit does not refer to guidance for everyday decisions in determining the will of God. It refers to being “controlled by” or “determined by” or “governed by” the Spirit. The passive form of the verb is significant, in that it suggests that the Spirit is the primary agent in Christian obedience, that it is his work in believers that accounts for their obedience. Although he does not exclude the need for believers to follow the Spirit, it emphasizes that any human obedience is the result of the Spirit’s work.²

And so, this life of putting to death the deeds of the body, although it is something that the Christian actively does; nevertheless, the Christian is passively being led of the Spirit to do these things. The Holy Spirit controls the heart and life of the Christian.

But this putting to death the deeds of the body is an activity that characterizes every true Christian. As we have said repeatedly, or sanctification is as much a part of our salvation as our justification by God’s grace alone through faith alone. Here are the pointed words of **Arthur Pink**:

That sanctification or personal holiness which we here desire to show the absolute necessity of, lies in or consists of three things. First, that internal change or renovation of our souls, whereby our minds, affections and wills are brought into harmony with God. Second, that impartial compliance with the revealed will of God in all duties of obedience and abstinence from evil, issuing from a principle of faith and love. Third, that directing of all our actions unto the glory of God, by Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel. This, and nothing short of this, is evangelical and saving sanctification. *The heart must be changed so as to be brought into conformity with God’s nature and will*: its motives, desires, thoughts and actions require to be purified. There must be a spirit of holiness working within so as to sanctify our outward performances if they are to be acceptable unto Him in whom “there is no darkness at all.”

Evangelical holiness consists not only in external works of piety and charity, but in pure thoughts, impulses and affections of the soul, chiefly in that disinterested love from which all good works must flow if they are to receive the approbation of Heaven. Not only must there be an abstinence from the execution of sinful lusts, but *there must be a loving and delighting to do the will of God in a cheerful manner*, obeying Him without repining or grudging against any duty, as if it were a grievous; yoke to be borne. Evangelical sanctification is that holiness of heart which causes us to love God supremely, so as to yield ourselves wholly up to His constant service in all things, and to His disposal of us as our absolute Lord, whether it be for prosperity or adversity, for life or death; and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

This entire sanctification of our whole inner and outer man is absolutely indispensable. As there must be a change of *state* before there can be of life—“make the tree good, and his fruit (will be) good” (Matt. 12:33)—so there must be sanctification before there can be glorification. Unless we are purged from the pollution of sin, we can never be fit for communion with God. “And there shall in no wise enter into it (the eternal dwelling place of God and His people) anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination” (Rev. 21:27). “To suppose that an unpurged sinner can be brought into the blessed enjoyment of God, is to overthrow both the law and the Gospel, and to say that Christ

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (William B. Eerdmans, 1996), p. 498.

² Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 422.

died in vain.”³ Personal holiness is equally imperative as is the forgiveness of sins in order to eternal bliss.

Plain and convincing as should be the above statements, there is a class of professing Christians who wish to regard the justification of the believer as constituting almost the whole of his salvation, instead of its being only one aspect thereof. Such people delight to dwell upon the imputed righteousness of Christ, but they evince little or no concern about personal holiness.⁴

And so, we read that being “led” of the Spirit to fight and defeat sin is a distinguishing sign that one is a child of God. “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). The phrase, “son of God”, was historically associated with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. God was portrayed and understood to be “the Father” of Israel. The Father had begotten His son, Israel, and cared for Israel as a father cares for his son. Under the new covenant all true believers are “sons of God.” God had begotten them as His children. He cares for them and blesses them as a father blesses his children.

We must understand our filial (family) relationship with the Father in terms of our relationship with and identity with Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. We read later in Romans 8:29, “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*” (Rom. 8:29). God purposed that His Son not be His *only* Son within His family. He purposed that Christ would be the eldest brother in a large family, all who are sons (and daughters) of God. The children of God are all of God’s elect, all of the redeemed ones through history. (This would, of course, include all the Old Testament saints as well as New Testament saints.)

