

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/3/03 PM

1 Peter 3:13-17 "How to Reach Our Community For Christ"

[adapted from a message at WBC on 7/4/93]

Main Idea: According to I Peter 3:13-17, if we are going to reach this world for Christ, we need to get a handle on two key, basic responsibilities.

I. Responsibility #1: Don't be intimidated by the Opposition (13-14).

II. Responsibility #2: Take advantage of the Opportunities (15-17).

A. Evangelism involves Verbal Influence (15).

B. Evangelism involves Visual Influence (16-17).

Several years ago we had some excitement around our house one day. A young robin flew into our garage and couldn't find its way out. The robin was kind of crazy. When Sherry and the girls discovered our "guest," they tried to coax him to fly outside. But all he did was flutter around the ceiling. He went back and forth from above the raised garage door, to the storage shelves. He couldn't see the huge opening that led to freedom. The girls tried putting down a trail of bread to show him the way. He either couldn't see it, or refused to follow it. By the time I came home for lunch, the bird had literally floundered in panic for 2 hours. I told the girls, "I'll take care of it." So I went out and tried to shew the bird out the big opening. To no avail. He just wouldn't cooperate. Finally I waited until the bird landed on the shelf. He dug in with his claws, and tried to hide behind a box. I took the leaf rake, and literally had to trap the bird under it, pick him up with my hands, and force him into the freedom of the outdoors.

Guess what happened the next day? No, not the robin again. This time a young cardinal! The same thing happened all over again. He couldn't see the opening. In his fear, he huddled in the captivity of the garage. Even though he could be free if he'd only go out the door. I had to forcibly get a hold of him and put him where he belonged.

It seems to me a lot of Christians resemble those frightened birds these days. You say, "What do you mean?" Think about it. We have a high calling. God has given us a significant task. We are the very ambassadors of the King of the universe. It is our privilege to represent the King, to herald the good news of what He has done for this world.

Yet what is happening? Many Christians are fluttering around inside church buildings. We're paralyzed by fear. We talk about how bad it is out there in society. We bemoan the fact that the media is biased against Christianity. We grieve over the loss of religious freedoms in the public schools. In essence, here's what's happened. Instead of flying through the open door, we've dug our frightened claws into the shelf, and said, "Get us outta here Lord!"

Listen. Our Lord doesn't want us outta here! If He did, He'd have already taken us to heaven. He gave us a task to do. We're to penetrate this world with the good news of the life He offers.

Objection: "Ok, but how? How can we reach this community for Christ?" That's the issue God addresses for us in His Word in a very important text, 1 Peter 3:13-17.

According to I Peter 3:13-17, if we are going to reach this world for Christ, we need to get a handle on two key, basic responsibilities.

I. Responsibility #1: Don't be intimidated by the Opposition (13-14).

Notice 1 Peter 3:13-14, "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.'"

The Setting:

Let me retrace the setting briefly. The year was 65 A.D., some 3 decades after Jesus Christ gave His life on the cross, conquered death, and ascended to heaven. His last words to His followers were clear, "You shall be witnesses unto Me (Acts 1:8)."

Ordinary people like Peter, James, John, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Apollos, and countless scores of others did exactly that. They took the gospel to the corners of the Roman Empire. In one generation, they reached the then known world.

Was everyone thrilled? No. Satan contests every step the church takes. In the mid-60's, Emperor Nero started a smear campaign against Christians. Many followers of Christ lost their homes and businesses, and eventually their lives.

Including people living in Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

Peter wrote this letter to the Christians in that region. They needed encouragement. It's not easy to live for Christ in a non-Christian world.

Here's Peter's first admonition. Don't be intimidated by the opposition.

He begins with a question. "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" Now that's an interesting question. In fact, it's a rhetorical question. The word "harm" means to "ill-treat." The phrase "eager to do good" contains the Greek word "zealotai" from which we get our English word "zealous." Here's Peter's question, "Who is going to ill-treat you if you are zealous for good?"

You say, "Lots of people, Peter! I know lots of self-seekers who wouldn't bat an eyelash to take advantage of someone, no matter how zealous for good that person was."

What's Peter's point? This. As a general rule, if you do good, people aren't going to hassle you.

For instance, pay your taxes, and you don't get letters from the IRS, usually! Be at work on time, and you don't get docked, usually.

But what if I do good, and suffer for it? Notice v 14 again, "But even if you should suffer for what is right [the KJV says, "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake..."], you are blessed. 'Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.'"

Grammatically, this is called a fourth class conditional clause. When Peter says, "If you suffer for righteousness' sake," he has in mind something that isn't typical. Usually, if you do what's right, you don't suffer.

But sometimes you do. Such was the case for the Christians reading Peter's letter. This was no hypothetical situation. The letter of 1 Peter is full of references to unjust suffering:

Verses Referring to Ill-treatment in I Peter:

1:1 "to the sojourners"

1:6 "though now for a season...trials"

2:12 "they speak against you as evildoers"

4:12 "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial"

Sometimes Christians do what's right, and still take it on the chin. What then? V 14 [in the KJV]: "Happy are ye."

