

Fearing God, not Man

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Preacher: Vijay Henderson

[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Thanks so much for joining us. 1 Peter 3 is where we are today, and there's a handout here, which will tell you where we're going. Let me ask you a question as we start.

What do you think the best strategy is in a fight? What do you think the best strategy is for a fight? Think about our fight against the coronavirus. Was Victoria's approach the right one of a gradual lockdown into stage four?

Or was full lockdown like New Zealand, was that the best approach? Think about the war on drugs. What is the best strategy in that fight? Is it zero tolerance, being tough on crime?

Or is education and treatment the way to go? Think about the war on terror against ISIS and al-Qaeda, Boko Haram. Is the right strategy to fight back harder?

Or is it to install democratic governments with Western ideologies? There are lots of fights in the world, but what is the best approach? See, our passage today outlines the Bible's strategy for Christians in a fight.

[1 : 07] Peter's writing to Christians who are being fought against, persecuted for their faith. And that is the issue that holds this whole section together. So look at 1 Peter 3.

It's there in verse 14. If you suffer for what is right. 3 verse 16. Those who speak against your good behavior in Christ.

3 verse 17. Suffering for doing good. Look over at 4 verse 4. When you don't join others in reckless living, they heap abuse on you.

And 4 verse 14. Insulted because of the name of Christ. And the nub of the whole issue in 1 Peter. It's there in 4 verse 16. If you suffer as a Christian.

What is the best strategy for Christians in this fight? How would you counsel a younger Christian who is suffering because of the name of Christ? Here are some options.

[2 : 09] Would you tell them to retreat and run away? That's the advice teachers give to little students. When they're bullied, just ignore them or walk away. Would you tell them to fight back?

Don't cop that. Stand your ground. After all, offense is the best defense, as they say. Would you tell them to keep your Christianity to themselves?

Behind closed doors. Away from the public square. That's the advice of secular governments. That way we'll all get along. Here is a really tempting strategy.

Would you tell them to blend in and conform? Because if standing out as a Christian makes you look like a foreigner from another country, then conforming to be like everyone else is surely the way to go.

I wonder which of these approaches you think is best for elect people who feel the pain of exile. Well, Peter says something very different from all of these.

[3 : 15] And actually, his advice is like a very bitter pill to swallow. Because since chapter 2, his repeated strategy is to keep doing good regardless.

To keep doing good. 2 verse 11, he says, Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

Live such good lives among the pagans. And that tastes like awful medicine. Because if doing good brings about persecution, what do you think is going to happen if you keep doing more good?

Would you ever counsel a younger Christian to keep doing the thing which is causing them to suffer in the first place? Well, what Peter does today is he gives three reasons why doing good and fearing God.

Those two ideas are linked tightly. Doing good, fearing God. Three reasons why that is the best medicine for Christians in this fight. Those three reasons are our three points today.

[4 : 22] So we're at verse 12. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

Here, Peter is quoting from Psalm 34, which we basically looked at last week. Psalm 34 is all about the fear of the Lord. It has a very famous verse in it where the psalmist says, Come, my children, listen to me.

I will teach you the fear of the Lord. And that is a bitter pill to swallow. Because when David wrote this, he was being fought against.

He was on the run for his faith. Surely, David should fear Abimelech and the foreign kings. But he says, No, in a time like this, it is still the Lord.

He's the one to fear. You see, David has swapped his fear of men for the fear of the Lord. He was so full of God's fear, reverence.

[5 : 22] He had no capacity to worry about anything else. And I think that's where Peter gets his idea from. Just thinking about God and his opinion of me maxes out my fear tolerance levels.

His strategy is that we do a fear swap. At work, amongst friends, anywhere out there where Christians are insulted and fought against, it is still the fear of the Lord.

His opinion, his verdict that matters most to me. I think it's like we have a space set inside or set aside for other people's approval.

And when they slander us for being a Christian, we are crushed. Because so much of our identity is wrapped up in what they think of us. Our natural response will be to conform to the world around us.

To run away. To fight back. Any strategy to avoid their disapproval. In that way, it seems we're controlled by our fears of other people.

[6 : 27] But Peter says that we swap fear. That we learn the fear of the Lord. That we're so maxed out on God's fear that we just don't care what other people think or say.

