

Zealous for Good

1 Peter 3:8-17

Over the last major section of his letter, Peter has taught us that we're to BE SUBJECT. He uses the phrase repeatedly, starting out at the earthly pinnacle of human authority, the emperor himself, and then moving on down to the governors sent my him. We're to be subject to human government in every way that doesn't violate God's Word; this is one of the ways it looks like to FEAR GOD.

Then he moved on to an equally difficult topic as he instructed slaves to BE SUBJECT to their masters, and that with the clear understanding that it's the CRUEL MASTERS who are especially in view. As they were mindful of God in their responses to harsh treatment, they honored Him and showed grace to the master. In all of these areas of subjection, no matter the physical circumstances, IN CHRIST WE'RE TRULY FREE.

From the government, through the marketplace, and finally arriving at the front door of our homes, Peter wrapped up his exhortation to BE SUBJECT as he instructed wives to show such honor to their (likely) unbelieving husbands. As we've recently discussed on Sundays, married individuals were coming to Christ. A husband might get saved while the wife refuses, or more likely a wife believes while the husband refuses. It's truly a wonder that folks were staying together in such situations; for the lost husband, his saved wife was NOT the woman he married! She wasn't the same person! Praise the Lord, while some marriages fractured due to the spiritual strain of suddenly being unequally yoked, some lost spouses STAYED with their believing spouse. In the case of a saved wife and a lost husband, Peter's challenging instructions to these women was to BE SUBJECT regardless of his spiritual condition. Submit to him IN THE LORD that he might be WON.

BE SUBJECT. BE SUBJECT. BE SUBJECT. This is HARD, and besides the EXTREMELY BASIC instructions to "be subject," Peter's words are a little vague on what such subjection looks like day-to-day in the face of persecution. Well, he's getting there, and that part is just as difficult. However, before he gets to it, it's as if he calls a TIME OUT and waves everyone into a HUDDLE to say...

1 Peter 3:8

Finally (or "to sum it all up"), **all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.**

I believe there's a TWOFOLD NECESSITY behind this instruction, the need for these qualities for the sake of GENUINE FELLOWSHIP AMONG BELIEVERS, as well as their need for believers to continue showing GRACE TO THE NONBELIEVERS persecuting them. Obviously, as followers of Christ, they weren't (we aren't) going to have "UNITY of mind" with the lost, and while they should show love to the lost, it couldn't be "brotherly" love as that is something unique to the brethren, an uncommon love shared within the family of God. Nevertheless, these qualities would be needed to accomplish both ends.

This is a call to intentionally and graciously affect the lives of OTHERS, not merely an exhortation to inward discipline. Peter wrote to “ALL of you,” which is an address to a group. Such qualities can only be observed in the context of a group. Show me HARMONY or SYMPATHY or BROTHERLY LOVE or COMPASSION or HUMILITY in ISOLATION. It’s impossible. I know this is probably pretty straightforward to you, but I want to emphasize that Peter’s instructions are FOR the Body of Christ, to be practiced WITHIN the body of Christ.

This has to do with the historical context of Christian persecution and the ESSENTIAL FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS. And this isn’t merely gathering in the same location. We could all be sitting in our cars in the parking lot and be “gathered” together. We could sit beside one another in rows or at tables, talking about the weather, and still not be experiencing true fellowship. However, when we share our lives with one another, allowing the Spirit to guide our thoughts and words, bringing His Word to our remembrance to be shared as encouragement with others, praying with and for one another, we are BUILT UP, STRENGTHENED, and ENCOURAGED to face the trials that we encounter.

And why would Peter encourage these believers to such a lifestyle? They’re going to need it, RIGHT?! The instruction he just gave them about subjection to governmental authority (under NERO), subjection of slaves to their masters (even CRUEL ones), and the subjection of wives to UNBELIEVING husbands is already an IMMENSELY TALL ORDER! What they’re being called to do is HARD! They would need God’s strength to do it, and He would give it to them THROUGH FELLOW BELIEVERS.

Peter names the individual requirements for such GENUINE FELLOWSHIP, and these characteristics EXCLUDE pretense, prideful self-reliance, apathy, and callous condescension. It’s a calling to BE THERE FOR ONE ANOTHER! In a word, this is a complete repudiation of SELF. Peter’s instructions only work when self is forgotten. It’s only when I stop focusing on myself and MY interests that discord is replaced with HARMONY, and apathy is replaced with **WILLINGNESS TO “COSUFFER” WITH ANOTHER**, selfishness is replaced with **LOVE FOR FELLOW BELIEVERS**, my hard heart is replaced with **A HEART OF COMPASSION**, and my pride with **HUMILITY**. This exhortation lauds qualities and affections that are drawn out for OTHERS. OTHERS...

