**Responding to Bullies**

**I Peter 3:13-18**

In his book Fuzzy Memories, Jack Handey writes: There used to be this bully who would demand my lunch money every day. Since I was smaller, I would give it to him. Then I decided to fight back. I started taking karate lessons. But then the karate lesson guy said I had to start paying him five dollars a lesson. So I just went back to paying the bully.

Maybe you remember your bully in school or next door. Just the mere mention of his or her name conjures up images of fear. You break out in a sweat and begin to look over your shoulder to make sure you’re not being followed. Mine was Johnny Hawley. It was 6th grade. We had moved up to Camp and began attending the school in Fairview. I don’t know what it was that set him against me but he had it in for me, egged on by his friends. Maybe I inadvertently took his favorite spot in the lunch room. Maybe he didn’t like that I was faster. Who knows but it culminated in a wrestling match at recess. The rest is a blur.

No one likes a bully but all too often we give into them. According to Wikipedia bullying is the use of force or coercion to abuse or intimidate others. The behavior can be habitual and involve an imbalance of social or physical power. It can include verbal harassment or threat, physical assault or coercion and may be directed repeatedly towards particular victims, perhaps on grounds of race, religion, gender, sexuality or ability.

Most bullying is not physical, but in other ways it still shoves, pushes, punches, intimidates and humiliates. It’s often social, like spreading rumors and lies about another through spoken or written words through electronic media. They aren’t just in the classroom or on the playground. They can be a neighbor, even a family member or a boss or co-worker.

Peter faced bullies. Our passage helps us know how

to respond to them. Over the years since Christ’s ascension, the demeanor of the rough fisherman had changed, softened because of Christ. We read in Acts about some of his episodes where he was intimidated for preaching about Christ. On more than one occasion there was verbal attack and arrest by the religious bullies of the day. They beat him and tried to force him to stop preaching, but he wouldn’t and didn’t. Years later as he is writing his first epistle, he may have been reflecting on those early days of the church and the problems religious bullies gave him. Rome itself had grown intolerant of Christianity.

Turn with me to **I Peter 3:13-18**. Today we complete our short series on the church with a look at the impact that we can have even among those who would bully us.

There is a personal petition.

There is a prepared position.

There is a perfect plan.

1. **THERE IS A PERSONAL PETITION –**

**v. 13-14**

Peter begins with a question about benevolence.

1. **A Question About Benevolence – v. 13**

**“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?”**

It’s a legitimate question to be sure. It seems crazy to think that someone would want to bring harm to someone else who only wants to show some kindness to others. Peter is suggesting that the individual has lived a life filled with generosity toward others. He has demonstrated kindness, thoughtfulness and unselfishness and he has done so with zeal or eagerness. He has been very intentional and enthusiastic about his acts of benevolence.

There’s an old saying that says “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.” It means exactly what it says. You shouldn’t seek to hurt someone who is trying to help you. As a general rule, people are not harmed for acts of kindness.

Sometimes though, a person may be reluctant to show kindness because they may fear that some reprisal will be brought against them. Unfortunately good deeds can be taken the wrong way. The recipient may feel manipulated in some way, that the person is expecting something in return for the kind gesture or that there is some ulterior motive.

It was during the reign of David when the king of the Ammonites died. **II Samuel 10** records that David desired to show kindness to the grieving family by sending a delegation to Ammon. It states that the king of Ammon had shown David kindness in some way. The account continues by noting that the advisors to the new king, Hanun, counseled with the king and told him that the delegation from David wasn’t sent to console him in his time of grief but instead to spy out the land. They took the delegation and humiliated them and sent them back to David. It was a defiant act against David so he sent his army to attack and defeat the Ammonites. His kindness had been spurned.

When you read the question posed by Peter it seems to be rhetorical. Would anyone really want to hurt someone who only wants to show kindness? In answer to his question he quotes the prophet Isaiah.

1. **A Quote About Benevolence – v. 14**

Having spent some time discussing various relationships between masters and servants and husbands and wives he now turns to suffering. Many of his readers had been dispersed to these regions as a result of suffering. Suffering is something his recipients had experienced. In **1:1** he describes them as **“strangers in the world, scattered throughout…”**

**1:6-7**

**4:12 -19**

**5:8-10**

Though it seems to be the rule of thumb that you shouldn’t suffer on account of doing good deeds, yet as we see in these passages we shouldn’t be surprised at suffering because Satan, our enemy wants to bring harm to us. There will be times when we suffer for the sake of righteousness. There will be times when we suffer for doing, even living right.

