

Doing Good when it Gets Difficult

This morning I would like to start off with some questions: What do the interactions between believers in Christ and unbelievers – those who are not followers of Christ – look like? (REPEAT) Are they close relationships? If you are a Christian, do you communicate well with unbelievers? Do you do good things for those that you know who are not Christians? Do people you know who are not believers like you or are they kind of turned off from even being around you? Are there those who make fun of you or tear you down for being a Christian?

Well, this morning we are going to look at a passage from 1 Peter chapter 3 which deals with how a Christian is to act toward and in relation to others, especially those who may not like you and even stand against **what** you believe. If you would please turn with me to 1 Peter 3 and we are going to look at verses 13 – 16. If you don't have a Bible there is one on the back of the pew in front of you. 1 Peter 3:13-16. Let's read that together.

Read 1 Peter 3:13 -16

Now, let me give you a little background so that we see how these verses fit into Peter's writings thus far in 1 Peter. Peter has just spent all of chapter 2 giving instruction to believers on how to live, act and treat other people. At the beginning of chapter 3, Peter focuses on wives and husbands and how they are to treat each other. Then in verses 10-12 Peter quotes Psalm 34:12-16 where Peter is bringing out that if you want to have a good life and enjoy this time on earth do what is good, don't let deceit come from your mouth, stay away from evil for God is attentive to those who are righteous and truly seek Him.

And then, in verse 13, Peter asks a rhetorical question: "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" The implied answer is No one. If you do these things he has stated. Love others, live in harmony, be sympathetic, be humble and compassionate. This is what pleases the Father and will draw His favor. If you go around daily showing kindness, seeking to be in harmony with others and showing compassion, then less people are going to be out to harm you. Even the ungodly will come down on those who take advantage of the helpless and hurt others. If you are rude, deceitful, lie and seek evil, then your enemies and troubles are going to increase.

Now, this does not mean that by being a good Christian you are going to avoid persecution. As a Christian, you will suffer for Christ. There is no getting around that. The fact is the world hated Jesus, He suffered willingly at their hand and you will suffer also if He is your Lord and you are following Him. Look at 1 Peter, chapter 2:21-23.

READ 1Peter 2:21-23

If you are a believer in Jesus and He is your Lord, then the example given by Christ for you to follow and the call that has been placed on your life is to suffer for Him. And don't miss that, the key here to the suffering is Jesus. 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 states:

²²Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Jesus was a stumbling block for the Jews – they didn't believe Him. They didn't believe in Him. And for the Gentiles, Jesus didn't match well with a culture that was strong into philosophy and the

worshiping of many gods. It's the same today. It's why Jesus does not fit well with our post modern culture and media that say there is not absolute truth and there are many ways of knowing God.

Jesus said that He is the Son of God and that He is the only way to the Father. He was insulted and persecuted and as a follower of Christ you are to follow in those same steps.

So back to our text, in verse 14 Peter goes on to deal with this issue. What if you are persecuted? What if people do condemn you for being good and for following Christ? What if you follow what Peter has already written in these previous chapters and you are attacked? Well, he says hey, but even if you should suffer, then great – you are blessed. **Suffer for doing right and you are blessed.** Now the word “blessed” here does not refer to happiness and everything being just perfect. This refers to a state of honor for suffering and having contentment in the midst of circumstances that come through the Holy Spirit. As a believer, not only will we suffer, but it is a privilege to be able to suffer for Christ in being like Him. Look at chapter 4:12-16.

READ 1 Peter 4:12-16

Don't be surprised. This is what is to come. Rejoice that you get to participate in it. **Rejoicing not just in suffering, but that you get to be a part of Christ's sufferings.** This suffering for Christ is a blessing because you bear the name of Christ. And this relationship with Christ is what allows us to follow through with what is given in this passage anyway.

