



FAITHFUL LIVING IN A FALLEN WORLD

A SERIES IN FIRST PETER



TENDER HEARTS AND HUMBLE MINDS

1 PETER 3:8-16

FAITHFUL
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FALLEN
WORLD

INTRO

You may have noticed that I often address the subject of suffering in my preaching. There are at least four reasons.

1. Suffering is often mentioned in Scripture.

In almost any book I choose to preach, there is at least a section about suffering. Some entire books are about suffering, like Job and this book we've been studying, 1 Peter.

2. I have experienced quite a bit of it myself.

I don't think that makes me unique. Perhaps pastoring opens me up to more, or at least unique opportunities to suffer, but many of you have suffered as much or more. But when I read and study the passages on suffering, it comforts me to see that God's servants have always suffered and that as they faithfully endure, God turned their suffering into beautiful examples of his faithfulness.

3. Doing so over long periods of time prepares people for inevitable periods of suffering.

It's an odd thing for which to be thankful, but I have been the recipient of gratitude for a consistent focus on this theme. So much current preaching out there says the opposite - that **if only** you are faithful enough, you will not experience much, if any, suffering. Let me be very clear with you: this is false teaching that cannot be reconciled to the Scripture. Avoid this teaching and anyone who makes it the main point of their theology and preaching.

4. There is more suffering to come, so we must continually prepare for that.

I could quote so many Scriptures and give so many examples, but it is enough here to say that Jesus promised we would suffer in this world, and Peter said not to be surprised about suffering. So we should expect to suffer and not be surprised by it, and take measures to be prepared for it. If you read these passages in scripture, stop and meditate on them and realize that they are written for your benefit and encouragement, so that you can be prepared to give glory to God as you rejoice in whatever suffering is coming next.

And I hope that this morning's sermon will be helpful to that end.

INTRO 2

Peter has been offering pointed instructions to specific groups of people (citizens, employees, wives, husbands), but now he speaks generally to all the groups he has already addressed. He lists some marks of the Christian life, aspects of character that we will possess in growing measure as we become more mature in Christ.

As we make our way in this world, we know these two truths:

1. Pressures will come
2. Pressures reveal character.

Affliction reveals character. Pressures, and affliction, and persecution, and reviling reveal character. When the pressures of life squeeze in on us—the pressure to compromise, to capitulate, to avoid being ostracized—we must look beyond the moment and into the future. We must not fear those who cannot affect our eternal destiny, but we must, out of reverence and respect for God, do what is good and right according to his definitions.

If we are in Christ and faithfully display the character of Christ even in difficult circumstances, this is bound to raise questions in those looking on. And we are to be ready to explain why we believe and behave as we do. In a time when Christians were likely experiencing real, present, and tangible persecution at the hands of their government and fellow citizens, the fact that they were hopeful in the middle of this would certainly have drawn attention to them.

When our emotions are churning, rising up and down in waves, and when we are terrified about what is happening or might happen soon, we must trust that God will come to our aid. We must trust that not only is he willing to be our refuge, he already is! We must not lose faith in his promises, but rather cling all the more tightly to them—and to him.

And so Peter is now ready to summarize his recent teaching about how to live properly as a Christian in this world. These instructions are for everybody in his audience, and these instructions are for us.

TEXT

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

Unity of Mind

The first on the list is Christian unity. This is mentioned often in the NT, and so we know that it is to be a high priority. What is described here is believers enjoying divinely inspired harmony. This is not merely the unity of a shared doctrinal statement (although it may include that), but a grasping of the unity that already exists between all true believers. By having the mind of Christ and the Spirit of Christ, we attain a special unity in Christ with all others who are in Christ.

William Barclay sets a high standard when he says the following:

“All through the New Testament rings the plea for Christian unity. It is more than a plea; it is an announcement that **people cannot live the Christian life unless in their personal relationships they are at unity with one another, and that the Church cannot be truly Christian if there are divisions within it...** He tells them that strifes and divisions are things of the flesh, marks that they are living on purely human standards, without the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 3: 3).”

Now, of course, it is not always up to us whether or not there is unity or division; we keep in mind the instruction in Rom. 12:18, **“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”**

And we keep in mind as well the words of Paul in 1 Cor. 11:18-19. There, he says that while divisions and factions are never desirable, they do serve a helpful function. He says, **“For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.”**

We could say then that division is never desirable, but sadly, we could say further that it is all but inevitable **and** that it can also be useful in discerning the motives of those involved.

