

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – January 15, 2016

First Letter of Saint Peter

Suffering for Doing Good

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For,

*“Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful speech.*

¹¹ *They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.*

¹² *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

¹³ *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

Outline of 1st Peter

1. **Opening Remarks** (1:1-2)
2. **Dignity of the Christian Life**
 - a. New birth in Christ (1:3-9)
 - b. Testimony of the Prophets (1:10-12)
 - c. Be Holy Yourselves (1:13-2:3)
 - d. Christ the Living Stone (2:4-10)
3. **Duties of the Christian Life**
 - a. Civil duties of the Saints (2:11-17)
 - b. Suffering like Christ (2:18-25)
 - c. Household duties of the Saints (3:1-7)
 - d. Moral duties of the Saints (3:8-12)
4. **Difficulties of Christian Persecution**
 - a. Conduct during Persecution (3:13-22)
 - b. Living for the Last Days (4:1-11)
 - c. Suffering and Christian Glory (4:12-19)
 - d. Shepherds and the Flock (5:1-5)
 - e. Humility and Vigilance (5:6-11)
5. **Closing Benediction**

Be Like-Minded

- 1) We all unconsciously approach Holy Scripture through our unspoken cultural norms and in this way we often unwittingly place boundaries on our interpretation of God's message.
- 2) Our U.S. culture is so centered on the individual that we find it hard to imagine a world in which the individual is subordinate to the family – subordinate to the community. Other cultures are different, and in many eastern cultures the best interest of the family is first, and individual considerations are a distant second.
- 3) Jesus said that we have but one Teacher, and we are all brothers. (Matthew 23:8) In Him we are the body of Christ, and each one of us is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27) In God's family, the well-being of the family is first; individual considerations are subordinate to the well-being of the family.

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- 4) Peter's command to us to be like-minded is a call to place the interest of the community, of our faith family, ahead of our own self-interests. More so, it is a call to develop such spiritual attentiveness that we come to perceive our vested self-interest only through the lens of what is in the best interest of the body of Christ.
- 5) Any self-interest apart from what is best for the community is rooted in pride which is sin.
- 6) Jesus Christ gave His life for the church (Ephesians 5:25) – for the community. As we are joined into His body, into community, we are to lay down our lives for one another.
 - a) It is easier to lay down my life than to lay down my opinion on this matter or that.
 - b) Salvation is easy for us because it cost God so much. We are saved by grace. But exhibiting salvation in my life is difficult. It requires that I yield increasingly to the nature of God in me, yield to the Holy Spirit: my old nature hates every fiber of that and will do everything it can to upset the life of Christ in me.
 - c) "Be faithful to Me," Jesus says, even though the nature of everything around us is to cause us to be unfaithful, including our own pre-incarnate nature, the "old self."
- 7) Peter is saying that we who are in Christ are to share in the same disposition. Within our faculty of perceiving and judging, we are to be concordant, harmonious. Be of one mind. It is a call to unity.
- 8) We cannot enter into like-mindedness unless we possess an attitude of Godly submission – one to another. My "I" must yield to our "we." There is no "I" in team, the saying goes, and Peter instructs that in God's economy the interests of the team must take precedence over the individual.

Do Not Repay Evil with Evil, Insult with Insult

- 1) *Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well."* (Matthew 5:39)
- 2) Peter echoes our Lord's teaching: ⁹ *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*
- 3) Peter's call to unity within our community has two aspects:

Unity When Insulted

- 1) The first relates to how I exhibit the life of Christ when I am victim, or on the receiving end. These verses reveal the humiliation of being a Christian. In the natural realm, if a person doesn't hit back he is a coward. But in the spiritual realm, not hitting back is the very evidence of the life of Jesus Christ in him.
- 2) When I am insulted, not only am I not to resent it, but I am to make it an opportunity to exhibit the life of Christ in me: We cannot imitate this life – we either have that life or we do not.
- 3) The teaching is not "do my duty" but rather "do what is not my duty out of love for Jesus Christ and my neighbor who as just insulted me."
 - a) It is not my duty to go the second mile or to turn the other cheek, but if we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ we will not hesitate to do these things.
 - b) A personal insult becomes an opportunity to reveal the incredible sweetness of the life of Christ in me, but only if that sweetness is already inside of me.
- 4) Once again my natural instincts will rage against this very idea: My tendency is to pout. To feel insulted. To feel wounded by the other not understanding me, or misrepresenting my position, or simply running over top of me. Our natural instincts want to harbor resentment and let it fester like an angry bee-hive.

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- 5) When you and I insist on having our own rights, insist on having our way, we actually hurt the Son of God. When we take the blow ourselves, we prevent Jesus from being hurt. It is what Paul meant when he spoke of "filling up in his flesh what is lacking in the affliction of Christ." (Colossians 1:24) It means being willing to take the blows because we are Christ's own, and Christ took the blows of crucifixion for you and me.
- 6) Peter is telling us never to be disappointed in the lack of righteousness in the other person, but never fail to be righteous ourselves. Never look for justice, but never fail to give it. We cannot do this unless our lives are yielded to the Holy Spirit.

