

I PETER 3:13-17
CONDUCT IN SUFFERING!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Peter chapter 3 as we continue our in-depth study of this letter that Peter wrote to the church which was dispersed throughout Asia Minor.

This morning our text is going to focus on – ***CONDUCT IN SUFFERING!***

I know, some of you are thinking, ***“Suffering, he just spent two weeks telling me that I have to be submissive to the government, to my boss, in my marriage and home. In fact, he told me that I have to be submissive in life! And then he nails me by saying that Jesus is our example and thus, we need to be submissive as He was! I think I suffered enough!”***

Sorry about that, but we are not done, not yet.

Remember how Peter started out this letter. He did so by speaking of – ***THE SALVATION OF THE BELIEVER!***

And salvation is the first step and the moment we get saved, then the sanctification process begins as the Lord is molding and shaping our lives into His image. We are becoming more like Christ, not God, but His nature should be seen in us.

And yes, then, as part of this sanctification process, we dealt with – ***THE SUBMISSION OF THE BELIEVER!***

Not easy but it is important as we witness for Christ with not only our words, but with our life!

Again, part of this sanctification process, as we will see this morning, we will deal with our – ***CONDUCT IN SUFFERING!***

Remember what Peter wrote back in I Peter 2:9-12, before he spoke of submission in our life and then suffering in our life! He wrote, **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”**

In other words, since you are a child of God, then live accordingly! That is so important for us to understand.

I think we all can see that suffering and persecution for our faith is on the increase, not only here in America, but in the world!

In fact, and these statistics are about a year ago, from January 2024, but around 365 million Christians are subject to ***“high levels of persecution and discrimination.”*** This compared to 340 million in 2021. 1 in 7 Christians are persecuted worldwide, including 1 in 5 in Africa and 1 in 7 in Asia. I think it is getting worse, even in less than a year!

Let me show you how crazy it is getting out there, who they are arresting. Not criminals, but Christians. Not for violence, but praying, for speaking forth the truths of God found in the Word of God in love.

Now some of you may not be interested in this but hear me out. When this comes upon this nation even more than it is now, do you know how you are going to respond? Peter is going to show us, and we will get to that in a few minutes.

But first, listen to this report. We are told,

Persecution against Christians is rapidly increasing across western countries. In many ways we are transitioning into a post-Christian era in historically Christian nations. Some may argue we have been in a post-Christian era for some time now.

Street preachers are being arrested. Hundreds of congregants have been fined by various governments over COVID policies. Some have lost their jobs due to sharing their Biblical values on their social media. Some have even been denied foster care and adoption opportunities because of their biblical beliefs. Dozens have faced fines or arrests for praying outside of abortion clinics. The west is no longer what it used to be . . .

- In Australia, Pastor Paul Furlong was fined, arrested, and spent a month behind bars for hosting an in-person church service. He was also banned from social media.
- In Canada pastor Derek Reimer was arrested not once but twice for praying silently outside a LGBTQ event.
- In Finland, Päivi Räsänen, a member of parliament was charged with hate speech for sharing the Christian understanding of marriage in a tweet online.
- In Latvia, the minister of justice divided a congregation into vaccinated and not-vaccinated members of the Roman Catholic Church in Riga. Only the vaccinated were permitted to participate in service.
- In Spain, two people were fined for their prayers outside of an abortion facility. One of which was a young man who prayed the rosary. [I am not condoning praying the rosary or what the Roman Catholic Church stands for, they are wrong, but notice that there was no violence and yet, they were arrested for praying!]
- In the United States, Shawn and Teresa Kellim were denied the license and opportunity to foster due to their beliefs.
- In the United Kingdom, a 71-year-old pastor, John Sherwood, was handcuffed and bruised right in the middle of his sermon on marriage and family.

Again, I repeat, the west is no longer what it used to be. There is a fierce narrative war to redefine what once was common biblical values. The moral conscience of the western nations has been rewritten. Biblical values are no longer seen as just archaic. Now they are seen as hate crimes and even weapons of terror.

In the Fall of 2023, it became known that multiple FBI offices coordinated a memo deeming *“radical-traditionalist Catholic ideology”* as a potential security threat. Two studies from the University of Maryland that were funded by the United States Department of Homeland Security listed Christians as *“perpetrators of terrorism.”*

No doubt there are many factors contributing to the rising persecution trend against Christians. Of course, the entertainment industry’s irreverence to Biblical values is to be expected nowadays however it is appalling as we begin to see government entities and bureaucracies weaponize their power against Biblical values. We are beginning to see that even on a local level for example in school board meetings.

