

Doing Good in Suffering

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Take a moment now to read 1 Peter 2:13-25. As we continue in our sermon series in 1 and 2 Peter, called Bold Obedience, we will be reflecting today on Peter's instructions in this passage.

The key verse in this passage is found early on in verse 15:

***“For it is God’s will that by doing good
you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.”***

I invite you to spend a few moments now in silent reflection on that verse.

We often struggle to know God's will, don't we? Yet here, Peter is bold in declaring one clear aspect of God's will for us who are His chosen, holy, and beloved people; that is, 'doing good'. Earlier, in verse 12, Peter had instructed his listeners to, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us." Good lives are marked by good deeds; they are lives known for doing good. And that's the kind of life God calls you and I to live. Why? Because our good deeds are a witness to the world! (Our failure to 'do good', our failure to live and respond in goodness, is also a witness to the world!) Good deeds are to be an integral part of the spiritual sacrifices that believers offer to God (verse 5)

as members of His holy priesthood. We are set apart to live lives of goodness in an evil world. This is God's will for us!

The reason for doing good offered in verse 15, is "to silence the ignorant talk of foolish men". That rationale was particularly relevant to Peter's initial audience, as they were facing severe persecution in the form of slander and blatant lies about their character, their life choices and their allegiance to Jesus Christ. I'm certain those first hearers were eager to find ways to bring an end to the verbal abuse and harassment that they were suffering. Peter's answer: "Do good!"

Today, we may not be slandered in the same way that those early believers were, but there is no shortage of "ignorant talk of foolish men" in our world. Can our choice to respond in goodness actually silence them? And, better yet, can it be a catalyst that causes them to turn from ignorance and foolishness to truth? Peter says it can!

But, what did this call to "do good" mean in the context into which Peter spoke these words of encouragement and instruction? What does it mean to "do good" in any context? The answer isn't always clear, is it? In this passage and the remainder of his letter, Peter seeks to answer that question for his original hearers by spelling out specific areas in which they could live out God's will and

'do good'. Some of his answers are a little surprising, especially given the context in which they were written, yet they are the Word of God to Peter's first hearers and to us today. Two specific ways to "do good" are addressed in today's passage. Join me in reflecting on them.

1. Submit to governmental authorities (verses 13-14)

Peter advises his hearers that doing good means honoring and respecting those who govern. For the original hearers that meant honoring and respecting Nero, the Roman Emperor, and those who carried out his policies. But Nero was very anti-Christian. His policies and practices often led to arrest and torture and sometimes death for those who followed Christ Jesus. Despite this reality, Peter instructs those early-day believers to submit to Nero's rulership. They were not to speak out against his policies or practices. They were not to stage protests. They were not to defend themselves in the face of his government's anti-Christian sentiments. They were to submit to the authority given them by God. That was what it meant to "do good" in that time and in that context. At face value, it made little sense. For us today, living in a democratic society, it makes no sense. But it was God's Word to His people as they faced intense persecution based in lies and deceit. Submitting to earthly authorities, living as good citizens on earth, especially in the face of persecution was one way that they could "live as servants

of God” (verse 16) bringing light in the midst of darkness (verse 9). It was one way that they would truly be “set apart” (holy) in their world (1 Peter 1:14-16); different and distinct from their culture. The normative response at that time would be to fight back. God’s Kingdom response was to submit.

In recent months we have journeyed through an experience that has required us, as present-day citizens of Canada and the world, to submit fully to governmental authorities. We’ve trusted their judgement, as led by God, in the face of circumstances that are beyond our own understanding. We’ve isolated ourselves and put aside many of our personal freedoms as we have obeyed the orders of Federal and Provincial Health Officers. It hasn’t been easy! But by submitting to them, we have chosen to “do good”. God is well-pleased! Now as things open up a little, many of us are eager to return to pre-COVID ways. We want all of our rights and freedoms back! And in a democratic society, we have the right to claim those freedoms. But, we must ask ourselves, in doing so, will we be ‘doing good’? We ask this because, as Christians, ‘doing good’ is our high calling. It takes precedence over our personal freedoms and rights, always!

