

Christian Perspective on Relationships  
1 Peter 2:11 – 3:12  
by Dellena Ludwig

Last week we studied, in the first part of 1 Peter, the “Christian Perspective in Suffering.” Did you spend this last week sensing the refining work of God in your suffering? It is amazing how at different seasons of our lives, different lessons seem to be high-lighted in the Bible. So, as we studied this week about the “Christian Perspective on Relationships,” have you recalled challenges in your relationships as I have? God is so good! He has given me a wonderful husband and two marvelous children, twelve grandchildren and an added bonus of one more on the way! I have deep Christian friendships and many more casual friendships. I have made friends on vacation tours that I thought would remain friends afterward, but didn't. I have casually reached out to others who grow into deep, sharing friends as time goes by. I have experienced strong spiritual bonds with supervisors and severe suffering from employers.

Today we will discuss how God desires for us to relate to others – both the good and evil “others” we meet in this world. As you recall, at the beginning of his letter, Peter addresses his audience as, “God's elect, strangers in the world”. (1 Peter 1:1) Then, in verse 11 of chapter 2, Peter picks up this label again, saying, “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which

war against your soul.” It is a hard thing to be placed in a strange country and try to function within a culture different than your own. Once you learn enough language to communicate casually, you still have many years of feeling like a stranger, feeling as if you do not really belong. Here Peter gives a challenge to believers in 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 on the day he visits us.”

Assimilation is encouraged in American society. We are a country of diversity. But to function in our society, it is recommended by educators that one be submerged in our language so that conversational English and later, academic English can be learned. Most adults that work in English speaking jobs will learn the language and culture more quickly than those who are isolated in their own homes or non-English speaking neighborhoods without cultural diversity. But here, Peter challenged Hebrew speaking believers who were living among non-Jewish, non-believing pagans, and he reveals that they will always stand out. Notice that this society of the Roman Empire is not just different, it is hostile. Here, believers will be “accused of doing wrong.”

Peter was dictating this letter to Jewish believers who have already begun feeling the sting of intolerance. Nero was the Emperor who would soon order the bigoted ousting of Jews from the city of Rome, and encourage the persecution of them throughout the empire. Then, in

64 a.d., Nero would decide to blame Christians and Jews with them for the fire he started in Rome, in order that he might renovate the city. Even at this writing, people were beginning to spread rumors about these believers. Christians held their religious meetings after dark or very early in the morning, so they must have been hiding something. Some, having heard that the believers' communion meal represented the blood and body of Christ, falsely accused them of cannibalism and even spread the rumor that they killed and ate young children in their rites. What should one do when so grossly slandered?

Peter gave his answer in verse 12, “Live such good lives among the pagans that...they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” The word “see” here refers to a careful watching over a period of time; not a snap judgment. Now you can be sure that if I heard that a neighbor was accused of hurting young children, I would definitely keep a tight reign on my children and watch that neighbor very closely. This is the type of watching to which Peter refers. But the end of verse 12 sets the stage for all of the instructions to follow.

There was a reason for making sure believers walked a careful life of good deeds: Because God will visit us, and believers want non-believers to glorify Him on that day. The day of his visit here is not the Day of Judgment, as one might think. In Revelation 20:11-15 God revealed the Great White Throne Judgment, in which the unrighteous are judged according to their deeds and then thrown into the lake of fire.

However, the Greek word used here, and elsewhere in the New Testament, was always in reference to giving favors rather than to inflict punishment.

Therefore, theologians believe Peter was referring to the time in each person's life in which the Holy Spirit convicts men of their need of a Savior. At that time, each non-believer who has closely watched the behavior of believers would have to admit that their charges against them were entirely unfounded. They would have no evidence to throw before God to rationalize their continued unbelief. Then, they must “glorify God” on that day.

This scenario is enough to give us pause, today. Our unsaved neighbors are watching us closely. Do they see evidence that would lead them to glorify God? Or do they even know that we claim His name? Do we abstain from sinful desires or are we assimilating to appear no different than unbelievers? Could our good deeds lead unsaved co-workers to lean favorably toward the call of the Holy Spirit to salvation? St. Francis of Assisi has been quoted as saying, “Preach the gospel. If necessary use words.” On the day Christ visits our neighbors, may our example be a brightly illuminated sign that points them straight to Him.