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Okay, just so you know, according to our government, the United States Department of Homeland Security listed you, a Christian as *“perpetrators of terrorism.”*

Why did they do that?

Because they understand, and rightly so, that Christians are a powerful force and it is not because we have more money, more resources, more guns, more this or more that. The only reason we are more powerful, the only reason we are a threat to their global agenda, is because God is with us and the gates of Hell will not prevail against His Church! And not only is God with us, but as a body of believers, we are strong. That is why they want to divide us up, cause all kinds of discourse so we separate from each other. Some are still not back at church from COVID!

Because of that I believe we are in this section of Scripture because this is exactly what the Lord wants us to understand – ***HOW WE CONDUCT OURSELVES IN SUFFERING!***

I have broken down the verses we will be looking at this morning into the following main points.

They are,

SUFFERING FOR THE FAITH – I PETER 3:13-14

DEFEND YOUR FAITH – I PETER 3:15-16

GOD’S WILL – I PETER 3:17

So with that as our introduction, let’s begin reading in I Peter chapter 3, beginning in verse 13 and let’s see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this topic –

CONDUCT IN SUFFERING!

I PETER 3**VERSES 13-14**

Let me start with this and then I will expound on these verses because I think many Christians have closed their eyes to the fact that persecution is happening in the world today and they are just ignoring it, they don't want to deal with it as long as it is not affecting them.

But let me say this – ***IT WILL AFFECT YOU AND THUS, YOU NEED TO BE PREPARED!***

One writer gave us this warning as he wrote,

Today there is an escalating hostility toward biblical Christianity throughout Western culture. But the roots of that hostility are decades, even centuries, old.

Francis Schaeffer provided the following analysis in the 1970 s:

In ancient Israel, when the nation had turned from God and from his truth and commands as given in Scripture, the prophet Jeremiah cried out that there was death in the city. He was speaking not only of physical death in Jerusalem but also a wider death.

Because Jewish society of that day had turned away from what God had given them in the Scripture, there was death in the *polis*, that is, death in the total culture and the total society.

In our era, sociologically, man destroyed the base which gave him the possibility of freedoms without chaos. Humanists have been determined to beat to death the knowledge of God and the knowledge that God has not been silent, but has spoken in the Bible and through Christ - and they have been determined to do this even though the death of values has come with the death of that knowledge.

We see two effects of our loss of meaning and values.

The first is degeneracy [depravity].

Think of New York City's Times Square - Forty-second and Broadway. If one goes to what used to be the lovely Kalverstraat in Amsterdam, one finds that it, too, has become equally squalid [repulsive]! The same is true of lovely old streets in Copenhagen. Pompeii has returned!

The marks of ancient Rome scar us: degeneracy, decadence, depravity, a love of violence for violence's sake. The situation is plain. If we look, we see it. If we see it, we are concerned.

But we must notice that there is a second result of modern man's loss of meaning and values which is more ominous, and which many people do not see.

This second result is that the elite will exist. Society cannot stand chaos. Some group or some person will fill the vacuum. An elite will offer us arbitrary absolutes, and who will stand in its way? (How Should We Then Live? [Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1976], 226-27; emphasis in the original)

Believers in Peter's time lived in the Roman Empire Schaeffer referred to, facing all the same kind of degeneracy and depravity that assaults today's church. But they faced more frequent and overt hostility and persecution than believers in today's culture face.

In some parts of the world, however, there is direct persecution of believers, and it is likely that in the coming years Christians everywhere will face increasing hostility, both from civil authorities and from unbelievers at the personal level.

This passage speaks to all who would live godly lives in the midst of a hostile, ungodly culture.

- John MacArthur, I Peter 3:13

So what Peter is saying here is important if we want to represent Christ in a world that is in darkness and is fighting against us!

For the most part, Peter is saying that it is unusual for people who are hostile to Christianity to harm you because you are zealous for Jesus, as long as you are not breaking the law, but it does happen and for the people of Peter's day, the persecution was growing.

We have had it pretty easy in this country, but things are changing and because we stand for the Lord, for what is good, persecution is coming and I don't want to alarm you, but it is here as you have seen in our introduction this morning!

