

Relationships In First Peter

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Text:

Introduction:

- I. 1st Peter Shows the Power of Our Relationships in Times of Persecution
 - A. Several years ago, our brother Sewell Hall visited a country he had been to many years before. The church was not doing well. There was much apathy and lack of loyalty. Seeing an old brother who had been there from the start Sewell asked, “What do you think we need to do”? He answered, “Brother Hall, pray for persecution.”
 - B. Persecution has a way of making strong churches. It separates the men from the boys. “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”
 - C. It becomes quite obvious in reading 1st Peter that these brethren were in times of trial and persecution. Peter shows that persecution may give us an awesome opportunity to win people to Christ. In fact, we may never have greater opportunity.
 - D. In our relationships, people are looking to see if Christ really matters to us and if He really makes a difference. You will notice that conversion is still Peter’s aim even in the worst of relationships.
 - E. Indeed, there is power in persecution!!

Body:

- I. **Sojourners and Pilgrims (1st Peter 2:11-17)**
 - A. First, it is paramount that Christians understand that we are “resident aliens” in this world. We may reside here, but we are aliens.
 1. A song we sing says it well. *“This world is not my home, I’m just a passing thro’. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door And I can’t feel at home in this world anymore.”*
 - B. Second, we also live in “enemy occupied territory” (C.S. Lewis).
 1. We must understand that there is a war going on that has been going on since Eden (our “ground zero”). It’s a war for our souls; an all out effort on Satan’s part to destroy God’s purposes for our lives.
 2. Peter begs us to abstain from *“fleshly lusts which war against the soul”* (2:11).
 - a. The word “war” in verse 11 refers to a “military campaign” (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible).
 - C. For the above two reasons the Christian can expect that the people of this world will *“speak against you as evil doers”* (2:12). This is what Peter’s readers were facing.
 1. If you have ever been in a foreign country, you are well aware that the citizens watch you and are prone to criticize. Perhaps, you have even been guilty of it yourself as immigrants enter the United States.
 2. Those who hated Christians were happy to raise charges against them. It is easy to imagine some of the things that might have been said against these Christians.
 - a. “They meet secretly at night (Acts 20:7). They are cannibals (in the Lord’s Supper they eat the body and the blood). They practice incest (‘brothers’ and

‘sisters’ live together). They damage trade and business (Acts 18:21-31; 16:16; 19:23ff). They turn slaves against their masters. They are disloyal to Caesar. Wherever they go they disturb the peace (Acts 24:5). They are irreligious (they refuse to bow down to the images of the gods)” (Reese, pg. 50).

- b. Such charges gave governmental authorities plenty of fodder to use against Christians. If this book is dealing with Nero’s persecution against Christians, the prejudices against them gave him plenty of room to blame them for the burning of Rome and take attention off himself.
- D. How does a Christian live in such a hostile environment and overcome such prejudice and charges against himself?
1. Peter answers, “*having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles*” (2:12).
 - a. He is calling us to an attractive, winsome life that works powerfully to influence non-Christians.
 - b. We must never forget that every Christian represents Christ and is an advertisement for Christianity.
 2. Christians must do two things honorable:
 - a. “*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man*” (2:13).
 - 1) Peter is here teaching that we must honor every institution of government (king, governors, etc), even when we may consider their conduct despicable.
 - 2) We must obey the laws they set forth, unless they violate the law of God (Acts 5:29).
 - 3) Even in those times when we must disobey those authorities, we can do it in a way that shows respect for the authorities.
 - a) Isn’t Daniel a great example of this (Daniel 1:8-20; 6:10, 21)?
 - 4) All of this we do because we answer to a higher authority. We are servants of God (2:16).
 - b. “*Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king*” (2:17)
 - 1) We are to hold all men as precious in our eyes. Do we do it brethren?
 - 2) Love our brothers and sisters across the globe.
 - 3) Fear God.
 - 4) Honor the king. Isn’t this last one amazing since these Christians were likely suffering persecution from the king?
- E. Peter is optimistic that such a consistent, attractive life will have powerful results.
1. It will prove that all the ignorant charges against them are false and silence (muzzle) their enemies (2:15).
 2. It will change the minds of some and lead them to glorify God (2:12).
- F. What can even hostile enemies who are ignorant of Christianity say when we are consistently honoring all people, loving the brotherhood, fearing God, and honoring the king?
1. Do not give them ammunition to use against Christ and the gospel!!