But that is the side trail in this discussion, not the main trail. The main trail is that we should hold Christian unity as a sacred state to be pursued and protected by every available means. There are few good reasons for causing disunity among God's people, and we should tread carefully any time we are considering saying or doing anything that might lead to disunity.

And what exactly is unity? Does this mean we all must think exactly the same about everything? No. C. E. B. Cranfield notes that this "does not mean that the like-mindedness we are to strive for is to be a drab uniformity of the sort beloved of bureaucrats. Rather is it to be a unity in which powerful tensions are held together [and] are overcome in common worship and common obedience. **Such unity will only come when Christians are humble and bold enough to lay hold on the unity already given in Christ and to take it more seriously than their own self-importance and sin...**" This is the unity of mind that Peter implores us to seek.

Sympathy

Next, he lists sympathy. We understand sympathy basically as feeling pity for someone, but in a truer sense in the Christian community, it means to enter into each other's suffering. In biblical language, it means genuinely weeping with those who weep, as Paul puts it.

Barclay observes that "sympathy and selfishness cannot co-exist... sympathy depends on the willingness to forget self and to identify oneself with the pains and sorrows of others."¹ "Sympathy and selfishness cannot co-exist" - you could say that about every Christian virtue, but it is particularly fitting to pair it with sympathy. You cannot genuinely weep with those who weep without forgetting yourself and voluntarily and fully entering into the pain of another. It will be difficult to "bear the burdens of others" if your life is dominated by self-interest.

¹ — The Letters of James and Peter (The New Daily Study Bible) by William Barclay
<https://a.co/hHpK0ql>

Brotherly Love

Next is brotherly, or familial love. We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ with the same intensity and consistency with which we love our biological families. Brotherly love is related to unity of mind, but of course, it goes beyond the mind, right to the heart. In numerous ways, you might have unity of mind without brotherly love, but we are to pursue both.

In John 13:35 Jesus says, **“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** If we want the world to see and know Jesus, unity of mind will not be enough. If we don't also have a love for one another, how will the world know we are followers of Jesus? There must be a strong but tender, loyal and precious familial love.

A Tender Heart

Next, he lists a tender heart. In our sympathy and compassion, we must be gentle and tender. In Greek, this is an adjective derived from the words for "good" and "the visceral organs". What is Peter getting at by using this word? It's that we are to have a positive gut-level sympathy, empathy, and compassion for one another. In James 2:15-16 we are reminded that **“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?”** As we care for one another, we must do so with tenderness and gut-level sympathy, proving by our actions that we mean what we say.

A Humble Mind

Lastly, Peter mentions a humble mind, by which he means that we are to have a modest opinion of ourselves. The key to Christian humility is to avoid comparing oneself to others and instead compare oneself to Christ. When we do this, it will align our behaviour with reality as we realize that, compared to Christ, there is nothing in us worthy of exaltation, and this will keep us from acting and speaking in self-exalting ways.

False Humility

There is an important side note for us here. Peter H. Davids makes a keen observation. He says, humility "does not mean a poor self-concept ('I'm no good'), but a willingness to take the lower place, to do the less exalted service, and to put the interests of others ahead of one's own interests."²

Do you see what he's saying? Humility is not saying or believing that what sums us up is "I'm no good." When we get into the "I'm no good" mind-space, we tend to default to inactivity. We do nothing because we need to affirm the self-fulfilling prophecy. "I'm not good, and if I do something it will be no good, therefore I will not do anything." But that's not humility; it is actually closer to self-pity, and it serves as an excuse to avoid action.

But true humility takes action—it takes the lower place. Taking a place is an activity. It requires effort. Humility volunteers for the less-exalted service and serves the interests of others. All of these are part of loving one another, and we are supposed to be emotionally interconnected to one another. How can we not be if we are going to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice? There is no other way!

Peter starts with unity of mind and ends with a humble mind. There is a connection and it is this: if we each practice *humility of mind*, we will find it easier to have *unity of mind* because We will count others as more important than ourselves. We will avoid elevating secondary issues to primary ones. And we will give as much grace to others as we have received from Christ.

Peter's next instructions are found in v9:

⁹Do 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.