Now, at the end of verse 14 and into verse 15 there are three different tasks given. The first and the third, are actually made possible by the second. John Piper refers to this as kind of like a sandwich as the text comes together. You will see what I mean. Verse 14 says, “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” This would be the top piece of bread in our sandwich. This verse refers to a passage in Isaiah chapter 8 where the nation of Judah was facing possible attack from the Assyrian army, as well as attack from Israel and Syria. King Ahaz of Judah was trying to make a deal with Assyria, and God is telling him and the nation of Judah to not fear all of this conflict, don't be frightened, only fear me. He says in **Isaiah 8:12-13:**

**do not fear what they fear,
and do not dread it.**

¹³ **The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy,
he is the one you are to fear,
he is the one you are to dread,**

As with Judah, our hope, our everything is in God. He is sovereign. He is in control. We have to be sure our eyes don't get off of Him and on to the things around us that can distract us. So, instead of fearing. Instead of being afraid of persecution and suffering when it comes for doing what is right, Peter writes in verse 15 that we are to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. The New American Standard has this as to “sanctify Christ as Lord.” **Peter is saying to put Christ in His rightful position as Lord of your life.** Magnify Him, exalt Him, honor Him. Keep Him in the center. Don't fear man or what he can do. Keep Christ at the ruling center of your heart and life. Show reverence and be in submission to Him. His will may require suffering, but He is Lord. With Jesus set apart as Lord in our hearts through Him we have strength, courage, and endurance to face what is to come. This by the way was the “meat” of the sandwich. It's what influences the two pieces of bread.

And so, in the last part of verse 15, without fear, with Christ in His proper position and place in our life, we are to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have. This is the bottom piece of bread in our sandwich. Let's look at the context here. You

are choosing to do right. You are following Christ. You face persecution, or suffering for doing what is right. You don't fear. You keep Christ as Lord of your life, submitting to Him – And in that state you need to be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have. **We need to be prepared to give an answer.** (Repeat) - (Slow but do not repeat following) **Now the word answer used here in verse 15 is the Greek word apologia which means to give an answer back, to give a defense.** It's where we get the term apologetics which is a branch of theology devoted to defending the faith. This does not mean to apologize for or to give an excuse for our faith, it means to answer back or to defend.

So here is what you have. For following Christ and doing what is right, you are put in a troubling situation and you are being persecuted in some way. Peter is saying that this is a perfect opportunity to glorify God, to suffer for His name and to share your faith. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you stick out. People watch you. And they are going to have questions. Why do you do so many good things? Why is it that you are willing to suffer for doing good things? Why is your attitude not like everyone else? Why aren't you angry about the way you have been treated? And when these questions come you have to be able to verbalize why you believe what you believe. Why you live the way you do. Why you are different. Our hope is in Jesus Christ: the one who sacrificed Himself for us, whose spirit lives in us now as believers and in whom we look forward to being whole and complete with Him for eternity. We have to be able to communicate this.

This is a big part of discipleship. Knowing the Word of God and what has happened, and what is happening in your life; being able to answer questions that are given. Now, we all know that this is not easy. If we took a pole right now I would say that almost every single one of you, if not all of you would say its not easy answering questions about our faith and our hope out in this world. For many, It's difficult to answer questions here, in a safe environment, much less out in the world. But that is why Peter says to be prepared, because we are not. **We have to be knowledgeable of the Word. We have to speak with confidence and in a way that we can be understood.** We have to be able to respond to false statements and misunderstandings and explain the truth. A Christian that has not prepared his or her response and who is not solid in the World of God will be insecure and will get torn apart when hostility comes. It takes preparation, time and practice to be able to do this. Now true, the Holy Spirit does use us and speaks through us. But that does not happen without us seeking to be like Christ and digging into the Word so that we clearly understand the hope that we have and then be able to articulate it to everyone who asks.