2. In contrast to Peter's teaching, I share a quote from a sermon given by a now deceased Christian in regard to former U.S. President Bill Clinton.
 - a. "I can pray for ole Clinton. I think he's the sorriest specimen for a human being. And if you ever believed in evolution, I think he's the nearest thing to a monkey that you ever saw. I certainly would believe in evolution if I was left up to just follow the human line of things. But I'd just simply pray that he as an enemy of immorality, he's an enemy of Christianity and there's no doubt in my mind that he and the devil are in cahoots together. So, they do all of that but you can pray that he might learn better. I would pray that he would. And I really don't want to see him go to hell. That's where he is headed as fast as he can go and I would love to see him converted. So, pray for that, not that God would bless him in all the mischief and meanness that he gets into, and all the sins that he's committed and won't admit. And that's simply a lack of repentance. There's nothing to the fellow. He's the sorriest specimen of a human being I ever saw. And if you want to believe in him and you don't like me for that, help yourself. That's just fine. I said what I said. I mean every word of it about him. And I would say too, I pray for him."
 - 1) Is this honoring all people? Is it honoring the king? Or does it give plenty of ammunition to use against Christians?
- G. May God help us to have honorable conduct even in the face of governmental opposition. Our hope is that the gospel will cut its way into peoples' hearts and bring them to glorify God for our behavior while they sought to harm us.

II. Servants (1st Peter 2:18 -25)

- A. Peter now addresses the slave and master relationships. The slaves mentioned here are household slaves which were allowed closer relationships with the family than other slaves.
- B. Again, Peter encourages those who are slaves to show utmost submission to their masters regardless of how they may have been treating them (2:18).
 1. *"To the good and gentle"*.
 2. *"To the harsh"*.
 - a. It is here implied that some of these Christians could expect, and perhaps already were, suffering wrongfully at the hands of their masters.
- C. Three reasons are given to encourage slaves to this submissive behavior.
 1. *"Conscience toward God"* (2:19-20).
 - a. Christians live with a constant awareness that God is watching our conduct. In every instance, we want him to look down and be well pleased (2 Cor. 5:9).
 2. *"To this you were called"* (2:21)
 - a. As we are seeing, a major theme in this first epistle of Peter is that **suffering leads to glory**. We could wish life were easier but scripture repeatedly shows us that God takes suffering and works it for good.
 - b. We are headed to a place where no harm will ever befall us but the road that leads us there is paved with difficulty.
 - c. It's our calling (1st Thessalonians 3:3).
 3. It's power to bring people to the *"Shepherd and Overseer of your souls"* (2:21-25).

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- a. Jesus is the supreme example of one who suffered wrongfully. He “*committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth*” (2:22).
 - b. At the cross, there was no retaliation on Jesus’ part toward His persecutors. “*When He was reviled He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten*” (2:23).
 - 1) We are made to marvel at Jesus’ composure at the cross as His persecutors attacked His body and then attempted to attack His spirit with vicious words (Mt. 16:29-44).
 - 2) What composure!! What meekness (strength under control)!! In the words of Paul Earnhart, “He could have annihilated the whole world and been done before supper”!
 - 3) Instead, He entrusted His mistreatment to God for Him to judge. And He will (2nd Tim. 4:14).
 - c. There was power in His behavior to soften hearts and convert others.
 - 1) It changed one of the thieves (Lk. 23:39-43).
 - 2) Even one of the soldiers was moved by what he saw that day and proclaimed “Truly, this was the Son of God” (Mt. 27:54).
 - 3) It changed even those reading this letter. “You were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of Your souls” (2:25).
 - 4) And it continues to melt hearts today (2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1st Pet. 3:18).
- D. Peter’s teaching has great application to us today. We may not have slave and master relationships but we do have employer and employee relationships. And we have other areas involving submission (military service, etc).
1. Christians ought to be the greatest workers on the planet because of Who we work for. We work for God (Eph. 6:7; Col. 3:23).
 2. Even when our superiors treat us harshly we have great opportunity to impact them by our submissive behavior.
 - a. Illustration: Nevil Hayes – Worker who persecuted him later coming to him for help.
 - b. Illustration: Sergeant moved by the behavior of a corporal (Jim McGuiggan, pg. 159).
 - c. Illustration: T.J. Williams. This brother was pressured by his superior to manipulate numbers to take advantage of customers. He replied to his boss, “*The man who will steal for you will steal from you.*” A great message was sent that I will be a great worker, will work hard for you and will treat you and others fairly. Those under him at his retirement gave him a plaque saying, “*To the greatest boss any group of men could ever work for.*”

