

## **The Christian's Duty in a Hostile World, Part 2**

Scripture: 1 Peter 4:7b–9

Code: 60-42

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **A. The Cost of Discipleship**

1. Luke 14:26-33--Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks terms of peace. So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." No one should become a follower of Jesus Christ without first counting the high cost of doing so. Being an authentic Christian demands a willingness to pay the price. We need to encourage people to consider what Christ asks of them since it is costly.

2. Matthew 13:44-46--"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Those parables imply that discipleship involves a commitment to Christ, which is a reflection of salvation's infinite worth.

3. Matthew 19:21--Jesus said, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." Selling material belongings and helping the poor don't merit salvation by themselves but are evidence of an obedient attitude toward Christ. Following Christ involves a willingness to do whatever He asks.

4. Luke 9:59-62--Jesus said to a man, "'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Permit me first to go and bury my father.' But [Christ] said to him, 'Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'" Nothing is to interfere with following Christ.

#### **B. The Ease of Discipleship**

1. Matthew 11:29-30--Jesus said, "Take My yoke upon you.... For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." That's a gracious invitation, but it is still a call to submit to Christ. Discipleship is costly, but the cost of hell is greater. Proverbs 13:15 says, "The way of the treacherous is hard." To reject Christ is to choose the harder, more costly way. It is a life of crushing guilt, hopeless disappointment, unsolvable problems, and eternal condemnation in hell. The cost of following Christ is small in comparison to that. Discipleship is a paradox since following Jesus Christ is costly but easy.

2.1 John 5:3--The apostle John said, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." A disciple is not only called to obey His commands, but also enabled by the Spirit's power to fulfill those commands. Obedience to God's Word in the Spirit's

power brings joy to the disciple because of Christ's great grace.

Because the world is complex, contemporary Christianity seems to assume that solutions to a Christian's problems are also complex. But that isn't true because God chooses common and humble people to know the things of God (1 Cor. 1:27-28). The foundations of the Christian life are simple and direct. And 1 Peter 4:7-11 supplies us with those simple, foundational elements of Christian living.

### **C. The Manifestation of Discipleship**

#### **1. A Desire to Do Right**

Because of the new nature that's implanted within his heart, a believer longs to be what God wants him to be. The apostle Paul saw sin as something he occasionally did but did not wish to do (Rom. 7:19). Although Paul wanted to obey God's law, which is holy, just, and good, he sometimes gave into the flesh. Sin can cloud a believer's longing to do right but still his basic impulse is to hate sin and love righteousness.

#### **2. The Discipline to Do Right**

Just the desire to do right doesn't guarantee the believer will do just that. A child's desire to be like someone else illustrates the point. Maybe a child has dreams of being a major-league baseball player. So he holds the bat the same way that his favorite player does. Or maybe he wants to be a medical doctor like his uncle. So he drapes a toy stethoscope around his neck and parades around the house. Or maybe he wants to be a musician. So he practices playing a violin. But a child doesn't become a professional baseball player, doctor, or musician through desire alone.

Fulfillment of a desire begins with a person's ability, which is developed through years of preparation. An individual needs to spend his time and energy building a foundation of habits, responses, strengths, timing, and even a memory to bring a desire to fruition. A successful moment at bat in the World Series results from years of disciplined preparation, not a strong wish. Disciplined study and practice prepare a doctor for performing surgery, not merely his desire to be a surgeon.

Many Christians desire spiritual excellence because they see Christ's image in the Bible, but they fail to have the daily discipline required to produce that excellence. That is why some Christians fall apart in a crisis. As a crisis descends, they would like to find a shortcut for spiritual strength instead of practicing the spiritual discipline of obeying God's Word. Obedience to revealed principles in His Word is the only way to be ready for a crisis. The day-to-day spiritual disciplines build the strength, courage, boldness, and depth that help a Christian be effective during his trial.

