

Defending Our Faith

Lesson for March 17, 2024

Unit I: Faith-FULL versus Faith-LESS

Adult Topic: Righteous and Humble Actions

Background Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

Printed Text: 1 Peter 3:8-17

Key verse: “*For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*” (1 Peter 3:17, NIV)

A famous evangelist told the following incident: I have a friend who in a time of business recession lost his job, a sizable fortune, and his beautiful home. To add to his sorrow, his precious wife died; yet he tenaciously held to his faith – the only thing he had left. One day when he was out walking in search of employment, he stopped to watch some men who were doing stonework on a large church. One of them was chiseling a triangular piece of rock. “Where are you going to put that?” he asked. The workman said, “Do you see that little opening up there near the spire? Well, I’m shaping this stone down here so that it will fit in up there.” Tears filled my friend’s eyes as he walked away, for the Lord had spoken to him through that laborer whose words gave new meaning to his troubled situation.

Our Daily Bread.

Unifying Lesson Principle

Adhering to dominant norms is a safe and convenient way to live. How do we voice objections to these norms without inviting conflict? In 1 Peter, Christians are encouraged to defend their faith through righteous and humble actions, even at the risk of suffering. (*Sunday School Commentary, 2023-2024, Townsend Press, p. 260*)

Key Terms

- 1. Blessing** (verse 9) – Praise; bountiful gift. The concept of blessing pervades the biblical record. Two distinct ideas are present. First, a blessing was a public declaration of a favored status with God. Second, the blessing endowed power for prosperity and success. In all cases, the blessing served as a guide and motivation to pursue a course of life within the blessing.
- 2. Hope** (verse 15) – Expectation; confidence. To trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future.
- 3. Suffer** (verses 14, 17) – The experience of physical pain and/or mental distress. To submit to or be forced to endure

Lesson Background

The book of First Peter was written by Simon Peter, known as a leader among the twelve apostles. Though he denied Jesus three times the night He was betrayed, Jesus restored Peter to leadership. Peter was the main speaker at Pentecost (Acts 2), suffered for his faith, and fled Jerusalem after a miraculous escape from Herod around AD 42 (Acts 12). Little is known of his ministry after this time, though he was at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and in Antioch with Paul near this time (Galatians 2:11–14). Peter was written to “those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). These probably included both Gentile and Jewish believers, though Peter's ministry focused primarily on Jews. Peter had probably traveled to at least some of these locations and was now writing to encourage and instruct the believers there who faced various challenges and persecutions.

The book's five chapters cover three main themes. The first section focuses on salvation (1 Peter 1:1—2:11). Believers are saved and preserved by God's power (1 Peter 1:3–5). God is with us despite persecution as predicted by past prophets (1 Peter 1:6–12). Believers therefore persevere by hope (1 Peter 1:13–21) through the love and power of Christ (1 Peter 1:22—2:10).

The second section discusses Christian living before others (1 Peter 2:11—4:6). This includes a variety of unbelievers such as governing authorities (1 Peter 2:11–17), masters (1 Peter 2:18–25), and family members (1 Peter 3:1–7). Believers therefore persevere by hope (1 Peter 1:13–21) through the love and power of Christ (1 Peter 1:22—2:10).

The second section discusses Christian living before others (1 Peter 2:11—4:6). This includes a variety of unbelievers such as governing authorities (1 Peter 2:11–17), masters (1 Peter 2:18–25), and family members (1 Peter 3:1–7). Believers are also called to live well among other believers (1 Peter 3:8–12). Suffering poses much difficulty for believers, yet those who follow Jesus must face it well (1 Peter 3:13—4:6).

The third section discusses the future and how Christians are called to live in light of it (1 Peter 4:7—5:11). Since Jesus could return at any time, believers are to live responsibly, not be surprised at trials, and "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good" (1 Peter 4:7–19). Leaders are specifically addressed (1 Peter 5:1–4). Peter concludes the letter with exhortations for humility, reminders of God's care, and a call to be cautious of Satan's schemes and stand firm in the faith (1 Peter 5:5–9). Peter emphasizes the future triumph of believers through God's restoration (1 Peter 5:10–11) and ends with final greetings (1 Peter 5:12–14).