I get it, though. We’re all run ragged, it seems. In the midst of such BUSYNESS, we develop TUNNEL VISION on our lives. The notion that other people exist with cares of their own doesn’t even enter into the mind of MOST, I would say, and barely finds a home in the nose-bleed section of the minds of others. It’s no surprise that the world that’s ruled by the Devil is set up to train us to focus on ourselves.

And we can FEEL it when we become overly focused on ourselves. Our stress level begins to climb with no signs of abating; that’s because deep down we know we’re relying upon ourselves, and we know how limited our resources are. We find ourselves fixating on problems, almost LOOKING for them. We become much more easily bothered, inconveniences become offenses, and others start looking more like OBSTACLES to our happiness than fellow sojourners struggling to overcome obstacles of their own.

Peter keeps returning to address the OUTLOOK of the INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER because, without addressing our own perspective, there's no way we'll see far enough to effectively love OTHERS. Sure enough, PAIN CAN CAUSE US TO LOOK TO GOD, but with the wrong outlook, we're prone to allowing pain to train our focus inward to ourselves. If anyone understood this insulated perspective and inward struggle, it was this DISPERSED, PERSECUTED PEOPLE. They've known such isolation and alienation for generations as displaced Jews who never returned to the Land after being exiled; it's become INGRAINED into their cultural identity. Now, as followers of Jesus, they find themselves displaced, at least, ONE STEP FURTHER, alienated from Jew and Gentile alike. Who else did they have if not each other? As I studied this, all that came to mind was life in the TRENCHES...



WWI was all about trench warfare. They were a terrible place to be—gunfire and explosions outside, and mud, rats, and filth inside—but you weren't the only one there...



You had your brothers-in-arms right next to you, and while we don't ever wish harm or misery on another, there's much comfort in knowing that there's someone else who understands what you're going through. WE ARE IN THIS SPIRITUAL BATTLE TOGETHER. However, when our outlook becomes focused on ourselves, it's as if we build walls within the trench. Experiences, burdens, prayers, and encouragement cease being shared as we isolate ourselves from those who need US to comfort them with the comfort with which we've been comforted (2 Corinthians 1:4), and we're cut off from those who might offer us life-giving encouragement.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT'S LIKE? Have you ever experienced such deep despair and struggle in your Christian walk, knowing that JUST OVER THERE there's someone who knows exactly what you're going through, but they don't even see you? I DO, and I can tell you that it's GUTWRENCHING, not merely discouraging or sickening, but so vexing that your abdomen spasms, to the point you can't take a full breath! If you could just have a moment of their time, but their focus is only INWARD. Maybe they don't have a word of wisdom or encouragement for you, or at least, they feel they don't. Maybe they're so deep in the mire of their own struggle that it's all they can do to remain standing themselves; they don't think they can handle anything else. Who knows? Nevertheless, to be able to tell someone else about what you're dealing with and to hear those fortifying yet woefully undervalued words, "I UNDERSTAND," and "YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY." AH!!! We need this, ESPECIALLY IF WE'RE LIVING ON THE FRONTLINES FOR JESUS! In one of most "**rubber meets the road**" passages of Scripture, Paul echoed this sentiment, saying...

Romans 12:15-16

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

As followers of Jesus living for Him behind enemy lines, a world ruled by His adversary and ours, WE ARE LIVING THE TRENCH LIFE, and we can't allow ourselves to build walls in the trench and isolate ourselves from the care we need nor from those who need care from us. This is genuine, transparent, humble, Christian fellowship, and as Peter said, we're going to need "**unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.**" They're ESSENTIAL COMMITMENTS we must make to one another. Peter's telling us, "*Learn to TRUST one another. You're going to have to if you're to complete your God-given calling in this lost world.*" Then, in response to the maltreatment these persecuted believers could expect from the lost, Peter writes...

1 Peter 3:9

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

Called to suffer, called to bless. Sound familiar? When Peter was addressing slaves, he taught them that they were called to suffer (2:21). However, as we listen to this instruction we hear echoes of Christ's sermon on the mount, where Jesus taught...