Just go to college and take a stand against homosexuality, transgenderism, say you are a Trump supporter, that you are pro-Israel, and you will, many times get kicked out of your class. If you disagree with their agenda, you are out. That is not education, that is brain washing!

Today we see in many parts of this world the persecution of Christians; in fact, more Christians have been martyred in our day than at any other part of Christian history!

And folks, like in Peter's day, that will grow only more intensely and spread throughout the world!

The question is, ***“Are you going to allow persecution, people coming against you and what you believe to change your behavior? Are you going to water down your faith? Are you going to play secret-agent Christian and live out your faith in secret?”***

Of course not, we are to live out our faith in spite of what people throw at us! You see, we should always answer evil with good even though when we do good, people may answer back with evil. Just don't let it change how you live out your faith!

Jesus said 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.”**

It is always a dangerous thing when the church, when believers befriend the world because it will only weaken the believers, weaken their faith while persecution will strengthen it.

When you read these New Testament letters, even the Gospel’s, why is there such an emphasis on suffering, persecution, martyrdom?

Because it was a reality, that is what they were facing, and the Holy Spirit is warning us that this too is what we will face.

In many countries right now, people are being arrested for their posts on Facebook that are hateful, according to what their standard of hateful is. In other words, they are being arrested for posting things that the government did not like!

That means that they are watching you. I am not trying to freak you out here, but it is a reality. And when you share your faith, that Jesus is the only way, that we are sinners, that what they deem as normal behavior we see as a sin because that is what God has said, then that will be deemed hateful by them, and they can come and arrest you.

I watched a post of a police officer, in full body armor, come and arrest someone in another country, in Europe for what they posted on Facebook, it was deemed as hateful! So please, don’t brush this off, it is happening!

And what is happening in other countries will happen here. Now we have Facebook jail were you can't post but I am talking about real jail time, real fines for posting things that Big Brother, I mean the Government doesn't like!

So to have the correct mindset, which is obviously needed if we are going to properly serve the Lord, when we are persecuted for our faith, and for some, even die for their faith, we must have the right attitude, we must have the mindset of a soldier!

You can have the best equipment money can buy, the best weapons you can imagine and yet, if you don't have the right attitude, then it will not help you at all.

One writer put it like this as he wrote, ***“Spiritual warfare will be won or lost in the mind - in your attitude toward what the Christian life is really all about and how you view every situation and circumstance that God puts you in. I believe one of the big reasons that the church in America is so powerless, defeated and irrelevant is because most Christians don't have the proper attitude toward the Christian life - they don't have the mindset of a soldier and as such they have no heart for battle. They are nothing more than ‘Country Club Christians.’”***

How true that is!

If you want to have that victory in the Christian life, if you want your walk to be a faithful walk with Christ, then it will start with the way you think!

I know, that sounds strange, but what is the Christian life all about?

Again, one writer put it like this as he wrote, *“Don’t be afraid of men, or terrified by their threats” (1Peter 3:14). How well the martyrs lived out this policy! When Polycarp was promised release if he would blaspheme Christ, he said, “Eighty-six years I have served Christ and He has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” When the proconsul threatened to expose him to the wild beasts, he replied, “It is well for me to be speedily released from this life of misery.” Finally, the ruler threatened to burn him alive. Polycarp said, “I fear not the fire that burns for a moment: You do not know that which burns forever and ever.”*

That is how we are to live for Christ, give Him our life as a living sacrifice – ***HERE I AM LORD, USE ME!***

The problem is that many are not prepared for what is coming and it is going to be a shock to them.

Some feel that before anything bad happens, the church will go home to be with the Lord, the Rapture will happen!

I personally don’t think so. I think we are going to see some worldwide persecution of Christians that has already begun, and we need to be ready, we need to have the right attitude to stand strong in the Lord and the power of His might or we will be defeated!

I am not talking about the Tribulation Period; we are not here for that. I am talking about the pre-labor pains before the Tribulation starts and if you are not seeing what is happening, then you are not watching, you are not paying attention!

The other problem here is that the church today wants the world to love them and to do that, they compromise what they believe, they water down the Scriptures so not to offend anyone!

Make no mistake about it, the world will not love us because we are at war with the world, and they are at war with God. And since they can't fight against God, they will come against those who believe in the One true God!

Meyer put it this way, *“Not to be hated by the world; to be loved and flattered and caressed by the world – is one of the most terrible positions in which a Christian can find himself. ‘What bad thing have I done’ asked the ancient sage, ‘that he should speak well of me?’”*

I would have to agree and as James warns us, **“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”** James 4:4.

