

TRUE EVANGELISM

1 Peter 3:13-17

(Express appreciation to the men who ministered during my absence – John Seavey and Mat Uchiyama on the Sunday mornings, and Ron Bystrom and Joe O'Banion on the Sunday evenings. Dr. Lockwood and Dennis Hayes led the Wednesday night prayer meetings, and Ralph Wecks brought brief messages at the Saturday morning prayer meetings. My thanks to all of you who prayed for Lucille during her surgery a week ago Wednesday, and also during her recovery since then. Several of the ladies had brought food to us, for which we are very grateful. Thanks, too, for those who have sent cards and written letters, and for those who have sent or brought flowers. We are thankful to the Lord for all of you, and trust that the Lord's blessing will be upon each one of you for your loving concern and prayers for us. Lucille's sister, Pat Rutledge, has been here since last Monday, and she has been a great help and encouragement to us. She leaves tomorrow to return to her home and her husband in Bellingham, WA. Lucille is recovering nicely from the surgery, but her main problem continues to be *pain*. She had hoped to be here this morning, but just isn't up to that yet. We ask for your continued prayers. Dr. Lin, her physician, has cut down on her pain medication, but we are hoping and praying that the day will come when she can be off of the medicine completely. On Tuesday Dr. Zook, her surgeon, will remove the clamps from her incision. The Lord has been very faithful and very good, and we ask you to pray that Lucille and I will learn what the Lord wants us to learn through the troubles we have faced in the last year and a half. But again let me say how thankful we are for each of you and for your prayers. We had a delightful time on Orcas Island, and especially enjoyed being with Gary and Martha and Will and Katie. We also came back through Bellingham, spent a night with Pat Rutledge, and got to see that newest great granddaughter of ours, little Kelsey Grace Matthews, and her parents, Jason and Andrea. They will be down here next week for Miles' graduation.)

(Mention other matters for praise and prayer.)

PRAYER.

Intro: All of the epistles, or letters, found in the NT have two main characteristics. They were all written to the people of God, and they all emphasize the importance holy character and holy living. Most of the epistles of Paul were written to churches, but a few were written to individuals. The churches to which he wrote were located in Rome,

Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica. The individuals to whom he wrote were Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. It is very likely, although not certain, that he wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, probably Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. James, Peter, John, and Jude wrote what we call General Epistles because they wrote to larger groups of believers. However, the Apostle John's book of the Revelation was sent originally to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. *But without a single exception they were all concerned about godly character and godly living.* And the writers of these epistles believed that in order to be holy, and to live in a holy manner, it was important for every child of God to know the truth of the Word of God which each of them had a part in writing. Their object was that the people of God should know God – all Three Persons of the Godhead – and that they should live their lives to please God, which basically is what a holy life is. It is a life that is pleasing to God. It is a life in which the people of God are continually seeking a greater understanding of the Word of God so as to be strengthened to do the will of God in daily life. And this life is to be nurtured not only by teaching, but by continual fellowship with the Lord in prayer.

Now it is apparent as we read through these NT letters that the believers in the first century were not perfect. They had their problems just as we do today. The NT epistles were usually written to help them with particular failings. *But one thing is certain, and it is especially prominent in this letter written by the Apostle Peter, 1 Peter. It was this: that the believers of the first century were living lives that drew opposition from the people around them who did not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior! Persecution was what the early church faced because of their love for the Lord, and because of the way they were living to please Him. But the interesting thing about their trials was that God in His infinite wisdom and sovereign power, was using these trials to make His people even more holy in their hearts and in their lives.*

At the same time the Apostle Peter warned these believers that they must not suffer because they have done wrong.

Note, for example, 1 Peter 2:11-12 and 13-15, and then follow those verses with what we read in vv. 18-20. (Read.)

And this brings us to our text for today: 1 Peter 3:13-17. (Read.) This passage follows what Peter had said in verses 8-12.

I. A BELIEVER'S RESPONSE TO WRONGDOING.

We often justify the wrong kind of behavior because someone else has

done something to hurt us. And so we naturally feel justified in retaliating against the person who has done us wrong. But when we are in such a position, we need to remember the three points which the Apostle Peter made in verse 12:

- 1) The Lord's eyes are upon the righteous. He sees everything that is going on. He doesn't miss a single thing.
- 2) When we cry out to Him, He hears what we have to say. So our trials are to make us turn to the Lord, to trust Him, and to look to Him for help, instead of taking matters into our own hands.
- 3) The third point is that the Lord takes our part against the evildoer if we are really trusting Him for the help that we need.

