

Cause Surprise Armed with the Mindset of Christ

1 Peter 4:1-8 • 2020-08-02



Anyone who has grown up around a place that has cattle or horses contained by an electric fence shares a common early memory. It's that surprise feeling when you find out what really does happen when you touch the electric fence. It usually remains an experience only in memory. That's because those who touch a fence designed to kick back 2000 pounds of flesh on hooves will probably never want to touch one again. Oddly enough, however, they will invite their friends to join the experience. "Come on, just try it." And in my experience if you are young enough and the peer pressure is applied you will probably join in. At least once until that surprise shock hits. "Okay. I'm done with touching electric fences." Isn't it something that others who have experienced the shock might want to invite anyone else to experience it? But that's the way it is with human nature. Can't you just picture a group of young boys near such a fence picking on the one who hasn't yet ever touched the electric fence? That's like what we read Peter telling us about this morning. The Christian wants to be done with sin, but the world is shocked that they don't want to continue in it. That's because God brings his people to cause a different kind of surprise. Today we see how we cause surprise armed with the mindset of Christ.

"Christ suffered in flesh." For him it was no surprise. He knew what would happen when they nailed him to the cross. But he willingly took on that suffering. Unlike our suffering because of our foolish sinning, his suffering wasn't because of foolishness. We, like brute beasts, have defied God's will and broken his commands. But Jesus the Messiah never once even desired to sin. He obediently lived a perfect life. Yet he suffered greatly and died.

Peter indicated the reason for his suffering just a little bit earlier in his letter: "Christ suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18) The love of God for us is so great that he saw every unrighteous act and willingly chose to take our place. His end goal was to do away with sin forever by taking its punishment on the cross once and for all.

The price of suffering he paid was tremendous. It wasn't just some jolt of electricity for one single wrong act. It was "once for all." Jesus was chosen by God to bear every sin and along with it every bit of suffering that everyone deserved. That is a shocking, unfathomable love for us!

God calls on us to now hold that same view towards sin. "Arm yourselves with the same mindset (as Christ)." He saw sin for what it really was: something which created separation from God and mankind and brought death and hell to all people. Christ saw all the desires and invitations of the sinful world as foolish as the invitation and desire to touch a fence designed to repel one-ton beasts. Arm yourself with that same mindset towards sin. Like someone who no longer ever wants to touch something harmful we ought to live our lives never wanting to turn back to the sin which once grasped us. And let this new mindset towards sin change the rest of your life. "(Arm yourself with the same mindset as Christ) so that you no longer live the rest of your time in the flesh for human desires but for God's will."

Human desires are by nature the opposite of God's will, and they lead to some shocking things. Peter lists for us a six-fold description of what they lead to. "Living in unbridled immorality, lusts, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and disgusting idolatry." Perhaps some of you might say to yourself, "I haven't wasted my time in things like that." And that may perhaps be true. Not every Christian is a former alcoholic, idol worshiper, or someone who had no moral boundaries. But Peter lists the most obviously destructive behaviors of those without the mindset of Christ.

All human desires will ultimately lead to such things in the end. Unbridled immorality begins with the simple acceptance of immoral jokes or entertainment. If the desire follows to its end it leads to having no regard for what is pure or good in God's sight. Lust begins in the heart and lets it chase after unfaithfulness and selfish, sinful desires. Drunkenness begins with the reliance on alcohol to handle hard times. Soon it takes hold and gives you a hard time. Peter's point is that when it becomes normal to live according to the sinful desires of the heart sin soon becomes the norm.

But what happens when someone arms themselves with the same mindset as Christ? Peter was aware of how the world responds to those who stand out for the sake of Christ. "They are surprised that you do not plunge into the same overflowing river of filth with them." It creates a shocking surprise for those who don't have the mindset of Christ. I was with a group of friends once on a run and we got to a resting point alongside a river. Some of them proceeded to jump right into the river, but I opted not to. Mostly it was because I knew that the river had lots of farm drainage and pollution flowing in it. Sure enough, those who did jump in were surprised at those who didn't want to jump in. They kept saying "Come on, you gotta jump in," even as one of them came out of the river overflowing with a slimy layer of filth. Each one stank terribly. It didn't look fun to me at all. "Come on, why aren't you guys jumping in too?" one of them asked as the ugly dark water dripped down his face. One even came out of the water with a fish hook stuck on their shorts. That's what Peter says the unbelieving world is like towards Christians who don't join them in the same desires.