Now, if we do suffer, if we are persecuted, may it not be because we are obnoxious but because we are zealous for our faith, for Jesus, and we respond in love.

And when they do persecute us, may our good behavior expose their wickedness, their evil, may they be ashamed of what they did to us!

Paul, in Colossians 3:2-4 tells us, **“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”**

You see, when your mind and affections are set on things above, when suffering comes your way, you will rejoice because you know that God is working and as Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, **“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”** Perspective is everything!

I like what Puritan Thomas Watson wrote regarding afflictions,

Afflictions work for good, as they make way for glory. . . . Not that they merit glory, but they prepare for it. As ploughing prepares the earth for a crop, so afflictions prepare and make us [ready] for glory. The painter lays his gold upon dark colours, so God first lays the dark colours of affliction, and then He lays the golden colour of glory. The vessel is first seasoned before wine is poured into it: the vessels of mercy are first seasoned with affliction, and then the wine of glory is poured in. Thus, we see afflictions are not prejudicial, but beneficial, to saints.

- Thomas Watson

I know, it can be overwhelming when you look at all that is going on in the world. And you may be wondering how we can even be effective in a world that is coming down hard against our faith.

If you are feeling that way, let me share this with you to give you a correct perspective of things. You see, so often we look outward when we should be looking upward!

Keep in mind that . . .

The early persecuted church did not have:

- A constitution in their countries that protected their right to worship
- Subsequently they did not have the protected right of free speech
- Although they met in homes, for the most part they did not own, buildings
- The early church was not a registered 501c3 nor did they receive tax breaks
- The early church did not market nor advertise
- They did not have a high production worship service

- They do not have celebrity Christians

Despite this they:

- Walked in supernatural obedience to God's word
- Saw a rapid multiplication of disciples
- Equipped disciples with a willingness to die for Christ
- Walked in the Fruit of the Spirit
- Walked in supernatural joy
- Walked in supernatural love that transcends cultural boundaries
- Had simple and honest fellowship
- Walked in freedom from government entanglements
- Essentially never had a capacity problem. (As lost households discover Christ their homes become new churches.)
- Walked in supernatural boldness and courage
- Walked in supernatural generosity
- Walked in supernatural love for their enemies
- Were largely debt free experiencing freedom from a building mortgage, utilities, and staff salaries

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How important that is for us to understand that the Lord will see us through, and we are not to walk in the power of our strength, but in His!

And when we understand that, when we apply that to our lives, then we will be able to do as Jesus admonishes us to do in Matthew 5:44-48, **“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”**

Let’s face it, there is no way we are going to live like that apart from Christ. We can’t do it on our own because the flesh won’t let us. Thus, as we walk in the Spirit then the fruit of the Spirit will be manifested in our lives, and it all begins with that Agape love that only comes from God. It is not a natural love, but a supernatural love!

Paul also hit on this issue of loving our enemies, those who were coming against us in Romans 12:14, as he wrote, **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”**

Remember when Paul was in prison in Rome, the first time he was in jail there in Rome, and he was under house arrest.

Did he mope around and complain about the situation he was in?

Did he complain about the guards and how immoral and brutal they were to him?

Do we see him complain about the food that he was getting to eat?

Do we see Paul complain?

We do not but what we do see is that because his life manifested the love of Christ, it was caught by those who were with him.

Remember what happened as Paul tells us in Philippians 1:12-14, **“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”**

His love for the Lord and for the Roman soldiers who were guarding him brought forth fruit!

The Roman soldiers were getting saved and the Christians there in Rome were encouraged by what they saw, and they were bold in their faith in spite of the persecution that they were facing.

It is not easy, but we can live a life that is surrendered to the Lord and ask Him to use us to the fullest.

In ancient Rome, crowds by the tens of thousands would gather in the Colosseum to watch as Christians were torn apart by wild animals.

Paul Rader, commenting on his visit to this famous landmark, said, *“I stood uncovered to the heavens above, where He sits for whom they gladly died, and asked myself, ‘Would I, could I, die for Him tonight to get this gospel to the ends of the earth?’”*

Rader continued, *“I prayed most fervently in that Roman arena for the spirit of a martyr, and for the working of the Holy Spirit in my heart, as He worked in Paul's heart when He brought him on his handcuffed way to Rome.”*

Those early Christians *“lived on the threshold of heaven, within a heartbeat of home, no possessions to hold them back.”*

I believe that we are living in the days when our witness for the Lord will be tested, may we stand strong in the power of His might as we shine for Him!

