

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

First Peter: Truth and Hope for Sojourners

“The Power of a Christian Mind”

1 Peter 4:1-6

Take a first look.

I. GOD CALLS FOR PEOPLE TODAY WHO ARE READY TO STAND UP FOR THE TRUTH, REGARDLESS OF WHAT IT COSTS. A schoolgirl named Nijole Sudanaite was taken on tours of old cathedrals in what was then the Soviet Union. She had the unpleasant habit of making **the sign of the cross** every time she passed by the altar. She was ordered to stop. She would not stop. Her Catholic Christian parents would not stop attending mass, even though her father was threatened with the loss of his job. When the communists threatened to throw Nijole and her brother out of school for refusing to join the party’s youth league, their mother told the authorities that her children would never be “hypocrites and compromisers.” And they were not.

Nijole had a profound experience of the Holy Spirit at 18. She joined an underground order of nuns. In the early 1970’s she published and distributed *Chronicles of the Catholic Church*, which detailed the communist persecution. In 1974, she was caught and tried. In the courtroom, she gave a clear witness for the truth.

“Are you happy with your triumph?” she asked. “What have you triumphed over? Over the moral ruins of the country, over millions of unborn children whom you have killed, over people robbed of their human dignity, poisoned by fear and evil passions?” And then she made a defiant prophecy. “Every day your crimes are bringing you closer to history’s junk heap.”

For such words, she was sentenced to the GULAG—hard labor in remote parts of the USSR.¹

II. What are we willing to endure for the truth? Peter issues a challenge to all Christians to be ready to face whatever we must, since we have not just decided to follow a dead hero; we have instead decided to fall in line with the Creator and Redeemer of the human race. Because He is “the Way and the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6), we must be ready to stand up and be counted with Him and to discover *the power of the Christian Mind*.

Take a closer look at 1 Peter 4:1-6.

I. THE CHRISTIAN MIND HAS POWER BECAUSE WE ARE IDENTIFIED WITH CHRIST. v. 1

1. *We are urged to empower ourselves with the same “attitude” as that of Christ.* v. 1. This is a clear call to develop a Christian Mind. “Arm yourselves with the same attitude” is a call to *think* like Jesus Christ in all things, and here especially regarding the cost of living by the truth.

A—Are we committed to developing a uniquely Christian way of seeing the world and every aspect of life?

I—Several years ago, the local school board held an open meeting inviting comment on two proposed changes in the school policy. One of them was a proposal to add “sexual orientation” to the school’s anti-discrimination policy. Dr. James Powell and I attended this

¹ Charles Colson, *The Body: Being Light in Darkness* (Word, 1992, 1996), p. 183. An updated and expanded edition of this book under the title *Being the Body: A New Call for the Church to Be Light in the Darkness* (Word, 2003) is also available.

Tuesday evening meeting. It was a bit intimidating. Each person who wanted to speak to the issue(s) was required to get up in front of everyone, sign his/her name to a chart on the bulletin board under "Yes" or "No," and wait to be called upon. Only six of us ventured forth on the question of adding "sexual orientation." Sadly, two of those who spoke in favor of adding the language were people who are active in other churches in town. Only Dr. Powell and I spoke against giving minority status to sexual behavior, along with such traits as sex, race, and ethnic origin. We discovered after reading the article in *The Daily Record* that among those present, eleven signed their names and agreed with us while only nine signed their names and agreed with those for the change. Why did we attend this meeting and speak against this change?

In some ways, our motivation was quite simple: We believe that God has created people in His image, to follow His design for all of life, which includes finding sexual fulfillment in the covenant relationship of marriage between one man and one woman. Any other practice of sexual behavior is sinful, falling outside of both God's design and will, and therefore outside of His purpose and blessing.

2. *Jesus Himself suffered in the body.* v. 1. The original meaning of the motto "in His steps" was walking in the steps of suffering for doing right (See 1 Peter 2:21). That is where the footprints of Jesus fell.

3. *Such suffering can cause us to rise above sin and evil desires.* vv. 1b-2

A—Are we prepared to stand up for what is right, with humility and graciousness, regardless of what happens as a result?

I—A few years ago, Jeannie read the biographical sketches of several great Christians of the past. One of those was Sir Henry Havelock, a British military officer who served during the Burmese War (and others) of the middle of the 19th century. He was known for his strict morals, his religious devotion to Jesus Christ, and his terseness.

Havelock's company was sent to the front while the hot season was at its height. Enemy forays were increasing, and sentries' bodies were being found mutilated. During this period, an outpost was attacked at night and a runner came back to headquarters for instant support. Commander-in-Chief Archibald Campbell sent an orderly to the next company on the roster. The orderly reappeared with the company officer, who had to confess that half his men were drunk. At this point, Campbell swore roundly and turned to his aid-de-camp. "Then call out Havelock's saints," he roared, "they are always sober and can be depended on and Havelock himself is always ready."² "Always sober, can be depended on, ... always ready." Those words can surely describe the Christian who is cultivating and acting in accord with The Christian Mind.