Lesson in Depth

I. Living Honorably before Others (1 Peter 3:8-12)

Finally, all of you, be like-minded: The word “finally” clues us in that we are still learning from the apostle Peter about lifestyle evangelism and our need to yield to one another and honor one another. Peter gives us five traits of all disciples of Jesus.

- Unity of mind
- Sympathy
- Brotherly love
- Compassion
- Humility

Be of one mind: Most of us are willing to have **one mind**, as long as that **one mind** is *my mind!* But the **one mind** is to be *the mind of Christ* (1 Corinthians 2:16). Our common **mind** is to be Jesus’ mind.

This command brings us back to the need to know God’s word. We can’t **be of one mind**, the mind of Jesus, if we don’t know what His mind is. The word of God shows us the mind of Jesus.

Be of one mind: This speaks to the essential *unity* of God’s people. We are one; but we are not all the same. While we should all **be of one mind**, we can’t expect everyone to be like us. God has built both unity and diversity among His people.

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Every cell of your body is different, and each one has its role to play. But every cell in your body has the same DNA code written in it, the master plan for the whole body. Every cell in your body has the same “mind.”

We could say that Christians should be like a good choir. Each one sings with his own voice and some sing different parts, but everyone sings to the same music and in harmony with one another.

Having compassion... tenderhearted (ESV)... courteous (ESV): Peter described the kind of warm love that should be among the people of God. We should be compassionate, brotherly, tenderhearted, and even polite.

Remember that this was the measure Jesus gave to the world to identify His true disciples: “*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35). Jesus did not command us to *like* our brothers and sisters in Christ. But we are commanded to love them; and once we start loving them, we will start liking them.

Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing: The greatest challenge to our love for others comes when we are wronged. At those times we are called to not return **evil for evil**, but to give a **blessing** instead.

No dispute, argument, or personality conflict among believers should linger. Even if one Christian gets out of line, the loving response of other Christians should keep the problem small and short-lived.

The natural response to hostility is retaliation. This is what the terrible ethnic conflicts all over the world are all about – one group wrongs another and dedicates the rest of its existence to repaying that wrong. Only the love of Jesus for our enemies can break the terrible cycle.

iii. Jesus reminded us that it is no great credit if we love those who love us in return; the real test of love is to demonstrate compassion to our enemies (Matthew 5:44-47).

That you may inherit a blessing: We love one another, but not only for the sake of Jesus, whose body we are members of. We love one another, but not only for the sake of our brother or sister for whom Jesus died. We also love one another for our *own sake* – by blessing those who have wronged us, we will **inherit a blessing**. If you can't love for the sake of Jesus, or for the sake of your brother, then do it for your *own sake*!

To prove this teaching, the apostle Peter quotes Psalm 34:12-16 in verses 10 through 12. This is the reason we bless and do not revile in return: because if you want to have a good, joyful life you will do this.

Let him turn away from evil and do good: Doing good is often difficult because as a general rule, evil is rewarded immediately and the reward of doing good is often delayed. But the rewards of good are better and far more secure than the rewards of doing evil. God promises this in the passage quoted by Peter.

Keep your tongues from evil. Keep your lips from speaking lies. Turn away from evil. Do good. Seek peace. Pursue peace. If you want God to be with you in this life, then you will not respond to evil with evil. You will not retaliate when made to suffer. Do you see how Peter is presenting this? The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and He listens to their prayers. If we are retaliating, reviling, and acting like the world treats us, then we are not the righteous. His eyes are not on us, and God is not listening to our prayers. Instead, God is against us because we are doing evil to those who do evil.

II. Live Honorably during Undeserved Suffering (1 Peter 3: 13-17)

And who is he who will harm you: Though Peter says that Christians should always answer evil with good, he also lived in the real world and he knew that people often repaid good with a response of evil.

“Not to be hated by the world; to be loved and flattered and caressed by the world – is one of the most terrible positions in which a Christian can find himself. ‘What bad thing have I done,’ asked the ancient sage, ‘that he should speak well of me?’” (Meyer)

If you become followers of what is good: Literally, **become followers** is “be zealous.” “Some Jews were zealots, boasting their zeal for the Lord or His Law... *all* Christians should be *zealots for that which is good.*” (Hart)

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed: Peter reminds us that there is even a blessing for us when we **suffer for righteousness' sake**. God will care for us, especially when we **suffer** unjustly.

