

Women's Bible Study

1Peter 3:13-14, October 26th, 2022

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Starting with the beginning of this chapter, we have gone from the command to submit to authority in a general sense and in more specific areas. Placing ourselves under the authority of another, helps in the purpose of working together well for the advancement of the Gospel and encouragement of the body of believers. Verses 8-12 have reminded us to pursue righteousness with the promise that God hears our prayers. Now we turn to the reality of living in an imperfect world and the strife that is present between those who seek to follow God through His grace, and those who are living for themselves.

1Peter 3:13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

Reading the above verse is a reminder. We should never be more concerned with people liking us or agreeing with us, than we are with holy living and sharing God's truths.

Right off the bat, we clearly see the struggle! We want others to like us. We feel good when others agree with us. We do not enjoy being ridiculed and rejected. So, we avoid these situations and sometimes even try to hide our true identity in Christ. **Do you ever choose to be a little less than honest because you fear the response you will get? Have you ever decided to go along with something you know is not quite right, in order to avoid conflict? Do these things matter?**

Peter's words were an encouragement to those who had believed in Jesus and now found themselves ostracized. This verse follows the promise in verse 12 that God will protect His children and hear their prayers. *Not only are the eyes of the Lord toward the righteous, and His ears attentive to their prayer* in verse 12, the text in verse 13 reads, **who is there to harm you?** This is a rhetorical question with an obvious answer – **NO ONE**. So we are given another reason to follow righteousness even though it may be difficult at times.

No real lasting harm can happen to those who are true Christians. This is a promise! Even physical death will not change your eternal reward in Heaven. Your salvation is secure.

Psalm 56:11 In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Psalm 118:6 The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?

The fear of man is a battle for us. If it were not, there would be no need for God to address it in His word. **In what ways do you see the intimidation of others affect your decisions?**

Ultimately, God will prevail, His truths will go forward, His strength is over all peoples and things. This is not a promise for security from evil and unrighteousness in

the world, but a promise that as we strive to live according to God's truths, He will use us for His purpose. Eventually, all God's children will be vindicated. We have a reminder that regardless how others respond to us, whether positive or negative; or how difficult it may be to live for Christ; we have a purpose and a focus. God will take care of the details if we seek to remain faithful to Him.

Psalm 37:3-6 Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday.

Proverbs 15:9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves one who pursues righteousness.

Perhaps you have seen others turn against you simply because you would not join in with a certain behavior or lifestyle. People like to keep the company of those who make them feel good about themselves. When sin is exposed, they become uncomfortable and often feel the need to justify behavior by gathering others on 'their side'. Most individuals are uncomfortable being singled out for any reason. It is true that Christians will be persecuted and even suffer. Why? Because they stand out from the crowd! Sometimes, it may look as though dishonesty and corruption prevail, but God remains faithful to His promises. Read with me what David wrote in Psalm 38.

Psalm 38:19 But my enemies are vigorous and strong, and many are those who hate me wrongfully. And those who repay evil for good, they oppose me, because I follow what is good.

In many cases, when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord – when they truly seek to live righteously in thought, word, and action towards others in all circumstances, – it will be increasingly difficult for someone to act against them. *"In this case none could do them real harm; and this inoffensive, upright, and benevolent conduct, would generally in time disarm the enmity of their neighbors"*, Thomas Scott. The quote from this commentary holds some truth.

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. *KJV*

There is a good application for us to live as pleasing to the Lord. A life of integrity can silence false accusations. Have you noticed that when you answer in kindness to a harsh word from someone, they lose their fight? There is not much satisfaction in having a verbal altercation by yourself! This causes me to remember a scripture in Proverbs –

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

We must seek to keep our focus on God. He has a perfect plan and will prevail. He will use His children and all circumstances for His glory. Do not give others a reason to convict you of wrongdoing. **How can you apply this in your life? Think of your attitude, your words, your actions, and your motivations – are you desiring to honor God in all areas?**

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Consider what it means to 'prove zealous for what is good'. I'm studying from the *NASB*; other translations read 'if you are followers of that which is good'. Think of this phrase as **a continued following of imitating Christ**. I actually like the word zealous because it conveys an active enthusiasm to follow the example we have in Jesus. **Think!** Jesus lived a perfect life on earth, even while being tempted as a Man. He never sinned, never returned an evil word or act. Even on the cross, He asked for forgiveness towards those who were persecuting Him. Christ did not come to the Earth for Himself; He came to fulfill the will of His Father. We were not created for our own good pleasure; we were created for God's pleasure, His purpose, and His glory.

