

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

How to Cope in a Hostile World

1 Peter 3:13-17

Part Two

Let us read 1 Pet. 3:13-17 “**And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? (14) But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, (15) but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; (16) and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (17) for it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.**”

The epistle of First Peter was written so that believers might know how to righteously respond in the midst of persecution. The section of Scripture we have just read is certainly once again addressing this particular theme.

I know that many of you at this point in your Christian walk may not feel that you are suffering persecution on any significant level. However, though this may be true at this point in time for whatever the reasons, we should not assume that this would continue. In **John 15:18-19** Jesus makes it clear that because of our relationship with Him the world can become a very cruel place as a result of the world’s hatred of Christ. As I shared with you last week we are in effect sitting on a powder keg which could explode at any time.

How are we going to cope with this situation acceptably? What needs to be true of our lives if we are going to be able to effectively cope in a hostile world?

WE NEED TO HAVE A PASSION TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT

Let us read **V. 13** “**And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?**” This is a rhetorical question and assumes that the answer will be “No one.”

We are living in a hostile world. We are therefore sitting on a powder keg that could explode into persecution at any time. But if we would “**prove zealous for what is good,**” the flame of potential persecution has a very good chance of being quenched.

Is this an absolute guarantee? Will we in fact be assured that we will not suffer persecution if we prove zealous for what is good? The answer is no! This leads us to the second thing that needs to be true of our lives if we are going to effectively cope in a hostile world.

WE NEED TO HAVE AN OPENNESS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF SUFFERING

Let us again go back to the passage, but this time let us now read **V. 14**, “**But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled.**”

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If we would prove ourselves zealous for what is good, certainly the hostility that the world may express toward us would be diminished but not eliminated. This is important for us to know in order that we would not be surprised when we in fact experience persecution.

The reason why hostility will not be eliminated is for the simple fact that the zealous pursuit of that which is good does not only produce a life filled with good works which ministers to many of the worlds felt needs but it also produces a life filled with light.

When the light of our life and of our message exposes sin invariably there will be the very possibility of hostility being felt or expressed toward us.

Christians who are zealous for what is good are in fact carrying a “double edged sword” that cuts both ways. But even knowing this to be a possibility we are not to fear their intimidation or to be troubled by them.

WHAT ELSE NEEDS TO BE TRUE OF OUR LIVES? NOT ONLY DO WE NEED TO COMMIT OURSELVES TO THE ZEALOUS PURSUIT OF THAT WHICH IS GOOD; NOT ONLY DO WE NEED TO HAVE AN OPENNESS TO THE POSSIBILITY OF SUFFERING BUT.

WE NEED TO HAVE A PROPER RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

Let us now look at **V. 15**, “**But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.**” Rather than fearing the potential hostility that might be directed toward us by others as we zealously pursue that which is good we are to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts.

What does this mean to “**sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts?**” The word translated “sanctify” comes from the root which means “set apart.” When we “**sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts,**” we are in effect making Him the Lord of our lives.

To break the throttling grip of fear we must confess Christ’s Lordship with more than mental assent. We must confess it with our heart. Setting him apart as Lord means bowing before him in complete and full adoration.

A praising heart is immune to the fear of other people. Fear of another sort takes possession of our hearts and mind: a fear that does not flee in terror, but draws near in awe and worship.

Let me read for you **Isaiah 8:12-13**, “**You are not to say, It is a conspiracy! In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. (13) It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread.**” Does this passage seem familiar to you? This is the very passage that Peter is alluding to in **1 Pet. 3:14-15**.

Are you afraid of being baptized? Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. Are you afraid of joining Evangelism Explosion and sharing Christ with people who do not know? Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. Are you afraid of sharing with your family members?

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Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. Are you afraid to confront a Christian friend with their sin? Sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart. Let all our earthly fears fade away in light of our growing fear of the Lord and our desire to please Him alone.

But someone may say that this response to Christ was to be reserved according to **Is. 8:12-13** for the Lord of Hosts alone! This is an excellent point and therefore what must our conclusion be? Our conclusion must be that Peter believed that Jesus was “The Lord of Hosts.”