Jesus spoke of the same attitude: *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28).

When we are suffering yet still do good and still have faith, we will be presented with opportunities to defend the hope we have. Use your suffering to help people meet Jesus. Our lifestyle evangelism is that people will see how this whole Jesus thing works in our lives in the face of suffering. Being a Christian during good times does not teach the world much of anything. But if we continue our righteousness and service to Jesus in the face of devastating suffering, we then have opened doors for the world to consider this Jesus. When we have joy when we ought to be sad, the world is going to look at us and wonder why we have not utterly collapsed. Suffering is the opportunity for us to honor Jesus as holy in our hearts.

Will we use our suffering for selfishness? Too often that is the choice we make. We have been conditioned to think that suffering allows us to have “me time,” to “focus on ourselves,” and neglect our obligations to others. Sometimes those who have suffered are the most selfish people. Sometimes it causes us to act that the world needs to revolve around us and everyone needs to think about me. We need to make our suffering purposeful. You are suffering. You cannot change that. Your suffering is what it is. But will you honor Christ as holy during your suffering? Will you give a defense of your hope and show your faith during your suffering? This is true lifestyle evangelism to the world.

And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled: The presence or possibility of suffering for doing good should not make us shrink back from doing good. Instead we should give a special place (**sanctify**) to God in our hearts, and always be ready to explain our faith (**give a defense**), always doing it with a right attitude (**meekness and fear**).

Other manuscripts render **sanctify the Lord God in your hearts** as, *sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts*. “The simple meaning of the injunction is that at the very center of life there is to be one Lord, and that is Christ... Other lords are not permitted to invade the sanctuary of the heart, and to exercise dominion over us. Our own selfish desires, the opinion of others, worldly wisdom, the pressure of circumstances, these and many other lords command us, and we turn away our simple and complete allegiance to our one Lord.” (Morgan)

We can **be ready to give a defense** if we have made ourselves ready in knowing the Bible. Peter knew how important it was to **give a defense to everyone who asks you**. He had to do this in the situations described in Acts 2:14-39, Acts 3:11-26, Acts 4:8-12, and Acts 5:29-32. In each point of testing Peter relied on the power of the Holy Spirit and was able to **give a defense**.

Those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed: Our **good conduct**, when our good is returned with evil, will prove others wrong in their opinions about us and it will make them **ashamed** for speaking against our godly lives.

For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil: None of us want to suffer. But if we must, may it be for **doing good** and not for **doing evil**. Sometimes Christians are obnoxious and offensive and are made **to suffer** for it. They may wish it were persecution for the sake of the gospel, but really it is simply suffering **for doing evil**.

Lesson Summary

This week believers are taught that God call for righteous and humble actions. Christians are to live in harmony, show kindness and compassion, seek peace, stand firm in their faith, be prepared to share their faith with others, maintain a clear conscience, and be willing to suffer for doing what is right. Specifically, this week's lessons include:

- 1. Harmony and Unity:** Verse 8 encourages believers to be harmonious, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble towards one another. This teaches the importance of unity and understanding in relationships within the Christian community and beyond.
- 2. Blessing Others:** Verse 9 urges believers not to repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing. This emphasizes the Christian principle of responding to negativity with positivity and kindness.
- 3. Peaceful Living:** Verse 11 advises believers to seek peace and pursue it, highlighting the value of living peacefully with others.
- 4. Standing Firm in Faith:** Verses 13-14 encourage believers to do good even in the face of adversity, knowing that they are blessed if they suffer for doing good rather than evil. This teaches the importance of standing firm in one's faith and values, even when faced with challenges.
- 5. Being Prepared to Give a Reason for Hope:** Verse 15 instructs believers to always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks them to give the reason for the hope that they have. This emphasizes the importance of being able to articulate one's faith and beliefs to others.
- 6. Maintaining a Clear Conscience:** Verse 16 highlights the importance of keeping a clear conscience, even in the midst of suffering, so that those who speak maliciously against believers may be ashamed of their slander.
- 7. Suffering for Righteousness' Sake:** Verse 17 concludes by stating that it is better to suffer for doing good, if it is God's will, than for doing evil. This reinforces the idea that suffering for righteousness' sake is commendable in the eyes of God.