Governmental authorities are asking us to take baby steps. Why? To ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable in our society are prioritized as we move beyond COVID-19. And, of course, the Bible also asks us to put the needs of

others, especially those who are vulnerable, before our own needs and wants and rights. Through the Spirit, Peter here instructs God's people to submit to governmental authorities; to "not use our freedom (in Christ) as a cover-up for evil" (verse 16). Does this instruction apply to us today in the midst of COVID-19 precautions and protocols? Absolutely!

The Church's affirmative response to COVID-19 protocols established by earthly authorities is a witness to the God of love and compassion that we serve. It affirms our belief that God has placed them in authority at this time and in this circumstance. Our determination to support our leaders, even when we don't understand or agree with all of their decisions, gives testimony to our faith in the God who has given them that power and authority.

Our willingness to "do good" by putting the needs of others before ourselves speaks volumes to our neighbours and friends. It is an incredible opportunity for us to practice what we preach. We could call our own shots; there are plenty within our communities who have during this crisis. But would we not, by following their example, just be using our freedom in Christ in self-serving (evil) ways? Our leaders' desire to protect the most vulnerable in our nation is a reflection of God's heart. Are we willing to trust that God is leading them in this? Are we willing to submit to their rulings, as from God Himself?

Or, using Peter's words, are we willing to "do good"? You know, it may be weeks yet before we can gather together for worship, and when we do gather again we may be required to adhere to stiff protocols which won't be comfortable or convenient. Are we willing to continue to make this personal sacrifice for the sake of the greater good?

Submission to earthly leaders is God's will for us as we seek, in His power, to "do good" each and every day that we are citizens of earth.

2. Submit to earthly masters (verses 18-20)

These instructions are given specifically to the slaves who were part of Peter's earliest audience. Slavery was a well-established part of society at that time. In fact, many individuals sold themselves into slavery in order to pay off debts. Many Masters were kind and benevolent towards their slaves, treating them as part of their broader family. Others, though, were harsh in their management of their slaves, and beatings were not uncommon. Peter here instructs the believers who were slaves to submit to their masters with all respect; even to those who were brutal. He goes so far as to say that bearing up under brutal beatings was to their credit (verse 19), especially when those beatings came while doing good (verse 20)! The latter, in fact, was said to be 'commendable before God'! I don't know about you, but this doesn't sit well with

me; mostly because I've been raised in a society that encourages us to speak out against such injustices and fight for their end. We live in a society that seeks to be 'anti-bullying', 'anti-racism', 'anti-prejudice' ... and that's a very good thing. Peter was speaking to a culture and context where those actions and sentiments were the norm, and the priority of the church at that time wasn't fixing culture, it was proclaiming the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. (Of course, that's still the church's priority today, and fighting injustices goes hand-in-hand with it because we live in a time where democracy reigns in most parts of the world, and with it freedom of speech, freedom to assemble, freedom of religion, etc., etc.!)

At that time, the steadfast faith and confidence of believers, in the face of abuse and injustice and physical beatings, was a testimony to the greatness of the Lord and Saviour they loved and served. Bearing up under the brutality of harsh masters was possible because those early Christians knew God was their Supreme Master (they were ever 'conscious of God' – verse 19b), and they trusted that in His perfect wisdom and timing their honour as His beloved children would one day be fully revealed and restored. In the meantime, they were called to trust in Him, even as they suffered severe persecution.

Peter gives absolute honour to their suffering by saying that it, in fact, was a mirroring of Christ's own sufferings (verse 21). He recounts for them how Jesus

was without fault, sinless. Never did He speak a lie. Never did He deceive or slander. He chose to “do good” throughout His life! (verse 22) Yet He suffered greatly for their sake and ours. He was insulted, but didn’t retaliate. He was beaten and tortured, yet made no threats. (verse 23a) Throughout His sufferings, He instead “entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly” (that is, God the Father) (verse 23b).