IV. The believer’s awareness of his relationship as a child to his heavenly Father (8:15).

We read of the nature of this relationship that we enjoy with God. **Verse 15** reads, “*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’*” Our relationship with God is not one that can be likened as slavery unto God, which would be characterized by the fear of God’s judgment and resultant condemnation. This is the experience of the one who relates to God based upon God’s law rather than through God’s grace. That experience of law keeping as a means to be right with God is one of slavery and is characterized by fear of God’s wrath. There is to that one the fear of death and fear of God’s judgment. But that is not how we experience our relationship with God, if we are true Christians and we are thinking rightly. In contrast to relating to God based on keeping His law, our relationship with God through His grace is characterized by filial love, in which we are aware of our adoption into His family. Here we see again that the believer is passive in this. As a believer you had “received” the “Spirit of adoption”; in other words, God gave to you the Holy Spirit of adoption.⁵

The Holy Spirit of adoption enables God’s people to express to God, “Abba, Father.” It is by the Holy Spirit who gives us assurance of our sonship to God that we may cry out to our God in this intimate and familiar manner. The expression, “Abba Father”, is the combination of two words, each of them meaning “Father.” The first term, “Abba” (αββα), is an Aramaic word, the term that Jesus Himself used with reference to God His Father. Aramaic was the common day-to-day language of the Jewish people. They had spoken Hebrew prior to the 6th century BC. But after they had been defeated and subjugated by Babylon in 587 BC, the Jews had adopted Aramaic, the language of their captors. When they returned from exile in Babylon, they retained their Aramaic language. The second term, translated “Father”, is the Greek word for Father, *patair* (ὁ πατήρ). He essentially says “Father, the (My) Father.”

The Aramaic term, *Abba*, is preserved in **Mark 14:36** in which we read, “

³ Pink quotes John Owen from his complete works, vol. 2, p. 511.

⁴ Arthur Pink, *The Doctrine of Repentance*.

⁵ You may take note that although the word spirit is used in the first clause of this sentence as well as the second, the first “spirit” describes a subjective, personal sense or awareness of condemnation, but the second “Spirit” is a reference to the Holy Spirit.

³²And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And He said to His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴And He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.” ³⁵And going a little farther, He fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. ³⁶And He said, “*Abba, Father*, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:32-36)

When Paul writes that the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to address God in this same way, it suggests that the Christian has the same relationship with God as does the Son of God. Obviously, this is not the “same” identical kind of relationship, because Jesus Christ is of the same essence of the Father and has existed as the only begotten Son of the Father from eternity. But our relationship with the Father is similar to the relationship that Jesus Christ enjoys with the Father. **Douglas Moo** stated the matter well:

In ascribing to Christians indwelt by the Spirit the use of this same term in addressing God, Paul shows that Christians have a relationship to God that is like (though, of course, not exactly like) Christ’s own relationship to the Father. In “adopting” us, God has taken no half-measures; we have been made full members of the family and partakers of all the privileges belonging to members of that family.⁶

The ability that the Christian has to call God in this intimate manner is born of the Holy Spirit in His soul, suggests that this knowledge of his relationship with God as *his* Father is not born from a theological statement or doctrinal persuasion, but it is from the very heart of the believer. The Holy Spirit Himself causes us to have within us this comforting conviction that we belong to God, for we are children of our heavenly Father. “The Spirit not only bestows ‘adoption’ on us; He also makes us aware of our new relationship”; we have not only the status, but the heart of sons.”⁷ Expressing this same understanding, **Martin Luther** wrote about the believer’s use of this word “Abba” toward God the Father:

This is but a little word, and yet notwithstanding it comprehendeth all things. The mouth speaketh not, but the affection of the heart speaketh after this manner. Although I be oppressed with anguish and terror on every side, and seem to be forsaken and utterly cast away from thy presence, yet I am thy child, and thou art my Father for Christ’s sake: I am beloved because of the Beloved (i.e. Christ). Wherefore this little word, Father, conceived effectually in the heart, passeth the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and the most eloquent rhetoricians that ever were in the world.⁸

V. The Holy Spirit gives assurance to believers that they are God’s children (8:16).

We read of the Holy Spirit’s work of witnessing to God’s people that they are the children of God. **Verse 16** reads, “*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*” This is an affirmation that the Holy Spirit is able to give the true Christian **a true and sound assurance of salvation**. We believe that there is available to the true believer a full and true knowledge that he currently possesses salvation. Our salvation is not “I think so” or I hope so”, but if the believer is thinking rightly and living rightly, and if God were to bless, the Christian can say, “I know that I am a child of God.” To make such a claim is viewed as folly or arrogance and self-righteousness by the world. For they assume that people are saved by the merit of one’s good works before God. Therefore, if you were to claim that you have assurance of salvation, then you must be self-righteous. But the Scriptures teach us repeatedly that we can know that we have eternal life. The apostle John wrote the epistle of 1 John so that true Christians could have true assurance of salvation. He wrote: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

⁶ Ibid, p. 503.

