

Sermon – 1 PETER 3:8-17, Leroy Coote 7th March 2021

Doing things from a position of strength and sticking to the plan are good qualities to have. If you do something from a position of strength, then that thing you do is more likely to have an impact. Not only that, sticking to the plan means that in time, whatever plan you have, ends up being completed and ends up best in the end.

These two concepts appear in our reading from 1 Peter 3 today. In fact, they are going to be the headings that I follow through this passage.

- What is our position of strength from verses 8-12
- What is the effect of sticking to the plan including a definition of what the plan is from verses 13-17?

By the end of today, what will become clear is the need for gospel stickability as Christians...and boy do we need it in the world that we live in at the moment.

So let us start from our position of strength. Our position of strength comes from doing good works that express that God has saved us.

This concept also acts as the context for our passage today. The reason we need the context is because of the word “finally” at the beginning of verse 8. The appearance of the word “finally” at this point seems rather strange doesn’t it, especially given that it appears halfway through the book. Normally, we would expect to see the word “finally” towards the end of the book. However, there is another reason that the word “finally” could appear. That reason being that it is finishing off a section of a book. This is the case here today as this part is finishing off the section of the book that started at Chapter 2 verse 11 based on submission to God and the authorities. And this section is addressed to the group of people known as of “all of you”.

In light of what I have just said, who is in the category of “all of you”? Based on the context of this passage, those in the category of “all of you” includes: yourselves from chapter 2:13, slaves from chapter 2:18 and husbands and wives from chapter 3:1-7 – in essence – everyone that Peter is writing to. Given that we these “final instructions” are effectively written to all recipients of this letter; what do these instructions contain?

To start with they contain five character traits found at the end of verse 8. These character traits are:

- be like-minded
- be sympathetic
- love one another
- be compassionate
- be humble.

Now on their own, they are great traits. But also on their own, they are open to a lot of interpretation of what is humble or even the standard of humble. Someone reading it on their own could interpret it as society’s view of humble or even their own view. However, that is not the case. There is a standard that drives how like-minded, sympathetic, loving, compassionate and humble we are

supposed to be. That standard is God's and what's more, it is God that sets the standard as to how we should display these five characteristics which were so perfectly modelled for us by Jesus Christ.

Why is this so? This comes from right at the start of the book because:

- It is because of God that we are saved.
- It is because of God through Jesus that we have hope.
- It is because of the sanctifying work of the Spirit that points us to do the things of God.

In response to what the Trinitarian God has done, we are called to be holy which means living lives that please him as measured by the word of God.

We are also called to submit to the authorities that he places over us. This includes government and our bosses. This means that when we are like-minded, sympathetic, loving, and compassionate and humble, we do it God's way as Christians. And we do it as a response to God saving us and choosing us to be his. The litmus test of holiness as expressed in one of these five forms is whether a person acknowledges that they have received these from us. Why? Because as a response to God saving us through the death and resurrection of his Son and by the sanctification of the Spirit, we are called to live holy lives and these five things mentioned are a part of each and every one of us living holy lives and being in submission to our Lord. This is also applicable when we encounter a difficult situation with anybody who perpetrates an evil act against you. If it is an act that breaks the law, by all means go to the police. However, the key is to show God's love as visibly as possible so that the people who are around see God through you. And this is counter-cultural.

Look at verse 9 with me, *"⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."*

It is the naturally human thing to return evil with evil. But God calls his people to go against human nature. This is mentioned in the second part of verse 9 which says, "On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." This is consistent with Matthew 5 when Jesus says this,

"⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

This is very contextual for 1 Peter because the situation the believers find themselves in is one of hostility towards them through people in the lands that they find themselves in not knowing what Christianity is all about. The scenario is similar here in our country now. We need to display holiness God's way in such a way that people see it and want to ask why we live holy lives.

One recent example stands out for me that you may recall from the news. There was a family who lost three children and a cousin to a car accident from a reckless driver. Their response to him from what we saw was not rage but forgiveness. That was a response that depicted holiness but what was significant was the amazing public reaction based on the question of, "How could you forgive the person that killed your children?" Their answer was that God wanted me too. This is holiness in action because others are positively impacted. Do our acts of holiness impact others? That is what God call us to do. But why should we do this?