That's why he says in verse 13, Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? The answer? No one. We just don't care. Look at verse 14.

Do not fear their threats. Do not be frightened. Here again, Peter quotes from the Old Testament. This time Isaiah 8, which Andrew read for us.

Enemies were at the gates preparing to invade God's people. Lots for the elect to fear. But Isaiah's advice? He says, 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. That's what we heard when Andrew read those verses. You see, David, Isaiah, Peter, a consistent Bible approach.

[7 : 30] When the elect feel the pain of being exiles, when we suffer as Christians, the Lord is still the one we are to fear. And if you do that fear swap, Peter says, verse 14, Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.

You are blessed. You see, you might lose relationships for doing good. You might be socially outcast for your faith, but you are blessed because things between you and God are great.

Verse 12, his eyes are on you. His ears are attentive to your prayer. Who cares about their opinions of me or their approval? Things between me and God are great.

It's his approval I care about and he sees me. His ears are attentive to my prayer. That is so much more of a blessing. Years ago, I was part of a team doing a university mission in England for a week.

And the whole team was sort of terrified of the social awkwardness of having to walk up to people on a college campus and talk to them about Jesus. But there was one guy in our team who just didn't care.

[8 : 47] He was so full of the fear of the Lord. He just didn't care about worrying about people. And he would just walk up to them and talk to them about Jesus. And everyone else in the team, we are crippled with social fear.

Well, this guy's diary was full of appointments all week to read Luke's gospel and to talk to people about Jesus. It was so impressive. It was so bold.

Peter says it was so blessed. A blessed strategy. His relationship with God was fantastic. It was so good. He just didn't care about other people and what they thought.

It is a blessed strategy. It is also a winning strategy. And this is our second point. Look at verse 15. Verse 15 is a very famous verse.

In your hearts, revere 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. There's the same idea to revere Christ, to fear

the Lord.

[9 : 49] A blessed strategy, yes, but a winning strategy here. Verse 15. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

If you really want to win against your persecutor, give them the reason why your hope rests on God's approval and not theirs. Give them the reason why you'll keep treating them with gentleness and respect, regardless of what they do to you.

And that, it might lead to some really good evangelism. But actually, Peter says it will cause them to be ashamed of their slander. You see, in the face of persecution, your options are to run away, to fight back, to go quiet, to be like everyone else.

But if you really want to win, or rather win the person, continue playing the long, silent game.

Continue to do good.

Actually, he said this many times in the letter already. 2 verse 12. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God themselves.

[11 : 10] 2 verse 15. It is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. 3 verse 1.

Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that they may be won over without words, but by the behavior of their wives.

When they see your purity and reverence, your God-fearing lives. Do you want your enemies to glorify God? To be silenced?

To be won over? To be evangelized? To be ashamed of themselves? Keep doing good because you fear God. It's like a long game of salvation chess.

A blessed strategy. A winning strategy. And finally, a better strategy. This is point 3. Verse 17.

[12 : 09] In verse 17, Peter claims it is better, if it's God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. And to prove his point, he shows three people who suffer for doing good.

There's Jesus himself, verse 18, who suffered once for sins. Not because he was doing anything wrong, but rather his death was the righteous for the unrighteous.

His death was to bring us to God. It was for a good reason. The second person is Noah. Noah felt the pain of exile. Remember, he was the only righteous man in the whole world.

Verse 20. When God waited patiently while the ark was being built. The third person, as we said all the way through, are Christians who are abused and insulted and maligned for Jesus' sake.

All of these groups of people, they suffered for their faith. But that is better, says Peter, because all three of them are vindicated by God.

[13 : 15] Vindicated when he saves them. See, the worst Jesus' enemies could do was verse 18. Put him to death in the body. But God vindicated him by raising him to life in the spirit.

Noah, he was tormented while the ark was being built. But God vindicated him. Verse 20. In the ark, only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water.

Verse 21. And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves, third person, you. Not the removal of dirt from your body, but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.

Just as a side note here, when Peter says that baptism saves, he doesn't mean the act of being washed in church that saves you. Rather, it's a shorthand for people who trust in Jesus.

Back in Peter's time, the only people getting baptized were Christian converts. So it's a shorthand for people who trust Jesus. But baptism is a great picture, actually, because in baptism, you go down into water.

