

Place Lurgan Baptist 17:8:2008

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-17

11. COPING WITH CONFLICT

John Chrysostom was one of the greatest of the Greek church fathers. He lived in from 347 Ad to 407. As a very young Christina he was brought before the Emperor, who said that if would not give up Christ, he would banished from the country. Chrysostom said, “ *You cannot, for the whole world is my Father’s land. You can’t banish me.*” The Emperor said, “ *Then I will take away all your property.*” “ *You cannot, my treasures are in heaven,*” was the reply. “ *Then I’ll take you to a place where there is not a friend to speak to.*” Chrysostom replied, “ *You cannot, I have a friend who is closer than a brother. I shall have Jesus Christ forever.*” The Emperor finally threatened, “ *Then I’ll take your life.*” The answer was, “ *You cannot for my life is hid with God in Christ.*” And the Emperor said, “ ***What do you do with a man like that?***” Its easy to be a believer when everything is fine, but when the fire is hot that is different. I wonder are you in the furnace right now ? A devoted pastor was facing serious surgery, and a friend visited him in the hospital to pray with him. “ *An interesting thing happened today,*” the pastor told him.

“ *One of the nurses looked at my chart and said, ‘ Well, I guess you’re preparing for the worst.’ I smiled at her and said, ‘ No, I’m preparing for the best. I’m a Christian, and God has promised to work all things together for good.’ Boy, did she drop that chart and leave this room in a hurry.*” Peter wrote this letter to prepare believers for a “ *fiery trial,*” of persecution, yet his approach was optimistic and positive. Today, there is an escalating hostility toward the gospel throughout the world. In some parts of our world this morning, there is direct persecution of believers, and it is likely that in the coming years Christians everywhere will face increasing hostility both from civil authorities and from unbelievers at the personal level. Let me share a promise with you that might not be as exciting as some of the others. “ *Yea, and all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” (2 Tim 3:12) You say, “ *I’m a Christian and I’m not being persecuted.*” Well, look at the promise. You make up your mind that you are going to live like Christ and for Christ and you’ll suffer.

Here were believers whom Peter describes as “ *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,*” yet they had suffered, were suffering, and would suffer. So Peter in this passage speaks about “ **Coping with Conflict.**” How can we cope in the midst of conflict ? How can we live godly in the midst of a hostile, ungodly culture ? Well, Peter gives us three things here that will help us to cope in the midst of the conflict.

(1) THE LIFE MUST BE CONSISTENT

You see,

**You are writing a gospel a chapter each day
By things that you do, by words that you say
Men read what you write, whether faithless or true
Say what is the gospel according to you**

The way we live in relationship to a lost world is a testimony concerning the credibility of Christianity and of Christ Himself. (1) This involves

(a) BEING FAITHFUL:

Do you notice that Peter uses the word “*good*,” three times in this short passage ? (3:13, 16) He is talking here about,

- **A Christ-like Conduct:**

Look if you will at (3:13) If we were to paraphrase this verse, *we could say that those who live honest lives will not usually suffer harm.* Usually. There are exceptions of course, to almost every rule, but generally it is unusual for people, even those who are hostile to the things of God, to harm believers who prove zealous for that which is good. The word “*followers*,” is the translation of a Greek word meaning “*zealots*.” The verb means to “*burn with zeal, to desire earnestly*.” We must be zealous for that which is good, and that will lead to a good conversation, that is a life like Christ’s. I wonder have you lost your zeal for that which is good ? Are you marked by lethargy and apathy when it comes to the things of God ? Look at Christendom

in the face of the challenge of the mighty forces of satanic darkness. Soft, flabby, drowsy, instead of zealous, strong and forceful. Is God not stirring us and saying “*Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light.*” (Eph 5:14) *

- **A Courageous Confession:**

“*But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake,*” (3:14) Peter says “*who is going to bother you if you do what is good,*” then he says “*but if they do.*” Don’t you love the “*buts*,” of the Bible ? If Christians on occasion suffer for doing what is right they suffer for the sake of a righteous God who promises that He will bless them. Do you recall what the Lord Jesus said ? “*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matt 5:10) Many Christians in the early church including some to whom Peter addresses these words did suffer for righteousness sake, their upright godly behaviour. (Acts 5:40 7:57-60 8:3-4) My is it not an honour to suffer for Him who freely poured out His life for us ? We should not be ashamed. Indeed we are privileged to worship the Lord today, because dauntless heroes of the faith were unafraid to suffer for righteousness sake. The blood of martyrs has always been the seed of the church.