So we have seen – ***SUFFERING FOR THE FAITH!***

As we read on, we will be looking at something that is again, very important for our witness of the Lord – ***DEFEND YOUR FAITH!***

VERSES 15-16

Here we see Peter call us to be ready to defend our faith. And that is very important, especially in the days we are living in.

But notice how Peter starts out here. He begins with “**But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . .**” (I Peter 3:15)

This word means to “***set apart***” and the idea that Peter is putting forth is that we are to set ourselves apart from all other things in life that would hamper or get in the way of us loving Jesus!

And think about that today. How much time do we spend on our phones, watching TV, obtaining material possessions and all that is drawing us away from God. And then compare that to how much time we spend with God!

People always want to know what the secret is in living the Christian life and there can be many answers. But the key is to love the Lord with your entire being and not let other loves compete with your love for Jesus!

That is what John wrote in Revelation 2, actually the letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus. The letter starts out like this, **“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ‘I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.’”** Revelation 2:1-4.

That is a great encouragement. Look at all that they were doing for the Lord. Jesus is watching them and is praising them for their work, how hard they are serving Him. That they are watching for those who are evil, coming against those who were bringing in false teaching, they have checked what they are teaching out and exposed them.

And they have persevered and not become weary in the work.

Sounds great and it is, but Jesus goes on to say, **“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”** Revelation 2:5.

In other words, ***“In spite of all that you are doing, I have this against you!”***

In spite of all the good they had done, there was only one thing that they did wrong! So how does all that good become negated by one bad thing?

Because this church had a lot of motion, a lot of activity but they had no emotion for Jesus, they had left their first love.

Now this is important for us to understand. They did not lose their first love. That happens by accident, like losing your car keys.

No, they did not lose their first love, but they left their first love. This is something that they did and not something that just happened to them by accident.

In Weymouth's N.T. translation of this passage it reads, "***Yet I have this against you - that you no longer love Me as you did at first.***"

Yes, we are to serve the Lord, but the Lord did not save us to have us just work, work, work!

No, He saved us so that we can have a love relationship with Him. What did Jesus say that the greatest commandment was?

In Matthew 22:37-38 we are told, "**Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'** This is the first and **great commandment.**" (Mark 12:30, Luke 10:27)

Notice that Jesus did not say, "***You shall serve and work, work, work, for the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.***"

Again, the Bible is not saying that we are not to serve Him, we are.

But our service is done out of love.

Imagine that I told my wife that I don't love her anymore, just an illustration, I do love her! But say I don't, but I will still work, pay the bills, cut the grass, do all the things that I need to do, but I don't love her anymore!

How do you think she would feel about that?

She would not appreciate it!

But I am doing everything that I am supposed to be doing, right? I am doing all the things that I did when I did love her, so what is the big deal?

I am doing all the motion but there is not that emotion for Julie, and she would rather have me love her than do all that work!

Then why do I do what I do?

Because I love her!

That is what the Lord wants out of us, our love for Him and out of that love we will serve Him.

For the Ephesian church, they worked to the point of exhaustion but there was no love for the Lord and that is the rebuke!

Now let's think about this. What if you came to this church in Ephesus and saw all that they were doing, all the activities and you might be thinking everything was okay. But it was not, as we saw.

Keep in mind that without love everything that is being done is being done in vain! That is why Jesus had this against them!

Spurgeon put it like this, ***"A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Lose love, lose all."***

And here's the thing. If your love for God has grown cold, your love for others will reflect that!

Do you spend time with your brothers and sisters in the Lord, talking with them, praying with them, just being with them. Or are you the first one out the door? Something we all need to think about and act upon.

You see, Jesus wants our hearts as well as our hands and head!

And think about this. Some 40 years earlier Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, **"Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."**

Ephesians 1:15-16.

What happened to their love for Jesus then?

At this point we are now into second and third generation Christians.

That first generation of believers knew God and His power.

By the time we get to the second generation of believers they might have known God but not His power.

And for that third generation of believers, they may have lost both.

You can't work for the Lord without loving Him, He won't accept that. He wants our love, and it is out of that love we have for Him that we serve Him!

But how can we fix this problem?

How can we fall in love with Jesus all over again?

