

A PEOPLE OF RIGHTEOUS SUFFERING
1 Peter 3:10-17
January 25, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

As I studied and mediated on our text this week, I could not help but notice Peter's use of the word "good" throughout. Six times he uses the word or some variant of it:

- v. 10 – "good days"
- v. 11 – "do good"
- v. 13 – "good"
- v. 16 – "good conscience" and "good behavior"
- v. 17 – "doing what is right" literally "doing good" (ESV)

As we saw last week, in verses 8-9 Peter sets forth how the believer is to live towards those in the body (v. 8) and towards those who are outside the body and bring ridicule to the believer (v. 9). Then in verse 10-12, Peter gives an example of how the believer should live in quoting Psalm 34:12-16. These verses serve as a conclusion to the section that began in 2:11-12 where Peter admonishes the Christian to be above reproach in dealing with those that slander them, again stressing their "good deeds." But these verses also serve as an introduction to the next section that we begin looking at this morning where Peter begins to hone in on the theme of Christian suffering. With this in mind, what we see in our text this morning is that *the Christian will suffer for living for Christ*, and Peter stresses that this is "good." With the theme of suffering for the sake of righteousness, let us look at how we as the body of Christ should live in the midst of suffering and persecution for the cause of Christ.

I. A Biblical Exhortation for Christian Living (3:10-12)

As noted, Peter here quotes Psalm 34:12-16 to reinforce his teaching on the Christian ethic. His readers would have recognized the context of these verses and it is important for us to know as well. Psalm 34 was penned by David before he was officially anointed as king of Israel. The psalm is connected to 1 Samuel 21:10-15 where David is fleeing for his life from King Saul and is seen by one of Saul's chief herdsmen, Doeg the Edomite. Knowing he had been found, David fled to Gath for protection. But he perceived that even there he was endangered and feigned madness before the king of Gath and is summarily put out by him.

It is during this flight that David gives all the credit to the Lord for his protection. While we might need to ponder a bit his faking insanity, it appears that even this was of the Lord as David penned the opening words of the psalm:

Psalm 34:1-4 – ¹ I will bless the LORD *at all times*; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. ² My soul will make its boast in the LORD; the humble will hear it and rejoice. ³ O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together. ⁴ I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.

And then in v. 8 David praised God with the words that Peter picks up, "O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" That is what Peter desires for his readers to glean from this Psalm. Psalm 34 focuses on suffering and the Lord's deliverance of those who are afflicted. It addresses the issue faced by Peter's audience. The psalm reminds

its readers that the Lord rescues His own when they suffer and that He will judge the wicked.¹ Meanwhile, the Christian is to display righteousness and trust in Him. How are they to do this?

1. A dominant desire (v. 10a)

“**The one who desires life, to love and see good days**” pictures an individual dominated by a sense of purpose, namely, “to love life.” It is not the length of life that is in view, but the quality of life while on this earth, regardless of the circumstances, but particularly in the midst of suffering.

This dominant desire is marked by two things. The first is “**to love.**” It is interesting that Peter would pen these words about loving life regardless of what comes your way. It was this very man that denied Christ three times as Jesus was carried away to the courts. His denials came because at that moment, to follow Christ would have brought suffering into his life. He saw Jesus being carried away to His sure death, and Peter knew that to identify with Him would probably have brought his death sentence as well. So rather than deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ, Peter denied him. But we know the rest of the story! Later, after His resurrection, Jesus comes to Peter and asks him three times, “Peter, do you love Me?” Three times would have been riveted in Peter’s mind. Three times he had denied him, and three times the very one he denied asks of his love for him. Peter’s response, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you” (Jn. 21:15-17). And Peter demonstrated by his life, and his death, the he truly loved him, suffering persecution for His name’s sake.

Peter says that the Christian also will be dominated by this desire to love life no matter what comes his way. This love is dominant because of the love that Christ has shown to them. Their love for Christ will at times bring suffering, but the suffering days are “**good days**” for those who love their life in Him and are unashamed to bear His name. Here Peter begins to tie together “good” and “suffering.” The suffering is “**good,**” beneficial and not empty and meaningless. They are “**good days**” because of their moral quality, a morality that is grounded in what is right according to God.

So Peter suggests, as David did, that to love life does not mean that one has a trouble-free life. Troubles are to be expected. It rather suggests an enjoyment of life and contentment with the life that God has given to them, no matter the outward circumstances. That is how Joseph was able to live a life that was honoring to God. He had a dominant desire to love life and see good days, and he did, in spite of the wicked deeds of his brothers. To be content with God in this life, regardless of what it throws at you, is the desire that should dominate your heart.

How can one show that they are content, that they have taken refuge in God and trust in Him for their deliverance?