Peter says **“even if you should suffer.”** In the Greek, this is a conditional clause that makes the possibility of suffering remote. It’s possible but not probable, but Peter continues that even if you should suffer, it brings a special blessing.

**Matthew 5:10-12 –** our reward is great and we are just like the OT prophets who also suffered.

**I Peter 2:20-21**

The individual who suffers should feel highly blessed or highly privileged. Why should the suffering believer feel blessed? Isn’t suffering at the hand of someone else intended to make the person suffer? It’s supposed to hurt. Here’s where the quote from Isaiah comes in. **“Do not fear what they fear; do no be frightened.”**

Literally read it would say **“Do not fear their fear.”** Simply put, don’t be afraid of their threats.

**Isaiah 8:11-17**

The setting of Isaiah’s words is that King Ahaz of Judah was being pressured by the kings of Israel and Syria to join them in fighting against the armies of Assyria. What they didn’t know is that King Ahaz had secretly made an alliance with the king of Assyria to fight against Israel and Syria. Isaiah had come in the name of the Lord to warn King Ahaz that this alliance was ungodly. Instead of being fearful on the one hand because of threats from other nations and trusting in the power of man he should instead trust in the power of God.

When bullies come along and want to inflict harm on us we are tempted to give in to our fears when facing the crisis. We only further embolden them to come back and knock us around for our “milk money.” Don’t be troubled by their threats. The word troubled is a word which means to be agitated or stirred up. Your washing machine most likely has what’s called an agitator that churns up the water and the clothes so that the clothes get clean. Peter is telling us not to be agitated by threats because there is no certainty that trouble will come, but if it does, don’t be afraid of them.

Like Isaiah, Peter is saying that when you put your trust in the Lord, there isn’t anything to fear. The Psalmist tells us not to fear what man can do to us. Don’t be afraid of them. Don’t be intimidated by them. Don’t be afraid of someone who can hurt the body. Instead be afraid of the One who can hurt the soul, who has the destiny of the soul in His hands.

When we are not afraid, we will be blessed. How will we be blessed?

**I Peter 4:14 “If you are insulted because of the**

**name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory of God rests on you.”**

**I Peter 5:10 “And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”**

**James 1:2-4 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete (whole), not lacking anything.”**

**II Corinthians 4:16-18 “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweigh them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”**

**Revelation 2:10 “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

How are we blessed when we suffer for the sake of righteousness?

We have the Spirit of God resting on us.

We will be strengthened and restored by the Lord.

We will develop perseverance to the end, building our faith and becoming spiritually mature.

We will receive eternal glory.

We will be given the crown of life.

So don’t fear their fear. **“Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.”**

The Psalmist has written **“The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”**

It is a personal petition to stand strong in the face of suffering, to remember, as Paul wrote to the Romans, that nothing can separate us from God’s love **(Romans 8:28-39).** Everything happens for a reason according to the divine plan of God for our good so that we can become like Christ in character.

There is a personal petition – don’t fear

There is a prepared position.

1. **THERE IS A PREPARED POSITION –**

**v. 15-17**

Scripture reveals a number of blessings that are ours when we experience suffering. Some are immediate and some are eternal. Some we receive now. Some we will receive in heaven. Regardless of when we receive these blessings how should we respond and why? Our passage reminds us that we need to be prepared for such occasions. When we suffer for Christ how should we respond and to receive those blessings.

The first is to reverence Christ.

The second is to respond for Christ.

The third is to show respect through Christ.

1. **Reverence Christ – v. 15a**

Instead of becoming fearful because of threats, we are to **“set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts.”**

You need to understand that the Greek word for “**set apart”** from which we get our word **“sanctify”** is the same word that Jesus uses when He begins what we have come to know as the Lord’s Prayer. **“Our Father, who art in Heaven, *hallowed* be Thy name.”** (Emphasis added)

The word **“hallowed”** comes from the same Greek construction or root as **“sanctify”** and means to be holy, to purify, to consecrate or to venerate. What Peter is asking his hearers to do is to revere, worship or show honor to Christ. We do so by putting him on the throne of our heart, by making Him Lord. Notice that Peter uses two names to describe the Lord. He first calls him Christ. It is the word for Messiah, the One the Jews were looking for who would redeem them, who would save them. The second term is Lord, or master. Jesus must be both Savior and Master in our lives. How do we honor Christ? How do we set Him apart? We honor Him when we submit to His rule and authority over our lives by abdicating the throne of our heart and giving Him complete control. This is an inner commitment to Him out of love for Him.

