

1 Pet 3.8-17 – Be willing to suffer for good and know why you do it Clint Le Page

Imagine you're a Christian in Guinea West Africa, and you live in a small village. The villagers who followed the traditional African religion boycotted the Christian minority, so they'd never speak to you, do business with you, all because you didn't participate in the ritual sacrifices.-----

You were even forced to drink dirty water from dirty streams, because you were refused access to the clean water by the local Muslims.-----

This happened in 2018.

Then Barnabas Fund came and built a new bore, providing fresh clean water for the Christians.

And do you know what those followers of Jesus did?

They provided all their neighbours with water from the bore;(SLIDE)

even the Muslims, who'd refused to give them clean water.-----

This demonstration of love led one village elder to express regret for how badly they'd treated the Christians in his community, and he said, "We never knew that the Christianity we were fighting could be a blessing to our village".-----

Love shown to enemies, those who harm us, is hard; but it is powerful.

My question is, Why? Why would Christians love those who hurt them, why do good when we suffer for it?-----

We're going to think about these things this morning.-----

Remember Peter is writing to Christians, who are strangers and exiles in this world.

Since ch2v12, they and we, have been encouraged to live good lives before the unbelievers around us.

Peter and his recipients were likely in a worsening situation, with increasing hostility to Christians.

And that's like our situation isn't it?

The flow of our culture is making it harder to follow Jesus and be open about what he says.

And the first response when we face suffering is to love n' protect ourselves.

But Peter calls us to something different, to the way of Christ.-----

He's spoken to slaves, to wives and husbands, and now he concludes the section by speaking to everyone - 'Finally, all of you'.

And our first of 3 points is Loving your enemies.(SLIDE)-----

V8 is spoken to Christians and how we should relate to one another.

And it begins with harmony and ends with humility.

All the qualities in v8 are needed in times of disagreement and trial, stress and suffering.---

We are to be like-minded, working for harmony; and show sympathy and compassion to other sufferers.

'Love one another' is literally 'love as brothers'.

In English we have a saying, 'blood is thicker than water', suggesting the special tie which holds a family together is close.

Believers have a similar link, but through blood which is more precious.

By grace we are brothers and sisters in the family of God, bought by Christ's blood.

The tie that binds us in Christian love should be evident, shown in action.-----

Then similar to what was said to slaves in ch2.21-22, Peter again says, don't pay people back evil for evil, insult for insult.

Rather repay people with a blessing.

As we saw a 2 weeks ago, Peter is not ruling out fleeing or taking legal action, but he is saying the Christian must say No to revenge.

And revenge n' getting even is deep rooted in our human hearts isn't it?-----

Yet the way of Christ is to not take revenge, even on persecutors.

To respond to evil with a '**blessing**' means that you speak kindly to them, you wish God's best for them; you pray for them, and seek their highest good.

And that's never easy.----- It's really hard.

So why do this? **Why** bless those who hurt or persecute you?----

V9 'so that you may inherit a blessing'.-----

Because as we've seen, since ch1v4, the blessing we inherit is 'kept in heaven for you'; it's our future eternal salvation.-----

Peter then quotes **Psalm 34**.-----

Originally, loving life and seeing good days meant enjoying a long life on earth.

But for Peter and for us, it now points to the eternal life that awaits us in heaven.

And his point from Ps 34 is, if you want life, don't speak evil, or deceit, v10.

Don't do evil, but do what is good, v11.

Why? **V12**, Because God's eyes, ears, face, will be open to you, not against you.

It's metaphorical language that means those who know God by faith and follow Jesus, obeying his commands, will please the Lord.-----

How can anyone constantly keep rejecting what God says, doing evil, and expect his blessing?-----

Last week in v7 husbands who fail to honour their wives were told God does not hear their prayers.

Now v12 is saying that's true for everyone who does evil.-----

Repentance needs to come first.-----

It's not saying we earn blessing or eternal life by living a righteous life.

But rather those of us saved by God, really want to, and really will live differently;

a new way, God's way; and know his favour.-----

And please understand that Ps 34 was **true of Jesus before** it was true of us.

He always kept his tongue from evil and his lips from deceit.

Jesus always turned away from evil and did good.

He was a peace-maker, and he trusted in God, who heard his prayers.-----

And what happened after he died on the cross, bearing the penalty for our sins?----

He was raised up to life, to experience never-stopping 'good days', in the presence of his Father.-----

Psalm 34 points to Jesus before us, and it can be true for us, only because it was first true for Jesus.-----

He is the supreme example of loving your enemies.

And knowing that blessing is coming to we who trust and follow him, ought to fill us with strength to love our enemies.-----

In what situation or what relationship do you need to turn away from evil and love, by doing good?----- How will you show love?-----

Then Peter speaks about **Suffering for doing good, Point 2**.

V13, 'Who then will harm you if you're devoted to doing what is good?'