Luke 6:27-29

27 But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.

Do you see how such a response to hostility and persecution completely DISARMS it? Typically, aggressors keep coming as long as their target resists or fights their assaults. However, unexpected, undeserved kindness (you know, like what the Lord showed us that brought us to repentance, Romans 2:4), diffuses the situation like cutting the proverbial "red wire" to a bomb. True, there is always the potential of inflaming our persecutors' wrath because of the CONVICTION that our Spirit-led conduct causes. However, much of the time such conduct will leave them utterly DUMBFOUNDED. Peter is saying, *"THIS IS HOW YOU DO IT! Jesus taught us this, and it's more than a 'good saying' that reflects how perfect He is. It's PRACTICAL WISDOM for enduring persecution, and Jesus not only taught it, HE LIVED IT!"*

We've been called to be a blessing **"that [we] may obtain a blessing,"** just like God called Abraham and promised to bless him and make him a blessing. God promised Abraham, **"in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"** (Genesis 12:3), and the Father fulfilled this promise through Abraham's offspring Jesus. The blessing of Abraham came to the Gentiles (US!!!) through Jesus (Galatians 3:14), and while we can certainly bless those who persecute us by responding graciously to their attacks, the GREATEST means by which we can be a blessing to those around us is to share with them how to know Jesus, have their sins forgiven, and how to know they have eternal life!

Though we're sharing good news that ought to bring relief and joy to all who hear it, it's a message what will draw out the hatred and persecution of the world because it's also a message of judgment. It says, *"There's Divine Authority to Whom you're accountable. You've broken His law, and you stand condemned. Your sin demands the death sentence, and you are NOT good enough to do anything about it."* The simple implication of wrongdoing is often too much for most, and despite the logic that disobedience against an eternal being demands eternal punishment, the notion that their sin demands HELL is unfathomable. Such a notion REPULSEs the lost because deep down it TERRIFIES them, and their unbelieving, emotional response is to REJECT the message, RIDICULE the messenger, and if possible, RID THEMSELVES of him.

Nevertheless, we're **"CALLED"** to this, meaning that we've been given DIVINE PURPOSE, to SUFFER and still BLESS, just like Jesus. YOU ARE CALLED! Think about your divine calling for a moment (if you need to, close your eyes). See yourself in your home. See yourself observing your workplace and those in it. See yourself encountering people at Walmart. John wrote that "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8b), and we join Him in that divine purpose as we carry out His call on our lives to bless while suffering. THIS IS HOW EVIL IS SWALLOWED UP BY GOOD! IT STOPS THE LOST IN THEIR TRACKS AND LEAVES THEM WONDERING, *"HOW? WHY?"*

We'll come back to the effects of our blessed conduct on the hearts of the lost in a moment, but Peter has further encouragement to bless out of suffering, not merely enduring persecution but THRIVING in the midst of it. Peter was inspired to draw from David's life experience of BEARING UP under King Saul's persecution, using this historical illustration to encourage these beleaguered saints. In verse 10, Peter begins quoting Psalm 34, saying...

1 Peter 3:10-12

10 For

**Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
11 let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.**

Psalm 34 is a psalm of David inspired by the time when he found himself at the mercy of the pagan king Achish of Gath (1 Samuel 21), when he pretended to be mad, drooling down his beard and marking on doors, and inciting the king to drive him out without harm. What's notable about this event is that it was the FIRST OF MANY, deadly CLOSE CALLS that David encountered as a result of King Saul's persecution. What's interesting about the PSALM is that it doesn't really recount any details about the moment when David fell into the hands of Achish (or any other terrifying confrontation). It was inspired by the first crisis David encountered after fleeing from Saul, but its content only records his steadfast hope in the Lord while being pursued by King Saul. Check out the first few verses of the psalm...

Psalm 34:1-3

**1 Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.
I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
2 My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
let the humble hear and be glad.
3 Oh, magnify the Lord with me,
and let us exalt his name together!**

David certainly embodied James' words when he wrote, **"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds" (James 1:2)**. While it's true that these words were written after surviving the threat, they evince the JOY and the TRUST that David had in the Lord during the trial, I believe, enabling him to endure it. Look again at the first two verses that Peter quoted from David...

