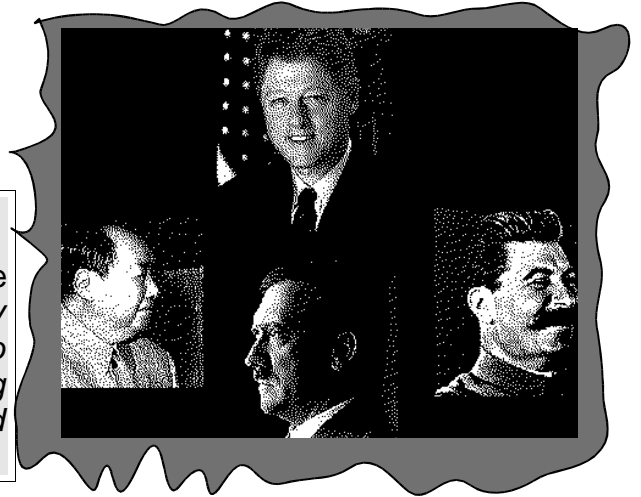


Study 3.

Follow the leader. 3:13-4:19

Real life update.

Christian persecution is real. Recently, via email, we were asked to pray for Christians in Iraq because, “*missionary workers who had entered the country and sought to establish new churches had to leave due to the escalating dangers of road bombs, car bombings, kidnappings and assassinations.*”



In this study we will be considering the paradox of Christianity. How can a person, who suffers for doing the right thing be blessed? The whole idea of suffering for doing the right thing just doesn't seem to make sense. We all have a strong sense of justice and when people violate it we retaliate. Lets try to nut out the Christian perspective on these issues.

1) The Christian mindset.

Read 3:13-17. What is the big point Peter is making in v13? Have you found this to be true?

Peter's readers had many good reasons to fear even for their lives, but following on from v12 why should they not fear?

Having told us what not to do, Peter then tells us what we should do. List the things he tells us to do and how we are to do them. V15.

Interestingly Peter, in this section, urges us to be responsive, not assertive, people. He doesn't promote **Bible bashing**. But in the light of the radical character of a genuine Christian Citizen how often would you expect to be questioned regarding your life style by curious non Christians? Has this ever happened to you? Were you prepared?

What do you need to do to be able to give a clear answer to someone who wants to know about your living hope?

2) Our example – Jesus.

Read 3:17-4:1. What reason does Peter give as to why it is better to suffer for doing the right thing rather than the wrong thing?

Peter puts forward Jesus and Noah as examples of Salvation happening in the midst of judgement and hardship. What are some of the similarities between Jesus and Noah?

What was the end result of Jesus' suffering? V22.

Now read 4:12-19. What should our attitude towards suffering be?

When you're experiencing persecution what are you to do? V19.

Historical insights.

Following the great fire which destroyed much of Rome in 64AD, the Emperor Nero, to avoid being blamed for the fire himself, put the blame upon the Christians.

Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace ... Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Tacitus. Annals XV, 44.



Pliny, the appointed governor of Bithynia- Pontus in AD 110/111 wrote to the Emperor Trajan asking whether age, gender or repentance should be considered in punishing those cited for the crime of being Christians. He tells Trajan what his policy was...

In the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished.

Trajan, in his reply, approved of Pliny's action. In what ways can we support Christians in the world today who are struggling to hold up under similar kinds of persecution?

3) Suffering and gifts.

Read section 4:1-11. What was Jesus' attitude towards suffering, that we are to imitate? Look up 2:22 for the answer.

List the five things Peter urges us to do in vv7-9. In what areas are you doing well?

Spiritual gifts are given, for us to serve each other, v10, but God gives us gifts for another significant purpose. What is it? V11.

Sometimes we just don't feel like serving others, or using our gifts. Peter remember, is writing to encourage suffering Christians. He stresses that by using their gifts, suffering can be alleviated. How is this encouraging?

Conclusions.

We've been told that in doing good, we are unlikely to run into trouble 3:13. We've been told also, not to be surprised if we do experience unjust suffering 4:12. And we've been told not to fear the things evil doers fear, namely exposure and punishment. What's Peter's final word to those who are suffering? 4:19.

Should we adopt the same attitude? Why?