Jesus goes on to tell the Ephesian church how they are to return to Him. He wrote,

“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.”

The Great Physician, Jesus Christ gives to them a prescription that would cure their spiritual condition and thus, the *EXHORTATION!*

It is very simple really; *REMEMBER, REPENT* and *REPEAT*.

You see, remember when you first were saved, the love you had for the Lord, how that fire burned brightly in you.

Then repent before God, do a 180 degree turn back to Him, return to Him.

And finally, repeat your first works or do those things you did when you were first saved.

Now you may be thinking, *“What things?”*

You were going to church on a regular basis – go to church once again!

You were going to Bible studies on a regular basis – go to those Bible studies once again!

You were getting up and reading your Bible – get up and read your Bible once again!

You spent time in prayer with the Lord – spend time with Him so He can speak to you!

You spent time in fellowship with other believers – get together with them once again!

You used to love singing praise songs unto the Lord – start singing again!

In other words – ***FALL IN LOVE WITH JESUS ALL OVER AGAIN!***

I have been married for 45 years and if I did not spend the time to stoke the fire in our relationship, that fire would go out and I think that is what happens many times with Christians.

If your heart has grown cold in your relationship with Jesus, if that fire has gone out and you are just serving Him but there is no love, ask Him to rekindle that fire once again, that passionate love once again so you can fall in love with Jesus all over again! And then act upon that!

Jesus gives us the answer to this loveless relationship with Him - ***REMEMBER, REPENT and REPEAT.***

May we get back to where we once were – in love with Jesus!

Again, this is the secret to living the Christian life - to have no other loves competing with your love for Jesus.

Now, once you have return to the Lord, you have fallen in love with Jesus all over again, you have set your life part for Him to use and you are spending time with Him, then you need to prepare yourself for the attacks from the enemy!

And Peter tells us that we must **“always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you . . .”** I Peter 3:15.

That word **“defense”** in the Greek is ***APOLOGIA***, (ap-ol-og-ee’-ah) and it is where we get our English word ***“apologetics”*** from.

Thus, it is a word that speaks of a formal defense in a judicial court.

In other words, can you defend your faith before the court of this world, can you explain to them what you believe?

You see, if we are living what we say we believe, then we need to be able to share that with others, give them the reason for the hope that is in us.

How is that done?

By “**sanctifying**” or setting your life apart for the Lord, by consecrating yourself to His control and be ready to share your faith. Be men and women of the Word!

You see, we are not to just endure through the suffering, but we are to be ready to defend our faith as the opportunities come our way!

Why is this such a big deal?

First of all, if you can't share your faith, you are a poor witness of Jesus and what are you going to give people if you are not giving them Jesus?

I remember when our children were young, and they would go over to a friend's house to spend the night.

There were many times that the mom would tell Julie the next morning when she came to pick them up, “***Your boys are so well behaved and polite. They were a pleasure to have over.***”

And my wife would be thinking, “***My boys?***”

The point I want to make here is that what we taught them was then manifested in their lives. They might not have behaved that way at home all the time, but when they were out, they manifested those things that they were taught, and it was a reflection of how we raised them.

As Christians, we have been born again, we are a new creation in Christ and thus, our life should reflect that relationship. People should see what God has done in our lives.

Years ago my wife invited my mom to a Calvary Chapel women's luncheon when we were living back in Chicago. And my mom agreed to go.

A lot of moms were there, invited by their daughters and they were sitting around each other, and most if not all of them were not Christians, most of them if not all of them were Catholics.

At one point some of these women started mocking, making fun of Calvary Chapel, putting it down, slamming what we believed, even though they claimed to be Christian, but they were not.

This was going on for a little bit and finally my mom spoke up. She's Italian and she might not be very tall, under five feet, but when she speaks, people listen! She knows people! And when I was told what she did it shocked me.

She basically told the other women that she might not agree with everything that we believe but she has watched how we raised our kids and how it was not a bad thing, it was good! That what we believed affected our lives, how we lived! She silenced these other women and hopefully they too took a look at how their daughters were raising their children, living out their faith and it impacted their lives.

We are a witness to what we believe and sometimes words are not enough, they need to see us live what we see we believe. If we don't, then words will become meaningless.

That is what Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**"

Jesus is speaking of the things that we do, how we live out our faith and it should shine so brightly that when people see the things that we are doing, they will glorify the Father in heaven!

Secondly, if you don't know what you believe, when difficult times come your way, your faith is going to be shaken, you may even doubt your salvation.

