

Sunday, November 14, 2021

1 Peter 3:13-17 (Be Ready)

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Intro

In March 2003, the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity with the Evangelical Alliance published a report titled: “Imagine How We Can Reach the UK”. They concluded:

“The reason the UK church is not effective in mission is because we are not making disciples who can live well for Christ in today’s culture and engage compellingly with the people they meet... The UK will never be reached until we create open, authentic, learning and praying communities that are focused on making whole-life disciples who live and share the Gospel wherever they relate to people in their daily lives.” –

Cited in Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church*, 35-37

“it’s not that evangelism has been tried and found wanting, it’s that evangelism has been found difficult and left untried” – J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism*, 42

The point? We need to be able to bring the gospel into our everyday relationships.

Let’s see what Peter says about this.

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Letter Intro

1 Peter speaks to Christians who are experiencing trials.

you have been grieved by various trials – 1 Pet 1:6

Nothing’s said about imprisonment or execution. Some opposition to Christian beliefs and conduct that’s resulted in loss of social status or loss of income or strained family relationships.

The book answers questions like how should I live in a culture where godliness is odd and even despised? How should I live in a culture where sin is normalized?

Previous context

Don’t return evil with evil (1 Pet 3:9) and pursue peace (1 Pet 3:11). Our passage explains how to respond to slander.

Point 1: Slandered because God wills it (3:17)

Explanation

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. – 1 Pet 3:17

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. – 1 Pet 4:19

God may will that we suffer. Will generally means what is desired or wished for. What someone wants to happen.

- 1) This seems counterintuitive to us. Doesn’t God bless obedience? Doesn’t God love his children?
- 2) God willing Christians to suffer speaks of God’s control over our circumstances.

▪ God permits our suffering. God could prevent these trials if he desired to do so.

3) God's will varies from person to person, church to church.

▪ God doesn't will the same experience for each of his children, each of his churches. Our experience is custom tailored by our wise Creator.

4) God wills that Christians suffer in one sense, but not in another.

On one hand, we're commanded, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matt 22:39). God desires that humans love one another. The command makes this clear. On the other hand, God wills that Christians suffer.

5) God's motives in permitting suffering are good.

▪ God desires that our faith be tested:

1 Peter 1:6-7 *In this [imperishable eternal inheritance] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. – 1 Pet 1:6-7*

▪ "so that" indicates purpose = trials come into our lives so that our faith may be found to be genuine. Response during trials reveals the presence of faith or the absence of faith. Strength of our faith, weakness of our faith.

▪ God also wills maturity and this comes through trials:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. – Jas 1:2-4

God never wills suffering for suffering's sake. God isn't vindictive. He doesn't delight in our suffering. He delights in the spiritual fruit that comes from our suffering.

6) God uses wicked intent of evil, responsible beings to bring about good.

Satan and sinners intend evil. But God has other intentions. God uses their wicked intent to bring about good.

Summary:

God is sovereign over our suffering. God's motives in permitting suffering are good and wise.

Application

The application here is proper perspective on suffering. God permits and directs trials for our spiritual good. Suffering doesn't mean God isn't in control. Suffering doesn't mean God doesn't care. God tailors our suffering for our spiritual good.

Point 2: Slandered because of obedience (3:14)

Explanation

Suffering because of obedience. Conformity to God's commands is causing difficulty.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake – 1 Pet 3:14

those who revile your good behavior in Christ – 1 Pet 3:16

For it is better to suffer for doing good – 1 Pet 3:17

They're not suffering because they're boastful or rude or dishonest. They're suffering because they're obeying God's moral will. In short, **God wills** that we suffer for faithfulness rather than deny the faith to avoid suffering! God wills faithfulness and faithfulness sometimes provokes negative response.

Slandered

To speak against someone. Speaking negatively about someone. In 1 Peter 2:12, Christians are being called evildoers. What's good in God's sight judged as evil. **Sin normalized.**

Reviled

Speaks of mistreatment. Generally threats and abuse.