A martyr in Switzerland was standing barefoot on the wood about to be burned to death. He called to the magistrate who was superintending his execution and urged him to come near. As the burly executioner came near, the Christian said in quiet confidence, “*I am about*

to be burned to death for faith in my Lord. Lay your hand on my heart. If it beats any faster than it ordinarily beats, don't believe in my Christ.” Do you hear Polycarp the Bishop of Smyrna crying out with unshakeable courage, “*Eighty and six years have I served my lord and He has been my truest Friend. How then can I blaspheme Him who shed His blood to wash away my sin ?*” They tied him to a stake and built a fire about him, but long before his suffering body was reduced to ashes, his triumphant soul was at home with the Lord. Where are the fearless men today who will stand for the Saviour at any cost, fearing God and Him alone ? (a) * *

- **A Clear Conscience:**

“*A good conscience,*” Peter calls it. Our word “*conscience,*” comes two Latin words “*Con,*” meaning “*with,*” and “*scio,*” meaning “*to know.*” The conscience is that internal judge that witnesses to us, that enables us to “*know with,*” either approving our actions or accusing. (Rom 2:14) Dr. J. Hunt says, “*Conscience may be defined as a thinking mind illuminated by the revelation of God.*” Now how does a good conscience help a believer in times of trial and opposition ? Well, it gives him *power without:* it fills him with courage because he knows he is right with God and men, so that he need not be afraid. Inscribed on Martin Luther's monument at Worms, Germany are his courageous words spoken before the church council on 18th April 1521, “*Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me Amen.*” His conscience bound to God's Word gave him courage to defy the whole established church. A good conscience

also gives *peace within:* and when you have peace within you can fight battles without. My how can we boldly witness for Christ if conscience is witnessing against us ? You see, living consistently involves (a) But it also involves,

(b) BEING JOYFUL:

As if to re-echo the words of Christ in (Matt 5) Peter says “*But and if ye happy are ye,*” (3:14) Peter says “*Consider yourselves blessed.*” My Peter is speaking from experience, for do you recall that after their imprisonment and trial Luke tells us “*And they departed from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name.*” (Acts 5:41) The joy in their hearts was greater than the pain in their bodies, so that they became heedless of the threats of further physical persecution. Sounds good you may say, but honestly, how can we consider ourselves blessed, when we've just been punched in the eye with the fist of injustice ? It's simple. Remember God is still in control, God's hand is still on your life, and someday you will be rewarded for your endurance of these undeserved trials. (Matt 5:10-12)

(c) BEING PEACEFUL:

Do you see (3:14) ? Peter is simply saying that the fear of the Lord conquers every other fear. “*Don't fear their fear,*” that is, don't be intimidated by unbelievers who would persecute you, don't be troubled literally “*don't be shaken or stirred up.*” The word “*troubled,*” means “*to be agitated, uneasy.*” Do you recall (Jn 14:1) ? “*Let not*

your heart be troubled.” Same root word here. Now Peter is quoting again from the Old Testament this time from Isaiah’s prophecy. (8:12-13) You see, Ahaz king of Judah faced a crisis because Assyria was about to invade. The kings of Israel and Syria wanted Ahaz to join them in an alliance, but Ahaz refused, so Israel and Syria threatened to invade Judah. Behind the scenes, Ahaz had allied Judah with Assyria, but the prophet Isaiah warned him against such an ungodly alliance and urged him to trust the Lord for deliverance “ *Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread.* ” (Is 8:13) Are you facing a crisis ? Are trials pressing in ? Are people pressuring you ? Are you tempted to give into your fears ? Trust God. How ? Why ? Because the Lord is on your side. He is watching over you. He is listening to you. He is fighting for you and “ *if God be for us who can be against us ?* ” (Rom 8:31) (1)

(2) THE LORD MUST BE PRE-EMINENT

For Peter now turns from a negative to a positive, “ *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,* ” (3:15) Without a doubt here lies the whole crux of the matter. No believer will be zealous, righteous, or courageous unless the Lord Jesus is the absolute ruler of the heart. Have you sanctified the Lord in your heart ? Have you given Him first place ? Notice here,

(a) THE PERSON THAT IS IDENTIFIED:

“ *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,* ” or “ *But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.* ” Now the change

over “ *from the Lord of Hosts,* ” in Isaiah to “ *Christ as Lord,* ” in this letter is significant. You see, Peter is urging us to cultivate the same attitude toward Christ as Isaiah did toward “ *the Lord of Hosts.* ” In fact, we are to give to Him the place and pre-eminence due to One who is “ *Lord,* ” the New Testament equivalent term for “ *Jehovah.* ” So Peter was exhorting these Christians to set apart their Messiah the Lord Jesus, as Jehovah, very God in their hearts, giving first place to Him in obedience of life.