[14 : 21] Not for, verse 21, removal of dirt from the body. And actually, I'll just give you the hot tip. The HTD baptism pool, which is under the ground there. That's the last place on earth you should go if you want to be washed from dirt from your body.

But if you want a symbol of someone's conscience being washed before God, then baptism is the place to go. We dunk people down.

It's a symbol of their sinful lives being washed away. We bring them up again, a symbol of their clear conscience with God, their salvation.

And that is a bit like Noah. Where the guilt of the world was washed away. And Noah was saved up on the water. And that is a bit like Jesus, who went down into the grave.

Who suffered in the body. But was risen up, made alive by the Spirit again. You see, even though God's enemies meant us all to suffer, He saves us.

[15 : 24] He vindicated us. Our salvation proves it is better to suffer for doing good than doing evil. Because God will rescue us.

But I think the thing that really links all three of these people together is the confidence of resurrection. Look at verse 18. You see, Jesus was put to death in the body.

That was the worst God's enemies can do with Him. That was their best weapon in the fight against Him. But He was made alive in the Spirit. You see, resurrection gives Jesus, gives us the power of, I told you so.

Now, we hate when people say, I told you so, don't we? It's usually because they are right and we are wrong. Likewise, if in a fight it's shown later that we were correct the whole time, it takes every ounce of our class and strength not to let them know about it.

But look at Jesus, verse 19. Proclamation here is a victory cry, like a herald in a battle who lets everyone know about it, who tells everyone who won and who lost.

[16 : 41] Here in verse 19, Jesus went and made proclamation by the Spirit to those imprisoned and disobedient spirits, the ones who tormented Noah while the ark was being built.

2 Peter chapter 2, it talks about a similar idea of fallen angels being held in chains until the final judgment day. I think that's the same idea here.

The point is this, that God has lots of enemies. Disobedient spirits, unrighteous people. Some of them put Jesus to death in the body.

Some of them tormented Noah while the ark was being built. Some of them persecute Christians today. But resurrection allows Jesus to go and proclaim that he won, that God won, that their rebellion against God had failed.

Verse 22 is a picture of that final day. Jesus goes into heaven. He's at God's right hand, angels, authorities, powers, everyone in submission to him.

[17 : 46] One day the whole universe will know that he was right to suffer for doing good, that he is ruling over everything, that he has won and they have lost.

You see, telling someone, I told you so, it has very ugly connotations. But actually, knowing that you will be proven right one day is a very powerful motivator to stand firm, to stay the course.

Jesus' resurrection means, it gives us the confidence that on the last day, he and we will be vindicated for all the universe to see.

That is a very powerful motivation. At the start of today, I asked you, I said, what is the best strategy in a fight? I asked you, how would you counsel a younger Christian who was suffering for their faith?

But really, how will you counsel yourselves? See, which one of these three reasons today did you need to hear the most? When you're at work and you're slandered?

[18 : 55] When you're in your family, maybe even in your marriage and you feel like a foreigner from another country? Maybe where you're amongst friends who like to heap abuse and make you the butt of the jokes.

I don't know what your situation is, where you feel that Christian rubber hit the road. But the next time you feel a conflict coming, your options are to run away, to fight back, to conform or to go quiet.

But also, your options are to keep doing good. Keep doing good because that is more blessed.

Because you've swapped your fear of people for fear of God. Will your heart and mind be so preoccupied with God and his approval that you just don't care what other people think?

Will you do point two? Will you play the long game? Like salvation chess, quietly continue to do good because that is what will win your opponents over or win over them, in fact.

[20 : 07] Will you remember point number three? That it is better to suffer now because God will save you later. It is better to suffer now because you will be vindicated.

You and Jesus on that final day for all the world to see when he is ruling. Let me pray that we would do these things.

Father God, we pray that you would help us to fear you, to continue to do good even if we suffer for it. We thank you, Father, that that is a blessed strategy, that you see us, that you hear our prayers when we do that, that that would win people over, just quietly continuing to do good.

Father, thank you that one day we will be vindicated along with Jesus. You have saved us now, but you will vindicate us in front of the universe. Would these three reasons help us to suffer for doing

good?

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.