

Navigating to Bless

Navigating a Post-Christian Culture Series, February 4 & 5, 2023 | 1 Peter 3:1-22
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How do we navigate a post-Christian world that sometimes doesn't like Christians?

Last week we began exploring the answer to that question.

Last week, I pointed you back to **1 Peter 2:12** where Peter writes:

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

I told you that Peter's argument there was that we should give the critics no reasons to criticize.

We give people no reason to despise us but reasons to respect us, even if they don't agree with us or like us. It was like a thesis statement.

This week, Peter takes that thought one step further as we turn to 1 Peter chapter 3.

Peter continues to tell us more about how we can avoid giving critics reasons to criticize us.

However, we also discover Peter's point. We are not just staying hidden. As disciples of Jesus, we are also living lives that speak compellingly to the citizens of the kingdoms of this world about the value of being citizens of the Kingdom of God.

So, this week I'd like to give you four pieces of encouragement from 1 Peter 3 for navigating a post-Christian world that sometimes doesn't like Christians.

#1: You can build a home that blesses people.

You can build a home that blesses people by creating the right environment.

In **1 Peter 3:1-2**, Peter tells wives to be respectful of their husbands:

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

I would love to tell you a lot about Roman households and Roman expectations on women.

However, what you really need to know is that Christianity upended those expectations. Christians understood that women and wives were people of value, sisters in Christ!

Peter surprisingly addresses wives directly, rather than talking to husbands about their wives.

Peter told wives to cultivate an environment of harmony and respect in their homes by submitting to their husbands.

Of course, Peter wasn't just writing to Christian wives in the first century. He was writing to us, and he helps us to see that an environment that blesses everyone starts with respect.

What is the alternative to what Peter is suggesting? It's an environment of strife and conflict. If everyone in a home is seeking to have their own way, then that is going to lead to conflict.

Peter recognizes that homes have leaders, husbands are called to lead, and submitting to that leadership is a way to create an environment of respect.

Peter is not setting up a house where men always get their way, nor is he allowing an atmosphere of abuse. However, he is saying that a home filled with respect is a home that blesses the people who live there and speaks loudly to the world around us.

You can build a home that blesses people by choosing the right values.

Peter addresses the puzzle of the values we choose in **1 Peter 3:3-4**:

Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.

The women of Peter’s time were caught in a puzzle. Having jewels, wearing them, having elaborate clothes, and showing them off were all signs of wealth and status.

At the same time, all of those things also spoke to having loose morals!

So, Roman women were expected to dress modestly in public.

It’s a conundrum people in every era can understand, and it gets to the heart of what we value and where we get our value from.

Peter was telling women in particular (although this teaching applies to everyone) to be careful about where our value comes from. It doesn’t come from our stuff. It doesn’t come from our appearance. It doesn’t even come from what other people think about us.

As Christians, our value comes from God’s creating us, loving us, and redeeming us.

That value comes out in our character, not our stuff.

Valuing ourselves rightly, getting our value from the right places, and having right values all build a home that blesses those living in it and those watching it.

You can build a home that blesses people by selecting role models who really inspire.

In **1 Peter 3:5-6**, Peter calls wives specifically to select right role models:

For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

In Peter’s non-Christian world and in our post-Christian world, we are inundated with bad role models, people whose lives are driven by non-Christian beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Peter told the Christian women and wives reading this letter to be careful about the role models they select. Are their role models Christian women of noble character?

The same should be said to all of us.

Who are the role models you choose to emulate? You will tend to become like the people you admire. If you admire flashy, brash, loud, arrogant, worldly people, then you will become like them. If you choose godly, Christian people as your role models, then you will become like them as well. That choice strongly influences the kind of homes we build.

We can build homes that bless those in them and those outside of them when we choose godly, Christian role models to imitate.

You can build a home that blesses people by acquiring skills, rather than living on autopilot.

Essentially in **1 Peter 3:7**, Peter tells husbands to use their brains:

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Peter switches to address husbands. The theme has not changed. The theme is still how we can live lives that avoid evil and speak to the broader world.