The great preacher of the 18th century, Alexander MacLaren once wrote “you cannot love Him too much, but you can love Him too little.”

When He is over our heart as King we will then have peace in times of suffering. Only when this occurs will we not be afraid of those who would seek to bring harm to us. We overcome this fear by having Christ on the throne and as the head.

Warren Wiersbe writes “What does it mean to “sanctify Christ as Lord” in your hearts? It means to turn everything over to Him, and to live only to please Him. It means to fear displeasing Him rather than fear what men might do to us. It combines **Matthew 6:33** and **Romans 12:1-2** in a daily attitude of faith that obeys God’s Word in spite of consequences. It means being satisfied with nothing less than the will of God in our lives.”

**(John 4:31-34)**

We honor Christ in our daily actions remembering that it is through our actions that same may come to know Christ as Savior or will be kept from Christ.

We honor Christ in our words remembering to reverence His holy name and not use it casually or take it in vain.

We honor Christ by giving Him first place. He is to have the primary place of worship. He is to be the object of our affection and adoration and obedience even in the middle of the storms of suffering.

Again from the pen of Alexander MacLaren “”With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm.” Whether or not our heart is troubled or calm in the pit of suffering depends on if Christ is set apart in the heart.

Reverence Christ.

When we show reverence to Christ it will be much easier to respond for Christ.

1. **Respond for Christ – v. 15b**

There is a need to constantly be prepared to share Christ through times of suffering. The word **“answer”** in the Greek is our English word apology. Peter is not suggesting that we must apologize for gospel or for sharing the gospel. Rather the word means to answer back, to give a defense. It was a legal term used in a court setting when a lawyer talked his client down from the charges preferred against him.

We are to defend against the charges brought against the Bible. We are to defend the faith. We call it apologetics. We are to give a reason for the hope we have in Christ in spite of suffering. It’s the same word Paul used when he spoke in defense of his testimony to the angry mob when he was in Jerusalem at the time of his arrest (**Acts 22:1**). The word itself also implies that our defense is both skillful and intelligent. In Athens every citizen was expected to be able to intelligently join in any discussion on the affairs of the state.

Our answer, our witness is done both through consistent and Christ like character as well as skillful conversation. It was Francis of Assisi who is credited with saying “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words.”

That’s why I’m so eager to have this course on Becoming a Contagious Christian. Here’s a brief description. It is “designed to equip believers for effective evangelism by showing them how they can share the gospel in a natural and powerful way while being the person God made them to be.”

Our response for Christ must be in a way that shows respect for others.

1. **Show Respect Through Christ – v. 15c-16**

Peter offers some advice when we are in those situations of defending our faith on how to respond. We should never come across as argumentative or arrogant with an “I’m better than you” attitude. Instead, Peter suggests that when we give a defense it should be done with gentleness and respect. After all, we want the gospel to be attractive, so don’t let the manner in which you answer in defense be a repellent. Repellents are for mosquitos. Our answer should always be in love and never in a condescending or disrespectful way.

We saw last week from **I Peter 2:12** that one of the best defenses for the gospel is our actions. **“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”**

Peter suggests in today’s passage that we should strive to keep a clear conscience. That was Paul’s goal when in testimony before Felix he said **“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” (Acts 24:16)**

Peter is saying that even if someone insults you or slanders you, they won’t have any incriminating evidence because it will be clear both by your actions and motives. It must have irked Daniel’s fellow administrators something terrible when they couldn’t find any incriminating evidence to convict him before King Darius. So they trumped up some false charges, but his conscience was clear.

Peter suggests too that because you have a clear conscience they will feel ashamed for what they have done in falsely accusing you.

Our conscience is the internal judge that witnesses to us whether or not our actions are right or wrong. That’s what Paul says happens to us even when we don’t have the law. Our conscience either convicts us or defends us.

Think of your conscience as a window to your soul. When we seek to keep the conscience clean it is like a window pane that we can easily see out of. Continuing to sin though only seeks to make the window pane dirtier so that it becomes more difficult to see the light of truth. Confession is the Windex that acknowledges the truth and seeks to restore the transparency of the soul to the truth of God’s Word and the illumination of the Spirit.

By continuing to sin we can defile our conscience.

We can sear our conscience so that we are no longer sensitive to right and wrong **(I Timothy 4:2).**

A further erosion of the conscience creates in us an evil conscience so that what is wrong we actually think is right and what is right we actually thing is wrong.