A Christian who lives in disobedience can't suddenly take control his life and instantaneously live and react like Christ would. That is a shallow type of Christianity. In his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines* Dallas Willard says, "The 'on-the-spot' episodes are not the place where we can, even by the grace of God, redirect unchristlike but ingrained tendencies of action toward sudden Christlikeness. Our efforts to take control at that moment will fail so uniformly and so ingloriously that the whole project of following Christ will appear ridiculous to the watching world...."

"Some decades ago there appeared a very successful Christian novel called *In His Steps*. The plot tells of a chain of tragic events that brings the minister of a prosperous church to realize how unlike Christ's life his own life had become. The minister then leads his congregation in a vow not to do anything without first asking themselves the question, 'What would Jesus do in this case?' As the content of the book makes clear, the author took this vow to be the same thing as intending to follow Jesus--to walk precisely 'in his steps.' It is, of course, a novel, but even in real life we would count on significant changes in the lives of earnest Christians who took such a vow--just as it happens in that book.

"But there is a flaw in this thinking.... Asking ourselves 'What would Jesus do?' when suddenly in the face of an important situation simply is not an adequate discipline or preparation to enable one to live as he lived. It no doubt will do some good and is certainly better than nothing at all, but that act alone is not sufficient to see us boldly and confidently through a crisis, and we could easily find ourselves

driven to despair over the powerless tension it will put us through" ([San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988], pp. 7-9).

Being like Jesus Christ is the result of daily spiritual discipline. And the secret of handling a crisis is to learn how to live the Christian life on a day-to-day basis by developing the necessary habits, godly faith, and spiritual courage. Jesus said, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

The novelist Leo Tolstoy wrote, "Man's whole life is a continual contradiction of what he knows to be his duty. In every department of life he acts in defiant opposition to the dictates of his conscience and his common sense" (cited by Dallas Willard, "Discipleship: For Christians Only?" Christianity Today [10 Oct. 1980]: 27). Fallen man can't even do what he thinks is right because his nature is debilitated. But because of his regenerate life, a Christian can overcome that impact of fallenness by cultivating godly habits. And 1 Peter 4:7-11 instructs us of our duty to build godly habits that help us stand in the midst of hostility, and whatever else we have to endure in life.

## **REVIEW**

### **I. THE INCENTIVE (v. 7a)**

## **LESSON**

### **II. THE INSTRUCTIONS (v. 7b-11a)**

"Be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies."

That speaks of holiness, love, and service. We're to concentrate our Christian living in those three dimensions. Holiness speaks of our relationship to God and His revealed Word. Love refers to our relationships with others. And service speaks of our responsibility to minister within the Body of Christ.

#### **A. About Personal Holiness (v. 7b)**

"Be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer."

Peter wanted every believer to be godly and pure so he could enjoy unhindered communion with God.

##### **1. It involves godly thinking**

The Greek term translated "be of sound judgment" (Gk., *sophronesate*) comes from two words that mean "to keep safe" and "the mind." It refers to guarding your mind and keeping it clear. The mind is to be fixed on spiritual priorities and holy living. The apostle Paul said, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2).

The verb also could imply not being swept away by emotion or passion. It was used to speak about the maniac Jesus delivered from the legion of demons, who then was "in his right mind" (Mark 5:15). The apostle Paul said we're not to think highly of ourselves "but to think so as to have sound judgment" (Rom. 12:3). It's important to guard your mind because a person acts according to the way he or she thinks (Prov. 23:7). Since the world is self-indulgent, deceiving, and demonically influenced, a believer can easily lose his spiritual and mental balance. Therefore a believer's focus should be on God and thoughts that please Him.

a) Joshua 1:8--The Lord said, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." God was pointing out the importance of thinking about His Word. b) Philippians 4:8--"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any

excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." Guarding the mind by right thinking is vital to Christian holiness.c) Colossians 3:16--"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." A believer is to saturate his mind with God's Word so his thinking will be pure.d) Titus 2:11-12--"The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age."Bringing the mind captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5) and His Word guards the mind and allows a believer to see things from an eternal perspective. That's the only way a believer can know what's important and what's not. Sudden emotion, changing fancies, unbalanced fanaticism, or foolish indifference won't sweep away the believer who guards his mind. Rather, his thinking will be poised and balanced.