As I studied this portion of Scripture I was challenged in my own life. I have confessed before, it is hard for me to speak out for the Lord if I am with strangers. When I encounter a homeless beggar, I tend to wave them off or drive the other way. Charles M. Sheldon printed a

story titled *In His Steps* that was first penned as a weekly story around 1896. In his book, the characters of a small town are jolted out of Christian complacency by the death of a young beggar. The pastor of the affluent church had just preached on the verse: 1 Peter 2:21 “To this you were called because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps.” He was moved to ask for volunteers who would actually commit for a year to not do anything without asking first, “What would Jesus do?” Think about this for a moment. Just how would our lives change if we chose to ask Him, before we spoke, before we bought, before we acted, before we walked away -”What would Jesus do?” - and then we chose to actually do it, no matter what it would cost us in suffering or being thought to be a strange alien?

Because Christian behavior was under scrutiny, Peter next urged believers to specific behavior in various relationships. First, he challenges believers to submit “to every governing authority instituted among men; whether to the king, as the supreme authority or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.” (1 Peter 2:13, 14) Now, the use of the word “king” was odious in the Latin, because Rome preferred the word “emperor” as their supreme ruler. Faithful Jews would give their allegiance only to the Lord God and longed to be free of Roman authority. But here they are challenged to submit to Roman authority.

We too may find it difficult to submit to the authorities who promote unbiblical laws and unfair judgments over us. More and more we see decisions which are intolerant against the Christian faith and tilted unfairly toward pagan beliefs. But we as yet have not begun to feel the persecution these believers felt. And what is the challenge in these verses? Submit, “For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” Submission has a purpose. Again Peter emphasized that their lives should “silence the talk of foolish men.” That is to “muzzle or gag (like an animal) the talk of creatures or people.

Submission, in this chapter, refers to living under the authority of another, as a soldier gives obedience to commands of a superior officer. Here, believers must live within the laws of their authorities who “punish evil doers, but commend those who do right” because it is God's will. God desires all to repent and be saved. He has left believers on this earth so they can live a testimony of obedience for the unbelievers around us – especially for those who will not listen to words. Submission, even to evil authorities is submission to God. “What Would Jesus Do?”

Now the people of Israel had difficulty with this concept of obedience to this pagan emperor who called himself deity. But Peter further challenged them in verse 16, to “Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil; live as servants of God. Show

proper respect to everyone.” Then Peter summarized believers' response to all relationships. “Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.” So next Peter confirms how this concept works in the employer/employee relationship.

In verse 18 Peter challenges, “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.” Slaves in the time of Peter were property. They were bought and sold for the sole purpose of work for their masters. They could bring praise to their masters and maybe even appreciation for good service. However, bad service or disobedience could bring punishment, sale, or even death. It was not unheard of that slaves were punished for the whims of their owners, unjustly. But there are several examples that slaves in a household might become believers with their righteous masters as they heard the gospel. [Cornelius; Philippian jailer, Philemon]

Should the new believing slave continue to serve unsaved masters? Should believing slaves still have to serve masters who might continue to be unjust, even after their conversion? Let's put this in our culture's frame of reference. Should we continue to follow rules that seem unjust but are instituted by unsaved employers? Should we disobey job orders that secular bosses give to us because they don't seem right? Should we turn down offers of employment because we sense that the employer is

unsaved? Such questions must be weighed in light of God's commands.  
“What Would Jesus Do?”

Peter gives two scenarios: 1.) An employee bears up under the pain of unjust suffering at the hand of an unsaved master because he is conscious of God. 2.) An employee suffers for doing good for a believing master, and endures it. The employee has made decisions that in all good conscious glorify God. He has obeyed the rules of his employer to the best of his ability, always choosing to follow Jesus' example even in a secular business, even with unsaved supervisors. Peter says it is commendable if such an employee should suffer pain in this instance. The suffering might be falling behind in sales or promotions because he refuses to pad his invoices or falsify expense accounts. Perhaps a teacher refuses to chat with other teachers about gossip or dirty jokes in the teacher's lounge, and loses out on the support of team teachers or is ostracized by their put-downs. “What Would Jesus Do?”