III. Wives and Husbands (1st Peter 3:1-7)

- A. Marriage brings with it power to mold us into greater Christ-likeness and that Christ-likeness has power to change spouses who are making our marriages difficult.
 1. I like the words of Gary Thomas. “If you want to be free to serve Jesus, there’s no question – stay single. Marriage takes a lot of time. But if you want to become more like Jesus, I can’t imagine a better thing to do than to get married. Being married

forces you to face some character issues you'd never have to face otherwise" (Thomas, pg. 21).

- B. It seems that Peter puts forth two marriage situations here, showing proper conduct in each.
1. In the first, the spouse (the husband) is not a Christian and this is deeply distressing his mate.
 2. In the second, both husband and wife are Christians.
- C. What's a wife to do when she is distressed because her husband is not a Christian?
1. She is not to:
 - a. Force God's word upon him by continually speaking (should I say nagging?) him about it.
 - 1) Quit trying to be the preacher in the absence of the preacher.
 - 2) Warren Wiersbe tells of one woman who did it that way. "I know one zealous wife who used to keep religious radio programs on all evening, usually very loud, so that her unsaved husband would 'hear the truth.' She only made it easier for him to leave home and spend his evenings with his friends" (Wiersbe, pg. 409).
 - 3) These verses from Proverbs apply here (Prov. 19:13; 21:9,19).
 - b. Seek to influence him by her physical beauty.
 - 1) "Don't think that you can win him with trendy hairstyles, or a better tan, or delicate jewelry or clinging robes. You might in this way attract him to the bedroom, but probably not to God. If you want to win him to God, your adornment is going to have to be a new woman within. The world can teach you how to win a man to yourself. But only scripture can teach you how to win him to God" (Piper).
 2. She is to:
 - a. Lovingly submit to him as the head of the family.
 - 1) Peter continues to show the power of submissive lifestyles. Most all men desire to be respected. When the wife shows that she adores her husband, appreciates his labor for the family and submits to his leadership, there is great power to influence him.
 - b. Let him continually see her chaste (pure) way of living.
 - c. Focus on adorning the inner woman with ornaments of character such as a "meek and quiet spirit".
 - d. Wait for the word, as it is lived out by her, to bring change in her husband. It has happened countless times.
 - 1) I am reminded of a man who became a Christian some months after his wife was restored to Christ. His very words to me were, "I can no longer resist the power of my godly wife!" That says it, doesn't it?
- D. How is a husband (who is a Christian) to treat his Christian wife?
1. He is to:

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- a. *Dwell with her with understanding.* The man who in frustration says, “You’ll never understand a woman”, is rebuked by 1st Peter 3:7. God would here teach us there is one woman you better understand; your wife!
 - 1) This would involve seeking to know her needs with the intent to meet them.
 - b. *Give honor to his wife as the weaker vessel.*
 - 1) She is to be treated tenderly and with care just as you would protect a fragile vessel.
 - 2) I’m reminded of a girl who once said in a classroom, “I don’t want to be equal to my husband. I want to be like my mama. My mama was on a pedestal.”
2. Two reasons are given for him treating her this way.
- a. *She is an heir with him of the grace of life.*
 - 1) She might be your wife but she is God’s daughter!! God loves her. He is leading her to eternal life. The husband must always remember God is watching how he treats her.
 - b. *That his prayers may not be hindered.*
 - 1) This may mean that when our spirits are embittered against our spouses we will not pray very well and perhaps not pray at all.
 - a) There is an interesting thread to observe in First Peter that shows that right living leads to right praying. Consider these verses.
 - 1] 1st Peter 3:7 - “That your prayers may not be hindered”.
 - 2] 1st Pet. 3:12 - “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”
 - 3] 1st Peter 4:7 – “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray” (NIV).
 - b) I heard once of a man who was losing control in a business meeting. His attitude was bad. A brother suggested that he stop and pray for his attitude and the attitude of others present. He insisted, “I don’t have a bad attitude!” Everyone bowed their head and after a moment he raised his head and said, “I can’t pray. I have a bad attitude.”
 - 2) It may mean also that if we continue in harsh treatment toward our wives it can affect God answering our prayers. That’s serious.
 - a) “Where strife and discord obtain in a home, prayer is cut into and interrupted – the message to heaven is short-circuited!” (Guy N. Woods, pg. 93).