Sounds kind of Stoic, doesn't it? Is Peter saying, "Hey, persecution's not so bad. Grin and bear it."? No. The word "happy" is the same word Jesus used in the Beattitudes. There it's translated "blessed," as the NIV does here in 1 Peter.

See: Mt 5:10-12 "Blessed are they who are persecuted for right..."

But wait. How can a time of suffering be a time of blessing? Take a close look at the latter part of v 14. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." Peter seems to be quoting Isaiah 8:12-14. That's significant.

Ahaz was the king of Judah in the 8th century BC. He faced a crisis. The mighty nation of Assyria was on the move to conquer the world. Israel and Syria formed a coalition against Assyria. They asked Judah to join. Ahaz refused. So Israel and Syria threatened to attack Judah! Do you know what Ahaz did? He made a deal with Assyria! It was like a mouse asking a cat for help against another mouse!

Then Isaiah the prophet stepped forward. He had this advice for Ahaz. Isa 8:12b-14, "...Do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare." The KJV puts it this way, "Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord..."

What's Isaiah's point? Ahaz, don't be afraid of men. Fear God, no matter how big your problem is. Sanctify the Lord. Trust Him.

Peter says, the same goes for us. If we are going to influence our world for Christ, here's our first responsibility. Don't be intimidated by opposition. Don't be surprised if the world doesn't applaud our efforts to spread the good news of Christ.

Warren Wiersbe rightly says, "Our enemies might hurt us, but they cannot harm us."

E.g.—Think of the growth of the persecuted church in China

You say, "How can a persecuted church impact its country with the gospel of Christ?" Listen. Opposition from the world doesn't hinder God's program. It never has. It never will.

Peter's counsel is clear, "Don't worry about the opposition. You just keep obeying the Lord's command." Live for God. Obey His Word. Proclaim the gospel to those around you.

This is key. When a church is obedient to the Lord, it impacts the world.

E.g.--

How can we reach this community for Christ? Here's our first responsibility. Don't be intimidated by the opposition.

II. Responsibility #2: Take advantage of the Opportunities (15-17).

Notice verse 15 "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."

God gives us a classic blueprint for evangelism, in verses 15-16. It's especially applicable for Christians desiring to influence a world that is critical of Christianity. But before we can impact lost people out there, something has to happen in our hearts.

The KJV says, "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." The root word is "holy." Here it doesn't mean "to make holy" but "to acknowledge and declare to be holy." Do you remember what Jesus said is to be the first element in our prayers? Mt 6:9 "Our Father...hallowed be Thy Name."

In the KJV Bible, the translation says, "But sanctify the Lord God." In the oldest greek manuscripts, the word "Christ" appears in place of the word "God." Sanctify the Lord Christ.

Listen. We don't make Christ Lord. He IS Lord. Our task is to acknowledge His Lordship. Our task is to declare the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord.

How do we declare the Lordship of Christ? We need to take advantage of the opportunities! When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, each crisis becomes an opportunity (Wiersbe).

Have you experienced that principle in your life?

E.g.--

There are two ingredients involved in successful evangelism.

A. Evangelism involves Verbal Influence (15).

Verse 15 again, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

"Be ready to give an answer..." the KJV says. The Greek word for "answer" is the word "apologia." Our english word "apology" from it. Now don't get the idea it means "to say I'm sorry." It doesn't. It's a legal term. An "answer" is "a defense presented in court." Apologetics is the branch of theology that deals with the defense of the faith.

Let that challenge sink in--Be ready always to give a verbal defense for the gospel. In a sense, we are all called to be Defense Attorneys for the gospel of Christ. Every one of us. And do you know what? The best opportunities for evangelism don't happen in the front of a church by an altar. Nor in a pastor's study. The best opportunities for evangelism occur when you're talking with your unsaved neighbor across the picket fence, or when you're sitting across from your buddy on lunchbreak. They happen in the school lunchroom, in the stands at the ballgame, and at the grocery checkout.

Yes, the opportunities abound. But do you know what's unfortunate? William Barclay hits the nail on the head, "It is one of the tragedies of the modern situation that there are so many Church members who, if they were asked what they believe, could not tell, and who, if they were asked why they believe it, would be equally helpless." (231)

Are you prepared to give a defense, an answer, for what you believe?

You may object, "But I'm not a professor at a Christian college!" Maybe not, but answer this. Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? Then Peter says you need to be ready! Are you ready? Could you tell someone right now, using the Bible to support your witness...

--how to become a Christian?

--why you believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven?

--why a person is not saved by being good, or religious, or moral?

--what Jesus did that made it possible for sinners to be saved?

Now some of you are thinking, "You know, I've really been negligent about sharing my faith with others. I'm going to witness more. But how do I get the opportunities?" Notice again what Peter says—verse 15, "to everyone who *asks you* to give the reason for the hope that you have."

What's the best way to influence unsaved people for Christ? What really impresses non-Christians? Beautiful church buildings? Not really. Are they impressed with our nice clothes and fancy houses? No.