"No longer live the rest of your time in the flesh for human desires but for God's will." If you do, the world will be shocked that you view things differently. "They are surprised... and they slander you." In the same way that a child on the

playground is picked on because they are different a Christian in the world is picked on because they are different. There are lots of immoral things posted on social media. Does a Christian ignore it, avoid it, or even forgo using social media altogether if they can't make good use of it? Or does he give a little thumbs up just to let his friends know he's not too different? I know several Christians who have opted not to serve alcohol at their wedding receptions. They didn't do it because they had to. It is alright for a Christian to drink. But they know how their culture has consistently abused it. So, some choose not to even include it at their celebrations. They certainly don't desire to abuse it. Might some of their guests be talking behind their back about how disappointed they are and how they can't really have fun without alcohol? What happens when a Christian woman finds out that her date wants more from his date than what is appropriate for those who honor marriage? He will make her feel foolish. He will pressure her to be like everyone else. And if she doesn't cave-in, he will slander her. What about the trend to attend sporting events on Sunday? How many classmates will stay good friends with the one student who decides that time is devoted to worship? Where does that disrespect end?

But Peter reminds us that those who plunge into human desires will encounter an even bigger surprising shock. The biggest surprise will come when the same Christ who suffered in flesh returns with his glorious body. "They will have to give an account to the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead." God's judgment is coming. And it doesn't matter what judgments the world makes against those who have the gospel. Those who have the gospel will live as surely as Christ lives. Peter reminds us that this day of judgement is near. We are to live each day as if it is our last.

"Have sound judgment and be self-controlled." Don't live by making decisions on a whim. Make decisions based on what you know to be God-pleasing. Don't say, "that's just the way it is done these days." Ask yourself with self-control and the mindset of Christ, "What does God consider good?" And instead of letting your old desires control you, you now live self-controlled. When you arm yourself with the same mindset as Christ you are not only done with the desire to sin, you are done with the control of sin over your life. You see it for what it really is. Like a person who knows what the electric fence will do you desire to avoid it. Even if that means enduring the slander of those around you. Even if all around you are inviting you to just jump in you don't.

But a Christian's goal isn't to let people face that surprise unprepared. It is to preach the gospel to those who are shocked when they see the different mindset and different desires of God's own. Today we've saved for last the most important surprise you will create with Christ's mindset. "Above all, love each other constantly, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

Don't misunderstand. Arming yourself with the mindset of Christ doesn't mean that you will no longer sin. We aren't perfectly like him for the rest of our time in the flesh. Yet constant love means we are forgiven and that we forgive one another. It creates the most outstanding surprise. When you get into an argument with someone it can be easy to want to stand your ground. When someone makes you feel bad it can be easy to want to make them feel bad. The mindset that we are born with wants to toss everybody in our way onto the electric fence so they can know how it feels. This is called vindictiveness. It is a loveless mindset that seeks to pile on the sin instead of being done with it. When you choose to give someone the cold shoulder, when you spend all your time trying to win and get ahead of others, when your actions demonstrate you are only looking out for yourself and anyone who gets in your way deserves to be slammed into the mud and slandered, you've adopted the mindset of the unbelieving world. Love is the mindset of Christ.

When he came to live a perfect life, he was slandered. Even his own brothers spoke against him and his family called him out of his mind. But in perfect love he endured. When his closest friends abandoned him, betrayed him, and denied him, he endured in love. When his enemies mocked him while he suffered on the cross, he remained constant in love and did not mock back. Even those who died next to him on the cross slandered him. But his constant love remained for all. And by that great love he suffered in our place. "Love covers over a multitude of sins." God is love; his blood covers every one of our sins.

That is the mindset of Christ. Our Lord endured all and loved constantly. He shocked the world not only by his life, but by his love and laying his life down to bring forgiveness. Arm yourself with such a mindset. When you do it will create a surprise. And for the rest of your time in the flesh life will never be the same.