## 2. It involves spiritual alertness

"Sober spirit" is close in meaning to sound judgment. The term speaks of taking things seriously and being alert. Elsewhere the term is translated "be on the alert" (Matt. 24:42) and "keep watching" (Matt. 26:41).

## 3. It involves prayerful communion

Godly thinking ("sound judgment") and spiritual alertness ("sober spirit") are necessary "for the purpose of prayer" (1 Pet. 4:7). Cluttered, imbalanced, confused, or self-centered thinking hinders prayerful communion with God. A believer can't know the fullness of that communion if his mind is unstable from worldly pursuits, ignorant of God's truth, or indifferent to God's purposes. Attitudes determine your relationship to God and are the result of your thinking patterns. To commune with God effectively and deeply requires that you think biblically.

Unending communion with God that is born out of thinking His thoughts is the heart of a believer's life and power. A believer who deeply studies the Word in search of finding great truths about God experiences communion with Him that's difficult to explain because he is touching the mind of God, if ever so lightly. Even in unspoken communion, there is an overwhelming sense of His presence. That communion comes only when you are making sound judgments and alert to divine truth.

The summation of Christian living is thinking God's thoughts. That means a believer is to read, meditate, think, and absorb God's Word daily so that his involuntary responses are godly. Out of that time in God's Word comes sweetness of communion, effective prayer, and spiritual power.

## **B. About Mutual Love (vv. 8-9)**

"Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint."

Peter turns from the vertical aspect of holiness before God to the horizontal aspect of love toward others. That primarily speaks of our relationships with other Christians but also has to do with evangelism. As Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Love is the substance of our witness to the world.

"Above all" speaks of the importance of love in our relationships. After a believer has strengthened his relationship with the Lord through intense times of Bible study and prayer, he will think with a biblical mind and a spiritual attitude. That will prepare him for any crisis. His next concern should be loving those around him.

## 1. How we should love (v. 8a)

"Keep fervent in your love for one another."

Peter's instruction here is similar to what Paul said elsewhere: "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" (Col. 3:14) and "[maintain] the same love" (Phil. 2:2). In 1 Peter 4:8 the participle translated "keep" amplifies the verbs of verse 7, which means a fervent love flows out of a balanced mind and spirit. "Fervent" refers to stretching or straining and pictures a person running with taut muscles to achieve the maximum output. Extrabiblical literature uses the term to describe a horse straining to run at full speed. So it speaks of intensity and exertion.

This love is sacrificial, not sentimental. By loving the unlovely, by loving one's enemies, by loving when it doesn't seem rational, and by loving to the point where it's costly, the believer crosses the barriers of human emotion. This kind of love requires stretching all your spiritual muscles in spite of insult, injury, and misjudgment from others.

## 2. Why we should love (v. 8b)

"Because love covers a multitude of sins."

Criticizing each other because of our sins causes strife and divisions. Even though we are Christians, we are still prone to sin occasionally because of the fallen human flesh in which we all dwell. So the only thing that will maintain our unity is love because love forgives.

Thinking he was spiritually mature and more magnanimous than anyone else, Peter said to the Lord, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matt. 18:21).

Undoubtedly Peter commended himself because rabbinical teaching at that time said a person should forgive three times. But the Lord told Peter he should forgive "up to seventy times seven" (v. 22).

First Peter 4:8 is reminiscent of Proverbs 10:12: "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions." In 1 Peter the present tense of the verb "covers" indicates a self-evident truth: By its nature love tends to forgive a multitude of sins. God Himself is the perfect example of One who forgives. He is "rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us" (Eph. 2:4).

Commentators differ on the interpretation of "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). Some say it's God's love that covers the sins, but others say it's the love of believers who are covering each other's sins out of their love for one another. I believe the verse is an axiom. Because it's self-evident that love covers sin, the love is from God to man as well as from Christian to Christian.