Unity When Insulting

- 1) The second aspect is me as perpetrator – yes, when I am the one who wounds a brother in faith. I am the cause of dis-unity with the body of Christ when I am intolerant of my brother, who is different from me. Although he or she is different, we are nonetheless both woven into Christ's body by grace.
- 2) We do not often consider our intolerance of our brother or sister in Christ as being a cause of dis-unity – of division and strife within our Christian community. Yet discord begins right here.
- 3) Jesus welcomed those who were outcasts or on the margin of accepted social norms of His day. This was more than mere tolerance; Jesus loved them and said that it was for the least, the last and the lost that He became incarnate and was made man. As His followers, we are to exhibit the same grace to those who are different from us.
- 4) When I accept my brother who is different from me and love him as Christ loves me, I exhibit the life of Christ in me: We cannot imitate this life – we either have that life or we do not.
- 5) Paul spoke to these differences. ³ *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.* ⁴ *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,* ⁵ *so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*" (Romans 12:3-5)
- 6) Intolerance is rooted in pride – in thinking of myself more highly than I ought to, as Paul points out.

That You May Inherit a Blessing

- 1) The quotation of from Psalm 34 illustrates that blessings come to those who do what is good and right before the Lord.
- 2) Doing good is often difficult because as a general rule, evil is rewarded immediately, and the reward of doing good is often delayed. We prefer immediate gratification.

When Evil is Paid for Doing Good

- 1) Peter next asks who it is that will harm us if we are eager to do good. But since he lived among men, he could plainly observe that at times evil is paid in exchange for a good.
- 2) Peter says that when we suffer for doing good, we are blessed in these times too. Wait! We are blessed when we suffer various evils, insults and threats on account of our doing good? How can that be?
- 3) Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:10)
- 4) When we suffer for righteousness sake, we are entitled to the blessing promised by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Quoting Isaiah, Peter says *"Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."* (Isaiah 8:12)
 - a) First, the best course is to stay out of harm's way as a general rule by doing good in the first place.

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- b) However, if doing good places us in harm's way and we suffer on account of doing good (i.e. suffering for righteousness sake) we are blessed already. Such suffering is the highest imitation of Christ and proof positive that His life rules in my heart.
- 5) Peter teaches us not to fear their threats. There are three reasons why we need not fear them:
- a) First, to suffer for the cause of a great truth, a good conscience, on account of loving someone who others find intolerable, or any part of our Christian duty is a great honor in God's kingdom.
- i) This kind of suffering contains rich blessings: the spiritual delights are greater than the temporary griefs; the eternal honor before God is greater than the temporary disgrace before man; the gain of spiritual illumination is so much greater than the loss of dignity before man.
- b) Second, as Jesus said, ¹¹ *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.* ¹² *Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* (Matthew 5:11-12)
- 6) Third, Christians have no reason to be afraid of the threats or rage of any of our enemies. Our enemies are God's enemies; His face is against them; His power is above them; they are the objects of His curse, and can do nothing to us except by His permission. Don't allow yourself to be troubled about them. (see the quote from Psalm 34 above) It is up to me, in my faith journey, to make sure that I am a friend of God and not His enemy.
- 7) I am not to fear those who can kill the body, but greatly reverence and fear Him who can destroy body and soul! (Luke 12:4-5)
- a) Isaiah, speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit, said, ¹² *Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.* ³ *The Lord Almighty is the One you are to regard as holy, He is the One you are to fear, He is the One you are to dread.* (Isaiah 8:12-13)
- b) Peter says that when I revere the Lord in my heart (verse 15) I gird myself with hidden interior strength that will be drawn upon during these times.
- c) We sanctify the Lord our God in our hearts when we adore Him with sincere and fervent hearts. We sanctify the Lord our God in our hearts when hold Him in awe and reverence in our thoughts. We sanctify the Lord our God in our hearts when we rely on His power, trust in His faithfulness, submit to His wisdom, imitate His holiness, and give Him the honor due His name.
- d) We sanctify the Lord our God before others when our lives exhibit His power and grace to such an extent that by our example others are invited and encouraged to glorify and honor God.

Always Be Ready to Give an Answer

- 1) Peter notes that when we live our lives in radical submission before God and neighbor, others will take note. It is so completely and utterly different than anything else, that it is literally shocking!
- 2) Choosing the path of suffering for doing good, or bearing insult graciously is pure insanity to those who do not know the love of God as expressed in Jesus Christ our Lord.
- 3) It will generate questions. These others will press us to explain the basis of our hope and joy. It appears to be sheer madness in terms of the expected way – the way of this fallen and sinful world. Always be ready.

Discussion Questions

- 1) I am presently in a circumstance of dis-unity or discord with a brother in Christ? What is my contribution toward it? Am I prepared to submit myself to Christ and my brother?
- 2) In what ways have I experienced God's promised blessing in the midst of suffering for doing good?