

Doing Good (2)

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Today we are continuing in our sermon series in 1 and 2 Peter with a look at 1 Peter 3:1-7. This is a continuation from last week's study which focused on fulfilling God's will by "doing good" in our relationships with governmental authorities and human masters. The call to submission rang clearly in Peter's teaching, though doing so would have been extremely challenging for his first hearers. This teaching is challenging for us today as well, especially in light of the COVID-19 restrictions that have been placed upon us so that the most vulnerable in our society can be kept safe. It's hard to be patient and wait for our rights and freedoms to be restored, but that is what we must do as we choose to do God's will and "do good" in this world.

In today's passage Peter's teaching on doing good looks at another earthly relationship; namely, marriage. Wives and husbands will want to pay very close attention. And the rest of us will need to do so as well, because the instructions given have significance beyond marriage. Take a moment now to read and reflect on 1 Peter 3:1-7.

In these seven verses, Peter offers more practical advice on how to live out God's will by doing good. Marriage was a significant part of culture in those days and thus was an important context in which to live out the Christian faith. That hasn't changed!

It's clear from Peter's instructions in verses 1-6 that in the early days of the church there were wives who came to follow Christ, whose husbands did not. In a highly patriarchal society, that would have brought a dramatic change to the marriage and family, and certainly would have created some significant challenges and plenty of questions for these new believers. Peter seeks to address those challenges lovingly and firmly in his instructions here.

As in 1 Peter 2: 13 and 18, he commands submission. In 1 Peter 3:1-2 he invites these wives to submit – that is, to honour, respect, and obey their husbands, even the unbelieving ones. And Peter ties this, yet again, to Christ's own submission to the will of the Father when He willingly suffered and died for the sake of the lost (1 Peter 2:21-25). He specifically says,

*“Wives, in the same way, be **submissive** to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without talk by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the **purity and reverence** of your lives.”*

The priority of the church at that time, as in our time, is to proclaim the Gospel (the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ) and to win the lost to

His Kingdom. For these wives, the path to winning their husbands to the Kingdom was submission, purity and reverence. In respecting and honouring their husbands, they were living out true respect for God. In living pure and reverent lives, they were demonstrating the transforming work of His Spirit in their lives.

Peter goes on to remind these wives that it wouldn't be their external beauty that would win their husbands to Jesus; but rather the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight (1 Peter 3:3-4). In some cases, that gentle and quiet spirit would reflect a dramatic change in them; the work of God within. In other cases, what was already part of their character would be made all the more beautiful by the work of the Spirit within. Either way, the evidence of God's transforming power in their lives would provide the witness needed that He was alive and life-changing! And that witness would, in time, win their husbands!

Peter cites the example of Sarah, who submitted to her husband Abraham. She did this, though Abraham didn't make it easy for her – asking her to leave her home and family to go to a land that God had yet to reveal, having her lie about her relationship with him on multiple occasions, giving the best of the new land to his nephew Lot, nearly sacrificing their only son, Isaac. (Their story is shared in Genesis 11-25.) Abraham wasn't perfect, yet Sarah honoured and obeyed him.

(Of course, Sarah wasn't perfect either!) Peter invites Christian wives to follow her example of submission and gentleness.

Peter then speaks to Christian husbands in verse 7, spelling out how they were to fulfill God's will and "do good" in their relationship with their wives. He first instructs them to show consideration and respect for their wives. In a patriarchal society this was quite counter-cultural. Peter is, in essence, instructing them to give their wives a voice and say in family matters. He, secondly, encourages these husbands to treat their wives as equals, though society at that time viewed them as "weaker" and offered them no rights and no voice. Why were Christian husbands to take this very different perspective? Because, Peter reminds them, their wives were heirs with them of the gracious gift of life. Every life is brought into existence by God and made in His image. It is His gracious gift. And, thus, each life holds absolute value. Christian husbands of all ages were to reflect that in the way they loved and honored their wives. Whether their wives were believers or unbelievers, these instructions were to apply. And the bonus of this caring and equitable consideration of their wives would be prayers answered!