For husbands, Peter says that their basic temptation is to be on autopilot.

Peter warned husbands that if they implement the models that have been handed to them by their culture, then they are going to do some very unwise, ungodly things.

The same thing can be said to us today! If we accept the post-Christian picture of a family, then we are going to build homes that are too busy, too materialistic, too conflicted, too unstable, and too self-centered.

Instead, Peter told Christian husbands (and all of us) to think. Put our brains in gear.

Think about and study how to be a good husband, how to love a wife and family well.

We can build homes that bless those who live in them and bless those around us.

This is a big responsibility that intimidates me!

Peter is saying that we can build homes that bless the people who live in them.

By building homes that are godly and bless the people who live in them, we are building homes that become beacons to the people around us.

That's a big responsibility to me, one that frankly intimidates me.

It's why I don't use Christian bumper stickers. I like the Christian fish symbol, and for years I thought about putting a fish on my car, but I don't because I'm not a great driver all the time.

I don't want to make a mistake driving and have someone see the fish on my car and think, "There goes one of those Christians."

And the same is true of my home and family.

We are not perfect, and I am intimidated by the thought that people would look at us and that our home would be the only picture they get of what a Christian home and family look like.

And yet, I know that it's true. And the job calls to me. It makes me want to be a better husband and father, and it makes me want to build a more godly, Christian home.

#2: You can bless people in the post-Christian world.

First, in 1 Peter 3:8, Peter reminds us that life inside the church should be a blessing.

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

Peter told us that unless the disciples who make up the Church are blessing one another, then we can never bless the world around us. If we can't love one another in the Kingdom of God, how can we love the citizens of the kingdoms of this world?

His first instruction is to love one another.

Then in 1 Peter 3:9-12, Peter puts a stake in the ground for blessing people outside the church.

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. For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let

him keep 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 prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

This is the heart of the matter for Peter.

He knew that people were living in a world filled with non-Christians. He knew that they would oppose us and even dislike us, or worse. How would we respond?

We can respond by returning evil for evil, but if we act like the enemy, we become the enemy.

Instead, Peter knew that the only way to respond to a world that opposes us and doesn't like us or worse would be to bless that world. That's the Jesus way!

Here at Valley, we equip people to live what we call the BLESS lifestyle.

The BLESS lifestyle is a personal outreach strategy.

It's a way that we can all reach out to non-Christian neighbors where we live, work, and play.

For us, BLESS is an acronym. B stands for "begin with prayer." L stands for "listen with care." The letter E reminds us to "eat together." The first S stands for "serve people," and the second S stands for "share your story." It's a lifestyle.

I strongly encourage you to consider adopting the BLESS lifestyle. It's what we do.

Peter's challenge here is even more straightforward and simple.

Peter is challenging us simply to bless people.

To bless means that we improve their condition by our words, actions, or gifts.

A blessing is something that's given, not something that is deserved.

Here, Peter reminds us, God is commanding us to bless people around us.

I'm challenging you today to choose to bless one person this week. Will you do that?

We can bless people in the post-Christian world.

#3: You can even bless people who oppose you.

Peter tells us this in 1 Peter 3:13-17:

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 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, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Peter knew that some people would oppose Christians.

Peter wasn't naïve or gullible. Peter saw the way people had opposed Jesus. Peter knew the kinds of opposition that his readers experienced; it's why he wrote this letter!

Most of the time when we do good, we get good outcomes.

However, sometimes we experience opposition and consequences ~~sometimes~~ when we do good, when we say things that are true and good, and even when we think and believe things that are good but out of step with what everyone else thinks.

Opposition takes many forms.

Peter recognized that how we deal with opposition comes down to a question of fear.

Whom will we fear?

Will we fear people who cause us to suffer for doing good? Or will we fear God?

In verse 14, Peter tells us not to fear people who can make us suffer now.

Instead, Peter wants us to love, respect, and live for God.