Peter then re-affirms the truth of the Gospel -- Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the tree” (that is, the cross) (verse 24). Intense pain and anguish was His, and He accepted these sufferings for our sake ... “so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness” (verse 24). This is the example He set for us. And through His suffering, we have been granted the ability to “do good” even as we suffer! It isn’t easy. (It wasn’t for Him either!) But doing good, even as we suffer, is possible!

Peter goes on to remind his hearers (believers past and present) that by Jesus’ wounds we have been healed (verse 24b). While we were lost in sin, gone astray like a flock of foolish, head-strong sheep, He suffered those wounds for us (verse 25). Nothing ... no amount of pain, no insults, no torment, no torture ... could keep Him from saving us. And because He died and rose again, we have

found healing; we've been granted the privilege of returning to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls – the All-Powerful, All-Loving God! (verse 25)

Does this mean that life will be simple and easy and pain-free going forward? Clearly not! As Peter declares, "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps!" (verse 21)

We don't have to suffer lives of slavery at the hands of cruel and harsh masters, as many of Peter's first hearers did, and we give thanks for that. But we do suffer many things in this world. Of that, there is no question. Some suffering comes because we are followers of Christ. Other suffering simply comes because we live in a broken and fallen world where evil abounds. In the face of cruelty, in the face of lies, in the face of discrimination and prejudice, Peter's words are spoken to us. We are to respond as Christ did. We are to suffer the evil actions and attitudes of men, accepting the abuse and the pain that flows from them, by trusting in our God of Love and by "doing good" in the face of evil. In some circumstances God will choose to intervene to spare us pain and hardship. In others, He will journey with us through the pain and hardship, building up our faith, and using our witness and good deeds to "silence the ignorant talk of foolish men". None of us seek to suffer, nor are we to glory it in; but by God's grace we

can stand true to His calling to “do good” in all of life’s circumstances, just as Jesus did. We can walk in the steps of our Suffering Saviour.

As I reflected on this passage over this past week, I was reminded again and again of an Andre Crouch song that we used to sing back in the 70s. At the time, I really had no idea of the challenges that this song spoke of ... or the blessings that God brings through the challenges. I was just a teen who’d lived a very sheltered life and enjoyed singing great music! 40 years later, having journeyed through many difficult periods of struggle, I know the solid truths that these simple words present. I hope you do too! I close with them, because they help to explain why God instructs us to do good in the face of suffering.

(Note: Recordings are available on YouTube, if you want to hear it sung!)

*I’ve had many tears and sorrows, I’ve had questions for tomorrow.
There’ve been times I didn’t know right from wrong.
But in every situation, God gave blessed consolation
That my trials come to only make me strong.*

*Through it all. Through it all.
I’ve learned to trust in Jesus. I’ve learned to trust in God.
Through it all. Through it all.
I’ve learned to depend upon His Word.*

*I’ve been to lots of places, and I’ve seen a lot of faces,
There’s been times I’ve felt so all alone.
But in my lonely hours, yes, those precious lonely hours.
Jesus let me know that I was His own.*

*Through it all. Through it all.
I've learned to trust in Jesus. I've learned to trust in God.
Through it all. Through it all.
I've learned to depend upon His Word.
I thank God for the mountains, and I thank Him for the valleys.
I thank Him for the storms He's brought me through.
For if I'd never had a problem, I wouldn't know that God could solve them,
I wouldn't know what faith in God could do.*

*Through it all. Through it all.
I've learned to trust in Jesus. I've learned to trust in God.
Through it all. Through it all.
I've learned to depend upon His Word.*

**It is God's will that by doing good
you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men!**

What does that mean for you today?