2. A prescribed practice (vv. 10b-11)

First, one must guard his tongue in the midst of his enemies. James taught about the power of the tongue, power to do both good and evil. Out of the same mouth, James said, come both blessing and cursing (James 3:6-9). This refers to the believer’s speech. He is not to return insult for insult as Peter has already suggested in v. 9. When slandered, we must not return slander. That would be to speak evil. “**SPEAKING DECEIT**” is a little different. It means to say one thing and meaning something else in order to lead another astray. Such speech is not becoming of the believer. The lying or deceitful tongue is one of the six things described in Proverbs 6 that the Lord hates. In the face of adversity, one must harness his tongue. The

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *NAC: 1,2 Peter, Jude*, 165-166.

purpose for this one writer suggests is because such restraint befits the believer and “pays off in great dividends because it leaves no ‘past’ to be corrected, no unfinished business to encounter later.”²

The second practice relates to the believer’s actions, **“HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD.”** This describes a person who goes to great lengths to avert an encounter with evil. Here again we see the moral implication signified by the word **“good.”** In context, this refers to those encounters we have with suffering. But it is a general principle of morality to be applied at all times. The believer is to flee from evil and turn to good. The theological undertones of repentance (turning from evil) are indicative of one who knows Christ. However, what one turns to must also be indicative. It does one no good to turn from evil only to replace it with another idol. Many who profess Christ turn to something that is not evil in and of itself but falls short of a full satisfaction in Christ who is the author and example of “good.” It might even be something that is Christian-oriented. For example, in my youth pastor days I often encountered those who were convicted about their unedifying music, and rightly so. They would turn from it and replace it with Christian music of their liking, which is admirable. However, what I noticed was that often their Christian music really was the entirety of their Christianity. There was no desire to be grounded in the Word or any other spiritual disciplines. In the end, all they did was replace one idol with another. They were satisfied with Christian music, not with Christ. Their actions nor their affections were really effected. And when turmoil came, they often reverted to their old ways because their refuge was not really in Christ. Peter suggests that for one to turn from evil and do good requires that one’s satisfaction be in Him and nothing of this world.

Finally, the Christian’s practice is shown by their purpose. They are to be pursuers of **“peace.”** Again, the context of Peter’s words is in the midst of persecution. In those times, those who are the persecuted are to seek peace, to be peacemakers. This peace is not to simply tolerate the persecution with the hope that the persecution will go away. **“Peace”** does not mean simply the absence of hostility, but the peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding. It means that we are to have gospel intentions for those who cause our sufferings. In short, we are to pray that they might experience the peace of God and peace with God in their lives as we have. One writer put it this way, “He is confident that his assignment is not to alter society but to change the hearts of men by inviting them to become partakers of the same creative Word which he enjoys. This will change society by changing hearts and wills.”³ This demonstrates that we truly do love our enemies.

3. A supreme motivation (v. 12)

Peter then reminds his readers of both their blessing in these matters as well as the judgment that awaits their persecutors. For those who take refuge in God, who are content with their circumstances and trust Him to deliver them, they have the promise that God is with them. He is concerned about their well-being and He knows and sees everything. He hears their prayers, and He answers them, in His time and in His way. The believer must not have the heart that Habakkuk had in the beginning when he feared the turmoil and oppression of Babylonians. His questioning and doubting God got him nowhere. But when God reassured Him that He was in control and would bring judgment on the Babylonians, Habakkuk praised God. God’s purposes were being served in the midst of the suffering, and His eyes were on those who lived by faith.

² D.J. Kenyon, quoted by D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 216.

³ *Ibid.*, 217.

But not so the wicked. His face is against those who do evil. The imagery of the face of God is seen in Moses encounter with God at Mt. Sinai. There, Moses asked to see the fullness of the glory of God. God likened His glory to His face. God's response is that no man can see the face of God and live. The picture we have in our text is that His face is against those who do evil. They will one day see him face to face, and they will not live. They will face His judgment, the full fury of His wrath for all eternity. Only those who have been made fit to stand before Him in the righteousness of Christ will be able to live. The psalmist put it this way in Psalm 1:5-6, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

Is that not our supreme motivation for loving and serving God? Yes, we serve Him for His glory, but we can take great comfort in the truth that He sees and knows everything that is happening in our lives. When we face persecution and seek refuge in Him, we have His promises that we will be blessed and the wicked will receive their due. In the meantime, we seek to bring our enemies to Christ.

II. The Blessed Result for Christian Suffering (3:13-17)

The truth that God watches over those who do evil as well as those who do good provides a natural transition for Peter's teaching on Christian suffering. This section through the end of chapter 4 is the main section because it contains the primary reason that Peter wrote the letter.

1. An important principle stated (vv. 13-14)

Peter begins this section by asking a rhetorical question, "**Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?**" "**Who**" points to the identity of an individual or group who has as their soul purpose bringing injury to a believer. "**Harm**" is a variant of the Greek word for "evil," evil which lies at the root of Christian suffering. So this question is asked to prepare his readers for such experiences. Peter does not suggest that they would not experience evil for pursuing to live as Christians, being "**zealous**" in their practice of vv. 8-12. They should expect it. But given v. 12, the answer is obvious. No one ultimately can harm those who are the children of God seeking to live in obedience to His commands. Those who have the righteousness of Christ are His children and no one can harm them. Paul suggests this very thing in Romans 8:31. Having established the entire scope of salvation as being of God, Paul asked, "What then shall we say to these things?" In light of all that God has accomplished savingly for us, "If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?" And later, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect" and "Who is the one who condemns" and "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" NO!