Consequently, Peter directed us to defend the hope within us.

Peter knew that there would be times when the world will push ungodly values and beliefs, make ungodly statements, and encourage or demand ungodly behaviors.

That happens to us in a post-Christian world with increasing frequency.

Will we do what the world demands, or will we do what God commands?

The choice is obvious. We do what God commands.

We can never disobey God in order to fit in or avoid consequences. Even our loyalty to and our submission to the government are tempered by the fact that we must obey God first.

If government, company, family, or friend command us to disobey God, we must instead obey God and disobey the kingdoms of this world.

We must be prepared to live ~~it~~ out the hope we have in Jesus Christ, demonstrate it, and explain it. We must be prepared to defend it.

Peter just told us to defend that hope winsomely.

We can defend the hope within us arrogantly or gently, in ways that pull people toward the Kingdom of God or push them away.

Peter tells us to use gentleness and respect.

We avoid using the tools of the kingdoms of this world like reviling and slander.

Jesus showed us by his own example that what Peter is telling us is right.

We can even bless those who oppose us if we speak and behave winsomely.

#4: You can bless people because Jesus supplies everything we need.

Peter assured us that Jesus does supply everything we need in 1 Peter 3:18-22:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through

the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

This passage may be one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament to interpret.

In Greek, it's filled with difficult vocabulary and grammar.

Consequently, this passage has been interpreted in many different ways through the centuries.

Rather than telling you what we don't know about this passage, I'm going to tell you what we do know because it's important to what Peter is calling us to do.

You can bless people because Jesus is victorious.

In verse 18 we read that Jesus died and rose again. That's what Peter means when he writes that Jesus was put to death in the flesh and made alive in the spirit. He died and rose again.

Then we have a mysterious statement about Jesus proclaiming to spirits in prison.

This is a reference to Genesis 6 where we read that some angels rebelled against God, came to earth, and sinned by mating with human females. This is all part of the great wickedness on earth leading up to the great flood.

The flood wiped away evil on earth, and God apparently imprisoned those angelic beings until final judgment comes.

In his resurrection, Jesus has proven that he is victorious over the worst that evil can do to him.

In the history of creation, angelic rebellion is the greatest, most potent evil. Satan himself and all demons are the result of angelic rebellion. Jesus' proclamation, then, is to those angelic beings in prison, awaiting final judgment that Jesus is victorious over the worst evil can do.

That's good news to Christians facing evil. You can bless people (even those who oppose you) because Jesus is victorious over evil.

You can bless people because you are saved, and being saved brings expectations.

As Peter continues, he addressed the flood and Noah.

Peter said that God saved Noah through the flood. He saved Noah and his family by wiping away the evil that threatened Noah and his descendants and by keeping them alive in the ark.

Then Peter argued that baptism was kind of like the flood. Baptism is a picture of Jesus' death and resurrection. When a person is baptized, that person goes under the water as a way to say that they believe that Jesus died; then the person is brought up out of the water to say that they believe that Jesus rose again from the dead. Then the person being baptized is saying, "I too am dead to my old life and alive like Christ to my new life."

Through baptism, we proclaim that we are saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

When we proclaim that we are saved, we are committing to living new lives.

Peter is reminding us that being saved comes with expectations that we live new lives. We live holy lives of obedience to God, AND we bless the people around us.

We can bless the people around us because being saved comes with expectations.

You can bless people because Jesus is Lord.

Peter marks three important events from Jesus' life in this passage.

Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sin.

Then he rose from the dead, victorious over sin, death, and evil.

Now Jesus has ascended to the right hand of God the Father, and every angelic power (even the evil ones), every authority (in heaven and on earth), and every power (including bad emperors) answers to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

What does that mean? It means that we can do this!

We can build homes that bless the people in them and the people around us.

We can bless people in the post-Christian world.

We can bless even the people who oppose us.

We can do it all because Jesus has given us everything we need.

So, as we navigate the post-Christian world, let's bless people.