His point is, for most people most of the time, if you're zealous n' passionate for doing good, people won't want to harm you.

But Peter knows that's not always the case.

V14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed.

It's possible even probable that we will suffer for doing good.

Righteousness is a synonym for good here.

But why do what's right, when you're going to suffer for it?-----

Again, because you 'are blessed'.

But notice it's experienced now.-----

As Jesus said in **Matt 5.10,(SLIDE)** Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

"You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me.

¹² Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven.

So Peter, with Jesus, is promising heaven awaits.
 But it's not just a promise of future blessing.
 Both Jesus and Peter are pronouncing a blessing – which means God is for you, not against you NOW.-----
 Brothers and sisters this means suffering is not the opposite of blessing.
 God is with you, and he will not leave you.-----
 God's favour rests upon you [11am - as we prayed for Clara earlier]; even when you don't feel it.-----

In **v14**, Peter quotes **Isaiah ch 8v12-13.(SLIDE)**

In Isa 8 God said that even though Assyria was coming to smash Israel, Isaiah was not to fear what others fear, but regard the Lord as holy.-----

Peter then applies what was said of the Lord Almighty, to the Lord Jesus, we're to regard him as holy, as we'll see in v15.-----

But because we're trusting in the Lord, we don't need to fear other people.

We don't need to be afraid of suffering or death.

We don't need to be intimidated, troubled or anxious.-----

I wonder when Peter wrote **v14** if he was remembering his own giving into fear.

Remember how in **Mark 14** Jesus was arrested n' on trial, and just outside, Peter's appearance and accent gave him away.

3 times **Peter denied** that he knew Jesus.

Maybe he had his own spectacular failure on his mind as he wrote.-----

But this also tells us that Peter is not the same person he was.

He has swapped a fear of man for a fear of God.-----

And if you're troubled by your own fear, or anxieties, then remember that if you trust in Jesus, you are not the same person either.-----

Even if you are weighed down by past sins, or held back by fear, remember that Jesus died for you, to forgive your sins and set you free.-----

Remember and believe that he has taken your guilt away, and by faith in Jesus you have the Holy Spirit.-----

As the post-Pentecost Peter was different, so the converted Christian is different.

Empowered by the Spirit, we can choose not to give into fear;

not let fear determine our choices, but trust God and do good.-----

And another reason we can trust God and do good, is because we trust God rules over our life.-----

v17, if you are suffering you can trust that it is **God's will**.-----

He is sovereign over your suffering.

Jesus's suffering, v18, was God's will.

And God's will, is that we be like Jesus, believing God will achieve his good purposes through our suffering.-----

So let's trust that God will achieve his good purposes through it. -----

Dietrich **Bonhoeffer(SLIDE)** was 22 when he started serving as a pastor.

With Hitler's rise to power in Germany many in the church wanted to conform to Nazi ideology.

And most of the church remained silent about the persecution of German Jews.

Bonhoeffer was an exception, while still preaching love for his enemies.-----

He joined the Secret Service, but his travel allowed him to help Jews escape Nazi oppression - we'd call that doing much good.-----

He was arrested in 1943 and spent 2 years in prison, and pastored people there.

He spent his last months in a concentration camp and was hanged in 1945.

Dying with hope he wrote, 'This is the end. For me, the beginning of life'.-----

A camp doctor who witnessed Bonhoeffer's hanging later described the scene:

"The prisoners ... were taken from their cells, and the verdicts... read out to them. Through the half-open door... I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on

the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer.

At the place of execution, he again said a prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued in a few seconds.

In the almost 50 years that I have worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."-----

What a wonderful example for us.-----

If you are suffering for doing what's right or good, whether at home, or school, or work, remember you are blessed.-----

We may suffer for doing good, but my **third point is**, this gives you an opportunity for **Sharing your hope.(SLIDE)**-----

Peter said, if you're suffering for doing good, don't be afraid or intimidated, but **v15**, 'in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you'.-----

We regard Christ the Lord as holy, literally we sanctify him, set him apart as holy, when we take time to think about Jesus' greatness, goodness, holiness;

and feel AWE (like Woowww!)

We set apart Christ as holy when we recognize his lordship and confess he is God, when in our hearts we devote ourselves to live for him, in our actions and words.----

And it is our response in words the Peter focuses on.

We are to be 'ready at any time' to give a answer to anyone who asks us for a reason for our hope.-----

This is not a direct call to evangelism, but I ask, how can anyone know the reason for our hope if they don't know we have **hope**, that Jesus has given us a hope of future new life and heaven?-----

In 2019 Melbourne Baptist pastor, **Murray Campbell** wrote these words,

'During the course of 2019, I have observed a growing sense of hopelessness being felt and expressed by people across the globe, especially among teenagers.**(SLIDE)**

Climate change, political agendas and social uncertainties are cultivating anxiety and despair. It is spilling over from social media and into our schools and onto our streets.'-----

How much more have people felt hopelessness through the covid pandemic of the last 2 years?-----Murr

Murray wrote, 'There is something particularly disturbing about witnessing a generation lose hope—but some perspective is in order. This is scarcely the first generation with reason to be anxious.