Revelation 4:11 "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

1Thessalonians 5:15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

3John 1:11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil has not seen God.

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Who are you living for?

Think about your goals; what is your focus for each day? If you are living for accolades from men, you will be sorely disappointed. Even in the Christian community, serving often goes without notice. As a believer, your treasures are in Heaven and in pleasing the One who has redeemed your soul.

Are you willing to prove yourself zealous for what is good, no matter the consequence?

Consider if your decisions are swayed by pleasing others rather than pleasing God. There may be a 'cost' to being a believer. Are you willing to 'pay the price' in your relationships, in your family, the workforce, your community?

Do you trust that regardless of how others might receive your message, you are secure in Christ?

We are to be zealous for what is good. We can have an active interest and enthusiasm for many things. Our concentration, however, needs to be on what is good – God alone, and His example, "*if ye imitate Him who is supremely good*", *Doddridge*. I pray we are less concerned about what might befall us when we speak and act in God's Truths, and more concerned about the blessings and encouragement we can share, trusting completely upon His protection of our soul.

Moving forward to 1Peter 3:14. The early church at the time of Peter's writing was subject to harsh treatment because it was different and opposed what had been widely accepted. This caused unrest, criticism, disruption, and persecution.

Consider this vivid picture. We have over a dozen chickens. When one of them looks different or even acts different than the rest, it is subject to being pecked on by the other chickens. Its presence disrupts the flock simply because it does not conform. Then as one chicken sees another being bullied, it follows the behavior until there is a division called a pecking order. The underdogs, or underchickens in this case, become pensive and stay in the background. We call this 'fowl' play 😊. Obviously, chickens do not have the capacity to think like humans yet their actions towards change and the threat perceived gives us a bit of a snapshot of human behaviors. Think of someone who talks different, dresses different, or looks different. Sometimes, being different causes ridicule or even harm. This is unfortunate but true.

The Jews had been given the Law, they sought to follow it, and were convinced that as God's chosen people, they had it all together and were superior to others. The Gentiles were happily entrenched in their idolatrous practices which gave them the freedom to live without regulation. Now, from both groups, a movement had emerged which accepted neither of these former lifestyles. You can imagine the threat to leadership, position, and power in what had already been established.

Being a Christian in our culture today, holds little to no sense of suffering. It is simply melded with the hundreds of other 'beliefs' people have adapted to themselves. Even so, the reality of living in a world ruled by sin will inevitably lead to suffering as righteousness is pursued. Suffering and persecution may not be life-threatening in your particular circumstance, however, living for Christ will cause you to stand out. It must! Because the pursuits of the world do not agree with the pursuit of holiness. We must be consistent in our loyalty towards God.

If we are blending in, then we are blundering in our witness for Jesus.

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.

"Be ye true and steady in all that ye affirm or deny: not inconstantly varying in what ye speak; lest, through falsehood and unfaithfulness, ye fall into just condemnation", Hall's Explication of Hard Texts.

How would your family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors, describe you? Would they use the word Christian, or Believer, or follower of Christ, in their explanation? Would they say you love Jesus above all else?

1Peter 3:14 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,

That we *will* suffer for the sake of righteousness is implied –

Matthew 5:10-11 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

1Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

So when you do suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Blessed means happy, fortunate, well-off, or even supremely blessed. Grasping this truth puts a different spin on difficulties! Not that every bump in the road can be claimed as suffering for Christ; often we cause our own troubles. But when we are mistreated directly because of the truths we believe and the faith we have in Jesus, it proves we belong to Him and that we are living for Him. In this assurance we are blessed!

- We are blessed because we have confirmation of our right standing with Christ.
- We are blessed because no matter the difficulties on earth, we can look forward with certainty to treasures in Heaven.
- We are blessed because we know God is working out His plan for mankind, and we have been called to be part of that plan, and His plan is perfect.
- We are blessed because we are secure in His care and protection.