II. THE CHRISTIAN MIND HAS POWER TO LIFT US ABOVE THE LEVEL OF OUR CULTURE. **vv. 3-4**

1. *Christ has lifted us above our past temptation and sin.* v. 3. It is Christ Himself Who has liberated us from the tyranny of the pursuit of immediate pleasure and has set us on a course for eternal life and joy. The list here of "doing what pagans choose to do" is well documented and illustrated in modern America: "unrestrained excesses, passions, acts of drunkenness, acts of carousing, drinking parties, and unlawful acts of idolatry." This describes a life under no control but the pursuit of instant gratification.

² John Pollock, *A Fistful of Heroes: Great Reformers and Evangelists*, pp. 52-53. A newer edition of this book is available entitled *A Fistful of Heroes: Christians at the Forefront of Change* (Christian Focus, 2013).

A—As followers of Jesus, we are called to live by the truth in Jesus Christ and remember the difference which that truth makes in our present values and priorities.

I—**Harry Blamires is the British Christian who has written eloquently about such a viewpoint in his book *The Christian Mind*.** He writes, “As a thinking being, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularization. He accepts religion—its morality, its worship, its spiritual culture; but he rejects the religious view of life, the thing which sets all earthly issues within the context of the eternal.”³ What a major difference this is! If we set every question before God and in the perspective of the eternal, the temporary fades greatly.

I—**Some years ago, CBS offered the shock jock Howard Stern a deal. They wanted to begin the following August televising his radio program on twelve of their fourteen TV stations. Stern is the one who auditioned porno actors by having them drop their drawers and showing it on the E! Entertainment Television network.** Sadly, that network continued to carry his debauchery on late night television. Stern said, “Television is ready for someone like me ... standards have gone to an all-time low, and I’m here to represent the change.”

A refreshing contrast occurred at the same time. CBS was close to completing a deal with another syndicated radio talk-show host named Laura Schlessinger. The deal was quite lucrative. It would have been an *Oprah*-type program stressing the morals and values that Dr. Laura derives from the Ten Commandments and would have been aired on the same stations as that of Stern’s program. A source close to her program told Cal Thomas that as soon as she was aware of their offer to Stern, she immediately rejected the contract offer to her. Why? To her way of thinking, accepting the CBS deal would be akin to “going to bed with the devil.” She said that she “has no intention of getting into a spitting contest with a skunk.” As it turned out, Stern’s offer was canceled and for a time Schlessinger did have a TV program. It actually got good ratings but was canceled anyway due to Schlessinger’s unflinching references to God and the Ten Commandments.

Perhaps a good question for us is this: what are we willing to sacrifice to make a buck or a name for ourselves? I join with Thomas in applauding Dr. Laura Schlessinger, who surely had higher standards than CBS’s Office of Standards and Practices.

2. *Christ has fortified us to endure verbal abuse because of righteousness.* v. 4.

A—What are we willing to endure because of the truth?

I—**Reggie White drew a lot of bad press a few years ago. Perhaps you know him by his nickname in professional football, “The Minister of Defense.”** He retired from the Green Bay Packers as one of the best defensive ends to ever play the game—at the time, holding the all-time record for number of sacks of the opposing quarterbacks. He was also an ordained Baptist minister, since his days in college. He passed in 2004 from heart failure.

What got him the media’s yellow flag was this. He was invited to address the Wisconsin state legislature, receiving some honor as one of the state’s football heroes. Instead of taking five minutes to speak about nothing in particular, he delivered what has been called “a 50-minute sermon ... on America’s social problems.” He called homosexual behavior sin, along with other sexual acts outside of the marriage covenant between one man and one woman. When he wanted to encourage racial reconciliation, he lauded the different “gifts” that racial groups seem to have been given by God: saying that blacks are gifted in “spirituality,” Hispanics have strong families; Asians work hard in academics; and whites are good at organization and making money. Together, he said, human beings in all their racial diversity make up the image of God. Perhaps his assessment was a little simplistic and general, but it was not mean-spirited or hateful in the least.

³ Quoted in Colson, *The Body*, p. 169.

He was branded a homophobe and a racist for his comments. How did this big Baptist Christian get by all those offensive linemen of cultural liberalism, anyhow? I think he scored a “sack” of the quarterback of the Relativist Mind Team.

III. THE CHRISTIAN MIND HAS POWER TO LOOK BEYOND THE PRESENT AND SEE THE FUTURE. v. 5

1. *The present can consume us with the battles of temptation or the distraction of pursuing pleasure.* Surely this is true in the sexual practices of this generation. There is little restraint practiced or promoted today.

A—We must not be swept away in the current tide.

