

Place: Lurgan Baptist 13:7:2008

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Reading: 1 Peter 2:11-17

7. SILENCING THE CRITICS

“ I have little doubt that the single greatest obstacle to the impact of the gospel has not been its inability to provide answers, but the failure of our part to live it out.” So said Ravi Zacharias a Christian apologist. After lecturing at a major American University this same speaker was driven to the airport by the organizer of the event. He was quite jolted by what he heard. The organizer said *“ My wife brought our neighbour last night. She is a medical Doctor and has not been to anything like this before. On their way home my wife asked her what she thought of it all. Do you know what she said ? She said ‘ that was a very powerful evening. The arguments were very persuasive. I wonder what he is like in his private life ? ”* The evangelist Gypsy Smith once said *“ There are five gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Christian and some people will never read the first four.”* Alexander McClaren the great preacher said, *“ The world takes its notions of God, most of all from people who say they belong to God’s family. They read us a great deal more than they read the Bible. They see us they only hear about Jesus Christ.”*

The German philosopher Heine said, *“ You show me your redeemed life and I will be inclined to believe in your Redeemer.”* Now the Christian faith has never loved by this world. There are always the critics. There is always who slander the Christian faith and make fun of those who love the Saviour. Peter speaks about them in this very passage. He says *“ For so is the will of God that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”* (2:15) The Greek word translated *“ silence,”* here means *“ to close the mouth with a muzzle.”* You see, Christians in the first century were the targets of all kinds of slanderous rumors. They were accused of,

- **Cannibalism:** this accusation took its rise from a perversion of the Lords words, *“ this is my body which is given for you.”* (Lk 22:19)
- **Immorality:** This took its rise from the fact that they called their meeting the Agape, the Love Feast.
- **Damaging Trade:** such was the charge of the silversmiths of Ephesus. (Acts 19:21)
- **Tampering with Family Relationships:** because often homes were broken up, when some members of the family got saved, and others did not.
- **Disloyalty of Caesar:** For no true believer would worship the Emperor’s godhead and burn his pinch of incense and declare that Caesar was Lord, for to him the Lord Jesus and no other was Lord.

So these were the charges which were directed against the believers. To Peter there was only one way to refute them and that was to live that their Christian life demonstrated that they were unfounded. When Plato was told that a certain man had been making slanderous charges against him his answer was, “ *I will live in such a way that no-one will believe what he says.* ” This was Peter’s solution to silencing the critics. So in this passage he talks about,

(1) THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS PERSONAL DUTY

Do you see how he begins ? “ *Dearly beloved,* ” he feels passionate about this. Peter is telling us in light of all that we are as God’s children. In light of us being a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, those who have received mercy, we are to live in a certain way. Our earthly conduct is to square with our heavenly blessings. *For the unbelievers earth is a playground, where the flesh is free to romp and run wild, but for believer’s earth is battleground.* It’s the place where we combat the lusts that war against our souls. Now when the New Testament talks about the flesh its does not mean the body. The flesh stands for that part of man’s nature wherein his natural desires have free rein. Fleshly desires therefore not only include the grosser sins but all that is characteristic of fallen human nature. Now what is our personal duty here ? Well, Peter talks about,

(a) THE MATTER OF INWARD DISCIPLINE:

“ *Abstain from fleshly lusts,* ” (2:11) this is not limited to sexual sin, though that is included. Peter is talking here

about all those desires that originate in your fallen human nature. Paul speaks of these in (Gal 5:19) when he says, “ *Now the works of the flesh are manifest which are these adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness revellings and such like.* ” You see, our real battle is not with people around us, but with passions within us. D.L. Moody said, “ ***I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know.*** ” If we yield to these sinful appetites than we will start acting like unsaved folk around us and become ineffective witnesses. You see, we are to abstain from fleshly lusts because,

1. WE DON’T BELONG HERE:

We are “ *strangers and pilgrims,* ” (2:11) The word “ *stranger,* ” means “ *sojourner, a person living in a foreign land where he has no rights of citizenship.* Pilgrims are people who stay only temporarily in places which are not their home. My “ *This world is not our home, we’re just a passing through.* ” Our citizenship is in heaven. We belong to a higher realm so don’t get bogged down in a lower level. Don’t let this world suck you in, with its standards, with its fashions, with its values. Abstain, hold yourself back from fleshly lusts for you don’t belong down here.