In sanctifying Christ as Lord in our hearts we are in fact giving testimony to our belief that Christ as God is the only one who has the supreme right to control our lives and therefore must yield all of our fears and apprehensions.

If we are going to effectively cope in a hostile world, we need to be zealous for that which is good, We need to have an openness to suffering and we also need to have a proper relationship with Jesus. **WHAT ELSE DO WE NEED?**

WE NEED TO BE READY TO GIVE ANSWERS

Let us look again at **V. 15**, “**But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.**” Our devotion to Christ should not only inspire us to sanctify Christ as Lord but also to prepare ourselves to respond to those who would challenge our hope.

When the passage speaks of hope it is in essence speaking of our faith. But it is speaking of faith as it looks to the future. Stephen, full of faith preached the gospel boldly and when the multitude rose up to stone him we see that same faith transform itself from boldness into confident expectation or hope when he lifted his eyes to the heavens and called on the Lord Jesus to “**receive his spirit.**”

In Evangelism Explosion we are taught to ask people the question, “If you were to die today would you be absolutely sure that you would go to heaven?” Most people that we ask do not have any confidence at all. This is in remarkable contrast to those who understand the person and work of Christ and who have placed their faith and trust in Him alone for their salvation. Their faith in Jesus expresses itself in confident assurance of future glory.

As we are presenting the gospel to people it is inevitable that they will call us to defend this hope. Paul was going throughout the world proclaiming the gospel. That Jesus Christ was the Son of God that He came to this earth taking on a human form, was crucified for our sins and was buried but arose again on the third day. The particular point of the gospel message that particularly incited hostility frequently was Paul’s declaration of the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection, of course, validated all that Jesus said about Himself and his atoning work on the cross. So the resurrection was particularly separated out for attack. We see this attack upon Paul and his message in **Acts 26**. Paul is before King Agrippa and he is now given the opportunity to defend His hope, and he does so with power and with authority. And so effectively that in **V. 28** King Agrippa said, “**In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.**”

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Can you defend the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you? Hopefully you are. But if you are not, then you need to get about doing so. It begins by you clearly understanding what you believe. This can be very effectively done by becoming a part of our Evangelism Explosion program. After going through this training you will be much better able to isolate the areas of further training.

The passage goes on to explain the manner in which we should carry on our defense. Look again at the passage. We are to conduct this defense, “**Always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.**” These are interesting words. If we are not thoroughly grounded in our own faith it may be very tempting to seek to overpower an opponent with the force of human personality or aggressiveness. If we are well grounded in our faith we may be condescending in our responses to individuals who are challenging our faith and our hopes. We must avoid both of these possible scenarios. What else needs to be true of our lives?

WE NEED TO HAVE A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

Not only must we realize in a hostile world that our message can be attacked but we can be also.

Repeatedly in the O.J. Simpson trial you can see this taking place. A witness will take the stand with a particular message, but in order to undermine the power of their testimony what do the attorneys do? They attack the messenger. They in effect are trying to destroy the power of their message by assailing the character of the messenger. Does this approach in fact work? And I believe that there can be very little doubt of this.

Let us read **VV. 16-17 “And keep a clear conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (17) For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”**

When we boldly and courageously share the good news with people, in order to remove the heat off themselves they can very easily turn, if not on the message then on us the messenger. The assaults upon us can be very harsh. The passage itself alerts us to the fact that those potential assaults can be slanderous.

What do we do if placed in that situation? We patiently hang in there and we continue to be zealous for that which is good. Why? So that “**those who revile our good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.**” Peter was confident that the readers rational defense in expounding their position combined with their commitment to righteousness would have an impact on their enemies, so that they “may be ashamed of their slander.” When might this take place? We saw this stated in **1 Pet. 2:12 “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”** We concluded that the day of visitation is the day that the Lord enters their hearts and lives.

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When would this take place? We don't know, but we are to continue keeping on with this hopeful anticipation. With this in mind Peter concludes the passage with this very succinct statement, **“For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”**

We live in a hostile world. We are in fact sitting on a powder keg. How are we to live in order to effectively cope with this situation?

We need to have a zealotry for doing what is right.

We need to have an openness to suffering.

We need to have a right relation with Christ.

We need to be prepared to give a defense for our hope.

We need to have a clear conscience.