² - Peter H. Davids, p125

The virtues Peter listed in v8 are necessary and needed in the church among Christians, where, hopefully, we are constantly seeking to do good to one another. But they are needed outside the church as well. It's as if in v8 he says, "Here's how to act towards other Christians..." and in v9 he says, "And most of the same holds true of your behaviour towards those who are not Christians!"

And it is probably (really, hopefully) true that those who are not part of your spiritual family are more likely to mistreat you, BUT, Peter goes on to say, EVEN IF THEY DO, the ground rules of Christian behaviour still apply. We are to bless others, doing good to them while not returning the evil and reviling that was launched in our direction.

And we are to actively bless; it goes beyond general good words. This is a blessing that really brings good to the one being blessed. Not only are we not to return evil for evil, but we are to make an effort to do good to the very one doing evil against us. Consider this...

And why are we to make this effort? It's because this is how Jesus conducted himself while here on earth, and this is what he did for us. Think about it in terms of Romans 5: while we were sinners, his enemies, he died for us. What do enemies do? They do evil against us. As the enemies of Christ, we did evil to him, and we deserved nothing but the same in return. But what did we get? We received grace and mercy, and blessing we did not deserve. We receive unmerited blessings from Christ; we are to provide unmerited blessings to others in the same way. (This week, bless someone who doesn't deserve your blessing.)

Notice as well that it is not enough simply to abstain from revenge, but we are to pray for and bless those who injure and harm us. It's not enough to "not do the bad thing," but we must proceed to do the good thing, to seek the good of another, even while it is the one who has done evil to us. We see then that to take revenge is to decline God's blessing; it is to reveal that we would rather serve our own desires than fulfill God's commands.

Peter continues to elaborate in v10-12 by quoting Psalm 34:

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.”

Do you desire to love life and see good days? Of course you do; who doesn't! Great, this passage of scripture is showing us how! If you desire to love life and see good days

1. If you desire to love life and see good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.

We learn in James 3 that whenever we open our mouths to speak, there is great potential for good and harm, AND that we will all be judged for the words that come from our mouths. Did they bring life or death? Did they give false assurance, or did they call forth repentance? Did they comfort the hurting or pronounce judgment where mercy was needed? Is your tongue a fire or a soothing balm for those who have been burned?

2. If you desire to love life and see good days, turn away from evil and do good.

Turn away from what God considers evil and do what God considers good, paying no regard to the contradictory demands of ungodly people or society at large. And this is like repentance - we are not just to turn away from something, we are to turn away constantly, AND we are to turn towards something good.

3. If you desire to love life and see good days, seek peace and pursue it.

It is not enough to give a warm welcome to peace when it is offered to us, but we should chase it when it seems to be getting away. We are to be peace-receivers, yes, but when peace will not be received, we must seek it and pursue it. This reminds us of the sacred unity that is to be protected among us. When disunity threatens, seek peace and pursue it.

¹³ Now [Peter asks] who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

This is a rhetorical question... Under normal conditions in a nation like Canada, which was established on godly principles, we should have no fear of persecution or reprisal for doing what is good. There will be a general alignment between God's commands and the laws of the nation, and this will be a comfortable environment in which to practice our faith. That fairly describes the Canada I grew up in.

And yet we know from history and experience that conditions are not always "normal." We know that conditions sometimes exist where the good we do is spoken of as evil. It may even be punishable by law! When this is the case, what should we do? Peter answers:

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness 'sake, *you will be blessed.* Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

This is a plain realization of our experience in the world. It doesn't make sense that we would be harmed for doing good, but it happens. And it happens more when what is considered good in society does not align with what God considers good. And, sadly, that increasingly describes the Canada I live in today! So we might be persecuted even when acting righteously, but even if this happens, Peter says, we will be blessed. It's one of the wonderful paradoxical blessings of the Christian faith.

And he is merely echoing the words of Jesus in Matt 5:10 “**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness ’sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” So Peter counsels endurance. “You shouldn’t need to suffer for doing good,” he says...

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness ’sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

The Greek word for troubled is interesting... It means to put in motion, to agitate back-and-forth, shake to-and-fro, what needs to remain still and at ease. This is an emotional agitation from getting stirred up inside.

Calvin says of this verse (John Calvin, not Calvin Hall) that, “The best remedy for checking the turbulent emotions of our minds will be to conquer immoderate terrors by trusting in the aid of God.”³ What’s he saying? When your emotions are churning, rising up and down in waves, when you are terrified about what is happening or might happen soon, you must trust that God will come to your aid. You must not lose faith in his promises, but rather cling all the more tightly to him and to them. We must not believe that the words and actions of mortal men have more power to injure us than God has to rescue us.