Application

If you're treated this way because of your conduct and allegiance to Christ, rejoice. This is okay and a sign of your faithfulness.

Have I really experienced this?

Before we're too negative and pity ourselves, we need to ask ourselves. Have I really experienced this? Some pre-conversion friends were upset by what I believed. Hostile when I shared the gospel in personal conversation. Not invited to their wedding. They got what I was saying. Jesus is the only way to be right with God. Troubled that I truly believed they would end up in hell if they didn't repent and believe.

A co-worker said he was a Christian. I asking probing questions to get a sense where he was at. It was obvious he didn't understand conversion. I pushed him on church membership. They told me to stop. Harry Fletcher was wise to say don't ask people if they're a Christian. Because if they're not they likely misunderstand what a Christian is.

Co-worker who was active in a pluralistic religious group (pluralism means they don't believe one religion is the exclusive source of truth) and hostile to pure Christianity that holds to the exclusivity of salvation in Christ alone. He got it too. Engaged me in hostile conversation with a raised voice before 10 co-workers. Not profitable. No give and take listening and conversation. Just repeated accusations and questions without giving me time to answer.

Co-worker in apprentice classes. Didn't know I was a Christian and talked like only a fool could be a Christian. Not so hostile because he was confident I was a fool.

Generally, few are really bold enough to be confrontational. Hostility more assumed than actual. Maybe I'm not as up front as I should be? Most people just have honest concerns. Why did my brother die? Why would a kind person who isn't a Christian go to hell?

Point 3: Slander requires a prepared defense (3:15)

Explanation

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you – 1 Pet 3:14-15

Two sets of commands. First, don't fear or be troubled. Second, regard Jesus as holy. The fear is real and not imagined. Verbal abuse is occurring. Unspecified trials. Loss of reputation? Loss of friendship? Loss of employment? Loss of family support?

Peter says, "*in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.*" Evangelistic engagement begins in the heart. Who do I fear? Who do I value most? Peter says regard Jesus as holy. Regard Jesus as distinct, exalted above humanity.

Ottoman illustration: last one destroyed → cost a significant amount → go to extreme measures to ensure it isn't destroyed, like bringing it into my bedroom when unruly children are coming → treat it like it's a sacred treasure of great value → this is the way we should value Jesus

We should treasure Jesus more than people. Sounds obvious. It's just that fear of the consequences of public affection for Jesus inclines us to practically honor Jesus' opponents above Jesus. No one wants to be called an evildoer. No one wants to be verbally abused. If the public shames people for Christian beliefs and conduct (sin normalized!), we're tempted to be silent about our faith in Christ.

The battle takes place in our heart. Do I treasure Jesus enough to speak for him? Cultivate regard for Jesus by meditating on what he's done for you. Salvation past, present, and future. Meditate on his character. Gentle and lowly. Merciful. Self-denial.

Don't be ashamed if this is a struggle for you. I assume you do struggle with this. I do too. Paul challenged Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel and to embrace suffering (2 Tim 1:8). Paul himself requested prayer, that he would have boldness to proclaim the gospel (Eph 6:18-20). Personal weakness drives us to God's resources! Call on divine strengthening. Implore PCC to pray for your boldness.

Answering questions

The context is answering questions that arise. Gospel conversations can be planned (Harry Fletcher method) or spontaneous. We're talking informal and unplanned conversations here where opportunity arises itself. Extended family dinner or lunch at the office. Some observations.

- 1) If we're faithful in our conduct we can assume questions will come.
- Questions are coming because Christians are living differently.
- 2) Prepared beforehand.

Illustration – Bill Belichick: researches opponent strategies and tendencies → opponents strengths and weaknesses → knows his team's strengths and weaknesses → prepares for contingencies → devises a comprehensive game plan with all these in mind → tries to leave nothing to chance → knows what he's going to do beforehand → has secondary plans in place in case his strategies are ineffective or the opponent's plan is surprising

- We need to know what we're going to say when unplanned conversations arise. A logical gospel presentation. Appropriate Bible verses. Lunch conversation with no Bible = Bible memorized enough to recite by memory. Brief answers to typical objections prepared.
- Option: God → man → Christ → response
- These Christians would be speaking to a biblically illiterate culture (people who never heard of Adam or Jesus). Much like many in our culture. This means sharing basics and ensuring understanding before calling for response.