2. THEY WAR AGAINST THE SOUL:

This is a strong term that means to carry out a long term military campaign. Sometimes you and I have the idea that

these things in the world can be tampered with, flirted with and we will not get burned. But Peter says they war against the soul. They launch a military campaign against the soul. Do you know that certain things happen when you and I give in to “*fleshly lusts*,”

- *It Hurts Our Sense of God:*

A Christian lured into evil by lust loses the sense of the presence and power of God.

- *It Halts Our Service to God:*

You see, Satan stirs up desires to attack the soul of a saint with the purpose of inflicting a wound that will severely restrict our service for the Lord.

- *It Hinders Our Soul before God:*

You see, it's not so much the body as the soul that endures these onslaughts. Peter says “*Abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul.*” How are you getting on in the matter of inward discipline? Do you avoid putting yourself in a situation where sinful desires are excited? Are you diligent when it comes to reading the newspaper, watching the television, looking at the adverts? (a)

(b) THE MATTER OF OUTWARD DEPARTMENT:

Look if you will at (2:12) Here Peter is getting right down to the matter of the critics of the Christian faith. He is talking about those who run down the gospel. Those

who malign and misrepresent the Christian faith. In the first century church they were accused of unbelievable things. “*They're a secret sect,*” people said. “*They are people of another kingdom, they follow another god.*” “*They have plans to overthrow us.*” Throughout the Roman Empire people gossiped about their secret meetings, their loyalty to another kingdom, their plans to infiltrate, indoctrinate, and lead an insurrection. Now the question is, how do you deal with that? *How do you handle it when folks put down the gospel? What do you say when they make fun of the Lord Jesus? How do you stop the mouths of the critics?* Peter says, live beautiful lives before them. The word “*conversation,*” of course means “*daily conduct.*” The word “*honest,*” or “*excellent,*” conveys the idea of beauty. We could use the words “*lovely, fine, winsome, gracious, fair to look at, noble.*” Do you see what Peter is saying? He's saying that there ought to be such an attractiveness about our lives that nobody will believe what the critics have to say.

American missionaries Herb and Ruth Clingen and their young son were prisoners in a Japanese War Camp in the Philippines during World War 2. Here prisoners were tortured, murdered, and starved to death. The inmates especially feared the camp commandant, Konishi. On one occasion near the end of the war he hatched a diabolical plan which he forced on the missionaries and their fellow prisoners. *He increased the food ration but gave the prisoners palay, unhusked rice.* Eating rice with its razor sharp outer shell would cause intestinal bleeding, that would kill the prisoners in hours. It was a death sentence for all internees. In the providence of God the Clingens

and others were saved for in February 1945 the Allied Forces liberated the camp. Years later the missionaries learned “ *that Konishi had been working as grounds keeper at a Manila golf course. He was put on trial for his war crimes and hanged. Before his execution he was gloriously saved saying that he had been deeply affected by the testimony of the Christian missionaries he had persecuted.*” (Herb and Ruth Clingen Song of Deliverance) Is this not how to silence our critics ? There ought to be a loveliness, an attractiveness, a winsomeness about these lives of ours ? (1)

(2) THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS CIVIL DUTY

For in (2:13-16) he is talking about the Christian as a citizen. Now we shall find this hard to understand unless we keep in mind what the New Testament teaches on the subject of civil government.