Now the employee who does evil deserves a demotion or punishment for doing wrong. But if one wished to be commended before God, you need to always choose to do right, and then endure the unjust demotions. Do the best job possible under your job description with a conscious clear before God. Why does God care about our employment? “For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” (1 Peter 2:15) Considering the

day God visits, even unjust employers will have nothing to say against God, because of our good choices in service to them, in the job God gave us.

But beyond ourselves this type of behavior follows Christ's example. The word "example" in verse 21 is the Greek word used to describe a copy of script or numbers that a child is to practice writing. Christ also suffered unjustly and gave the ultimate example of silent submission for us. By living our lives making right choices out of appreciation for His sacrifice, we are practicing again and again to copy His example for the rest of our lives.

We celebrated Christ's Resurrection Day on Easter last month. We remembered His trial and betrayal and crucifixion on the cross. Yet "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:22, 23) More than a marvelous example of submission to God's will, Jesus died for our sins. Isaiah 53:6 states, "We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." He chose obedience in the job the Father had for him to do. He didn't complain, he prayed for his own obedience. He didn't revile, he forgave his tormentors. That's what Jesus would do.

Jesus died for the punishment we owed, “so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24 is a quote of Isaiah 53:9. Because of our sins, our souls were condemned to eternal separation from God forever. But because Jesus died for those sins, himself being sinless, he gave us the free gift of eternal life for our souls. Therefore, “by his wounds, you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24) Matthew Henry put it this way: “Christ was bruised and crucified as a sacrifice for our sins, and by his stripes the diseases of our souls are cured.” The Lamb sacrificed for our sin offering is the very “Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” We are free by His sacrifice to live in His flock forever.

Now, just as the Jews thought of themselves as free people, subject only to God, we have the freedom to choose right living, under the watchful eye of “the Shepherd and Overseer of (our) souls.” So, Peter next addresses how that should look in our domestic relationships. “Wives, in the same way, be submissive to your husbands.” (1 Peter 3:1) In the same way that Jesus submitted to the cruel treatment of his persecutors, wives should also submit to their husbands, even if they are unbelievers.

Now, remember, wives were also considered of less value in the Roman world than their husbands. They were possessions at best and additional slaves at worst. Many a daughter was given in marriage by her father to seal a business deal or to make a treaty, with little thought

as to the relationship she would have with her husband. Then, on top of that, some became believers when their husbands had not. “What Would Jesus Do?”

Peter said that Jesus' example must be at work in the marriage relationship too. But there is an added reason for staying attuned to God's life of obedience in your marriage. We read on in verse 1 of chapter 3, “so that, if any of them do not believe in the Word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.” There is no doubt that disagreements come up in every marriage. But Peter here placed over each encounter between a believing wife and her unbelieving husband, these powerful words, “he may be won over.” In every disagreement, in every batch of dirty laundry, in every meal preparation, in every moment of intimacy, even in every moment of unjust derision, the behavior of the wife may be the deciding “straw” that tips your husband's heart toward faith.

We might think, if I was only younger, prettier, more fashionable – then he might love me enough to come to church with me. But Peter offers in verses 3 and 4 a different line of thought. “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.” Peter is not saying that women should not fix their hair

in fashionable styles. He is not saying they should never wear jewelry. He is not saying they should not wear fine clothes! In fact, I have heard that men appreciate it when women take care of their appearance. Rather Peter is saying that compared to the inner self that models Jesus' character, this outward ornamentation is much less important, less enduring and less attractive for their souls.

Peter then gives women the example of Sarah, the wife of Abraham. "For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God, used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master." (1 Peter 3:5,6) The story Peter refers to is in Genesis 18:12. In this chapter, Abraham is visited by the Lord and two angels, who were on their way to destroy Sodom. Abraham realized that this was a special visitation and invited them to stay for dinner. He didn't ask Sarah if this was okay, he didn't give any advance warning, he just told her, "Quick! Get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread. Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them under a tree." (Gen. 18:67) Now this was a big meal! This wasn't leftovers or a frozen entree, it would take quite some time to roast a calf! Granted, Abraham was helping to get the dinner ready, but still, Sarah had to jump when he said jump! Also, she was not a spry young wife

herself. Verse 11 tells us, “Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing.”

