

## **Christianity In Shoe Leather**

I Peter 3:8-17

Whenever we read the Bible, we should remind ourselves that **all of it** is the inspired Word of God, written by real people [such as the Apostle Peter] and directed to real people. The original people that I Peter was directed to were **God's elect**, who had been **born again to a living hope**. However, in A.D. 63 or 64, these born again Christians were living under severe persecution – that was going to get worse before it got better. One of the reasons God inspired Peter to write this letter is so that many of the people who were persecuting the followers of Jesus, would be convicted of their sin, repent and turn to Christ – so they too could be born again to a living hope.

In this morning's passage, the Apostle Peter is NOT explaining how people can be born again. He is explaining how born again people are to live – as they

walk out their Christian faith in the shoe leather of life. The attitudes and character qualities that Christians were to possess 1900 years ago, are the same attitudes and character qualities that Christians are to possess today. I Peter 3:8, lists **five** of these qualities, “Finally, **all of you**, have <sup>1</sup> unity of mind, <sup>2</sup> sympathy, <sup>3</sup> brotherly love, <sup>4</sup> a tender heart, and <sup>5</sup> a humble mind.”

The first mark of a Christian, that Peter highlights, is that followers of Christ are to walk in unity with other believers who are in fellowship with God. If a Christian is out of fellowship with God, then he or she will not enjoy unity with Christians who ARE in fellowship with God.

Christian unity is not an option – it is an essential. Why? Because Jesus told us in John 17: 21, that if we walk in unity, the world will believe that God has sent Him. If Christians do not walk in unity, then the world will not believe. And by the way, Christians do not

create unity. Our job is simply to maintain the unity God has already given us. In **Ephesians 4:4-6**, the Apostle Paul lays out the foundation upon which our unity rests,

“There is one body [the mystical body of Christ, into which all believers have been placed by the Holy Spirit] and one Spirit [who indwells every believer in Christ] – just as you were called to the one hope . . . <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all . . .”

In light of all that Christians share in common, we ought to be able to walk in step together. It doesn't mean we have to agree on all the jots and tittles of our faith – but we must agree and keep our eyes on the essentials of the Christian faith.

The next character quality every Christian is to possess – in a growing measure – is sympathy, which is the willingness to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. Sympathy and self-centeredness cannot co-exist. Since we are to imitate

Christ, Christians must have sympathy for others.

Listen to what we read about Jesus in **Mark 1:40-41**,

“And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’

<sup>41</sup> Moved with sympathy, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I will; be clean.’”

Sympathy comes into our hearts when Christ comes into our hearts and reigns there. And so does the next quality Peter lists – which is brotherly love. The Apostle John, in a not so tactful way, declares in **I John 4:20-21**, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar . . . whoever loves God **must also** love his brother.” Jesus emphasizes the importance of brotherly love in **John 13:35**, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Next Peter speaks of having a tender, compassionate heart. Having a tender heart requires a willingness to enter into the pain of others. And here is a challenge

for being tender hearted: when we are constantly bombarded by news of people suffering from a multitude of abuses, we can harden our hearts – simply as a means of protecting ourselves from being overwhelmed with pain. Just as skin that is suffering from the pain of constant friction, will form a callous to protect itself, so our hearts can become calloused to protect ourselves from the constant news of tragedy. To be tender hearted, requires us to push through the pain and put feet to our compassion by doing acts of kindness for those in need. We may not be able to stop all suffering, but we can all do our part.

A few Saturdays ago, pastor Ken was sharing about a boy who was walking along the beach after a big storm and throwing star fish, that had gotten washed up on the shore, back into the water – so they could live. A crusty, hard hearted adult, who was watching what the boy was doing, arrogantly told him, “Little boy,

you cannot possibly save all the star fish!” After the boy tossed another star fish into the water, he said, “Yup, but I just saved that one.” And friends, if there are thousands of people like that boy, then a whole lot of star are going to be saved.