And so instead of doing evil, we do good.. One place that the reality of our faith in Christ becomes evident is when we are the objects of the harmful, and often hurtful, behavior of others.

So note the question that Peter asked in verse 13. (Read.) The word "followers" is an interesting word. It is the Greek word for *a zealot*. And a zealot can be one who is looking for any opportunity to do evil, but here it means one who is looking for any opportunity to do good. And the word "be" is the Greek word for *become*. So someone seeks our harm, but he or she sees that we take this as an opportunity to do "good," *i.e.*, that which is pleasing to the Lord.

But then Peter went on in verse 14 to say that even if people seek to do evil to us because we stand for what is right in the sight of God, we are to rejoice in the privilege of suffering for the Lord's sake. Let me remind you again of what we read in Acts 5:41-42:

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

This was written after the apostles had been beaten, and told never to teach again in the name of Jesus. The true people of God in Scripture, such as Daniel and his three friends, realized the price they might have to pay for obeying the Lord, but they obeyed nevertheless, not fearing their enemies, but if they had a fear it was that they might fail the Lord in such a time of testing.

Let's skip verse 15 for the moment, and go on to verse 16 where the thought of verses 13 and 14 continues.

"A good conscience" is a conscience that has been enlightened and instructed by the Word of God. And though people may falsely accuse us

of being evildoers because we obey the Word of God, yet the Apostle Peter said that our accusers are the ones who will be ashamed when it is shown by our conduct that their accusations are false.

And then in verse 17 Peter said that sometimes it is the will of God for us to suffer for doing the right thing, but that is always “better” than doing evil.

Now the point in all that the Apostle Peter was saying in this epistle about living to please the Lord, was that such a life is never acceptable in the world. Those early Christians faced all kinds of opposition because they were Christians who lived like Christians ought to live. Many of them, including the apostles, faced all kinds of suffering because they loved the Lord and lived to please Him. And if tradition along this line is reliable, all of the apostles died a martyr’s death because they loved the Lord.

In our day we do not face that kind of opposition. We are protected by the laws of our country. But that does not mean that the Gospel is any more acceptable than it has been in the past. Living for the Lord often causes the loss of friends, and sometimes strongly divides members of the same family. Christians are often the objects of ridicule because of their faith in Christ and their desire to live according to the Bible. But I believe that this leads us to the very point that the Apostle Peter was making here in verse 15. *He brought up the subject of evangelism.*

II. WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

Evangelism is the spread of the Gospel through preaching in the hope of seeing other people turn to Christ for the salvation of their souls. And in every generation every Christian needs to ask, “What is true evangelism? What does the Bible teach us about how we are to evangelize the world?”

We all ought to know that professing Christians give many answers to that question today. On an individual basis we are taught a variety of methods by which we are to try to get people to listen to the message that we have to proclaim because it is generally believed among Christians that if we present the right arguments at the right time, we can get people to “accept Christ.” We have lost sight of the teaching of Scripture regarding man’s depravity, that no man seeks God, that no man can come to the Lord, nor will any man come to the Lord of His own accord. He has to be drawn to the Lord by the Spirit of God. People talk about man’s “free will,” never having learned that man’s will is in bondage to his sinful nature, and that he is a slave to his sin. We have a message to proclaim which the world does not want. How can we get them to listen? All of this has to do with

evangelism on a person to person level.

Or take what is called “mass evangelism,” where we try to reach great numbers of people. Now we all rejoice when anyone truly is drawn to Christ. God often works even when the wrong methods are being used because He is a sovereign God and can work whenever and wherever and with whomever He may choose to work. But what is the prevailing idea today? We spend thousands and thousands of dollars in massive advertising, rent the largest auditorium or stadium that we can find, employ as many contemporary musicians as we can to come to present music which is brought right out of the world as far as its style is concerned. We want people to be attracted by the programs we are prepared to put on in the hope that this will bring them under the Gospel so they will be saved. Hundreds, and even thousands, will profess faith in Christ, but what is the result? Only weeks after it is hard to find any of them who supposedly are saved. We seek to draw support from churches of the widest possible doctrinal stand, and some whose doctrine is contrary to the doctrines of Scripture. But doctrine is not the main issue to those who plan these great campaigns. The main idea is to get the largest number of people into the meetings, and so everything is done to get the most people involved regardless of what they believe.

