



The Reflector

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we must not forget who we are

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The first epistle of Peter was written to strengthen Christians during a time of extraordinary persecution that was going to get worse. Such times are trying times for the faithful. The pressure to find relief is tremendous. Under such pressure there is the ever present temptation to either *retaliate* or *capitulate*.

In chapter two, Peter seeks to fortify them against either of these reactions. To fortify his readers against retaliation, he reminds them of the attitude of Jesus under the horrible suffering he endured at the hand of his persecutors, yet without retaliating (verses 21-25). To fortify against capitulation, he reminds them of who they were and what they had in Christ Jesus (verses 4-10). They would forfeit all this if they gave in to the pressure and capitulated.

All who live godly in every age are persecuted to some degree (2 Tim. 2:12). It may not always be in the form or to the degree as that spoken of by Peter, but real none the less. We too have to guard against retaliation and capitulation. We will discuss in this article only one of these – capitulation. We will look closely at the words of Peter to remind us who we are so we can strengthen our resolve not to surrender to the pressures of our times.

We need to remember who we are whether persecuted or not. In high school, we had a sports rivalry with a school not far away. One football game ended with a free-for-all fight. The next week

our principal called the whole school into assembly and lectured us on how to behave as we represent our school at such events and closed his lecture with, “Just don’t forget who you are.”

While in a gospel meeting in a neighboring state, my attention was called to the philandering ways of the local preacher. I felt compelled to talk to him about it and did in his office at the church building. He said, “I have a weakness. When I get away for here, I sometimes forget that I am a preacher.” I told him, “The problem is not that so much that you forget that you are a preacher, you are forgetting that you are a Christian.”

While we must not forget at anytime who we are as Christians, there are times when we especially need to remember who we are:

1. When we are provoked by persecution and injustice.
2. When we have a strong desire to conform to the world.
3. When we’re discouraged by problems among Christians.
4. When we see false religion’s greatly outdoing us in numerical growth.
5. While we are belittled by the “wise of this world.”

We cannot remember who we are unless we know who we are in the first place. Just who are we, according to Peter in our text?

We Are God’s Chosen Special People.

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal

priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10 NKJV).

Without Christ we were nobody ("not a people"), now we're someone special. We are now living stones in God's house, chosen and precious. (Verses 4, 5). We are also royal priests in God's kingdom. (Verse 9, cf. Revelation 1:5-7). We are a people after his own possession, his own special, peculiar people bought by the blood of Christ. (Cf. Acts 20:28).

We are not a "self-made people." We are who we are because we have obtained mercy. (Verse 10; 1 Corinthians 15:10). We are to "proclaim the praises of him" (verse 9) and not ourselves because we are his workmanship and not our own (Ephesians 2:8-10).

We Are God's Light in the World.

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:" (1 Peter 2:9 KJV).

We shine as lights in the midst of spiritual and moral darkness in the world of millions of people whose minds are controlled by the influence of the "god of this world." (Philippians 2:15). Both individual disciples and congregations of our Lord are to shine as lights in the midst of a crooked nation. (Cf. Matthew 5:13-16; Revelation 1:20).

We are the light that the world needs but not necessarily what it wants. (Cf. John 3:19-21). A good influence and a good reputation are not necessarily the same. Generally speaking a good reputation is what people think of us. In a world that loves darkness rather than light we may not be able to enjoy a good reputation. But we can have a tremendous influence by our example and teaching that radiates light in the midst of all the darkness around us. If we don't influence the world for good

in this way, who will? The world as a whole will not appreciate us (John 15:19; 17:14), but those who have come to love the light will appreciate us.

We're God's Heirs to Heaven.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you," (1 Peter 1:3-4 KJV).

This means we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). We become children of God by faith when we put on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:26-27).

Though we have not yet received that inheritance reserved for us in heaven, we are already citizens of heaven. (Philippians 3:20-21). As such we are strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land waiting for our deliverance to the homeland. In the meantime as representatives of our homeland we display the values we have learned from our Father in heaven. It is much like a patriotic American living on foreign soil. He is careful to be true to his American heritage while away from home and counts the days until he can return to his home.

As heirs of God, we "we will by no means be put to shame." We will receive our inheritance if we remain faithful to him. "Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.'" (1 Peter 2:6 NKJV).

Knowing who we are, how can we become discouraged enough to quit? How can we allow those who would oppose us to cause us to drop our heads as though we were some kind of inferior creatures upon the earth? Or like we had something of which to be ashamed? While we must never lift up our heads out of vanity and pride, there's no reason for us to have an inferior complex about being a Christian. We can in all humility recognize and demonstrate all that we are by the

grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. There's certainly no reason for us to cut and run when we are faced with persecution or opposition. We are God's children. We can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens us. We've been elevated to "heavenly places" in him where we enjoy all spiritual blessings. (Ephesians 1:3). We have been taken from not being a people to being the people of God – citizens in his own holy nation.