Isaiah spoke against such people when he wrote **“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.” (5:20)**

Having a clear conscience depends on how much light of God’s truth, His Word, you allow to enter in. The more you study His Word, the more your conscience can discern between right and wrong.

A good conscience encourages doing right.

A good conscience gives peace in the heart while an uneasy conscience divides the heart and drains strength from us and we become an easy target for attack or easily give in to sin.

A good conscience removes fear of what others might say or do to us because we know their attacks are unfounded.

A good conscience is transparent and authentic and is the standard of our conscience to help us determine right and wrong should be God’s Word. The conscience is not the lamp, but rather the skylight that lets the light in.

A good conscience frees from guilt and criticism.

Peter wants us to understand that a strong Christian comes from a good conscience and a good conscience makes for a great witness.

So when we respond in answer to their accusations keep this in mind:

Peter is not saying that we need to be ready to answer every religious question that some might ask. Remember, when Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees to try and trap Him in His words He sometimes answered their question with a question of His own.

The point Peter is making is to always be ready to give a reason for the hope you have in Christ. Explain the basis of your hope. Have confidence in that hope. Respond with respect and a clear conscience.

Reverence Christ.

Respond for Christ.

Show respect through Christ.

There is a personal petition.

There is a prepared position.

There is a perfect plan.

1. **THERE IS A PERFECT PLAN – v. 18**

To sum up his discussion about suffering and how we should respond, Peter provides the perfect example in Christ. Christ’s suffering should stir us on to endurance, to keep going.

**Hebrews 12:1-3**

When you’re tempted to throw a little pity party because of the suffering you may be enduring, think about what Christ endured on your behalf and the purpose He went through it.

We see His sacrifice.

We see His substitution.

We see his service.

1. **We See His Sacrifice**

**“For Christ died for sins once for all”**

His suffering has an eternal benefit. He died for sins. It was a one time deal. He would never have to go through it again. He didn’t swoon into unconsciousness for a brief time. He didn’t fall asleep while it was all going on. He died. You understand that the Bible according to **Romans 3:23**, says that the penalty of sin is death. Christ died for sins – not His own, but yours and mine. He sacrificed Himself so that we wouldn’t have to experience spiritual death, separation from God.

The Old Testament law required that the sacrifice for sin was to be perfect, without blemish. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear though that the sacrifice of animals was only a picture because their blood could never atone for sin, it could never satisfy the demands of a holy God. Only Jesus, the sinless One could. He was our sacrifice.

**Hebrews 9:26b-28 “But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.”**

Not only do we see Christ as our sacrifice, we also see Him as our substitute.

1. **We See His Substitution**

**“the righteous for the unrighteous”**

Simply put, a substitute is someone who takes the place of another. In school we have substitute teachers. In baseball the person may be called a pinch runner or a pinch hitter, but he is still a substitute.

Christ became our substitute. Taking the place we rightly deserved. The sinless One (**I Peter 2:22**) took on our sin. The innocent died on behalf of the guilty.

**I Peter 2:24 “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have bee healed.”**

I recently read about Charles Colson, known as the hatchet man under President Nixon’s administration. After Watergate had uncovered deceit and crimes, he along with other of Nixon’s cabinet served time in prison. Colson was the only one remaining in prison when an event occurred in his family that was devastating. Throughout his internment several men regularly met with him to study the Bible. When they heard the news of what happened in Colson’s family they all petitioned the court to serve out the remaining days of his sentence so that he could be with his family. It was that night that Colson surrendered his life to Christ. Their willingness to be his substitute showed him how Christ became his substitute for sin.

Christ took on our sentence for our freedom.

We see His sacrifice.

We see His substitution.

We see His service.

1. **We See His Service**

**“to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.”**

That He brought us to God means that He led us into God’s presence through His atoning sacrifice. In our sinful condition, we cannot be in God’s presence. Through our faith in His substitutionary sacrifice we have been declared righteous by God. He no longer sees our sin. We are no longer His enemy. Led by Christ we can now enter into God’s presence boldly, without fear or reprisal. We see clearly the purpose of His substitutionary sacrifice. It is for reconciliation between us and God.

Through our faith in Him we have all been brought into His church, the body of Christ, united by the Holy Spirit who indwells us. When we consider our suffering, keep in mind what Christ endured so that we could have eternal life and then persevere, stand fast, hold on, keep going. There are plenty of bullies in the world, but it may just be that through your suffering that bully may come to know the same Christ who also died for them.