1 Peter 3:10-11

10 For

**Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
11 let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.**

Peter says NOT to repay evil for evil because that how a person gets to "love life and see good days." Regardless of how others behave or how they treat us, we're to "seek peace and pursue it." Once more we hear the echoes of Jesus' sermon on the mount. "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God**" (Matthew 5:9). I appreciate how both David and Peter emphasize that peace is something to be PURSUED. In a world overseen by the Devil, whose mission in this world can be summed up as "to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10), PEACE CAN BE ELUSIVE. Peace is NOT EFFORTLESS. Peace must be SOUGHT AFTER, PURSUED, MADE, and PRESERVED. It is not the default; it doesn't just happen. The only things that "just happen" in this world are those that ERODE PEACE, NOT ESTABLISH IT. And Peter reiterates that "GETTING EVEN" through wicked speech or actions is NOT how a person gets peace. Now this should go without saying, but because of our propensity to LASH BACK at offenders, Peter says, "HEY! DON'T GET EVEN!" The Devil has already used that initial attack or offense to ROB our lives of peace, and we don't restore it by settling the score, we only multiply the devastation.

So, WHAT DO WE DO? Nothing?! Just put on shirts that say "WELCOME" and lay down? By no means! Peter continues to teach us through the words of David...

1 Peter 3:12

**For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.**

THE LORD SEES! He HEARS THEIR PRAYERS, meaning that we're to offer them up to Him! "**The face of the Lord is against those who do evil,**" those who would do us harm (or those of us who would return evil for evil), but those of us who seek to DO RIGHT for God's sake, regardless of how we're treated, WE HAVE AN ALLY IN HIM. Who understood this truth better than David? Though Samuel had anointed him king over Israel, he would live life on the run, hiding in caves and narrowly escaping Saul's spear. On multiple occasions, David was seemingly presented with the opportunity to rid himself of his adversary; however, because Saul was the Lord's anointed, David refused to harm him, ENTRUSTING HIMSELF TO THE LORD INSTEAD. In that same psalm, David wrote...

Psalm 34:17-22

**19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the Lord delivers him out of them all.
20 He keeps all his bones;
not one of them is broken.
21 Affliction will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.
22 The Lord redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.**

The Lord sees and hears us. Like David, we needn't worry about how to maneuver around our trials and bring about our own victories. We can entrust ourselves to the LORD and be FREE TO BLESS, knowing that He will deliver us, and in that same confident spirit, Peter writes...

1 Peter 3:13-14

13 Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,
Jesus said...

Matthew 5:10-12

**10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Peter said to **"have no fear of them, nor be troubled."** LIVE. Boldly live for Jesus, who also said in the CONTEXT of instructions to proclaim His Word regardless of the persecution it brings...

Matthew 10:28

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

To the natural world, this is CRAZY! In the same way they perceive the cross of Jesus Christ, such an outlook is FOOLISHNESS! *"There's nothing worse than physical death,"* they say. *"There's nothing beyond this world,"* they claim, but we live as if we've seen that heavenly realm and the One who sits enthroned there because, by faith, WE HAVE. As I said before, they can't help but ask, *"HOW? WHY?"* They aren't just left scratching their heads; they're shaken to their core. The undaunted hope of a follower of Jesus shouts into the ears of those blinded by the devil that THERE'S A REALITY BEYOND WHAT THEIR FAITHLESS EYES CAN SEE! In the psalm of David that we've been reading from tonight, he also wrote about overcoming this FEAR. He said...

Psalms 34:4

**I sought the Lord, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.**

So, there IS a fear to be delivered from, but he also wrote...

Psalm 34:9, 11

**9 Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!**

**11 Come, O children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.**

So how do we live with the steadfastness of David and the steadfastness that Peter was seeking to instill in these persecuted believers? How do we safeguard our hearts against the unhealthy, destructive fear of man and the devil, for that matter? Peter answers...

1 Peter 3:15-16

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

The NET Bible translates Peter's instruction, **"but set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts..." (NET)**. Once more, Peter says, *"This is HOW you do this."* No one or nothing can be Lord of your heart but Christ ALONE. If there are any allegiances that compete with Him, including a fearfulness of what others may think or do because of your faith, you won't be able to do this.

"HOW DO I DO THIS? How do I sanctify Christ as Lord of my heart?" SURRENDER everything to His authority, every area, every sphere of life. HE GETS IT ALL. If there's an area of my life that I hesitate to submit to Him according to His Word, that's a competing allegiance to His Lordship, an IDOL in my life. Such idols must be objectively identified and surrendered to Jesus. Again, He says, "Don't fear man. FEAR ME."