Given this, v. 14 might seem to prove this false because of the word "**but,**" which often means a contrast. However, here the word is used for clarification, not for contrast. Believers can be harmed, even killed, by their enemies. Peter himself died a death of persecution. But his point is that those who endure opposition for the sake of righteousness "**are blessed.**" Since this blessing comes from God, who is the giver of all good things, then there is no one who can harm in the sense of keeping them from receiving that blessing, which Peter elsewhere has related to the believer's future inheritance. Peter then again turns to the Old Testament to reinforce his reasoning, quoting Isaiah 8:12-13 and saying they need not fear or be agitated by the intimidation of an unbeliever who is unable to rob them of their blessing. Fear of man and faith in God do not

mix. Fear of man leads to doubt and discontent. Fear leads to reacting in the flesh rather than by faith in God. This faith is seen in vv. 15-16, where we see...

2. The right response to persecution (vv. 15-16)

Here “**but**” does denote a contrast. Rather than fear or being intimidated, Peter exhorts the Christian to respond to persecution in three ways in a particular order.

a. Sanctify Christ (v. 15a)

Again echoing Isaiah 8:13 Peter says that rather than fear, one should literally, “Set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts.” Jesus told His disciples not to fear what their enemies might do to them, but rather fear God, who has the power to destroy both soul and body in hell (Mt. 10:28). This fear of God is at the very center of Peter’s thinking in sanctifying Christ as Lord. The heart is the source of human behavior. Jesus taught that whatever is in the heart is going to manifest itself (Mt. 15:18; Mk. 7:20). To sanctify Christ means to have an inward attitude of obedience to Him as Lord, as Master, of joyfully submitting to Him and His rule in our lives. As I. Howard Marshall puts it, this attitude “dictates our behavior in the world. Christians will not act in any way that will bring dishonor on Christ or suggest that they do not reverence him as Lord.”⁴

Of course this means that we must sanctify Christ daily. If we are not joyfully submitting to His reign when things are going well, when we are not suffering persecution, then it is fool’s gold to think that we will reverence Him when we are persecuted. Job, when he had lost everything, did not come to the point of asking his wife, “Shall we accept good from God and not accept adversity?” overnight. We are clearly told twice that Job was “a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil” (Job 1:8; 2:3,10). Job was prepared to answer his wife and his situation because he feared God, not man.

b. A ready witness (v. 15b)

“**Always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.**” This is one of the great apologetics texts in the Scripture. In context, however, this does not provide a strategy for evangelism in every situation, but specifically in hostile situations. The believer is to promote the gospel and Christ in times of difficulty. Peter here encourages Christians who are suffering to be prepared to answer those who oppose them. They are to give an account of the hope that is within them, that glorious salvation that Peter set forth throughout the opening of the letter that the believer will one day receive and experience fully. This does not mean that the Christian must answer each and every question raised by every person. What it does mean is that our speech and actions in the midst of persecution should make the world stop and wonder how we endure such suffering.

The very word “**defense**” suggests a battle, a fight. We by nature seek to do whatever we need to do to win the fight, often forgetting that we are not in it to win the fight, but win a person to Christ. That is why Peter interjects two words that sometimes are forgotten in making this defense, “**gentleness**” and “**reverence.**” Both actions think of the other first. We are not to lash out against our enemies but treat them as we would want to be treated. Richard Belcher points out a dual benefit in this. First, the believer is strengthened by answering the unbeliever in this way. Second, the unbeliever is given the gospel. This demonstrates that we truly love our enemy.

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The IVP NT Commentary Series: 1 Peter*, 115.

c. Clear conscience

What is a **“good conscience?”** It is a conscience that is free from guilt. It is a mind that is in tune with God and His Word. It is to be able to sleep at night knowing that in the midst of turmoil you have with as much as is in you sought to reflect the glory of God in sanctifying Christ and responding with gospel words and actions. It is to know that you have done good and pursued peace.

Why is a **“good conscience”** needed? Peter reiterates what he had already set forth in 2:12,15, that by our words and actions seasoned with grace we put to shame those who slander and revile our **“good behavior in Christ.”** Again, we must be careful that we do not make our purpose in the matter to win the fight and relieve ourselves of the persecution. **“Put to shame”** is for the purpose of silencing their slanders, but with the higher purpose that they might believe the gospel.

3. An assurance amid the suffering (v. 17)

“For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.” Simply put, Peter suggests that if we are going to suffer, it is better to suffer persecution and endure it with patience than to be punished for breaking the law. There is no merit in getting what we deserve because of our sin. But great are the benefits for suffering for doing what is right.

Peter had already written words similar to these to this in 2:20. Of interest is that both passages lead into a declaration about the sufferings of Christ, who did only good. Sometimes it is God’s will that there be suffering, even to the point of death. But we must caution that this does not mean that one goes seeking a martyr’s death. The suffering described in this passage, and the sufferings that Christ endured, came by the will of God in the normal course of faithfulness and obedience to Him.

Conclusion

1. Are you eager to do good?
2. In the midst of suffering, you are not alone (Elijah after Baal; Paul at Corinth) God has others who are able to sympathize with you.