⁷ Ibid, p. 502

⁸ Ibid, p. 503.

Our confession of faith states the possibility of having assurance of salvation. Here are several statements of the matter from **The Baptist Confession of 1689**:

1. Although temporary believers, and other unregenerate men, may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God and state of salvation, which hope of theirs shall perish; yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before him, may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed. (Job 8:13, 14; Matthew 7:22, 23; 1 John 2:3; 1 John 3:14, 18, 19, 21, 24; 1 John 5:13; Romans 5:2, 5)
2. This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith founded on the blood and righteousness of Christ revealed in the Gospel; and also upon the inward evidence of those graces of the Spirit unto which promises are made, and on the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God; and, as a fruit thereof, keeping the heart both humble and holy. (Hebrews 6:11, 19; Hebrews 6:17, 18; 2 Peter 1:4, 5, 10, 11; Romans 8:15, 16; 1 John 3:1-3)⁹

You probably noticed the identical language in the confession with our text here in Romans 8:15f. It speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit in giving people assurance of salvation.

The Word of God identifies three different ways that God gives assurance of salvation to His people. There is *first* that *which may be obtained through believing and trusting the promises of the Scripture*. For example, Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). And so, believing the promise, you come unto Him in this manner, knowing that He has promised He will not cast you away from Him. The *second* form of assurance is *the passing of the tests* that the Scripture lays before us, particularly those tests that may be seen in 1 John.¹⁰ And the *third* form of assurance is this assurance of the Holy Spirit. **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**, the 20th century reformed and evangelical leader, believed that this was the highest and most convincing manner of possessing assurance of salvation. After writing about the first two ways to have assurance of salvation, he wrote of the third based on our Romans 8 passage:

But there is yet another and higher form of assurance: “The Spirit beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.” The first two I have mentioned refer to our spirits; but the Spirit Himself also beareth witness ‘with’ our spirits that we are the children of God. This is the highest and the most glorious assurance of all and it is ‘given’ to us and is not the result of our deductions from the Scriptures. Goodwin, and Owen, and Bolton, John Preston, John Howe and many others of the Puritans, as well as Jonathan Edwards and indeed John Wesley have eloquent teaching concerning this.¹¹

This teaching of the Protestant Reformers regarding the possibility of possessing assurance of salvation in this life was a clear departure from the teaching of Roman Catholicism. Many Roman Catholics believe that **Thomas Aquinas** was the greatest theologian of the Christian era. It has been Aquinas’ teaching about assurance by which Rome has dealt with the matter of assurance to this present day. In fact, at the **Council of Trent** Rome formalized this teaching as official church dogma at which Rome declared the impossibility of assurance of salvation.

The Council of Trent was called by the Roman Catholic Church in the mid 1500’s in order to refute the teaching of the breakaway Protestants and correct many abuses of practice in Catholicism that had

⁹ *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*. Article 18, paragraphs 1 & 2.

¹⁰ There are three kinds of tests in 1 John: (1) The test of the faith; you must believe the true essential teachings of the Gospel’ (2) the test of love; you must have and show a genuine love for the brethren; (3) the test of righteousness; you must order your life in righteousness, seeking to obey God from the heart.

¹¹ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans*, p. 187.

contributed to the schism with the Protestants. The council issued condemnations in 1563 on what it defined as Protestant heresies and defined Church teachings in the areas of Scripture and Tradition, Original Sin, Justification, Sacraments, the Eucharist in Holy Mass and the veneration of saints. It essentially codified the teaching of Rome of the medieval period.

For example, Rome repudiated the major tenant of Protestantism, justification by God's grace through faith alone, apart from works. In Trent's statement about justification, it said:

No one, moreover, as long as he is in this mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; as if it were true, that he is justified, either cannot sin any more, or if he do sin, that he ought to promise himself an assured repentance; for except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen to eternal life.

Also, **Trent** stated regarding assurance of salvation:

Let no one herein promise himself anything as certain with an absolute certainty; though all ought to place and repose a most firm hope in God's help.

