

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST PETER

### GODLINESS IN SUFFERING!

Read 1 Peter 3:8-17

#### **Introduction.**

Christians will suffer, so let us suffer with a clear conscience. In this passage Peter calls each of us to integrity before God, integrity before God's people, and integrity before the unbelievers who live around us. But also contained in this passage are fascinating references to Christ's atonement and Christian baptism.

#### **Live in Harmony with Other Christians**

*“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender-hearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.” (vv8-9)*

*“Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation. No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that’s your job, to bless. You’ll be a blessing and also get a blessing.” (vv8-9 MSG)*

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” 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. 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.”

#### **Compassion... Tender-hearted... Courteous**

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.

#### **No Revenge**

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. 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).

## **Inherit of 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!

## **Living Righteous Lives in the World**

*“For “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”” (vv10-12)*

Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12-16 to bolster his case for a pure tongue and a clear conscience.

Our tongue is prone to evil, especially when we are under pressure. We complain. We blame. We vacillate. But in the Spirit, our tongue becomes an agent of blessing. Notice the path of the righteous man and woman:

*"Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:11 = Psalm 34:14)*

When we are tempted, sometimes we must consciously and deliberately turn away from evil and toward good. Notice that the way of righteousness is not passive. It is a decision. See the three verbs in verse 11:

1. Turn
2. Seek
3. Pursue

To live a Christian life in Peter's Day was a struggle and sometimes brought suffering. The same is true today. The Christian life calls for courage and fortitude in the face of evil.

## **Don't Be Afraid of Suffering**

*“And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”” (vv13-14)*

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. Peter suggests that we should be zealots for doing good. Zealots means "one who is earnestly committed to a side or cause, enthusiast, adherent, loyalist." But even if we suffer for doing good, God blesses us.

To encourage Christians in suffering, Peter admonishes us with a word from the Lord in Isaiah: *"Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."* When God spoke these words to Isaiah, Isaiah reports that God's *"strong hand [was] upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people"* (Isaiah 8:11-12). The people feared death at the hands of their enemies, but Isaiah was not to fear. He was not to panic or be intimidated. He was to fear the Lord, not the enemy. He was to trust in the Lord. So are we.

## **A Prepared, Gentle Witness**

*“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.” (vv15-16)*

I see four distinct parts to this instruction.

1. **Focus on Christ rather than your fears.** It is vital that we get our priorities straight. Just as God said to Isaiah during his crisis in the passage just quoted, we are not to fear what unbeliever's fear, but to fear God. Look at the full context of the Isaiah passage:

*"God spoke strongly to me, grabbed me with both hands and warned me not to go along with this people. He said: "Don't be like this people, always afraid somebody is plotting against them. Don't fear what they fear. Don't take on their worries. If you're going to worry, worry about The Holy. Fear God-of-the-Angel-Armies. The Holy can be either a Hiding Place or a Boulder blocking your way, the Rock standing in the willful way of both houses of Israel, a barbed-wire Fence preventing trespass to the citizens of Jerusalem. Many of them are going to run into that Rock and get their bones broken, get tangled up in that barbed wire and not get free of it." (Isaiah 8:11-15 MSG)*

Make very sure that it is God whom you fear. Peter also recalls what Jesus had told his disciples:

*"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows." (Luke 12:4-7)*

Focus on Christ rather than your fears.

2. **Be ready to give an answer.**

Sometimes we find ourselves terrified to witness to our friends, much less our enemies who are actively persecuting us. But we are to "be prepared" (NIV) or "be ready" (KJV, NRSV). Ahead of time decide that you will not suffer silently. No, you won't reply with an insult, but you will reply. It is good for us to think through why we serve Jesus and the hope we have in him, so that we can articulate it to others. In times of persecution, the Holy Spirit will help us know what to say (Luke 12:11-12), but we must overcome our fears, so we are willing to say what God gives us.

3. **Reply with meekness and fear. "But do this with gentleness and respect."**

We're sorely tempted to tell off our tormenters and condemn them to the hell that they (and we, for that matter) so richly deserve. We must resist that temptation. Rather, we must answer as did Jesus. "Gentleness" (NIV, NRSV), "meekness" (KJV) is the Greek noun *prautēs*, "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness in the older favorable sense." The second noun in this clause, "respect" (NIV), "reverence" (NRSV), "fear" (KJV) is Greek *phobos*, "fear," which we've seen before. Here it means "reverence, respect," as it did in 2:18 and 3:2. We are not to "lose it." Rather we are to speak about our Lord with joy and gentleness, respecting our tormenters as people for whom Christ died.

4. **Keep a good conscience.**

When we're under pressure and our life is on the line, we are tempted to justify any action with the argument that the ends justify the means. As followers of the sinless Son of God, we don't have that option. "Conscience" here and in 3:21 below is the Greek noun *syneidēsis*, "the inward faculty of distinguishing right and wrong, moral consciousness, conscience." We must act righteously and speak with gentleness, even in the face of evil. Otherwise, we become evil ourselves. Remember Peter's exhortation in verse 9:

*"Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:9)*

### **Suffering for Good**

*"For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil." (v17)*

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.