

Study 21

QUIET EVANGELISM

First Peter 3:13-18

Peter has been counselling a persecuted church. In the midst of their persecution he advises them to walk closely with the Lord. During these dark times he wanted them to diligently guard their conduct. He implies that *a Christian's true spirituality is revealed when they are under pressure*. Persecution produces such pressure. Thus, Peter is imploring Christians that the most urgent requirement for them, during these times of persecution and pressure, is to remain faithful in their Christ-like conduct. If the world can see a truly spiritual Christian during times of heavy pressure, they will be impressed that Christ must be alive in that person.

1. How does Second Corinthians 3:3 describe Christians showing Christ in their lives when under pressure?

2. What did Christ say awaited His followers and why in Matthew 5:10?

3. What godly virtue does tribulation produce according to Romans 5:3?

THE PURPOSE OF PERSECUTION

History shows that there have been frequent outbursts of persecution against God's people. These have generally come from two sources: *governments and religions*. At various times some governments have viewed Christianity as a *threat* to their control over people. The most recent large scale example of this was *communism*. Religious leaders have also viewed true Christianity as a threat to their control over people. This includes those religious leaders who were claiming to be Christian.

4. What type(s) of persecution did the early Church face?

These persecutors were using persecution in an attempt to destroy Christianity. If torture couldn't persuade a believer to forsake Jesus, and thus discourage others from following Christ as well, then they would use *murder* to silence them! The early Church was experiencing this. Yet these persecutors came to recognise that Christianity was could not be controlled by them because it was empowered, guided, and protected by God. After the initial wave of persecution against the Church was unable to destroy it, it seems that the Enemy devised a new strategy of attempting to destroy the Church from within! When godless men attempt to control the Church, the Church inevitably ceases to be the Church! The end result of a man-controlled Church is a mere religious institution filled with lifeless man-made rituals and ceremonies (2Tim. 3:5).

5. In Exodus 20:25 the Israelites are told to establish certain altars made from an *unhewn* rock. No chisel or tool was to shape the rock used as an altar for making sacrifices to God. How does this (Exodus 20:25) illustrate the principle of man not attempting to control God (or even the worship of God)?

The force behind the persecution of the Church is Satan. He continues to move carnal man with his original lying promise that you could be (like) God (Gen. 3:5); that is, don't let God be in control, *you take control*. This is what motivates persecutors. Thus the purpose of persecution is to stop the spread of God's control in people's lives. The enemy seeks to use persecution to snuff-out evangelism.

6. But what actually happened after the first wave of persecution against the Church? (Acts 8:1, 4)

REACTING TO PERSECUTION

7. Knowing that God uses anything the enemy does for His glory, how does Peter advise the Christians to respond in verse 14?

8. Rather than being silenced about Christ, what should believers be ready to do according to verse 15?

9. What would confirm the believer's witness about Christ changing their lives? (vs. 16)

Peter says that people will notice Christ in us by the way we *live*. They may even ask about what it is that has made such a difference in our life. We need to be prepared and ready to give an answer. In this way our evangelism is preceded by quiet, godly living. This is especially powerful in situations where people have an opportunity to closely observe our lives. In those circumstances we don't need to be on soap-box preaching at them continually, because our lives will do that for us.

CHRIST GLORIFIED

In the midst of whatever we might be going through, we are reminded of what Christ went through for us. This reminder comes in such a way as to show us that His sufferings were for a time, then came glory (vs. 18). No matter what suffering, trial, or hassles, you're having now, they won't last! Hang in there! Don't be a quitter.

Amen.