

Fearing God, not Man

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- [0 : 00] My name is Vijay, I'm one of the pastors here, and welcome. Thank you for joining us today. You'll definitely need your Bibles open and your passages, the one that Graham read from 1 Peter, with you. And there was a handout as well, which tells you where I'm going.
- Let me start with a question. What do you think the best strategy is in a fight? Think about our fights against the coronavirus. Was Victoria's approach right?
- A gradual lockdown until we get to stage four? Or do you think that full lockdown from the beginning, like New Zealand, was the best approach? Think about the war on drugs. What is the best strategy in that fight?
- Is zero tolerance, tougher sentencing correct, or education and treatment the way to go? Think about the war on terror against ISIS and Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram.
- Is the right strategy to fight back harder or to install democratic governments and Western ideals? There are lots of fights in the world, but what is the best approach?
- [1 : 11] Our passage today, it outlines the Bible strategy for Christians in a fight. 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, actually. So just have a look down. It's there in 3 verse 14, suffering for what is right.
- 3 verse 16, those who speak against your good behaviour in Christ. 3 verse 17, suffer for doing good. It's in 4 verse 14, you're insulted because of the name of Christ.
- And the nub of the whole book, in fact, is 4 verse 16, if you suffer as a Christian. What is the best strategy for Christians in a fight?
- How would you counsel a younger Christian who is being insulted for their faith, for their good behaviour in Christ? Would you tell them to retreat and walk away?
- [2 : 20] That's the strategy that teachers give to little children. Just ignore those bullies and walk away. Would you tell them to fight back? Don't cop that. Stand up for yourself.
- The best defence is a good offence, as they say. What about keeping your Christianity to yourself? Just keep it behind closed doors, away from the public square.
- That's the advice of secular governments. That way we can all get along. Here's a tempting strategy. Would you tell a younger Christian to blend in and conform?
- Because if standing out as a Christian makes you look like a foreigner from another country, then conforming to everyone else is surely the best way to go. I wonder which of these approaches you think is best, the best medicine for elect people who feel the pain of exile.
- Well, Peter says something different from all of these. And actually, his advice seems like a very bitter pill to swallow. Because since chapter 2, Peter's strategy is to keep doing good regardless.
- [3 : 35] So chapter 2, verse 11, which sort of heads this whole section. 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. If doing good for God brings about persecution, what do you expect will happen if you keep doing more good?

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

Those two ideas are linked. Doing good, fearing God. Three reasons why this is the best medicine. There are points today. So point one. I'm going to start at 3, verse 12, in fact.

3, 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.

[4 : 40] Here Peter is quoting from Psalm 34, which is all about the fear of the Lord. In Psalm 34 is a famous verse. Come, my children, listen to me.

I will teach you the fear of the Lord. And that is a bitter pill. Because when David wrote this, he was on the run for his faith. Surely it's his enemies he should fear.

But David says, no. At a time like this, it is still the Lord. He's the one to fear. You see, David swapped his fear of Abimelech and foreign kings for a fear of the Lord.

He was so full of fear of God, he had no capacity to worry about anything else. I think that's where Peter gets his idea from. Just thinking about God and his opinion of me, it maxes out my fear tolerance levels.

His strategy is that we do a fear swap. At work, at work, amongst our friends, anywhere out there where Christians are insulted and fought against.

[5 : 47] It is still the fear of the Lord. His opinion, his verdict, his power that we are to fear. It's like that we have a certain amount of space set aside in our hearts and minds for other people's approval.

And when they slander us for our faith, we will be crushed. Because so much of our esteem is tied up in what they think of us. Our natural response will be to conform to the world around us.

To keep quiet. To fight back anything to avoid their disapproval. It's in that way we are controlled by our fears. But Peter's strategy is that we swap fears.

That we learn the fear of the Lord. That we're so maxed out on God's fear. His approval of me. His opinion that we just don't care what other people think.

So we can say verse 13. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? Answer. No one. We don't care.

[6 : 57] Verse 14. Do not fear their threats. Do not be frightened. Here again. Peter is quoting from the Old Testament. This time it's Isaiah 8.

Which Andrew read for us. Enemies were at the gates. Preparing to invade God's people. There was lots for the elect to fear. But Isaiah's advice.

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. You see. David. Isaiah. Peter.

A consistent Bible approach. When the elect. Feel the pain of being exiles. When we suffer as a Christian. The Lord is still the one.

We are to fear. Actually this has been the medicine. Almost all the way through. One Peter. So chapter 1 verse 17. Live out your time as foreigners.