The reason God wants Christians to walk out the qualities described in our passage this morning, is so that more people may believe in Christ, which then enables more people to carry the water of life to those who are perishing.

The next character quality we are to possess and grow in – is humility of mind. Humility is one of those qualities that if you brag about it, you don’t have it. There are two necessary ingredients for humility to exist and grow: 1) We must have a sense of utter dependance upon God – not just for our salvation, but also for our ability to do good, which theologically is called sanctification. 2) In order to maintain humility

we must continually compare ourselves to Christ's perfect righteousness – and not to other people. We can always find **some person** who makes us look good. But the only correct measuring stick of goodness – is Christ and His perfect obedience to God's Moral Law. The reason comparing ourselves to Christ – doesn't discourage us, is because as Christians – the perfect righteousness of Christ has been imputed into our accounts. In other words, instead of getting the F – I deserve on my report card, I get the A – that Christ earned and then gave to me when I repented of my sin and put my trust in Him. Understanding our imputed righteousness in Christ, should never make us proud. It should only make us grateful.

Every quality we have discussed in verse 8, is the result of God's grace in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. The same is true for what we read in verses 9-11,

“Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, **ble**ss****, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.<sup>10</sup> [Peter now quotes from Psalm 34] ‘For whoever desires to love life and see good days [let me pause here and say, God never intended for His people to be grumps and sourpusses. A Christian should cherish life], let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit [in order for our tongues **not to speak evil**, we must let God deal with the wickedness in our hearts. In Old Testament vernacular, that means we must let God circumcise our hearts. And what does a circumcised heart look like – how does it behave? The Psalmist says in verses 11 and 12];<sup>11</sup> let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it’ [and we must remember that it is God’s Word that defines good and evil – not our culture].

Let’s go back to verse 9, which tells us not to repay evil for evil. Wayne Grudem, in his commentary on I Peter, explains that if we are to have a Biblical worldview, we must understand that Peter was NOT directing these words to civil authorities – whose God-given responsibility is to punish evil doers. For

example, if we are in a courtroom, and the evidence demands that a jury declares a person guilty of murder, then the judge must repay that evil act with a just penalty. A strong Biblical case can be made that cold-blooded murder, with multiple witnesses, is a death penalty crime. I grow tired of hearing that if our governing officials put a murderer to death, then it makes them and the rest of us – as bad as the murderer. No, that is not true. Just punishments, for proven crimes, promptly carried out, help to restrain others from doing bad things. That is why the words “law” and “order” go together.

Let’s go to verse 12, which gives us two motivating reasons for living like Christians, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” I praise God that in Christ, I am in a position where God’s favor and care rests upon me, which

makes me want to do good. God's favor doesn't mean I will never go through hardships. It means that when I do – God will be with me.

Question: Are evil people in a good place? No. God's face is against them. How many of you want God to be your adversary? I don't see any hands up. If you were on a path in life that caused God's face to be against you, and someone knew how to get you off that path and get you onto a path where God's blessings would be upon you – would you want that person to tell you about it? Then should we not be willing to do that for someone on a bad path in life?

In today's culture, we are told it is unloving to tell someone they are on a bad path. That is not God's thinking. Listen to the end of Leviticus 19:18, “. . . you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” The hundred dollar question is: What does love for our neighbor look like? To find out we need to read what is

said just before that command. Please follow as I read

**Leviticus 19:17-18,**

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him [the NIV says “you shall rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.”] <sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

If my neighbor, whom I am to love, is on a bad path, the loving thing to do – is warn him. And if he is open to that warning, then I may also be able to tell him about a better way to live – a way that God blesses.

We all know that there are many people who are not open to hearing what a Christian has to say. Are there things we can do – to possibly change that? Peter has already told us in verse 9, not to repay evil for evil – but instead we are to bless people who do us wrong and want what is good for them. That tends to get peoples’ attention.

But there is something else we can do to that God says can get peoples' attention. Look at verses 13-14,

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? [normally no one] <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed [Jesus promised that in Matthew 5:10-12]. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.”