But what is “true evangelism”? I am borrowing that title from a book written early in this century by Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer who became the founder and first president of the Dallas Theological Seminary. In his early days before he started the seminary he was busy in evangelistic work, and back then became very concerned that the things that were going on were not in harmony with the Word of God. He would be extremely distressed if he were alive today to see what is going on in the name of evangelism.

III. TRUE EVANGELISM.

In 1 Peter 5:12 the Apostle Peter spoke of “the true grace of God.” The term suggests that it is possible that there can be a *false and misleading* idea about the grace of God. The same is true of evangelism. While we do not have the expression, “true evangelism,” in Scripture, yet it is possible to be involved in methods of evangelism that are false in the light of what the Scriptures teach on this important subject.

In 1 Peter 3:15 we have the teaching of the Apostle Peter as to what *true evangelism, Biblical evangelism*, really is. The epistle was written, as I have said, to help the people of God to whom Peter was writing to know how to live holy, godly lives. And as we have seen, he singled out various

groups to tell them how they needed to live to please the Lord. ***And then we come to verse 15 in chapter 3.*** What was the point he was making?

He was saying that if we are living the way God wants us to live, if the Lord's people, if people in our churches which profess to believe the Bible and to preach the Gospel, will only live godly lives, the people of the world are going to be asking us to tell them about the hope that we have which makes us the way we are. Godly people are people who pray. Godly people are people who trust the Lord. Godly people are the people the Lord works through to awaken in others by the lives they live that what we have in Christ is what the world does not have and what the world can never provide.

Let me spend just a few minutes of this great fifteenth verse of 1 Peter 3.

What does it mean to “sanctify the Lord God” in our hearts?

The word “sanctify” can mean *to make holy*, but it can't possibly mean that in relation to the Lord God because He is perfectly, absolutely, and eternally holy! And besides what could we, mere human beings, do to make the Lord God better than He is?

But this word also means *to set apart*. And some MSS read instead of “the Lord God,” *Christ as Lord*. There seems to be more textual support for this latter reading – “Christ as Lord.” But the meaning remains the same regardless of which wording is the correct wording.

I haven't read any explanation of this word “sanctify” which satisfies my understanding of this passage, and so I am going to tell you what I believe Peter had in mind. I believe he was saying that believers need to set the Lord apart in the hearts as being the main Person in their lives, the One they love the most, the One they want most to please. He alone is to be our Lord, and we joyfully recognize that we are His servants, living only to do His will. And the fact that this is to be done in our hearts, means that it is real! He is not just our Lord in name only, but He is really our Lord. We are committed to Him alone! Such a relationship with the Lord will obviously show up in the way a person lives. This is the way of true holiness.

But what then?

“Be ready,” that is, *be prepared*. Because instead of you asking people to listen to what you have to say, they will be asking you for a statement of your faith, and *what you believe, and why?* The Apostle Paul said that we

are saved by hope. We have life now, our sins are forgiven. Are we prepared to tell people why we know our sins are forgiven. And what is the future prospect, a certain prospect, for all who know the Savior. It is not only to be in heaven, and with the Lord, but, most amazingly, to be like our blessed Lord.

And finally, “with meekness and fear.” We do all of this with the greatest humility, not taking any of the credit for ourselves, but giving all of the glory to God, to the Lord Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit.

Concl: This is “true evangelism.” This is God’s way, not better or more novel methods, but a holy people, who walk with the Lord, seeking to please Him in all things. We are never separated from the message we are to proclaim. Our lives are to be a manifestation of what it means to know God and to know Christ in salvation. Oh, that the Lord would cause us to do His work in His way that we might have His blessing. It would be a new day for the church, a day of greater usefulness in these days when it is so obvious that the world is desperately in need of the Gospel of the grace of God. Let 1 Peter 3:15 be a verse that you have committed to memory. But more than that, let it be descriptive of what you are doing each day in your relationship with the Lord, and then “be ready” for those doors that the Lord will open to you to tell others the Gospel of the grace of God “with meekness and fear.”