

Lesson 9. **A prepared mind** – 1 Peter 1:13.

Imagine you are a prisoner of war in a foreign place, but you are about to escape! You possess forged documents about who you are. You have learned some essential phrases in the language people speak outside. You have a list of sympathetic contacts you can go to safely. Your dress, your behaviour, your speech and presentation, will make you as similar to everyone else as you can possibly be. You need to be like everyone else out there, so you will not be recaptured!

This is the exact opposite of Peter's description of Christians in verse 1. He calls us, "Strangers in the world". A stranger is one whose speech, customs, knowledge and habits mark him out as being different from everyone else. Christians are not to melt into the world as if we are not here! We are to stand out and be different.

However, one likeness to the prisoner of war is seen in verse 13. We are to "be self-controlled". The escaping prisoner must not allow his natural language, his natural behaviour to control him. He must curb his usual reactions in order to keep safe in his cover. As Christians we must keep our old natural human reactions under control in order to live the new Christian life.

Another clue as to what a "prepared" mind is can be seen in verses 2, 15-16. "... Be holy in all you do". "... Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ ...".

To live successfully in the eyes of God we must be

1. strangers in the world
2. self-controlled
3. sanctified by the Holy Spirit and the blood of Jesus Christ,
where “sanctified” means to be made holy, set apart from sin,
consecrated.

Remember, we are not speaking of what the world thinks about us, nor even what other Christians think about us. We are seeking to live properly *in the sight of God*.

Think back over the past seven days. Imagine the paparazzi press have been snapping photos of *everything* you have done. They show them back to you. Have you been living as God requires: a stranger; self-controlled; sanctified? Verse 17 says, “Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear”.

How is this type of living possible? How can we be so transformed, so different, so immovable? How can anyone stand against the tide of neighbouring humanity? The key is in verse 13, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action. ...”. “Brace up our minds” (JBP); “Gird up the loins of your mind” (KJV); “Have your minds ready for action” (GNB).

The New English Bible (NEB) translates using the picture of athletes at the start of an important race. “You must therefore be like men stripped for action, perfectly self-controlled”. Notice the word “mind” is not actually mentioned in

this translation. The athlete's mind is already made up. It is the result of this that is seen. "I am going to run this race. I have entered. I have trained. When the starting gun fires I am perfectly ready to give this race everything I have got". The effect of the athlete's decision is that he is here on the starting line about to run the race. His mind has controlled his actions.

The key to successful action in our Christian lives is normally what we have allowed God to do in our minds. When God has prepared our minds we are ready for anything life throws at us!

A mental patient in a hospital is one whose mind is incapable of controlling their own actions – whose actions bear no resemblance to what is expected. Totally differently a Christian lives so controlled by his or her renewed mind that his behaviour lives, breathes and exudes godliness. She lives reflecting Jesus Christ as her Lord.

It is what we put into our minds that controls what comes out in our lives. Jesus said more than once, "... Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks", Matthew 12:34. "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man "unclean"", Matthew 15:18.

The word "Therefore" in verse 13 tells us where to look to discover both how and why to prepare our minds for action. **Peter urges those sanctified, self-controlled, strangers to get stripped off ready for action,** (to get focused

in athletic terms), **by holding in their minds the truths he has already pointed out to them in verses 3-12.** They are at least five.

Firstly, **our minds are prepared remembering God has given us spiritual life,** verses 3-4. God has given us new birth. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ...”. As a believer, we begin to develop a positive attitude to life, regardless of our circumstances, as we grasp God’s word – his truth – in our hearts.

Historically, this is probably the first time the phrase “born again” is used in our Bible. John 3:3-7 would almost certainly have been written 30 years after Peter’s letter. Only born again people can live this way.

Since God has given us spiritual life by spiritual birth, we should always remember it and always rejoice in it! Do not argue too much about how this new birth occurs. I celebrate my human birthday 29th January every year. My family and friends can see evidence that I am alive! Nobody wants to examine precisely what happened in 1948/1949, around the time of my physical birth. My life is a sure sign my birth has taken place.

Secondly, **our minds are prepared by remembering God keeps us by his own power,** verse 5. Christians “... through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”.