I—A man named Robert Layton told some years ago in *Ensign* about attending a meeting to preview a new course in sexuality where his 13-year-old son attends school. It sounded like our experience when attending our local school board meeting. He was surprised to find only a dozen or so parents there. He thumbed through the curriculum and noticed that abstinence from sexual activity was only mentioned in passing. When questions were called for, he asked why abstinence did not play a noticeable part in the material.

He was shocked with the response. There was a great deal of laughing. Someone suggested that if he thought abstinence had any merit, he should go back to burying his head in the sand. The teacher and the school nurse said nothing as he drowned in a sea of embarrassment. The teacher explained that their job was to teach “facts,” and leave the home to teach morals.

After 20 minutes, the teacher urged everyone to fill out a name tag and have some donuts at the back. Mr. Layton prayed silently for guidance, while everyone else filled out name tags and shook hands and ate donuts. He was ashamed that he had not been able to convince them to include a serious discussion of abstinence.

After everyone was seated again, the teacher asked everyone to peel off their name tags. On the back of one was a flower. It represented disease. The handshake represented intimacy. She traced the first handshake through all the people until everyone was “infected.” She made a good point: “Since we all shook hands, we all have the disease.”

This is where Mr. Layton sensed it was time to offer a humble word. He raised his hand, apologized for any upset he might have caused, congratulated the teacher on an excellent object lesson, and then made one small point: “Not all of us were infected,” he said. “One of us ... abstained.”

2. *The future will be a time of accounting.* The fact is, all of us will stand before the Creator of the world one day and give account of our lives.

A—Are we preparing for that final exit interview?

I—In Uganda, as many as one in ten have died of AIDS. The culture has been sexually promiscuous for many years. Whole villages have been wiped out. The Southern Baptist Christian True Love Waits Campaign was used by God all over Uganda. The Ugandan director of this campaign several years ago lost a sister to AIDS. She left six children, four of them still school-age. He himself could not count the number of sexual partners he had before coming to Christ at age 21 and deciding to practice sexual purity. Speaking about his sister’s death, he told missionary Sharon Pumpelly and her husband, “If it wasn’t for Christ, I wouldn’t be any different.” He told them he would surely be dead if it wasn’t for Christ making him a new person.⁴

IV. THE CHRISTIAN MIND HAS THE POWER TO GIVE LIFE IN A CULTURE OF DEATH. v. 6

⁴ From an article in *The Commission*, published by the International Mission Board, SBC.

1. *The Good News has been proclaimed as an antidote to death.* How is it that the “Good News was preached ... to those who are now dead”? The best interpretation of this sentence is this: The gospel has been preached to many people, some who accepted the message and some who have rejected it. Those who accepted it, though some of them have died—one of God’s treatments for a sinful world—they are not dead. They are alive with Him in heaven. Those who rejected the message have only the fearful prospect of God’s judgment ahead.

A—Consider the power of the Good News of Jesus to conquer the fear of death.

I—**In 1998, a woman named Karla Faye Tucker was executed in the Huntsville prison in Texas. She had been held for many years on death row**, called Ellis One at the maximum-security prison there at Huntsville. All accounts of her life show that a genuine conversion to Christ followed her incarceration. She lived a new life before the prisoners and guards for many years. When she was executed, she was “judged according to men in regard to the body,” but she truly lives “according to God in regard to the spirit.”

How is this possible? Because it is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses people from *all* sin, according to the Good News (see 1 John 1:8-10), not our own efforts at making up for our sins.

2. *The Good News has been proclaimed as a prescription for life.*

A—We must offer this life to all who will hear.

I—**One semester a few years ago, I had the privilege of sharing in a group that answered questions in the CWU SUB pit.** It was arranged by Campus Crusade leaders and was called, “Pastors in the Pit.” We answered questions about all kinds of issues, from theology to philosophy to morality—attempting both to give clear and Christian answers while pointing those present to Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. I am still haunted by one young woman who was there with her boyfriend. A young man whom she knew and admired had committed suicide. She wondered what happened to him. Will she see him again? What could have driven him to such an extreme and unchangeable choice?

The question gave us opportunity to point to Jesus Christ. It was He Who said, in the presence of death and grief, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (See John 11). The question that He asked the sister of a dead friend was the same one He asks us, “Do you believe this?” What is it that gives us a hope that is beyond death itself? What is it that gives us the ability to live differently in this present life with a confidence that the choices we make now do prepare us either for eternal bliss or eternal misery?

It is the work and truth of Jesus Christ.

Take it home (applications).

I. HAVE WE PUT OUR FAITH WITHOUT RESERVATION IN JESUS CHRIST? This is where the power of the Christian mind has its source.

1. We must *admit* our sin—our stubborn and sinful hearts.
2. We must *believe* in His death and resurrection.
3. We must *commit* our lives to Him in repentance and faith.

II. WE MUST STAND UP AND BE COUNTED, WITH HUMILITY BUT WITH RESOLVE, FOR THE TRUTH AS IT IS REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST. This is where the power of the Christian mind gives its expression.