2Corinthians 4:17-18 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Next, we read an encouragement quoted from the Old Testament, 'do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled'. Once again, let's be reminded of the context in which this was written. The Apostle Peter was writing to encourage the dispersed Christians to keep moving forward in the truths which had been revealed to them even though they suffered because of their transformed lives.

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. "It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread.

This encouragement of moving forward in truth is easily applied to modern-day believers. Think of all the things that allow you to be distracted from what is truly important. Our natural desires cause us to want to fit in, to be liked, to be comfortable, and to have positive experiences. We avoid trouble, criticism, and the thought of being different. Others around us may become easily bothered by the injustices they see in their communities, government, and the world. They may feel that a personal call to action is necessary to right these wrongs. And when you do not jump on their bandwagon, you may be ridiculed, or ostracized, for not caring about their passions.

So how do we *not* succumb to fear and intimidation? How do we not feel troubled?

I can be caught off-guard; I forget that I am to *expect* those who do not know Christ to think I am different and perhaps a bit weird. I sometimes allow myself to be surprised that others may not think the same. I need to be reminded consistently of who I am in Christ and remember my mission in Him is to share His gospel to those who are unsaved, and to encourage those who are like-minded. I need to fight the temptation of wanting to be accepted by everyone. The reality is that I should not be intimidated by those who disagree with God's word. God shall be our fear; God shall be our dread.

Matthew 10:28 "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Luke 12:4 "I say to you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

Pray for a heart of humility – remembering we are saved only because of God's grace, nothing we have done or deserve;

Pray for true compassion for those who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior – their end is eternal suffering;

Pray for gentleness and boldness in sharing the truth of God's love for all mankind and His coming judgement of all who refuse Him.

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

Let's read our text again. 1Peter 3:14 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,

Troubled means to be stirred-up, or agitated. Most of us know others who are easily angered; perhaps even you struggle with this. These are the individuals we typically avoid because they are ready to explode at any moment. We tip-toe around them for fear that something will set them off!

Think! What often causes an individual to become agitated? Things don't work the way they think they should; people don't respond the way they want them to; they become anxious when they remember they are not in control, or they have made an error, or caused a problem; there doesn't seem to be enough time to accomplish what is expected, etc., etc., etc. You can probably pinpoint several situations where you lose the ability to remain calm and peaceful in your soul. 1Peter 3:14 is clear, it says we are not to be troubled. Remember, this was specifically written to those Christians who were being persecuted because of their faith. Most of us will never experience a direct threat to our physical body as a result of our faith. It seems then, our concerns are but a mere trifle in comparison, and the test to remain at peace and trust God in all things should be easy. But we are weak, and our sin nature produces a challenge for us. God is gracious to give us the solution to our negative responses.

“... the Gospel gives the believer a heart assured of God's favor, and therefore unruffled, amidst all adversities. Not only be not afraid, but be not even agitated”, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary.

“If we are true Christians, we have really no reason to be alarmed in view of anything that can happen to us. God is our protector, and he is abundantly able to vanquish all our foes; to uphold us in all our trials; to conduct us through the valley of death, and to bring us to heaven”, Albert Barnes' NT Commentary.

“A most certain counsel in afflictions, be they never so terrible, to be of a steady mind and to stand fast. But how shall we attain to it? If we sanctify God in our minds and hearts, that is to say, if we rest upon him as one that is almighty that loves mankind, that is good and true indeed”, 1599 Geneva Bible Notes.

Consider Isaiah 8:13 again. If we are truly God's children, then we know He is mightier than any foe, He is supreme above all forces from without and within, He is our perfect peace and protection, He is holy and righteous in all His ways, He is merciful and extends forgiveness to those who love Him. There is absolutely no fear in any difficulty **if we fear Him**. God always knows better, always acts in pure holiness, He is stronger than any foe, sees every situation perfectly clear, understands each heart motivation, and holds all in His hands for His glory.

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? – No one.

If you do suffer for the sake of righteousness, consider it a blessing.

There is no reason to fear intimidation; nor are you to become agitated.

How will you apply these truths?