And as Peter shows us at the end of verse 15, this is not just about speaking truth, and what God has done in your life, but there is emphasis on **how** you say it. Peter writes: "But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience..." I know you have seen before what this is addressing. It's how the world often views Christianity. Pushy, arrogant, rude – I'm better than you – I have the answers – you are wrong, I'm right. You're going to hell! No, Peter says look, when you respond to questions about your faith, especially when you have been persecuted, respond with confidence, truth and knowledge, but respond with gentleness or meekness. Please don't confuse this with weakness. **A good way to define meekness is power under control. We have this awesome power of God in our life and we need to communicate it appropriately.** You are to fear God and honor Him in your responses and speak boldly but with humbleness, showing respect to the person you are speaking to, *which by the way includes those who may be doing the persecuting.*

Alright, it was already kind of tough, not it just got plain difficult. Not only do I have to endure suffering for Christ and doing right, *but I have to respond with respect and gentleness even if the person asking questions about my hope in Christ is ridiculing or persecuting me?* Yes. What good would it do to suffer for Christ and doing good and then sin in the process? You would open this up

for misunderstandings and being grouped in with everyone else in the world that responds with anger or frustration when attacked.

And by keeping a clear conscience, as Peter says in verse 16, we give credence to what we believe and what we are saying. It backs up our defense that we are giving verbally. **A clear conscience allows us to speak freely, confidently and with courage.** It shows that there is something to this. People can see it in your life. You're not just blowing hot air here. You can say and show that this is real. This is life for me because of Jesus who has transformed me and whose Spirit is a part of me.

And honestly, how are you going to defend your faith if your conscience is darkened with sin in response. You will be seen as just another hypocrite that says things that his/her life does not live up to. And talking about dealing with hostility. You will be eaten alive. Look, it is easy for the world to condemn Christianity when it has Christians that it can point to that have scandalized the faith. Now, no one is perfect. God knows that we still sin. However, we should be on of path of growth so that we learn from our mistakes and are not practicing sin against God. **Unbelievers will look for opportunities to point out a Christian's sin because it allows them to justify their own behavior.** As a Christian you would be doing the opposite of what Christ has called us to do, when the result that we really want is seen at the end of verse 16.

Read the end of verse 15 through 16.

When we do not fear, and set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts and we are prepared to answer questions about the hope we have and we respond to those questions with gentleness, respect and a clear conscience, then those who have attacked us and have spoken maliciously against our good behavior in Christ are ashamed of their slander. Everything comes back on them because there is no foundation for the remarks they bring. And our actions in response to those attacks do not give them a foundation. But we all know that this sounds good but it is not easy. It is difficult to respond humbly with love and respect when we are unjustly persecuted. **But it is a transformed life, one who is a believer in Jesus Christ, whom is seeking to grow and allows the Holy Spirit to work inside him or her that moves toward this reality in their life.**

And really that is our challenge here, to live this out. You know, what do you take with you as you leave here. There are a few points that I want to emphasize as a review as we ask, **"What now?"**

First, **All believers in Christ have been called to be like Christ, to do good, and to grow in Him.** We are not to do good just because it is a rule given in church or by some religion. We are to do good because Christ is Lord of our lives. He set the example and we are to be like Him. If we are going to please and glorify Him it is through doing good and honoring Him with our lives. This gets into that thing of worship not just being what happens in a Sunday morning in a service. It's what happens everyday, every moment of your life with the choices you make.

Secondly, **you may suffer harm for doing good and following Christ.** This may not be in the form of being arrested and being put in prison, but in that moment, your situation may be just as impacting on your life. None of us like to be made fun of, discouraged, or rejected. Words sting and people can be very cruel. But just because it hurts, does not mean that it's not God's will. And when those things happen, there is hope and purpose.

And third, **the way to deal with those attacks is to keep Christ in a position as Lord of your life.** Keep Him in control, don't dethrone Him. Keep Him in the center and have everything revolving around and being influenced by Him.

Fourth, **with Christ at center you are able to not fear and to be prepared with your defense for the hope that you have in Christ.** Christ is your strength, your hope. He guides you in the reading and study of His Word through His Holy Spirit. You can face all challenges, all situations and can be fully prepared and confident in your responses as you study His Word and know Him as Lord.

Fifth, **When we do respond, we need to have an attitude and speech that is gentle, respectful, under control, and which does not lead us into sin.** Proverbs 15:1 states: A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Our words if possible, need to promote more conversation so that the futile attacks of others will cause them to recognize their sin and be ashamed of their actions. Therefore, allowing us to be salt and light to this world around us who do not know our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.