The result? No assurance of salvation is possible in this life according to Roman Catholic teaching.¹² This remains true today as well. Five conclusions about assurance of salvation came forth from The Council of Trent which is true of Catholicism today:

(1) Assurance of salvation was only possible in rare cases through special revelation from God, which was only experienced by martyr-saints or eminent ascetics, or among those who lived monastic lives.

(2) For the ordinary believer the maximum level of certainty obtainable was a moral probability or "a firm hope in God's help," since even a mature believer could not be certain of final perseverance.

(3) Even if assurance were possible for the ordinary believer, it would not be desirable. Roman Catholicism considered it

Wholesome and beneficial for the Christian to entertain honest doubts in the high matters of justification and salvation. Such doubts keep him from an overwhelming confidence in himself, minister in true humility of character, and serve in a more salutary restraint on evil passions than joy and peace could ever be."¹³

Roman Catholicism believes it is damaging to a Christian to have assurance of salvation.

(4) Trent confirmed that the doctrine of assurance cannot be sustained by a theology built on sacramental grace. In other words, if your salvation is dependent on grace given to you by the church through observing many various duties and efforts over the course of a lifetime, you can never be assured in this life that you have salvation.

(5) The effect of a lack of assurance make individuals under Rome's teaching feel themselves dependent upon the church as God's way of channeling saving grace to the sinner.¹⁴

¹² The exception to this according to Rome if God gives a personal, immediate, and supernatural revelation of salvation to an individual.

¹³ Louis Berkof, *Assurance of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Smitter Book, 1928), p. 22.

¹⁴ These five conclusions are from Joel Beeke's excellent book, *The Quest for Full Assurance; the Legacy of Calvin and his Successors* (Carlisle, PA, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999) pp. 14f.

It was this view of the way of and assurance of salvation which had resulted in the great break between Rome and the Protestant Reformers in the early 16th century. The Protestants argued against church authority for the superior and final authority of the Scriptures. Much of the Protestant Reformation involved the nature of true assurance of salvation in contrast to the teaching of Roman Catholicism.¹⁵

And so, Rome says that you, the ordinary believer, cannot nor should you have assurance of salvation. It teaches that it would not be desirable if you could have assurance, for it would cause you to become careless and sinful. God's Word declares,

¹¹And this is the testimony: that *God has given us eternal life*, and this life is in his Son. ¹²*He who has the Son has life*; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³*These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life*, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Assurance of salvation is desirable and readily available for the one who truly has Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Here in Romans 8:26, Paul stated that the Holy Spirit may give to His people immediate, personal, assurance of salvation to individuals.

VI. The believer may be confident and assured that he is an heir of God, a fellow heir of Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:17 is a continuation of the sentence begun in Romans 8:16:

¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*

Christians are “fellow heirs with Christ.” Jesus Christ inherited all things. One day we will share with Jesus Christ in the ownership and enjoyment of all things.

Jesus Christ was glorified when He first rose from the dead on that first Easter Sunday and when he ascended into heaven and was enthroned by His heavenly Father. Jesus Christ, being God's obedient Son was given possession of all things in heaven and earth. Our Lord Himself taught that His glorification would be preceded by His sufferings. They would give way to Him being glorified. Jesus told two of His disciples on the afternoon of His resurrection:

²⁵And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

His glory was the inheritance that He was given upon His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven. What is implied is that His sufferings on His cross were essential to precede His glorification. His glorification also speaks off His resurrection body which came forth from death.

VII. The believer must suffer with Christ if he is to share in Christ's inheritance in glory.

¹⁵ Ibid., Beeke summarized the matter as it stood between Rome and the early Reformers: “The effect of this lack of assurance made individuals feel dependent upon the church as God's peculiar channel of divine grace, so that the issue between Roman Catholicism and the Reformers was essentially on of ecclesiastical authority pitted against scriptural authority. Thus the situation became ripe for a reaction on the part of the Protestant Reformers in support of a scriptural and personal quest of assurance of salvation.”

¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, ***provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.***

God has appointed Christians to be a people characterized by suffering in this life. Now there are some of our people that are suffering right now from physical problems. They are enduring pain due to their physical maladies. And God has a purpose in these experiences as we could show clearly from the Scriptures. But the suffering that is being addressed here is suffering that is encountered in this life because the Christian is living in the world which is contrary and opposed to God, therefore it is contrary and opposed to Christians who advocate living according to the will of God. Paul wrote to Timothy, “

¹⁰But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, ¹¹persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra--what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. ¹²***Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*** ¹³But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:10-16)

Paul told Timothy that just as he had suffered at the hands of evil men that Timothy would also, indeed all who seek to live for God and make known God’s righteousness in this world will receive the same kind of treatment. Why was the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah hounded and persecuted? He told the king and people of Jerusalem that they were under God’s wrath due to their sins and that they must repent in order to escape God’s judgment. Why was John the Baptist eventually beheaded by a king who was governed by the fear of his wife and his subjects? It is because John had told him, “It is not lawful for you to have that woman as your wife”

For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife. ⁴Because John had said to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” (Matt. 14:3f)

Why was our Lord crucified?

¹⁹“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (John 3:19-21)

But every Christian is called upon to stand with his Lord in righteousness and we are to make known to our world today what is true and false, what is good and evil, what is right and wrong. This will cost us when we do so. But our Lord does and will commend us for having done so. Our Lord taught His disciples:

³⁴When He had called the people to *Himself*, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ³⁵“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸***For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous***

and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mar 8:1 NKJ)

He said in another place:

¹⁸“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. ²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³He who hates Me hates My Father also. ²⁴If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. ²⁵But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘They hated Me without a cause.’ (John 15:18-25)

And when you and I attempt to follow the words and ways of our Savior in this world, we will encounter the unreasonable hatred and persecution of the world.

This is certainly the case in the world today, and it is so increasingly. Who would have ever imagined that the day would arrive that the world would call you a bigot if you espouse that lawful marriage is only between a man and a woman? But here we are. But that the debate has degenerated to this lowest level is itself an indication of how far the Lord has abandoned our society and has given it over to its sin.

And so, they call us bigots. We are the purveyors of hate. We are the problem with this world. The world would be better place without us. But would they not be surprised if they knew all that we believe? For we espouse standards of righteousness that are far narrower than refusing to acknowledge gay marriage. We advocate that God has declared in His most Holy Word that all sexual activity outside of marriage is sin, if it is heterosexual and certainly if it is homosexual. And marriage before God is that of a man and a woman, but even that marriage should be within the parameters that God has set forth regarding divorce and the legitimacy to remarry. Whether or not the world likes this or approves of this is immaterial. Mark it down. God’s Word declares that on the Day of Judgment that God has appointed that will most surely come, it will be His law that will govern the day, not what this world allows or affirms is right or legitimate. And God has said, “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4)

What should be the attitude of Christians when they are unjustly maligned and maltreated? We read in **1 Peter 4:12-19** these words of instruction.

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. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

It is a normal part of being a Christian to suffer persecution (4:12). This is the unified testimony of Scripture: God’s people will suffer because they are God’s people. We live in a fallen world, in a world that is hostile toward God and His rule. When we become Christians, having acknowledged His rule, and

we attempt to order our lives according to His rule, then the world that is hostile toward Him becomes hostile toward us. We should not think it “strange” when this occurs.

This suffering may be of an intense nature. Note that it is a “fiery trial.” This carries the idea of intensity of suffering. It may also suggest the purifying spiritual benefit that comes to us through these trials. And in fact that is God’s design for us in allowing us to encounter them. These trials purify us as fire refines metal. It separates us from lethargy, from superfluous cares, from undue affection of temporal things. Our fiery trials cause us to look onto Him from Whom our help is derived.

The proper response is one of rejoicing (4:13). This is something that you need to remind yourself of when you are in the midst of your difficulty. It is easy to become depressed and discouraged under such conditions. And it is only when you can lift your eyes from your present difficulties and see things from the broader picture can you rise above the gloom to see things clearly. We can rejoice because we are suffering what Christ had suffered. There is “a fellowship of Christ’s sufferings” that Paul spoke about in Philippians 3:10. The same idea is found here. We can grow closer to Christ in fellowship when we encounter the same kinds of things that He encountered.

We can rejoice because this portends our glorification with Christ. The sufferings of Christ led to the glories of Christ. He was crowned with glory, honor, and power, because He was first crowned with shame and thorns. If we suffer shame and thorns unjustly, we also will be glorified one day when we are vindicated before the throne of our Father in heaven. We can rejoice because suffering for Christ’s sake is a sign of God’s presence and blessing (4:14). And ultimately, it betrays your persecutors’ attitude toward Him and their ultimate fate (4:15).

May our Lord enable us to be a positive, rejoicing people, even as we represent God and His will to our generation.