That last sentence of verse 14, is beyond our natural ability to do. To have no fear of those who hate us, requires the power of the Holy Spirit and faith in God.

Listen to what Jesus said in **Matthew 10:25-28**,

“If they have called the master of the house [Jesus] Beelzebul [Satan], how much more will they malign those of his household [followers of Christ] . . . <sup>28</sup> do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

When we give into fear, it hurts our testimony for Christ. When we do not fear, it strengthens our testimony and puts fear into our opponents. The Apostle Paul testifies of this in **Philippians 1:27-28**,

“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by

your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation . . . .”

Not being frightened by our opponents is a difficult command to walk out – even with God’s grace. And some great people of God have **at times** failed and given in to fear. Let me cite an example from Psalm 34, which Peter quoted from. The inspired introduction to Psalm 34, tells us the circumstances in which David wrote it. David was fleeing from King Saul, who was trying to kill him because God had chosen David to replace Saul as king. The city David fled to belonged to the Philistines, and their king was Achish [his title was Abimelech]. **I Samuel 21:11-15**, tells us more,

“And the servants of Achish said to him, ‘Is not this David the king of the land [of Israel]? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’<sup>12</sup> And David took these words to heart and was **much afraid** of Achish the king of Gath.<sup>13</sup> So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate

and let his spittle run down his beard. <sup>14</sup> Then Achish said to his servants, ‘Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? <sup>15</sup> Do I lack madmen?’”

David had done well about **not fearing** Goliath, but not so well with Achish. Question: What kind of a testimony would David have with Achish – if he later tried to tell him about the greatness of God? Not so good. However, I believe the truths of Psalm 34, were written by David after he had repented of his fear and once again learned to trust God while navigating deep waters. How well did David recover? Enough to stand tall and prevail against King Saul and many other enemies after that.

It probably sounds strange to us to think about dying for our faith in Christ, but multitudes have already done that, and thousands of Christians are facing that possibility – as we sit here this morning. The Christians that Peter was writing to, were not going to be strangers

to death – for their faith in Christ. Two respected Roman historians, have testified that Nero killed vast multitudes of Christians from A.D. 65 – until the time of his death in June of A.D. 68. The Apostles Paul and Peter were among them. Did Nero prevail over those righteous men? Today we call our sons Paul and Peter and our dogs Nero. Today the Roman Empire is gone and Christianity continues its worldwide growth.

Let's close by reading I Peter 3:15-17,

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience [which means we have never knowingly sinned against God without repenting of it. Nor have we knowingly wronged someone without repenting and confessing our wrong to that person – and then tried to make it right. Having a clear conscience is extremely important], so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.”

When unbelievers see Christians at peace, when other people would be falling apart, it piques their interest in what we have. And so Christians need to be prepared to give reasons for our faith. And friends, Christianity is a reasonable faith. It is reasonable to believe that there is a God who created the universe. It is unreasonable not to. It is reasonable to believe the Bible is God's Word **because** it clearly shows itself to be supernatural by its unity and fulfilled prophecies. It is reasonable to believe that Jesus is the Divine Son of God, who rose from the dead. Why? Because the people who lived with Him 24/7 – for three years – all testified that He is the Son of God, and all of them were willing to die for the fact that they saw Him, touched Him, spoke to Him, and ate with Him **after He rose from the dead.**

Every Christian needs to put in the mental sweat required to think through our faith and be able to give

reasonable, gentle answers to those who ask us about it.

Let me summarize I Peter 3:8-17: When we live the way Christians should live, unbelievers take note of it. And if we suffer for doing what is right, we are blessed. And if we suffer without fear of our opponents, it shakes to the core, their false confidence in the lies they believe – which then opens the door for truth. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, help us all to live as Christians should live, and to be willing and able to give reasons for the hope we have in Christ. And then Father, please work through us to help many other people to be born again to a living hope. We pray this in Jesus name and for His glory. Amen