

## 10. Learning to Live as an Example in the World

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to become examples in their relationships with one another as Christians. We saw that as people live lives that are pleasing to God, He will work in such a way that we will be able to see the Lord give us lives that we can enjoy. However, we also live in a world where most of the people are not Christians. At times, we will suffer for Christ because many people in the world are in rebellion against Christ. As a result, our topic today will teach us ways that we can help our children learn to live as examples in the world where many people are in rebellion against the Lord.

In 1 Peter 3:13-14 we read, “And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’” As you can see, these verses begin with a question. It would seem like people would not want to harm us when we are doing what is good. However, Christ told the disciples the night before He was crucified in John 15:18-20, “‘If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.’” Here, we see that there are people in the world who will make Christians suffer because of their hatred for Christ. Such people are actually persecuting Christ when they make us suffer.

There is a need to examine our lives when we suffer. Peter wrote that if we suffer for the sake of righteousness that we are blessed. Here, we see a key lesson for our own lives and also one that we want to help our children understand. We are to make sure that we are suffering for righteousness and not for our own sin. Ephesians 4:15 says, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--.” Two things are necessary in order for our suffering to be for righteousness' sake. First, we must be sharing the truth. Second, we must be sharing the truth in love. We can share the truth with a wrong attitude and the world will rebel against our sinful attitude. In such a case, we will be suffering for our own sin.

In contrast, if we share the truth and also share the truth in love, we see that we are blessed. The apostles understood this when they were beaten by the Jewish religious leaders for sharing the Gospel. Acts 5:41-42 says, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.” The apostles were filled with joy when they had been beaten by the religious leaders because they had shared the truth and they had shared the truth in love. As a result, they considered it a privilege to suffer for Christ.

In fact, the apostles also showed that they were not fearful or troubled because of the threats that were made against them by the religious leaders. We see the response of Peter and John in Acts 4:18-20 when they were threatened, “So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the

things which we have seen and heard.” Here, we see that Peter and John spoke the truth in love and were not afraid of any threats because their desire was to be obedient to the Lord.

The word that is translated “be troubled” means “*to cause inner conflicts that take away our calmness of mind.*” In John 14:27 Christ said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Christ wants us to experience His peace. He does not want Christians to have inner conflicts that take away that peace. This is a peace that the world can never give us. As we have that inner peace, we are able to share the Word of God effectively even with people who might oppose.

1 Peter 3:15-16 says, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*” The word “sanctify” means “*to set apart.*” We are to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. Here, we see that we are to recognize Christ as the Lord and Master of our lives. When we have that attitude, we will always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us about the hope that we have in our lives.

The word that is translated “defense” means “*a speech or message of defense.*” Philippians 1:16-17 says, “The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.” Here, we see that people had two different attitudes as they preached the Gospel. Some preached Christ for self-gain. Others preached Christ from a heart of love. Those who preached from a heart of love knew that Paul was going to give a defense of the gospel when he spoke to the Roman emperor.

Here, we see that as Christians we should always be prepared to give a defense of the hope that Christ has given to us. Titus 3:7 says, “That having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” As Christians, we have been given the hope and confident assurance of eternal life. As a result, we are to be prepared to explain to people why we have that hope.

We also see the attitude that we are to have as we speak to others about the hope that we have in Christ. We see that we are to share that message with meekness and fear. The word that is translated “meekness” means “*with gentleness of spirit.*” James 3:13 uses this word when it says, “Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom.” Here, we see that if we depend on the Lord for godly wisdom we will give that defense with a gentle spirit that makes it possible for us to speak with wisdom. We will also speak with a godly reverence or fear because of our desire to please God.

As we give a defense of the hope that we have within us, we will be able to have a good conscience. A good conscience is a conscience that has no guilt because we know that we have a clear conscience before the Lord. Paul said, as he gave his defense before Felix in Acts 24:16, “This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” Paul

knew that his conscience was clear before God so it did not bother him to have to give a defense before a Roman ruler.

Peter had heard the Jewish leaders speak against Christ and accuse Him of many things. He saw that when Christ was crucified He was crucified between two criminals who were being judged for crimes that they had committed. However, Peter also knew how Christ had responded to the shameful treatment that He received. Peter knew the words of Christ that are recorded in Luke 23:34 where we read, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’ And they divided His garments and cast lots.” Peter had seen the example of Christ as He showed love to His enemies. At the same time, Peter had also denied Christ himself. As a result, Peter knew how it felt not to have a good conscience before God. Peter felt like such a failure that he and six other disciples went back to fishing. There, Christ came to Peter and restored Peter and promised him that he would have a great ministry. From that point in time, Peter made it very clear that he wanted to have a good conscience before the Lord.

As a result, Peter asked the Lord to give him boldness and strength to be a good witness for Christ. He boldly preached on the Day of Pentecost when three thousand were saved. Later, when Peter was brought before the very same religious leaders that condemned Christ to death, Peter silenced the words of the religious leaders by his good conduct. Acts 4:8-13 says, “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the “stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.” Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” Peter was totally without fear and had a good conscience before the religious leaders.

1 Peter 3:17 says, “For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” Peter knew the guilt and shame he felt when he had not been a good witness. He also knew the blessing and good conscience that the Lord gave him when he was faithful to give a defense for the Lord. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the way that Peter felt in both situations. That way they can fully understand why it is worth it to suffer for doing what they know is good and pleasing in the sight of the Lord. That will encourage them to ask the Lord for His strength so that they can live their lives as godly examples in the world. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to live as godly examples in the world.