

Lesson 20 – 1 Peter:

II. Believers' conduct in everyday circumstances	2:11 – 5:11
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1) Suffering for Righteousness Sake: 3:13-17:

“Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats. Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!”

Suffering for doing what is right evokes two responses for the Christian:

1. Reverence toward the Lord (toward Christ as Lord);
2. Readiness to answer for one's hope in a gentle and respectful way.

In this world, it is always possible that Christians may have to suffer for righteousness' sake (because we are aligned with Christ). This could God's will for our lives. When it is, we should not regard this suffering as a privilege. In these kinds of circumstances, we should maintain true heart reverence for Jesus Christ as Lord and be ready to declare our Christian hope. We should take care not to do anything that deserves suffering, don't be evildoers, but by our conscientious and consistent good behavior and conduct put those who would malign or attack us to shame.

v. 13 – “Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good?” Peter starts this section by pointing out that if Christians are living as they ought to, the likelihood of suffering is small. The peaceful and quiet life of obedience is generally free from the opposition of men. So, Peter asserts that if you are pursuing righteousness, who is likely to mistreat you. Certainly, magistrates and

judges, if they are doing their duty, exist to support and not persecute those who do well. See 1 Peter 2:14 – “or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.”

Yet, in its context, and as a challenge to Christians, this question could have deeper implications. Peter goes on to speak of the possibility of suffering on account of righteousness and is doing so, he was reiterating the teaching of Jesus, who warned His disciples that they might be persecuted for righteousness' sake. See Matthew 5:10-12 and compare with 2 Timothy 3:12:

Matthew 5:10-12 - “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.”

2 Timothy 3:12 – “Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

So, we cannot say that Christians will be free from opposition and its consequent hardships. What Peter asks is, “who is he that will harm you?” The Greek verb “kakoun” may mean not only mean ‘to ill-treat’ or ‘to distress’ but also, which is appropriate here, to damage through such ill-treatment. This verb is used in Acts 7:6 – “God also told him that his descendants would live in a foreign land, where they would be oppressed as slaves for 400 years.” And in Acts 12:1 – “About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church.”

So, in its context the question may mean, ‘No matter what physical suffering or material hardship you may have to encounter, who can do you any real evil if you are actively doing good?’ Those who seek to do good, as the quotation from Psalms 34 confirms, have God to watch over them. God can be counted on in His righteousness not only to answer their cry for help, but also to set His face against evildoers. How then can anyone do them evil, if God Himself is active to help them, and to oppose the evildoer?

v. 14 – “But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t worry or be afraid of their threats.” The Greek underlying “but and if you suffer” expresses a remote possibility, that is. “even if you should suffer.” Peter asserts that any who then suffer for ‘righteousness’ sake are happy (Greek –

Blessed). This reiterates Jesus's explicit teaching in Matthew 5:10-12 – “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.”

It is paradoxical that the exact opposite of men's natural opinion and reaction, to be happy. To be ‘happy’ in this sense does not mean to ‘feel delighted’ but to be ‘highly privileged’, we are the objects of divine favor. By contrast, when men have to suffer, their natural reaction is not only to feel unhappy, but also to regard themselves as underprivileged, unfairly treated, and objects of God's neglect or ill-treatment.

“So don't worry or be afraid of their threats.” – more literally means “fear not their fear,” – either the fear which they experience or the fear which they instill. Peter here follows some of the phrases and ideas of Isaiah 8:12 and 13. “Don't call everything a conspiracy, like they do and don't live in dread of what frightens them. Make the Lord of Heaven's Armies holy in your life. He is the one you should fear. He is the one who should make you tremble.”

So, Peter is saying that we should not share their fear, not be afraid. The ‘fear’ used here could be used to describe religious reverence. In that case, it is a plea not to apostatize, in a day of peril and panic not to worship other gods to which many are turning, but quietly to reverence Jehovah and take refuge in Him. Peter, knows that some of those he is writing to, could be under pressure to join in Emperor worship or to revert to heathen idolatry.