Then Peter tells us to also live, **"always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."** If you're a student of apologetics—the branch of theology that teaches us how to reason through and articulate WHY we believe WHAT we believe—this verse is familiar to you. The Greek word translated "defense" is the word from which we get the word apologetics. However, as we've endeavored to firmly ground our study of tonight's passage in the CONTEXT of Peter's letter—suffering persecution for righteousness' sake—we readily understand that the actual focus of his exhortation is on answering someone who asks HOW YOU'RE ABLE TO ENDURE PERSECUTION WHEN YOU'VE DONE NOTHING WRONG. *"You keep making decisions and living life in such a way that makes no sense in this world, in a way that only gets you in trouble with those who are*

in authority. It's like you're ASKING FOR IT, like YOU CAN'T HELP YOURSELF. WHY?! How can you be so sure that YOUR WAY IS THE RIGHT WAY? What gives you SUCH HOPE to keep living by your convictions?" Or as folks simply observe your life, they may find themselves asking...

"How do you keep your temper in the midst of crazy circumstances or when people disrespect you on account of your faith?"

"How do you endure the trial (the sickness, pain, heartache, loss) that you're going through? How do you actually give glory to this God that you say loves you but still allows such terrible things to happen to you?"

"Why are you so willing, almost eager, to risk everything you have (even your very life) over this Jesus?"

WHAT DO WE SAY? How do we answer critics who have been shaken by God through our Spirit-led response to suffering and are now teetering on the edge of belief and unbelief?

You may think it's time for the cosmological or teleological argument for the existence of God, or time to present all the evidence supporting the veracity of the Bible, but I argue that IT ISN'T. That time may come, but in such a moment at Peter describes, they've already been captivated by the POWER and the GRACE and the LOVE OF GOD! Give them more of that!

"GOD EXISTS! He's a person to know, and I DO KNOW HIM! He speaks to me through His Word and His Spirit. He guides my life, and He gives me strength and grace to obey Him, and He promises that when this life is over, I'll go to be with Him forever in Heaven where there is no evil, no sorrow, or sickness, or pain, no terror. There will only be love, and joy, and peace, and glory, the PRESENCE of God. Therefore, I don't have to live like this world is all there is. I don't have to fear what man may do to me; I can trust God. He will take care of me forever. That's the HOPE I have, and I have it because Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, really lived, really died to pay for my sins, was really buried, and really rose from the dead, and He's willing to forgive anyone who repents and calls on Him in faith."

Of course, this answer is going to be most readily received if given with **"gentleness and respect"** rather than being SHARP or SHORT in your answer. Again, your supernatural response to persecution has opened the door of their heart for the gospel; don't slam it shut with a terse answer, and that can be really hard as you look into your persecutor's face.

It's going to be received better from one with "a good conscience," one that's been informed by the Word of God as evidenced by your life. Conduct that matches our message is not only evinces the power of God to change lives, but such GOOD conduct MUZZLES foolish TALK, taking away any ammo they think they have against us, and shaming them now before objective observers, and in eternity before the One who judges justly. Peter writes...

1 Peter 3:17

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

The "**doing good**" part is something we don't have to wonder about, whether it's God's will or not; we know it is. Even in the brief passage we've studying tonight we seen it several times. **"Turn away from evil and do good...zealous for what is good...having a good conscience...good behavior in Christ..."**

However, as odd as it may seem, given the APPARENTLY evil aspect of suffering, it is something that God occasionally wills in our lives as well. A.W. Tozer put it this way. He said...

"Know that sorrows and tribulation are not God's highest will, for there will not be any of them in heaven. In this mixed-up world, though, we are in a state where they are necessary."

Sorrows and tribulation only exist because of sin, and sin exists because of us—yes, because of Adam, but we're complicit every day too. Because every aspect of our lives is to some degree tainted by sin, suffering and tribulation resultant of sin is one of the greatest lessons that teaches our hearts to despise it. What's more, James wrote that trials that test our faith produce steadfastness which in full effect perfects us so that we're lacking in nothing (James 1:2-4), and that is why he can say "REJOICE" when it comes to trials! God's doing something in your life! The trials, and specifically, the PERSECUTION we face because of our stand for Jesus has been ALLOWED by our Heavenly Father, and despite how it might feel, He still loves us! The trial is for our GOOD, and as we remain obedient, FEARING GOD instead of man, blessing out of suffering as we go through the trial, we're conformed further into the image of Christ.