- The institution of civil government is by Divine Ordination: Paul says “ *the powers that be are ordained of God.*” (Rom 13:1)
- The purpose of government is clearly stated: Look if you will at (2:14 Rom 13:3-4) Government must guard, maintain, and promote justice, order and peace.
- It is the duty of all men including believers to obey those in authority.
- The only exception to this rule is if civil government commands that which is contrary to what God requires. (Acts 5:29)

Now keeping that in mind look at what Peter says. He tells us we are to,

(a) OBEY AUTHORITY:

“ *Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.*” (2:13) Now don’t forget,

1. The Setting:

The secular power of the time was the Roman Empire, whose leaders condemned Christ to death and persecuted his followers. Many of the believers who received Peter’s letter had suffered persecution. The bodies of their friends and loved ones had bloodied the sand of the Roman coliseum. Their corpses soaked in oil had lit that vast stadium. These believers had been the target of the worst kind of mistreatment by the government, by their fellow citizens, by their neighbours. *Should these Christians pick up arms and resist a government with such a leader as Nero at its helm ? Should they organize protest rallies ?* “ *No,*” says Peter. Incredibly, in the midst of all this he says “ *Submit.*” Now look at,

2. The Command:

“ *Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.*” The word “ *ordinance,*” means “ *creation or institution,*” it does not refer to each individual law, but to the institutions that make and enforce the laws. You see, it’s possible to submit to the institutions and still disobey the laws, if they run contrary to the law of God.

Do you recall and his three friends refused to obey the king's dietary laws ? They disobeyed the law, but the way they did it proved that they honoured the king and respected the authorities. (Dan 1:8) Do you recall Peter and the apostles faced a similar challenge after Pentecost ? The Jewish Council commanded them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18) but Peter said, “ *we ought to obey God rather than men.* ” (5:29) Now they did not cause a rebellion or question the authority of the council. They submitted to the institution but they refused to stop preaching. Is it not important that we respect the office even though we cannot respect the man or woman in the office ? The word “ *submit,* ” here is a military term. It means “ *to fall in rank under an authority.* ” It conveys the idea of subjecting oneself, or placing oneself under another's authority. My God does not promote anarchy. The Lord Jesus said, “ *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.* ” (Matt 22:21) You see, the believer was not out on this earth to overthrow governments but to establish in the human heart a kingdom that is not of this world. 1. 2.

3. The Motive:

“ *For the Lord's sake,* ” (2:13) We obey because we want to honour the Lord and imitate the Lord Jesus “ *who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.* ” (2:23) My are you an example in civil obedience ? When it comes to filling in the tax forms, to driving the car, to keeping the law, are we model

citizens ? You say preacher, “ *I don't worry about all of that government stuff. I am a Christian, I am free in Christ. The Lord has set me free and I don't have to obey anyone.* ” Well, Peter deals with that issue in this very passage, for he tells us we are not only to (a) but to,

(b) ACT RESPONSIBLY:

Look if you will at (2:16) In other words, don't use your freedom in Christ as a cover up for doing wrong. Let's translate that into today's terms. I jump into my car after this service go to the top of the road and turn left and I get to the traffic lights and the light turns red as I approach it. *Well, I am not free in Christ. I don't have to obey all of these silly old laws that the government has laid down. I just move right on through that right light and wham I have wrecked my car.* The government has no right to control this pulpit. To tell us what to teach and preach, but it has every right to control matters that relate to health and safety. If the law requires a certain number of exits or fire extinguishers, or emergency lights, the church must comply. Now if you are like me, and you're not an administrative animal, it bores you out of your mind to hear all this being discussed, but the church must comply. Do you see what Peter is saying ? **Act responsibly.** Be a good citizen for the best way to silence the critics of the gospel is by doing good. (Ezra 4:12, 18)

Look at (2:15) Like a pack of yelping, snapping dogs these pagan critics were accusing these believers of all sorts of things. Peter says “ *here's the best way to muzzle them, by doing good.* ” By the way most of the critics of