Look at verses 10-12, *¹⁰ For “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

This quote from Psalm 34 encourages the people that he is writing to, to be transformed into holiness. Holiness is about loving life, as mentioned in verse 10. Believers in Christ love life because of what God has done for them in choosing them to be one of his people even though we don't realise that we have been chosen until we have actually accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. But we also see good days because of what our good God has done for us. As a result, we must keep our tongue from evil and our lips from deceitful speech such as gossip and slander, This is one of the rare mentions of speech in 1 Peter as there has been an emphasis up to this point of holy living and action. After all, we are often told that actions speak louder than words and to a point, this is where the believers Peter is writing to will be most effective as they are trying to promote the Christian faith with their lives.

But the people are not to just keep their tongues from evil but their whole lives from evil and do good. Doing good means doing good by God's standards as that is the context of the book. This includes seeking peace and pursuing it which is especially prevalent in societies that do not understand the Christian way of life. This is because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, also known as the chosen. God is watching his people and the face (or the whole person of the Lord) is against those who do evil. Therefore, the position of strength of the believer is holy living that impacts all we come into contact with.

That is effective Christianity whereby non-believers are impacted by the holy lives of the believers. May we all partake in holy living as measured by God's standards with God's help.

Given our position of strength is holy living – God's way - how do we stick to holy living God's way in a situation of exile where there is hostility towards Christianity? We find this in the second part of our reading for today – verses 13-17.

Peter starts this section with what on the surface of it looks like a rhetorical question. Listen to what he says,

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?”

Whilst there is a sense that physical harm could be possible, behind this line I believe is that because God has chosen you he will protect you as that is what he promises. We know this from 1 Peter 1:5 when we are told that through faith, we are shielded by God's power. Not only are we not going to be harmed for doing good but if we suffer for doing the right thing, then we will be blessed as mentioned in verse 14. This is the reward for sticking to the Christian faith – God will protect us and help us withstand any persecution for living holy lives or being faithful to God and expressing our faithfulness to Him in word and in action.

And because we are blessed, we should not fear the threats of those authority figures mentioned earlier and nor should we be frightened as mentioned in verse 14. But why should we not fear their threats or be frightened? Because in our hearts we should be revering Christ as Lord. Fear often strikes at the core of our being. The core of our being is the heart. However, if we are revering Christ as Lord in our heart then we should not fear because of the promise earlier that God will protect us. God's protection is not about harm from the authorities but is about God depositing himself in our

hearts so that we do not stray from his great and glorious protection. And that my friends, is something that we can hold very close to our heart if we are believers in Christ. That is a good thing isn't it?

However, these holy lives that we are leading may cause others to ask questions about them. How should we respond? Back then, they didn't have the "ask the Vicar" line, so this is how they were to respond. Listen to verse 15.

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,"

We need to be prepared to give an answer for our holy living which includes giving a reason for the hope you have in Christ. This is where we speak out about our faith: which is in response to people seeing our faith in action. In essence, this is an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with one of those who have asked you about your faith. I hope and pray that we are able to share the gospel of Christ with anybody we meet. Each of us who are believers needs to be able to explain the Christian faith to anybody who asks as that is the essence of the verse at this point in time. As we open up more as a church, I am more than happy to run more courses throughout the year on what the gospel is and sharing your faith as I believe these are core to our growth as Christians. If you are interested in me running a course around the end of May or in early June, then please let me know. However, we need to do this with gentleness and respect as that was the way people spoke to each other then and now. It is also about valuing the person who asked you for an answer and showing them that they are important.

Really, we need to be brave in this circumstance but also confident that we are able to share our faith to other people when asked. (Pause) Not only do we do this with gentleness and respect, we also need to keep a clear conscience. Another term for clear conscience is a "level-head" which I believe captures the essence of that section much better. But the reason for the clear conscience is so that we know how to best react to those *who speak maliciously against the believer's good behaviour*. When you have a clear conscience, then you will resist the temptation to bite back at the slanderer and be more able to continue in holy living that creates a faithful testimony to what God has done in your life. Holy living is also God's will and human nature which is opposed to Christianity will cause suffering for the believer and we may need to suffer according to verse 17. So what is the plan?

We stick to holy living despite the hostility that is around. In other words, we God please within the law of the land rather than people please. We answer those who question us about our faith by sharing the hope that we have in Christ. But we do this knowing that God will protect us because we are his, who are chosen to live holy lives because of what God has done for us.

What then are we to do as a result of this passage? Live holy lives and keep living holy lives amidst hostility because this is what will make Christianity stronger and lead his church towards another revival, Not only that, we need to be prepared to speak out about our faith when the opportunity arises: as that is what Jesus did and what we are called to do as God's people.