Peter tells us what we should do instead:

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; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

Honor Christ

First, we are to honour Christ. This is the opposite of fearful anxiety. We are to honour Christ in our hearts as the holy, sovereign, omnipotent King of all kings that he is.

³ — The Complete Biblical Commentary Collection of John Calvin by John Calvin
<https://a.co/fAMVsAo>

Instead of fearing people, we are to revere Christ. Instead of fearing hostility, expect it. Prepare for it. Are you prepared for it? In a time when Christians were likely experiencing real, present, tangible persecution at the hands of their government and fellow citizens, the fact that they were hopeful in the middle of this would certainly have drawn attention to them. They needed to be, and we should be, prepared for this attention.

To Make a Defense

And so, second, we are to be prepared to make a defence, to offer words in defence, words that ring with "intelligent reasoning". We are to be able to offer a well-reasoned reply, a thought-out response with compelling proof

When circumstances are dire, yet we are hopeful, people will be curious about that. And we are supposed to be prepared to explain why this is. Why is it that someone who is paying such a high price for following Jesus is still following Jesus as if the costs don't matter? Are we prepared to give an answer for this?

Now, there are several reasons why, today, we might not be prepared:

1. You might not be prepared because you have failed to prepare yourself

Why do you continue to follow Jesus?

What does it mean to be a Christian, and why are you one?

Who is this Jesus you follow, and what difference did he make?

What does it mean to have your sins forgiven, and why does that matter?

Why do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

And on and on...

Are you prepared to give an answer to those questions? If not, why not?

2. You might not be prepared because you don't have this hope, so you haven't been asked about it

Do you have this hope?

Can people tell?

How can they tell?

3. You might not be prepared because you are almost always surrounded by people who believe and think, and act like you.

Of course, it's not a bad thing to have a good network of Christian friends, but we should be giving ourselves regular opportunities to befriend those who do not follow Christ as we do.

And when that happens, we must be able to give a reasonable and intelligent statement about this odd hope we hold. We must know what we believe and why. Are you able to do that? This is a great quote by William Barclay:

"Our faith must be a first-hand discovery and not a second-hand story. It is one of the tragedies of the modern situation that there are so many church members who, if they were asked what they believe, could not tell, and who, if they were asked why they believe it, would be equally helpless. Christians must go through the mental and spiritual effort of thinking out their faith, so that they can explain what they believe and why."⁴

We must be prepared to defend why we have hope in seemingly hopeless situations, to give a well-reasoned reply to a question about our peculiar behaviour. Why do you not return evil for evil? When

⁴ — The Letters of James and Peter (The New Daily Study Bible) by William Barclay
<https://a.co/2mpfNF8>

someone verbally assaults you, you're quick with words - you could do the same. Why don't you? When someone harms you for doing good, you're big and strong - why don't you hurt them back?

Gentleness and Respect

So we should be prepared, but how should we prepare? Should we prepare for a verbal confrontation or for a reasonable conversation? Are we training as a boxer or as a conversation partner? Are we preparing for combat or friendly engagement?

Well, make no mistake, there are times for verbal confrontation, for combat, but that is never to be our starting point. We are told in numerous places not to be contentious, and Peter adds clarification to his instruction lest anyone use the command as an opportunity to wield a club. He anticipates that this might be misunderstood as a license to engage in a hostile or aggressive debate or presentation. But no, we are to do so with gentleness and respect.

Gentleness or meekness. Meekness is a "gentle strength," a strength that expresses "power with reserve." This means that when you could overwhelm and pummel someone with your argument, you choose not to. You choose instead to leave the outcome in God's hands to bring about and not in your hands to force. You restrain your dominance.

It's not enough simply to give and answer; HOW you give an answer is equally important. Peter H. Davids points out that "Meekness is a cardinal NT virtue... It indicates an unwillingness to establish one's own justice, to defend oneself, and to attack an opponent, but instead a committing of one's cause to God. So instead of a response that puts down the other person or criticizes the enemy, Peter wishes a gentle, humble explanation in tune with the attitude of Christ."⁵

So we are to exercise gentleness or meekness toward others and respect or reverence before God. If we apply reverent respect for God

⁵ Peter H. Davids, P 132

to our life and speech, humility will flow out of us, and meekness will be evident in our words. But if we do not possess and apply the virtue of meekness, we will not be gentle or respectful, and we are all but guaranteed to veer off into contentiousness. And to be contentious is the opposite of meekness; it is to suppress meekness.