3) Peter assumes our hope is defensible.

Example of a reasonable response

Why do you believe Jesus is the only way to heaven? What about other religions? How do you know you're right and others are wrong?

1) The Christian faith is grounded in God's revelation to man. We call this revelation the Bible.

- How could we know what God expects of us apart from God telling us? The Bible tells us how to relate to God.

2) God as Creator has certain Creator rights

- He sets the rules in how we relate to him. He's holy and opposed to evil, not indifferent to evil.

3) Man

- Adam existed in perfect fellowship with God with unhindered relationship.

- Adam had one requirement: don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or you'll die.

- Adam sinned (broke God's command) and our world fell into ruin. Physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death.

- With sin came a ruptured relationship with our Creator. With spiritual death came an inclination to rebel against God's law. So we rebel against God and find ourselves in need of God's forgiveness. In need of reconciliation with God.

4) Christ

- To restore this relationship, God acted by sending his son Jesus to die for sinners, so that whoever repents and believes would have eternal life.

- God is holy. So his wrath against sin needs to be satisfied. If we're to be forgiven of our sin, our sin needs to be punished. We need a substitute.

- On the cross God treated Jesus as if he was sinner. As if he was me. As if he was you. If we accept God's offer of salvation through Christ alone, God treats us as if we were Jesus. Sinless. Perfect.

- Why only Jesus and not Buddha or Mohammed? Our sins have separated us from God. Buddha, Mohammed, etc. have not acted to alleviate this problem. Only Jesus lived a sinless life. Only Jesus is a worthy sacrifice to take the punishment we deserve. Only Jesus rose from the dead. Only Jesus substantiated his claims.

5) Response

- Turn from rebellion by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Just a brief example. Arguing for the reliability of the Bible and the reality of the resurrection would require further argument. Good Sunday school class! I have pointed out Jesus' uniqueness as sinless and resurrected. Other religions don't deal with the sin problem. Other religions can't point to a confirmatory proof like the resurrection.

Point 4: Slander requires a respectful response (3:15)

Explanation

yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. – 1 Pet 3:15-16

Manner of defense matters.

Gentleness

Gently, not harshly. Considerate. Courteous.

Respect

Treating people with honor and dignity given the fact that they're created in the image of God.

Having a good conscience

No shame because we've been abusive when explaining the gospel. Not returning slander with slander. Not trying to win an argument. Not trying to feed our pride. Bearing patiently with objections. Asking questions. Finding out their real concerns. Extending mercy as God extended mercy to us. Being patient and longsuffering. Bearing with people over time.

We regard Jesus as holy when we respond to hostility with respectful behavior. In doing so we commend the gospel and demonstrate the reality of its promises. That God transforms sinners.

Application

Let people be offended by the message content, not the messenger. Winsome response. Break the stereotypes! Show them a real person with integrity, mercy, and steadfast faith!

Point 5: Slander endured well results in divine blessing (3:14)

Explanation

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. – 1 Pet 3:14

Blessing not spelled out in our passage, but spelled out elsewhere in the letter.

- 1) *an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time – 1 Pet 1:4-5*
- 2) *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. – 1 Pet 4:14*

If saved, the Holy Spirit rests on us. God is powerfully present when we undergo opposition for our faith.

Application

God is present, strengthening you in the moment, helping you to honor Jesus as holy when challenging questions come. Confidence in God, not ourselves.

Conclusion

Slandered because God wills it. Trials tailored for our spiritual good. **Slandered because of obedience.** Obedience can be costly. **Slander requires a prepared defense.** Have a game plan ready. **Slander requires**

a respectful response. Manner of speech matters. **Slander endured well results in divine blessing.** God is with us in the moment.