[7 : 54] Here in reverent fear. 2 verse 17. Fear God. Honor the emperor. 2 verse 18. Slaves in reverent fear of God. Submit yourselves.

2 verse 20. If you suffer for doing good. It's commendable before God. 3 verse 2. Wives. They should see the purity and reverence.

For God. Of your lives. 3 verse 4. The beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. Is of great worth in God's sight. If you do a fear swap.

Says Peter. Then 3 verse 14. Even if you should suffer for what is right. You are blessed. You are blessed.

You might lose relationships on earth. For doing good. But you are blessed. Because things between you and God. Are great. 3 verse 12.

[8 : 52] His eyes are on you. His ears are attentive to your prayer. Who cares about others opinion of me. Things between me and God. Are great. He sees me.

He listens to my prayers. That is so much more of a blessing. Years ago I was part of a team doing a university mission.

And there was. It was all sort of awkward. And the whole team. We were terrified of the social awkwardness of it all. You know. Just walking up to people. Talking to them about Jesus. But there was one guy on the team who just didn't care.

He just didn't care. And he would walk up to people. And talk to them. And everyone else on the team. We were crippled by social fear. While this one guy. His diary was full of appointments.

To read Luke's gospel. And talk to people one to one. About Jesus. It was so impressive. So bold. He feared God.

[9 : 52] More than the social awkwardness of it all. Not only is that a blessed strategy. His relationship with God is terrific.

But it's also a winning strategy too. And this is our second point. 3 verse 15. Look down at verse 15. It's a very famous verse. But 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. And actually it's the same idea as point one.

Revering Christ. But it's actually a winning strategy. 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. You see. If you really want to have a win. Over your persecutor.

[10 : 48] Give them the reason. Why your hope rests. In God's opinion. And not theirs. Give them the reason. Why you'll keep treating them. With gentleness and respect.

Regardless of what they say about you. And that might lead to some great evangelism. This verse is used in evangelistic sort of ways. But actually Peter says. It causes them to be ashamed of their slander.

You see. In the face of persecution. Your options are to run away. Or fight back. Or keep quiet. But if you really want to win. Continue doing good.

That is a winning strategy. Listen. Actually he's been saying this all along as well. Chapter 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. 2 verse 15. It is God's will that by doing good. You should silence the ignorant talk.

[11 : 51] Of foolish people. 3 verse 1. Wives in the same way. Submit yourselves to your own husband. 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 for themselves?

Do you want them to be silenced? Do you want them to be won over? Do you want them to be evangelized? Do you want them to be ashamed of themselves? Then keep doing good. Because you fear God.

More than you fear them. It is a blessed strategy. It is a winning strategy. It's like playing the longer game of salvation chess.

A winning strategy. And finally. It is a better strategy. So this is point 3. Verse 17. It is better.

[12 : 49] If it is God's will. To suffer for doing good. Than for evil. And to prove his point. Peter shows us 3 people. Who suffer for doing good.

The first is Jesus himself. Verse 18. Who suffered once for sins. And not that he did anything wrong. But rather his death was. The righteous for the unrighteous.

It was to bring us to God. For a good reason. Second person is Noah. Noah felt the pain of exile. Remember he was the only righteous man alive.

Verse 20. When God waited patiently. While the ark was being built. The third person are Christians. Who we've said all along. Are abused and insulted for their faith.

These people. Fear God more. They're willing to suffer for doing good. But all three. Will be vindicated. Will be shown to be right.

[13 : 47] When God saves them. So the worst Jesus enemies could do. Was verse 18. To put him to death in the body. But God vindicated him. He made him alive.

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. A third person. You. Not the removal of dirt from the body.

But the pledge. Of a clear conscience. Towards God. I'll just say. When Peter says. That baptism saves you. He doesn't mean the act. Of being washed in church. Rather.

He uses it as a shorthand. For trusting in Jesus. Back in Peter's day. The only people being baptized. Were Christian converts. So baptism is a shorthand.

[14 : 42] For people who trust in Jesus. But baptism is a great picture. Actually. Because. You know. You go down into the water. Not. For verse 21. Removal.

Of dirt from the body. Actually. Let me just give you the tip. The HCD. Baptism pool. Is the last place on earth. You should go. If you want to. Wash yourself clean.

But if you want a symbol. Of someone's conscience. Being washed. Clean. Before God. Then baptism. Is the place. To go. We dunk people down.