The Greek term translated "love" (Gk., *agape*) is volitional and spiritual. Our salvation is a result of God's choosing to love us (John 3:16; 1 John 4:19). "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). We're to follow His lead and demonstrate our love for Him and others. After all, that is what "the whole Law and the Prophets" depend on (Matt. 22:40). Hatred, selfishness, and self-centeredness stir up strife but love forgives. The church would be transformed if it were to love that way. Love should be at the base of all our spiritual relationships.

## 3. Who we should love (v. 9)

"Be hospitable to one another without complaint."

"Be hospitable" speaks of loving strangers--believers we don't know. It's easier to love our friends and cover their sins, but Peter says to extend that same love to believers we don't know well. That refers not only to a spiritual love that forgives sin but also to an affectionate love that prompts you to open your heart and home to those in need. Love is intensely practical, not just an emotional feeling. In New Testament times Christians obliged to travel often couldn't stay at the inns because they tended to be houses of ill repute. Without the hospitality offered by the early church, many Christians would have found it difficult to survive.

Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." That is reminiscent of the time when the Lord and two of His angels visited Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:1-2). And according to the law, the Jewish people were to extend hospitality to strangers (Ex. 22:21; Deut. 14:29). Jesus commended believers for providing food, clothing, and shelter for others (Matt. 25:35-40). And He taught that we should invite the poor, the blind, and the lame into our homes and feed them (Luke 14:12-14). God honors those kinds of sacrifices for others.

The spirit of hospitality is larger than providing a meal and opening a door. Being hospitable involves loving people outside our normal circle and to doing it without grumbling. Hospitality isn't like the "Poor Richard's Almanac mentality," which says that fish and visitors smell in three days! Rather, we're to open our hearts toward those we don't know.

## **Focusing on the Facts**

1. In what sense is discipleship costly? Support your answer with Scripture.
2. In what sense is discipleship easy? Support your answer with Scripture.
3. What does Romans 7:19 teach us about discipleship?
4. How can a Christian be prepared to handle a crisis?
5. What does "be of sound judgment" (1 Pet. 4:7) mean? Support your answer with Scripture.
6. What Scriptures show that a believer's focus should be on God and His Word?
7. What does "sober spirit" mean in 1 Peter 4:7?
8. How do sound judgment and a sober spirit relate to prayer (1 Pet. 4:7)?
9. How does a believer have prayerful communion with God?
10. The summation of Christian living is.
11. What is the significance of "keep" in 1 Peter 4:8?
12. Explain the meaning of "fervent" in 1 Peter 4:8.
13. In what sense is love sacrificial?
14. What lesson did the Lord teach Peter about forgiveness (Matt. 18:21)?
15. Whose love is covering the sins in 1 Peter 4:8?
16. What does "be hospitable" (1 Pet. 4:9) mean? Support your answer with Scripture.

## **Pondering the Principles**

1. First Peter 4:7 instructs us of our duty concerning personal holiness. J. C. Ryle said, "Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgement, hating what He hates, loving what He loves, and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man" (Holiness [Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1987], p. 34). It is important for you to regularly study God's Word so you can be of one mind with God. Sound judgment and spiritual alertness are the fruition of deeply studying His Word. Plan to begin studying Scripture. If you already are, be encouraged to continue so you will be "approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).
2. A believer who loves fervently readily forgives the sins of others. Jerry Bridges said, "Forgiveness cost God his Son on the cross, but what does it cost us to forgive one another? Forgiving costs us our sense of justice. We all have this innate sense deep within our souls, but it has been perverted by our selfish sinful natures. We want to see 'justice' done, but the justice we envision satisfies our own interests. We must realize that justice has been done. God is the only rightful administrator of justice in all of creation, and his justice has been satisfied. In order to forgive our brother, we must be satisfied with God's justice and forego the satisfaction of our own" (The Practice of Godliness [Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1983], p. 252). Read Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13 and ask the Lord to help you have a fervent love that forgives others.

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