Christianity don't know what they are talking about. Most of the folks who criticize the Lord, the church, and the believers really don't know what they are talking about. Most people are down on what they are not up on. Someone has said, "***most critics ought to be called crickets because they do their chirping in the dark.***" They don't know what they are talking about. But here is the way to silence them. Be a model citizen. (1) (2)

(3) THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS SOCIAL DUTY

For in little staccato bursts Peter gives us four commands in (2:17) when he says, "*Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*" Do you see here,

(a) ***OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE WORLD:***

"*Honour all men.*" Now that had tremendous relevance in Peter's day. You see, there were about sixty million slaves in the Roman Empire at this time. I mean they had all kinds of slaves. When the Romans conquered the world they quit work. They said there is no need when you are a world conqueror, no need for you to do the work. So they got slaves to do all the work for them. They had Doctor slaves, they had Teacher slaves, and they had Actor slaves. The Roman world was filled with slaves. So far as the Romans were concerned a slave was more like a thing than a human being. They didn't even look upon a slave as having a soul. Aristotle the philosopher said,

"*that the only difference between a slave and a beast was that a slave happened to be able to speak.*" Yet in the midst of that atmosphere the gospel of Christ came and it said, "*Honour all men.*" You see, every person is created in God's image (Gen 1:26 Ps 100:3) every person is an object of God's love. In our computer age people are looked upon more as numbers than human beings. There was one of those men up in the mountains a few years ago taking a census. He went to this mountain home, knocked on the door and the lady came. He said, "*I am taking a census and I would like to know the number of your children.*" She said, "*Well, there is Bill, and there is Sue, and there is Mary.*" He said, "*No, I am just interested in the number of your children.*" She said, "***Sir, my children don't have numbers they have names.***" Do you treat people with respect ? You may not agree with their conduct, their creed, their character, but do you show respect for them as individuals made in the image of God ? When you go into that restaurant, when you board that plane, when you wait at that counter, when you lie in that hospital ward, how do you act ? Do you help or hurt the testimony of your church by your attitude ? (a)

(b) ***OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE CHURCH:***

"*Love the brotherhood,*" (2:17) He calls the church the brotherhood. He recognizes the church as a family. And he understands that the cement that holds God's family together is love. Do you recall the words of the Lord Jesus ? "*A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love*

one another.” (Jn 13:34) Christian love is this. We treat each other the way God treats us. How does God treat us ? God forgives us, so we forgive one another. God receives us, so we receive one another. God is kind to us, so we are kind to one another. What about your relationship with your brothers and sisters in Christ ? Is it marked by love ?

(c) OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE LORD:

“ *Fear God,*” (2:17) Have reverence for God. Someone has said that “ *to fear God is to abstain from everything that displeases Him and do all that pleases Him.*” Do you recall what was said of Nehemiah ? “ *So did not I because of the fear of God.*” (Neh 5:15) Does the fear of God grip your soul ?

(d) OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE NATION:

“ *Honour the King,*” (2:17) which brings the matter full circle, back to the basic command of (2:13) Paul puts it like this, “ *Render therefore to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.*” (Rom 13:7) As God’s agent for carrying out the purposes of government, the Monarch, the President, the Prime Minister is worthy of the respect that God commands. So we see here the (1) (2) (3) *In our personal duty our lives are to be marked by attractiveness, in our civil duty our lives are to be marked by submissiveness, in our social duty our lives are to be marked by graciousness. This is how to silence the critics.* Warren Wiersbe tells that in the summer of 1805 a

number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in a council at Buffalo Creek, New York, to hear a presentation of the gospel message by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the service a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. Among other things the chief said this, “ **Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbours. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and led disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again of what you have said.**” That’s laying it on the line. I wonder how many people are looking at you and me and saying, “ *I hear what he says, now I am going to watch how he lives.*” Do you need to take seriously Christ’s words, “ *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*” (Matt 5:16)