In II Timothy 2:15 we are told, "**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**"

Paul starts out this verse by speaking of being a diligent worker, "**Be diligent to present yourself approved to God . . .**"

And the idea with this word "**diligent**" is that it speaks of a "*zealous persistence to accomplish a certain objective.*"

So this is someone who is zealous and persistent in teaching the Word of God!

And isn't this interesting? As you teach God's Word correctly, you are presenting yourself as approved of God. And the idea here is that you are standing before the Lord, and you are presenting yourself for inspection. Kind of like a soldier would do before a commanding officer.

And as you do, you are "**approved**", or you are accepted after testing. The Lord has inspected what you have presented to Him, and you are worthy to continue serving the Lord in ministry!

But you will not be able to share the Word of God with others unless you read the Word of God, study the Word of God and apply the Word of God to your life!

And Paul tells us that we are not to just make the Word of God say whatever we want, as some do. But that we are to "**rightly divide**" God's Word or "*to cut straight.*"

The Geek word, ***ORTHOTOMEIO***, (or-thot-om-eh'-o) was used of a craftsman cutting a straight line, or a farmer plowing a straight furrow, or a mason setting a straight line for bricks.

Thus, there is a right way to teach God's Word, to share what it means, and a wrong way!

Why is this so important?

Spurgeon put it like this. He wrote, *“Swords are meant to cut and hack, and wound, and kill with, and the word of truth is for pricking men in the heart and killing their sins. The word of God is not committed to God’s ministers to amuse men with its glitter, nor to charm them with the jewels in its hilt, but to conquer their souls for Jesus.”*

Exactly! May we **“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”**

Now let me also put this warning out there. Yes, we are to speak the truths of God found in the Word of God, we are not to make God’s Word say what we want but it is what God has spoken.

But we also have to be careful not to get into quarrels with people. Paul, in II Timothy 2:23-26 put it like this, **“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”**

I have had people call on the church phone and try to convince me that Jesus is not God. I think they were trying to convert me to what they believe.

And I would go through the Scriptures with them, and it would reach a point where they are yelling at me.

Finally, I would just tell them, *“If you are trying to convert me to believe what you believe, yelling at me isn’t working!”*

And I would politely tell them that this conversation is over, there is no point in continuing because you are not listening, and you are just getting mad. And I would hang up.

My prayer is that after the call ended that they would check out what the Bible really says and **“if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.”** II Timothy 2:25.

So we can see here that we are to know what we believe and we need to be ready to share it!

In other words – ***DEFEND YOUR FAITH!***

As we finish up this morning we will be looking at – ***GOD’S WILL!***

VERSE 17

Peter makes two points here.

First, I will deal with the negative and then we will look at the positive.

If you are suffering because you are doing evil, how does that glorify God?

It doesn’t and that is the problem. There are a lot of Christians who are just obnoxious with their faith and then they say things like, ***“I am being persecuted for righteousness sake!”***

No, you are not! You are being persecuted because you are obnoxious!

That is what we are not to do, suffering for the evil things we are doing.

But it is God’s will for us to suffer for doing good! When that happens and we do so with the nature of Christ flowing through our lives, it is a light that brings glory to the Father, and it also shines upon those who witness what we are going through!

Paul put it like this in II Corinthians 12:7-10, **“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

For Paul, there was this major thorn in the flesh that God allowed to keep him humble. And yes, Paul prayed for this to depart from him, but in the end the Lord told Paul that His grace would be given to him to see him through these tough times.

It is not easy, if it was easy then we would not have to rest in the Lord, seek His comfort, His peace, His direction and so on!

So we have seen that as Christians, there is – ***SUFFERING FOR THE FAITH!***

Not only that, but you must be able to – ***DEFEND YOUR FAITH!***

And as hard as this may be, the Lord is with us and these things we are going through in life, well, it is – ***GOD’S WILL!***

I know, at times it doesn’t seem fair, but as we will see next time, Jesus is our example or as Peter puts it, **“For Christ [the Messiah Himself] died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous (the Just for the unjust, the Innocent for the guilty), that He might bring us to God.”** I Peter 3:18 (The Amplified Bible)

Perspective is everything and we will see that next time.

As I close this morning, may we live out our faith in such a way that people will see Jesus in us and by our actions the Father would be glorified!

Or as Paul wrote in I Corinthians 10:31, “**Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**”