A symbol. Of their. Sinful life. Being washed away. They come up again. A symbol. Of their. Clear conscience. Their. Salvation.

With God. And that's a bit like. Noah. Where the guilt. Of the world. Was washed away. But he was saved. On the water. And.

[15 : 36] And that's a bit like. Jesus. Who went. Down into the grave. And after dying for sins. But then. Rose up again. You see. Even though. God's enemies. Meant us. All to suffer.

He. Saves us. We are vindicated. By him. Our salvation. Proves. That it is better. To suffer. For doing good. Than for evil.

But. I think. What really links. All these three things. Is the confidence. Of resurrection. The confidence. Of resurrection. You see. Verse 18. Jesus was.

Put to death. In the body. It was the worst. God's enemies. Could do to him. It was their best. Weapon in the fight. But. He was made alive. In the spirit.

Verse 22. It goes further. Doesn't it? It says. He has gone. Into heaven. And is at God's right hand. With angels. And authorities. And powers. Into submission. You see.

[16 : 33] Resurrection. Gives us all. The power. Of. I told you so. You see. We hate it. When people say. I told you so. Because it means. That they are right. And we are wrong.

Likewise. In a conflict. If it's proved. That. We are correct. In the end. It takes. Every bit of. Strength. And class. Not to let them know. All about it.

But look at Jesus. In verse 19. After being made alive. He went. And made. Proclamation. To the imprisoned spirits. To those. Who were disobedient.

Long ago. The proclamation. Here. Is a victory cry. Like a herald. In a battle. Who lets everyone know. Who won. And who lost. Actually.

This is a common idea. In the New Testament. So Philippians 2. After Jesus resurrection. Every knee will bow. And every tongue. Confess. That he is the Lord. Colossians 2.

[17 : 29] 15. He makes a public spectacle. Of his enemies. Triumphant over them. At the cross. And here in verse 19. In the spirit.

Jesus went. And made. Proclamation. To those. Imprisoned. And disobedient spirits. The ones. In the time. Of Noah. While the ark. Was being built.

2 Peter 2. Talks about. A similar idea. Of fallen angels. Being held. In chains. Until judgment day. I think that's. The same idea. But the point is this.

God has lots. Of enemies. Spiritual. And. Physical. 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. But resurrection. Allows Jesus. To go and proclaim. That he has.

[18 : 25] Won. That their rebellion. Against God. Has failed. Actually verse 22. It's a picture. Of that final day. When the whole universe. Will know. That he is.

That he is. Victorious. That he is. Vindicated. You see. Telling someone. I told you so. It's sort of got an. Ugly connotation. But knowing that you will be proven right.

Is a powerful motivator. To keep you staying. The course. Jesus resurrection means. On the last day. Both. He. And you.

Will be. Vindicated. For all your suffering. Now. Resurrection means. It is better. To suffer now. For doing good.

At the start. I asked you. What the best strategy. In a fight was. I asked you. How you would counsel. A younger Christian. Who was suffering. For their faith. But really. How would you counsel.

[19 : 23] Yourself. Which one of these. Three reasons. Do you need to hear the most. When you're at work. Being slandered. For your faith. At home. In your family.

Maybe even in your own marriage. Where you feel like. A foreigner. From another country. Or amongst your friends. Who like to heap. Abuse. On you. I don't know what your. Situation is.

Where the. The Christian rubber. Hits the road. But next time. You feel a conflict. Coming. Because of your faith. Will you. Retreat. Will you fight back.

Will you. Run away. Will you keep quiet. Will you conform. Or will you. Realize point one. That it is more.

Blessed. To swap your fear. Of people. For a fear. Of God. Will your heart. And mind. Be so. Preoccupied. With God's approval.

[20 : 18] That you just don't care. What other people. Think. Or say. Will you. Do point two. Play that long game. Like salvation chess. Quietly.

Keep doing good. Because that will. Win. Those people over. Or will you. Point three. It is better to suffer now. Because God.

Will save you. Later. On that final day. You. And Jesus. Will be. Vindicated. For all. The universe. To see. Let me pray.

That we would do these things. Father God. Would we. Keep suffering. For doing good. Would we keep. Fearing you. More.

Than people. Please help us. Learn. These three reasons. When we feel. The Christian conflict. Coming our way. Please. Will we stand.

[21 : 13] Firm. Please. Would we. Fear you. Would we. Keep doing good. Regardless. Of what people. Do to us. Please. Keep our eyes. On our salvation.

On that final day. When we all. Will be. Vindicated. We ask this. In Jesus name. Amen.