The exhortation that Peter gives in verse 15 is to reverence Christ as Lord, and not to hesitate, when asked, to confess your Christian hope. But on the other hand, Isaiah 8:12 may simply mean – “Do not share their fear; do not join in the general panic. So, Peter here may mean not to fear the evildoer, and do not let them alarm you. In either case, Peter gives the additional exhortation “don't worry or be afraid of their threats.” The King James version says, “Neither be troubled.”

v. 15 – “Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. In the Greek the reading “Christ” instead of God is preferred because Jesus is the Christ. He is the one who suffered to provide redemption, so He is worshipped as God. The order of the words in the Greek, beginning “Kurion de” suggest that “Lord” should be given predicative force, meaning, as the KJV and NKJV says “to sanctify the Lord

God in your hearts” – consecrate, set apart the Lord in our hearts! We must worship Him as the Lord of our life.

Take note of the sanctuary in which Christ is to be acknowledged as holy and worshipped – it is the human heart! This language may suggest that due to persecution, joining in a meeting place might be impossible. So, Christians are instructed and encouraged that no matter what the circumstances are, we are to be in communion with Christ by realizing His indwelling Presence and by maintaining our inner heart reverence toward Him. This also reminds us of the inner, personal and spiritual character of all true Christian worship. Christ has promised to manifest His Presence, not in building, nor in connection with visible material objects, but with His people, in their hearts and in their midst. See Matthew 18:20 – “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” See Matthew 28:20 – “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.”

Some think that the phrase “And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it” implies that there was official persecution of Christians and that Christians were having to face interrogation at a formal trial. The Greek words for ‘be ready’ means to give an apology, explanation, or speech in defense. Yet, the phraseology suggests something which might be called for at any time in even the most informal and spontaneous manner. Not just in a formal defense. The verb “aitein” suggest ordinary conversation rather than an official enquiry. The words “always be ready” makes the reference to be general and comprehensive, not just in a legal defense.

Christians must remember that anybody at any time may ask us to explain and justify his Christian testimony. Peter here gives us some practical guidance concerning Christian witness. Scholars suggest that we should not always be preaching at people but rather be ready when the other person asks about your faith in Christ. We should be alert to discern questions in conversations and be ready to share. We are to share in a logical or reasoned explanation of our hope in Christ, but not in an aggressive manner. We are to share with meekness, without arrogance or self-assertion. We are to be respectful! The spirit of our words may matter with some more than the content of our words. If we offend then they will not properly hear our testimony of Christ.

Some scholars suggested that Peter may have had in mind his own failure when he denied the Lord. He was unexpectedly asked by an unfamiliar person in an unusual place in a passing way and he was not ready with his answer, and he did not speak with meekness or with reverence.

v. 16 – “But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.” This verse is similar to chapter 2:12 – “Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.” By conscientiously maintaining consistent good conduct, Christians, may put their detractors, slanderers, persecutors to shame by their virtuous behavior. If we do not maintain good behavior, we endanger our own faith relationship. When people speak against us, our good conduct will “shame down” or “put to shame” them to the point to silence them from reviling on us.

v. 17 – “Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!” Should God will, it is better to suffer for doing good than to suffer for doing wrong or evil. When evil doers suffer, they are experiencing the consequences of their wrongdoing. Something they deserve, a result of judgment. But when well-doers suffer, their suffering is not a true moral consequence of their own well-doing, even though it may be their good actions that have provoked men to mistreat them. If the righteous God, who has established moral order in creation, not only allows well-doers to suffer, but Himself wills that they should, it must be for some good reason and purpose. God must intend that some profit or benefit should come out of it, for His own glory, for other’s good, or the personal good of the sufferer. This thinking brings Peter to thought of the supreme example of such worthwhile suffering, the example that he himself was taught by Christ and the Spirit – the suffering of Christ who suffered at men’s hands when Himself righteous and for well-doing, and He suffered according to the will of God, and for the benefit of all mankind.