Many people look for security in these days. Some look in housing. Others in life insurances. Some look for a job they can work at for life to give their family security. In Sudan some go to live in camps for displaced people. The Christian has a stronger shield of protection than any other. He or she is “kept” by God (KJV;GNB); “guarded” by God (RSV/JBP); “under the protection of” God (NEB). Or as the Living Bible (LB) says, “God, in his mighty power, will make sure you get there safely”.

God’s keeping power is greater than any military force because it goes beyond this world. It is greater than any nuclear deterrent and it has no destructive side effects. God protects the real us – not the worldly things we may have to live with in this life. The word “kept” (from the Greek PHROUREO) means “to keep with a military guard”. No-one can come against God and win. No-one, and nothing, can penetrate God’s hold on us and prise us from his grasp.

Thirdly, **our minds are prepared by remembering God proves the quality of our faith in temporary trials**, verse 6-7.

The world seeks happiness through happenings. If happenings do not happen we are unhappy. The Christian is so completely different. Our minds are secure in God’s truth, verse 6, and “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials”.

Christians are not immune from trials and difficulties. We face them almost all of the time. But we know that, verse 7, “These have come so that your faith –

of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour, when Jesus Christ is revealed”.

Faith that only says it is faith may not be Christian faith. Christian faith that lives through reversals, set backs, challenges and obstacles, and still grows on and on, is real Christian faith.

Christians who imagine they exercise faith when they trust God for a trouble free life, have actually given in to the desires of the flesh. Our Lord Jesus said himself, “In this world *you will have trouble*. But take heart! I have overcome the world”, John 16:33 (italics mine).

The same God who gives spiritual life, and who shields us by his power, also allows – even encourages – trials that will prove our faith genuine. Keeping this in mind should change our attitudes to troubles we face in daily life.

Fourthly, **our minds are prepared by remembering God provides, love, joy and peace in our souls**, verse 8-9. “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls”.

When Job lost his wealth, his family, his health, how could he say: “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised”, Job 1:21?.

When Paul and Silas were shackled in Philippi’s stocks, deep in the prison, how could they sing God’s praises, Acts 16:25?

When our Lord Jesus Christ was nailed on to the cross, how could he say, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. ...”, Luke 23:34?

The answer is their eyes were opened to the reality that is beyond this physical world and life. They saw with faith beyond the present.

This is where our spiritual eyes should be fixed. Without this focus we will not recognise worldliness in ourselves. We need theological sense to realise it. So many Christians are empty inside! Outward appearances deceive. Inner strength comes from knowing who we believe in and appreciating all he has done. Only sharing God’s view of our world makes our lives make sense.

Fifthly, **our minds are prepared by remembering God enables us to see clearly what many before us have only glimpsed**, verses 10-12. “The goal of your faith”. Not an easy life. Not an abundance of earthly blessings, but: “the salvation of your souls” ... “Concerning this salvation ...”.

“Salvation” (Greek SOTERIA) means deliverance, preservation. God’s power can keep us from sin. In awe angels look at this salvation. The prophets peered ahead and wondered about this salvation. We Christians, those who

are being saved today, know an amazing spiritual security despite every human situation we face.

The Bible is given to change our lives. It changes our lives as it changes our minds. We strip off, ready to put into practice in daily life what we have learned from God through Scripture. Since what we discover in Scripture is true, we ought to do something about it in our lives. Unbelievers, and worldly Christians, live as they do, not because they think that is the way to live, but *because they really don't think about it at all!*

Many so-called Christians live aimless, fruitless, futile lives. Peter says that serious-minded Christians will repudiate laxity, carelessness and aimlessness. Peter writes: "Therefore". He concludes strongly, *because* God has given us spiritual life, *because* God keeps us by his own power, *because* God proves the quality of our faith in temporary trials, *because* God provides, love, joy and peace in our souls, and *because* God enables us to see clearly what many before us have only glimpsed, "**prepare your minds for action;** be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed", verse 13.

This is an ever strengthening circle. As we use our minds to think God's truths our lives are changed. As our lives are changed so we think more on God's life-changing truths! And so on. And so on. And so on. God expects us to have a good grasp on his truth because we need it to live well from day to day. He will help us think as we should as we work with him.