(b) THE PLACE THAT IS SPECIFIED:

For Peter says, “ *Sanctify Christ as Lord,* ” where ? “ *In your hearts.* ” (3:15) Now when the Bible speaks of the heart, it doesn’t refer to this little muscle inside here that pumps blood. Rather in Scripture the heart comprises the sphere of thought, emotion, will, and conscience. The Bible says, “ *Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life,* ” again “ *As he thinketh in his heart so is he.* ” (Prov 4:23 23:7) The heart is the control centre of a man’s life. It is the “ *Cabinet Room,* ” where policy is decided and decisions are made. Once in a while someone says, “ *I believe you need to follow your own heart.* ” *Whatever the heart tells you to do, then you do it.* ” That’s all right if you have sanctified Christ as Lord in your heart. If you haven’t you are in dangerous trouble because the heart is deceitful. You see, what Peter is saying here is this. God is to be at the centre of my life. Christ is to be at the centre of my life.

Do you know something ? We need to start seriously living our daily lives with reference to Him as Lord, so that all the issues that engage my mind, my emotions, my will, my conscience are resolved by Him. So He is the Lord at the centre of my life not at the circumference. He takes control, we take orders. He is Lord, we are servants. *The Lord in the heart is Lord of the heart.* Is He ? (a) (b)

(c) THE PRINCIPLE THAT IS RATIFIED:

It's the principle of Lordship. "*But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.*" What does it mean to sanctify Christ as Lord in your heart ? What does that word "*sanctify,*" mean ? It simply means to set Him apart, to treat Him as He ought to be treated. The word "*sanctify,*" means that I am to treat as holy, or I am to set apart. I am no longer to be lord in my own heart. I am to take my hands off the steering wheel of my life and in my place I am to set the Lord Jesus. I am to let Him put His hand on the steering wheel of my life, direct my life, control my life, undisputed Lord, unrivaled Lord, unquestioned Lord. My We sing it "*He is Lord, He is Lord.*" But is He your Lord ? It means what He says I do, where He sends I go. His Word, His Will, His Way, holds supreme place in my heart.

*O that with yonder sacred throng
We at His feet may fall
Join in the everlasting song
And crown Him Lord of all*

Now is this not the major problem in our churches ? The principle of Lordship. You see, we have created an artificial distinction between trusting Christ as Saviour and acknowledging Christ as Lord. So we have a host of people who have "*accepted Christ,*" in order to miss hell and reach heaven, but they are not concerned about recognizing His Lordship in their lives. My salvation is not a cafeteria line where we can take the Saviourhood of Christ, and pass up on His Lordship, take what we want and leave the rest. The Bible says, "*For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" (Rom 10:13) At the service of the coronation of our Queen a close friend of the Royal Family sat fairly close to the Queen Mother. Later she told, how that during the coronation service , when it came to the moment when that stripling of a girl was crowned Queen, she looked at the face of the Queen Mother and saw the tears streaming down her cheeks. *Most people watched it on television, and the crown was placed on the one who had the right to wear it, the only one.* Have you placed the crown on His head ? Have you sanctified Christ as Lord in your heart ? Have you had a coronation service and you brought the crown and placed it on the head of the Lord Jesus and said, "*Lord Jesus I crown you Lord of all ?*" How do we cope in the midst of conflict ? (1) (2)

(3) THE LIPS MUST BE FLUENT

For notice what Peter says. Look if you will at (3:15) Have you ever noticed how useful the persecuted Christians of the first century were ? Their sufferings were the platform from which they declared and demonstrated

the power of the gospel. They were ready to give an answer. You see, when Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, each crisis becomes an opportunity for witness. Did you notice that Peter gives us some clues here as to how to witness effectively ? He says we are to be,

(a) A READY WITNESS:

Now old Simon must have thought about that. Because there came a time in his life and he wasn't ready. Do you remember that ? Simon Peter was certainly not acknowledging the Lordship of Christ at that moment for the Bible says, "*But Peter followed Him afar off unto the high priests palace, and went in and sat with the servants to see the end.*" (Matt 26:58) There he was warming himself by the world's fire. And when the time came and he was asked a reason of the hope that was in him, he blew it and denied he even knew the Lord. Peter wasn't ready. Are you ready ? How "*ready,*" are you for the Lord's work ? How willing to do what is required of you ? How well trained morally and spiritually are you for your daily duties ? (a)