In view of all this, how can one resist being born again and becoming one of God's own special people?

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever.' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:22-25 NKJV).

So, then wherever we go and in whose presence we ever find ourselves let's always remember who we are and why we're here as the Lord's own special people. ■

what is happiness?

R. J. Evans

How many times have you reasoned, "I'd be happy, if only..."? And then the dream usually continues with "if only I had more money," or "if only I had married someone else," or "if only I had more friends, a better job, a bigger house, etc." The illusive breakthrough into happiness for many people hinges upon those two little words— "if only."

What Is Your Concept?

Most people have little trouble coming up with their own formula for happiness. In view of the above "if only's," it usually consists of wealth, status, power, or freedom from frustration of any

kind. If you have one or more of these as your goal, then you need to consider if it is worthwhile or not. One of the best ways to find out is to observe those who have lived in such conditions. King Solomon is a prime example of one who "had everything." According to 2 Chronicles 6-9, he had enough wealth to overshadow any modern-day "Bill Gates."

Consider Solomon's Wealth

On a yearly basis, Solomon received six hundred sixty-six talents of gold (2 Chronicles 9:13). Six hundred sixty-six talents of gold would be about 960,000 ounces. Comparing that with today's standard (say at \$1,525 per ounce) it would amount to something like \$1,464,000,000 (one billion, four hundred sixty-four million) per year. Then added to that, we are told "besides what the traveling merchants and traders brought. And all the kings of Arabia and governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon" (2 Chronicles 9:14). There was no need for Solomon to purchase certain items. He made five hundred shields of gold, all his drinking vessels were of gold, in fact, none was of silver, for silver "was accounted as nothing in the days of Solomon" (2 Chronicles 9:20). Even when the queen of Sheba came "to test Solomon with hard questions, having a very great retinue, camels that bore spices, gold in abundance, and precious stones" (2 Chronicles 9:1). And wealth was not everything, for the Bible says Solomon "loved many foreign women" (1 Kings 11:1). Of course, that is an understatement, for "he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (1 Kings 11:3). A total of a thousand women! And that became the major factor in his downfall — "and his wives turned away his heart" from God (1 Kings 11:3).

But Was Solomon Happy?

Being king, Solomon could do just about anything he so desired, and that is precisely what he set out to do. He wrote about those things in the book of Ecclesiastes. He experimented with almost everything under the sun, he built temples and

elaborate houses, he planted gardens and vineyards ((Ecclesiastes 2). He stated, “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them, I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure” ((Ecclesiastes 2:10). In view of all of this, from the world’s viewpoint, Solomon must have been the happiest man who ever lived. Wrong! Unfortunately, Solomon was miserable. Notice what he stated — “Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind” ((Ecclesiastes 2:17).

Now Let’s Consider the Apostle Paul

If there ever was a man who appeared to have every right to be miserable, it would have been Paul. Although a highly educated man, when necessary, he gladly made a living working with his hands making tents. He did much traveling under adverse conditions by foot or by ship. His life was one of constant danger and peril. Paul cataloged many of his sufferings, beatings, imprisonments, perils and anxieties in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28. Also, there was a great deal of worldly honor that Paul was willing to give up and consider rubbish “for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:4-11). Then, on top of all that has just been mentioned, Paul had a serious physical ailment which he referred to as “a thorn in the flesh...a messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

Yet Paul Was Happy!

True abiding joy and happiness today are not derived from earthly wealth, position, sexual freedom, or unlimited power. It comes as a result of becoming a Christian (Acts 8:39). And as a faithful Christian and true servant of the Lord, Paul was a contented man. A “contented” man is a happy man! Please observe some of Paul’s statements concerning this matter: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content...Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4, 11). Did Paul know something about happiness that Solomon didn’t? No, Solomon

knew it, but ignored it, and it ruined his life. As an old man, he made this statement about life: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Conclusion

All children of God can and should be “rejoicing Christians” (Philippians 4:4). Think of all the joys and blessings that are ours as His children. We enjoy all the spiritual blessings which are in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). We enjoy the peace of God that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). We have the hope of heaven which is an anchor to our souls (Hebrews 6:18-19). Thus, true happiness is obeying and faithfully serving God. If you practice this in your life, you will rejoice; if you choose to ignore this, then the results will be much like that of Solomon. If you have not obeyed the gospel of Christ and are not faithfully serving the Master, we plead with you to start doing so now (2 Corinthians 6:2). ■

Psalm 16

1 Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust. 2 O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee; 3 But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight. 4 Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. 5 The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. 6 The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. 7 I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons. 8 I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. 10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 11 Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.