IV. Brothers in Christ (1st Peter 3:8-12; 4:7-11; 5:5-7)

- A. The enemy is always looking for an opportunity to speak against us (1st Pet. 2:12). How delighted he would be, if after every external attack on us has failed, we crumble from the inside in our mistreatments of each other.
- B. Jesus taught us the power and impact our love for each other can have on the world (Jn. 13:35).

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- C. Peter, following that example, calls upon us to love each other “warts and all”. In his words, “Love will cover a multitude of sins” (1st Peter 4:8).
1. Realizing that we all have faults and all of us sin, we can patiently work with the “unbrotherly brother.”
 2. I heard once of some Christians who were struggling with a brother in Christ, named Bob. An older Christian chimed in saying, “Bob is alright. He’s like my husband. He’s obnoxious. If I can love my husband, we can love Bob.”
- D. A major key to our harmony as brothers and sisters is to be “clothed with humility” (1st Pet. 5:5-7).
1. It has been suggested that as Peter writes this epistle he cannot help but have flashbacks to some of his days with Jesus. It is easy to see him as he writes “be clothed with humility”, remembering Jesus with a towel around his waist washing the feet of the disciples (John 13:1-17).
 2. Remember, the disciples were on that occasion quarreling over which one of them was the greatest. Jesus taught, “It shall not be so among you”. He proceeds to show them humility in action as He washed their feet.
 - a. Remember too that one of the ones in the room that night was Judas, the betraying brother.
 - b. Jesus is calling us to His example of love for all, even brethren who hurt us. It may be high to attain but it is there we have to reach!
 3. We must put on this same humility.
 - a. One of the greatest problems in the church comes from people pressing to be somebody!!
 - b. T.S. Eliot once observed, “Half of the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important. They do not mean to do harm. They are absorbed in an endless struggle to think well of themselves.”
 - c. Listen up brother. You are somebody. You are a son of the King. Jesus knew who He was and had nothing to prove to anyone. King’s sons ought to be able to bow and wash feet.
 4. This will help us to minister to our brothers and sisters to the aim of God being glorified (1st Pet. 4:10-11).
- E. The road to harmony and happiness is laid out in 1st Peter 3:8-12.
1. Evil for good is Satan’s way.
 2. Evil for evil and good for good is the human way (Mt. 5:46).
 3. Good for evil is Christ’s way (1st Pet. 2:21-22).
- F. How frustrated the enemy must be when his hopes for internal crumbling fail as Christians follow Peter’s command to have fervent love for one another (1st Pet. 4:8).
- V. **Elders (1st Peter 5:1-4)**
- A. Stability in troubling times often depends on the effectiveness of elders to lead. When elders develop great relationships with their sheep, they can guide them through any storm.
 - B. I do not think we can over-emphasize the command to “shepherd” in verse two.
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1. Men often try to bring the leadership skills they have learned in the world into the eldership. It will not work. You can't run the eldership like a CEO or a Sergeant or etc.
 2. It will work effectively when elders develop the mindset of a shepherd.
 - a. This is what God was looking for when He raised up David to lead Israel (Psa. 78:70-72). God wanted a shepherd mindset.
 - b. In the words of Lynn Anderson's book, *They Smell Like Sheep*. They oversee with love and care and affection. They work so closely and intimately with the sheep, they name them, they know them, and they smell like them.
 - c. They don't have to be constrained to do this job nor do they do it for dishonest gain. They simply love the sheep.
 - d. They don't abusively domineer over the flock. They don't drive the sheep. They lead.
 - e. Listen to this story ("Distorted Leadership Models, pg. 29-30, *They Smell Like Sheep*, Lynn Anderson)
 3. When sheep have true shepherds they will run to them in times of trial and persecution. Oh, that God would raise up more of this kind.
- C. Of course, all of this has an earthly cost to it. Most of us have observed first-hand the strain, the weight, and the sufferings good shepherds (elders) endure as they seek to lead their flock.
1. Yet, Peter returns to the theme throughout this book. Shepherds, your suffering will be rewarded with glory (1st Pet. 5:1,4). Stay at it.

Conclusion:

- I. Let us remember that in all of our relationships, even the distressing ones, God is at work. He is working for our good and using us as His tools to bring even our enemies to Christ.
- II. May God give us strength to shine in troubled times. To this we were called.

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