Contentiousness is when you know you **can** overwhelm and pummel people with your argument, and you choose to do exactly that. And when you do this, you do not leave the outcome in God's hands to bring about; you try to force it with your own hand. You attempt to show force in a situation where, in your opinion, God is not showing enough force.

But this should not be so. Our arguments should be carried on, as one writer put it, "in a tone which God can hear with joy."⁶

So...

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

"A good conscience" or a clear conscience means having "the consciousness that your behaviour has been moral." When this is the case, the Christian life is the best affirmation of Christianity. But if we claim to follow Jesus but do not act much like him, we falsify our own claims. Whatever we claim to believe that is not matched by how we live will carry very little weight.

But when your life is in line with your testimony, when we are confident that we have acted morally according to God's standards, then those who oppose us will be put to shame. First, because their slander and accusations will be seen as baseless, and they will be embarrassed. Second, in the coming final judgment, if they do not repent, they will stand condemned and ashamed for their actions.

⁶ Barclay

CONCLUSION

One of the themes of Peter's letter is suffering, and in the recent sections, he has described the various ways and situations in which we might encounter suffering. But even as we encounter suffering and trials and afflictions, and unjust leaders who perform unjust acts, Peter wants us to know that if we have faith in Jesus, *there is no pause button on Christian behaviour*. Regardless of our circumstances, we should act and speak in ways that we can maintain a good conscience so that we are confident that our behaviour has been good and acceptable to God.

How can we do this?

By accepting and applying Peter's commands in these verses:

By having unity of mind, sympathy, familial love, a tender heart and a humble mind

By not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling

By keeping our tongues from evil

By keeping our lips from speaking deceit

By turning from evil and doing good

By seeking and pursuing peace

By not fearing or being troubled

By gently and respectfully making a defence for our hope

Now, you might lack these qualities if your heart and mind do not belong to Jesus, or if they do belong to Jesus but you are in a period of living by your own wisdom and not the wisdom of God. If that's the case, you will lack these qualities, and you will repay evil for evil and reviling for reviling. That will be your reflexive impulse. You will respond out of your flesh and by the Spirit.

However, if you possess those qualities, then your reflex, your impulse, will increasingly be to bless, to seek and pursue peace, and

safeguard the unity in Christ that already exists among those who have been born again to a new hope.

Pressure reveals character. Affliction reveals character. Persecution... Reviling... These all reveal character and show whether or not you will act like Jesus when you encounter what is similar to what he endured. We are called to bless and not curse. Not to respond to evil with evil or to respond to abusive language with abusive language.

And it follows that if we do not bless others, then we will not receive God's blessing. If we repay evil for evil, more evil will come upon us. If we repay reviling with reviling, more reviling will be returned to us by the revilers. But if we bless those who curse us, we set our hearts wide open to receive God's blessing.

In the present state of our society, we can see that hearts have become hard and minds have become proud. Many seem to believe that because evil has been done to them, they are now justified in doing evil. There is rampant reviling—abusive, angry, insulting criticism—and this is sinful. We are supposed to be the opposite of this! We are to give the word of God access to our hearts and minds so that we might be restrained from proceeding with unholy and unrighteous desires. We are to bless when others curse. In fact, we are to consider suffering for righteousness a blessing in itself!

We must always act in ways that our consciences can remain light and clear. We should rather gladly accept suffering than bend the rules of Christian behaviour to avoid it. That doesn't mean we can't or shouldn't speak up at all, but when we do, it should be with gentleness and respect. **"For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil."** (1 Peter 3:17)

Finally

We should strive for peace in our relationships.

We should return blessings when we are reviled.

We should have no fear of those who torment us, nor should we be shaken or disturbed, knowing that Christ is holy and sovereign as our ultimate protector.

When we are treated poorly, we should be filled with a hope that makes people curious, and we should be ready to give an answer for that hope.

We should give that answer with gentleness and respect.

And we should leave vengeance for these acts of cruelty and injustice in God's hands.

We can rest and even rejoice in our suffering when we understand that he is not surprised by anything that happens and that he has promised to preserve us and protect us from eternal harm.

He is faithful, he will surely do it...

Let's pray.

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, a pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit:
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