Now it's easy to look at Peter's instructions here and say they are only intended to apply to married men and women. And, certainly, those who are married should take them very much to heart. But let's not be too hasty in

limiting the scope of Peter's instructions here. You see, the call to "do good" and the call to win others to the Kingdom of God applies to all believers ... male and female, married and single, young and old. We may have a husband or wife to win; or it may be a friend, or co-worker, or neighbour, or sibling, or child. Each of us is called to share the Good News and seek to draw others into the Kingdom of God. Each is us is called to be "doing good ... (and) silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15). So, are there broader lessons to be drawn from Peter's very specific instructions here that can help us in our efforts to draw people to Jesus? I believe there are and I invite you to explore some with me:

1. A Changed Life is a Powerful Witness!

The primary message in Peter's instructions to wives is that a changed life is the strongest witness and greatest proof of God's salvation that anyone can offer to the world. Lives transformed by the Spirit of God, lives that are willing to submit and sacrifice for the sake of others, provide a powerful testimony.

Do others see that kind of radical transformation within you? Do they see someone who is willing to submit to authorities and sacrifice for others? Or do they see an individual who pushes his/her own rights, preferences and wants at the expense of others? Without God within, our sinful nature draws us to the latter, but the Spirit of God within empowers us to be the former ... submissive

and sacrificial, putting others first, doing good in the world. This life of submission and sacrifice is our greatest witness to God's grace. We "do good" as we live in this way in all of our relationships; especially with unbelievers.

2. Purity and Gentleness Draws People!

Peter encourages those early Christian wives to live "in purity and reverence" (verse 2) and to shine with "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (verse 4). He assures them (and us) that others will be won over "without talk" (verse 1), as long as we live lives of gentleness and holiness. We can't and won't bull-doze anyone into the Kingdom of God. Nor can we hope to argue or debate them in. But as we choose to live out the fruit of the God's Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22) -- others will be drawn from darkness into the glorious light of His Kingdom.

Are you offering that purity and gentleness that draws people to Jesus ... in your speech ... in your actions and reactions? Are you loving and gracious as you share the good news? Does your life match the message of transformation and re-generation you proclaim? Is your Spirit-infused character attracting people or repelling them? Gentleness and holiness will draw others to Christ.

3. Your Inner Life Matters!

Peter expressly tells wives that external adornments – braided hair, gold jewelry, fine clothes - isn't what makes them beautiful (verse 3). True beauty comes from within. Beauty rests within the inner self (verse 4). That is rarely the message we receive in our culture today with its photo-shopped models; though our mothers say it often, because it is truth! It's our inner lives that matter most!

The inner self of the believer is possessed by the Spirit of God who is pure and holy. He abounds in love and grace and mercy. Surrendering our lives to Him so that He can pour out these traits in us and through us leads to true inner beauty. His work is to restore fully the image of God in us! Our inner lives are what matter most ... both for our well-being and for our witness. So, let's make them our priority. Let's stay in tune with the Spirit and the work He wants to do within us. Let's allow Him full control so that He can transform us, bit by bit to bring that glorious beauty out.

Are you giving enough time and attention to your inner life? Are you spending time daily with God in prayer and the study of His Word? Are you surrendering daily to the Spirit? In these COVID-19 days we all have plenty of time to do this!

4. We Must Respect and Honour the Value of Every Human

Within our society there are many situations where true equality is not modeled or honored. Though we claim equality as a right, we're not there yet! Because of this we often hold prejudices and biases, sometimes quite unknowingly.

Christianity embraces the truth that God has made all people in His image and His love for all is boundless. In this, all have infinite value and worth. At the same time, we understand that all have sinned and are in need of God's saving grace and forgiveness. (You and I included!) We are equal in worth. We are equal in need.

As Jesus' followers we need to see the value in every life, and reflect it well in how we speak and interact with others. Our culture may choose to label some as unworthy and others as more worthy, but that is not God's way. The homeless person, the addict, the Fortune 500 CEO, the bartender, the bailiff ... young/old, male/female, white/black ... the sinner, the saint ... all are worthy of His love and our love and respect. Every voice matters. Every life matters. While others in society would judge or put down or ignore someone, we are to choose to love and respect and build them up – to treat as equal all who are “heirs of the gift of life” (verse 7)! This call to counter-cultural love and acceptance isn't easy, but by

the power of the Spirit within us we can live out these instructions in all of our relationships.

Do you value all equally or are there hidden prejudices that need to be surrendered? Do you see others as God sees them – of infinite value and beauty? Are you eager to see all come to faith and receive salvation through Jesus Christ?

Do you want to “do good” in this world? Then allow your changed life, your gentleness and your purity to serve as a witness to God’s transforming work in you. Live lives of gentleness and purity and draw others to Christ. Prioritize your inner life -- let the Spirit continue to re-make it so that it shines. Accept and demonstrate the value of every life as you seek to love and serve others in Jesus’ Name. And, if you are blessed to have a wife or husband ... start at home, loving and serving them!