A few years ago I talked with Keith Simpson. He had moved from here and was living in Dayton at the time. He talked about the challenge of reaching inner city kids. He said, "How are you going to convince a 15 year old kid who's making \$5000 a week selling drugs, who owns a Mercedes and doesn't even have his license yet...that he needs a relationship with Jesus Christ!" He's not interested in things, is he? He's got that.

But what *is* he looking for? HOPE! Most of his role models in his neighborhood have a criminal record, and a good portion have spent time in prison. What key will unlock the door of his heart? *Hope* will. And that's what we have, isn't it? Peter says to give him "a reason of the HOPE that is in you."

Listen. People are looking for hope. Not just inner city 15 year olds either. 50 year old housewives. 22 year old college graduates. 40 year old successful businessmen. How do I know that?

Do you know what God's Word says is true of every person who doesn't have Christ in his/her life? Eph 2:12 "having no hope, and without God in the world."

Don't miss that. People who don't have God, don't have hope.

Most people who don't have Christ in their lives don't know what they're missing. To them, life is a ratrace, and the one who dies with the most toys wins. They don't think much about God or hope. That is, until they rub shoulders with someone who has God and hope in their lives.

And sooner or later they pop the question, "What makes you tick? What is it about your life that's so different?"

When that happens, what do you do? Blast them with the "4 Spiritual Laws"?! No. Peter says to give them an answer, but how? "But do this with gentleness and respect." The KJV says, "with meekness and fear." Never forget this. Our task is not to win arguments. We are called to be witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys (Wiersbe).

When was the last time you shared your faith with someone? If it's been awhile, follow Peter's counsel. Go back. Peter says if we live godly lives, unsaved people will notice. If we rub shoulders with unsaved people, they will see our hope and ask about it. If they're not asking, the problem may be one of two things. One, we're not rubbing shoulders with them. In other words, we have no meaningful interaction with non-

Christians. Or two, they don't see any hope in us. They don't see that our lives are really that much different than theirs. When we face trials, instead of trusting God, we become anxious like they do. When money is tight, instead of knowing that our Heavenly Father will take care of us, we take matters into our own hands. And so, the reason they don't ask us about the hope in us is that they don't *see* any hope in us.

My friends, if we're not having opportunities to tell lost people about Christ, something's wrong. Which of the two potential problems is present in your life? For me, it's the lack of meaningful relationships with non-Christians. My life is surrounded by Christians. That has to change. Maybe the same is true for you. But if we're going to get close to lost people we must make sure they see something different in us. Maybe that's your struggle—lots of contact with non-Christians, but no impact due to the lack of personal holiness. Lost people don't really see the Lord in your life and therefore would have no reason to ask you about the hope in you.

Let's be honest about the changes that need to happen in our lives.

A moment ago I mentioned evangelism is a two-pronged activity. It involves verbal influence, but know this. It involves *more than* verbal influence.

B. Evangelism involves Visual Influence (16-17).

Verses 16-17, "Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

Someone has said, "A saint is someone whose life makes it easier to believe in God." (Barclay, 231)

Have you ever been in a Dr.'s office waiting room, and had this happen? The place is packed. Nearly everybody is quietly reading a magazine. Except for 2 people. And they're anything but quiet. You can't help but hearing them spout off their religious opinions. Neither can everybody else in the room.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not questioning the sincerity people like the two I described. But I do want to pose the question, What kind of influence does that kind of religious talk have on non-Christians?

Don't miss those words in verse 16, "your good behavior in Christ." Effective evangelism involves both verbal influence and visual influence.

Now please don't misunderstand. I didn't say that if we have a proper balance of the verbal and visual, we won't face opposition. Remember our first responsibility--Don't be intimidated by the opposition.

There will always be critics of the gospel. But did you catch what Peter said? He said that we could silence the validity of the critics of Christianity. How? By not giving them any reason to criticize us.

Never underestimate the power of a clean conscience and a pure life. Verse 16 concludes, "So that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

Oh, they'll manufacture reasons. The world will accuse us of being religious bigots, of holding to outdated fables, of endorsing harmful practices of indoctrination. But don't worry about that. Just keep sharing the truth. And living the truth. And the

time will come when the critics will be *ashamed*. When? On that day when they acknowledge the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord!

When will that happen? When will the critics be ashamed? There's one of two possibilities. It could happen when God by His grace opens that critic's eyes so he can see his need for Christ, repent, believe in Christ, and be saved. That's our aim. But for many, it will not happen this side of the grave. For many it will be when they fall before their Maker at the Judgment Day. Then they'll acknowledge that Christ is Lord. But then it will be too late.

Conclusion:

Do you see why it's so urgent for us to take advantage of the opportunities?! We CAN have an impact on lost people. We can reach unregenerate folks in this community. How? The Spirit of God can use our verbal influence and visual influence to bring hope to those lost in their sins.

Friends, we've got to get out of the garage and into the world. We'll never reach the lost from inside this building. Nor will we reach them by moaning about how wicked it is out there. If we're going to impact this world for Christ, we have to get a handle on 2 responsibilities:

1. We must not be intimidated by the Opposition (13-14).
2. We must take advantage of the Opportunities (15-17).

Let's spend time doing two things:

- discussing what we have seen from the Word
- praying for the Spirit to mobilize us to action