The children of the last century had to contend with the trauma of the world wars; the Great Depression; the cold war with its continual threat of nuclear apocalypse... Millennials are not the first generation to face enormous life-changing obstacles.

[And] It is time to revisit the person of Jesus Christ—for most Australians now, it is time to get to know him for the very first time...**(SLIDE)** Here is a person in whom we can rest our hope... He came into a hostile world and to a people without hope. He demonstrated his divinity in the most powerful and loving ways. He chose to take a road to crucifixion. He was raised to life on the third day. He has ascended to heaven. He will hold the nations to account. He will hold all of us to account. He

brings hope and healing, peace and reconciliation... Even today there are millions of millennials turning to Jesus—discovering in his gospel a hope they cannot find anywhere else.

End quote.

Our Christian hope is life-changing and transforming, and attractive, especially to suffering people.-----

And Peter's first hearers knew suffering too.

Drawing details from 1 Peter together, in commentator **Paul Barnett's** words, 'Initially the former friends of these converts [Peter wrote to] found it strange that they had discontinued their drinking binges and accompanying sexual activities [4.3-4]. Next these ex-friends have begun to spread evil rumours about them [2.12-13] and to insult them in public [3.9,16]). Finally it would appear these enemies are bringing accusations against the believers in the courts.'

In **v15**, the word 'defense' is court room language.

And that may be us one day soon.

But as another writer put it, 'could we say we are "on trial" for Jesus every day, as we live as Christians in a pagan [and secular] society.'-----

People must know that we have hope if they are to ask hope why we have hope.

What might that look like for you practically?(SLIDE)

I think it's being ready and prepared for questions like [we heard in the kids talk]:

Why don't you get even with that person?

Why are you a Christian?

How can you be sure you're going to heaven?-----

Why do you go to church?

Why are you different?-----

How can you smile or be thankful, in your cancer treatment?

Or in those covid restrictions?

Or when you lose your job for not compromising on doing what's right, or for being open about your Christian views?-----

Think through now, what you could say, so you're prepared.-----

And consider how you could speak of how Jesus died to forgive your rejection of God, he rose to give you new life, life forever, and it changes everything for you.----

Because Jesus we know this world and this life is NOT all there is.

It will not last forever. The new creation is coming.

Jesus gives hope.

Can people see that in you?-----

Do you want to tell them why you have hope?-----

Pray for opportunities to speak, and faithfulness to Jesus in what you say.-----

And when we speak, **v16**, it's to be with **gentleness**, not with pride, smugness, n' superiority.

Not with fightin' words; but with a humble attitude, and gentle words.-----

We're also to respond with 'reverence'; the word is literally fear.

And in the light of v14 it doesn't mean fear of people, but fear of God;

a deep awe-filled respect for God.

When we do that, we'll want to live and speak in a way the honours the God who made us & saved us.

That means living in a way where we want to keep a **clear conscience**.-----

All people are born with some sense of right and wrong, with God's moral law written on their hearts (Rom 2.15).

And the conscience is that inner voice or feeling that tells you when you've done something right, or wrong.-----

On the one hand, when we receive the forgiveness Christ offers we experience our guilty conscience cleansed (Heb 9.14).

Then we are to 'keep a clear conscience', by doing good.-----

If you have a tender conscience or a convicted conscience, come again to Jesus, trust in him, remember the cross he bore for you, and be thankful.-----

And this clean conscience of a justified sinner frees us to witness & testify to Jesus.

So v16, when you do good but are accused of doing wrong, you can have the peace of a clear conscience.-----

The point is, as we look to share our hope and the Jesus reason for our hope, live a life of good works, which back up the power of the Gospel to change lives.-----

Yes, we're not perfect, and let's be the first in our friendship circle or workplace to admit we're not perfect; the first to apologise when we're wrong.

But let's strive for humility and integrity and goodness, from the heart.-----

The Christian bumper sticker may say, "**Christians are not perfect, just forgiven**", (**SLIDE**) and that is true.

However, the Lord who forgives us also makes us new, so that by grace we show the reality of Christ's salvation in a life of good deeds, love and hope.

Our life and our words are to bear testimony to Jesus.-----

Does that make sense?-----

Our good deeds should give us opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus, not bring shame to Jesus.

So as I conclude, sometimes we will suffer for doing good, or that day will come.

Where people spread lies about us, falsely accuse us, and make us suffer.

But we don't need to fear them, we are people of hope(**SLIDE**)

Even when we suffer for doing good we are blessed, we have the chance to point people to Jesus.

So be ready to speak of why you're a Christian, why he gives you hope, why he's worth trusting and living for.-----

Let's pray