(b) A REGULAR WITNESS:

We must be ready. When ? Always. How challenging. You know often we are told that there are proper seasons for spreading the gospel, times and places set part. We talk about being "*in season,*" and "*out of season,*" but Peter says we must be ready always. Pastor Mullan was walking down one of the streets in South Belfast one day when he bumped into Fred. Fred was a regular at the

Bible Class in Lurgan on Tuesday nights. He had been praying about a man in his workplace that was not saved. Fred was burdened about that man and when he met Pastor Mullan he said, "*Pastor, God has laid this man on my heart, will you come and speak to him about the Saviour.*" The Pastor replied, "*Fred you tell me God laid this man on your heart. Well, if the Lord has burdened you about this man, then it is your responsibility and duty to speak to him about the Saviour.*" My don't look for a substitute. You see, when Christ is Lord in your life, he can loosen your tongue, He can quicken your mind, He can direct your words. (a) (b)

(c) A REASONABLE WITNESS:

Do you see how Peter puts it ? "*Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.*" (3:15) And my if you are handling mistreatment or suffering for the glory of God people will ask. "*How do you do it ?*" "*How do you handle this ?*" "*Why is it you haven't lost your joy ?*" "*What is it that keeps you going ?*" And we need to be ready, to make a defence, to give an answer, to witness to anyone who asks. The word "*answer,*" is a word from which we get the word apologetics. We talk about the apologetics of the Christian faith. Now that does not mean apologizing for the gospel, it means a verbal defense of the gospel. Sometimes it was used of a formal defense before a judge. (Acts 25:16 2 Tim 4:16) Paul says, "*I am set for the defence of the gospel.*" (Phil 1:17) But here he is talking about an informal spontaneous witness concerning the reasonableness of your faith.

Can you do that ? Can you give an orderly reasonable explanation of your faith ? Do you know what you believe ? Have you thought it out ? Are you able to state it intelligently ? Did you notice also that Peter says we are to be,

(d) A RESPECTABLE WITNESS:

“ *With meekness and fear,*” (3:13) Meekness refers to humility. You don’t bully people into salvation, you woo them. Logically and reasonably. Meekly, reverently, seriously because we speak as His ambassadors. The apostle Paul was in the jail at Philippi. The Lord Jesus was the Lord of His life. He was singing and praising God in the midnight hour, his life was consistent, his Lord was pre-eminent and when the crisis came the Philippian jailor came to him and said, “ *What must I do to be saved ?*” And Paul said, “ *you good for nothing bum, you put us in jail here take this, whack, whack, whack.*” Is that what he did ? No. His life was consistent, his Lord was pre-eminent, his lips were fluent “ *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*” (Acts 16:31)

In a large manufacturing town, a group of atheists were busy distributing their literature from door to door. In a counter attack a minister decided to deliver a Sunday evening sermon on the “ *Evidences of Christianity.*” He was surprised to see the champion of the infidel movement in his audience. Later, the minister called on the man urging him to believe the proofs that he had given of the truths of the gospel. The unsaved man quickly retorted “ *Believe. Certainly not. Nor do you either. Why I*

believed what you and your church profess to believe, I should scarcely be fit for business. My whole soul would be absorbed in the tremendous consequences at stake. But you and your people are not different from other people. No, I tell you, you do not believe.” What a challenge to those of us who name our Saviour as Lord. Do we really believe what we profess ? If we do, then we shall have a ready answer and a testimony that will convince, convict, and convert. My it all boils down to one thing. **The Lordship of Christ.** Do we know why we struggle to get believers to fill key positions in this church ? The Lordship of Christ. Do you know why members do not take their responsibilities seriously ? The Lordship of Christ. Do you know why we have so few Christians who want to be engaged in reaching out to the lost ? The Lordship of Christ. Do you know why Christians do not tithe ? The Lordship of Christ. Do you know why church people do not submit to their eldership ? The Lordship of Christ. Do you know why the prayer meetings are depleted ? The Lordship of Christ.

“ **He is Lord, He is Lord,**” Is He really that in your life and mine ? When I was a teenager going every Wednesday night to the mid-week service in Banbridge Baptist, I was greatly encouraged by the older brethren. Indeed each Wednesday night, I used to stand yonder at the top of the bridge and listen as Johnny Neill instructed me in the things of God. Nearly always he would leave me with these words, “ **Denny, son, always remember this, if Christ is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all.**”