Why was her age important? Because the Lord made Abraham a promise that day, while he ate this meal. “Where is your wife Sarah?’ they asked. ‘There in the tent,’ he said. Then the Lord said, ‘I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.’” (Genesis 18:10)

Remember, Sarah was listening from inside their tent to this conversation. “So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, ‘After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?’” (Genesis 18:12) Do you see the use of the word “master?” That is the same word translated “Lord” here in 1 Peter 3:6. The use of this word here shows Sarah was in a habit of giving Abraham her respect. She had heard him tell of God's promises. She highly respected him for his relationship with and obedience to God. He did not always do exactly what we would call the “Christian thing” in his relationship with Sarah. But she respected him, over all these years.

Peter's point is this: Women who put the time in to cultivate “a gentle, quiet spirit” of purity and reverence in their lives, will reap a harvest of blessings when they ask, “What Would Jesus Do” to win this man I love? When purity and respect are lived, God will bless your life. He will use your attractive quiet spirit to reveal Himself to your husband.

Sarah didn't receive her heart's desire of a son from being beautiful outside, although Abraham mentioned several times how beautiful he thought she was! It wasn't even that she called him "Lord" or "Master." It was that she deeply honored her husband and desired the same promises from God that he did. Her inward spirit looked to God for her fulfillment and God used her husband to accomplish His will for her. "You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear." (1 Peter 3:6b)

Then, Peter turned to the relationship between believing husbands to their unbelieving wives. In verse 7 he challenges them, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." (1 Peter 3:7) There were some husbands who became believers but had unbelieving wives. "What Would Jesus Do?" To win their wives to Christ, the husband needed to also show an inward quality of character that would attract them to their Savior in the same way Christ did. The wife is physically weaker. She needs to have respect for her position as wife in the family. Jesus gave honor to women during his life on earth and through the inspired Scripture where it's said in Galatians 3:28-29, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." As a believing husband lived with his

wife in respect, with a mind as to how cherished she was to Jesus, his inner attitude would show outwardly in his behavior towards her. This gave her evidence of Christ's love and the hope of becoming heirs together in Christ.

But an additional reason for this behavior toward his wife was, “so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” (1 Peter 3:7b) We studied in James where the author said, “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16b) But in Hebrews believers are admonished to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...” (Hebrews 12:1) Benson in his commentary states, “All sin hinders prayer, particularly anger.” “What Would Jesus Do” when your unbelieving wife frustrates your attempts to share your faith?; when your unbelieving wife ridicules your words of faith?; when your unbelieving wife demands that you keep your faith to yourself and let her believe the way she wants to believe? Peter says to respond as Jesus did by giving her your respect and consideration, so your prayers will not be hindered and so that she may be won to your Lord.

Next, Peter shared admonitions for relationships with fellow believers. “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.” Peter's previous instructions concerned how to demonstrate individual behavior, in order

that unbelievers might be drawn to salvation. Now, he relates to believers as a group, together in the church. How can we as Christians act in the church to draw those unbelievers who are watching from the outside? What behavior is magnetic?

When they see how we live in harmony, in unity of mind, they will be drawn. When they see the sympathy and compassion of the church, they will be drawn. When they see our humility they will be drawn to our Lord, Jesus Christ. However, if we as believers are just as vindictive, demanding and vengeful as the unbelieving world, how will they see a difference? If we, as believers give up and divorce our spouse as easily as the unbelieving world, how will they see a difference? If we as the church live our week-day life working under the same dishonest practices that the unbelieving world does, to get ahead at all costs, how will they see a difference?

However, what would be the result if we speak as Jesus would speak, “keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.” (1 Peter 3:10) What if we reacted to evil like Jesus would, “turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.” (verse 11) Peter here quoted Psalm 34:12-16. He is asking which of us would like to inherit a blessing, to live a life worth living? You see, all of these admonitions to live a life like Jesus would live will not just help unbelievers come to salvation, but will also help believers “love life and see good days.” This “see” is referring to experiencing. The phrase, “good days” has an

inference to eternal life. Even if your life here never gets any better, if you live a life as Jesus would, church, you will “inherit a blessing” (verse 9) in the eternal life to come in the presence of our Lord.

Remember, we are aliens and strangers in this world.

But if that is not motivation enough, Peter adds our Lord's awareness. “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.” (1 Peter 3:12) Just as in the case of the believing husband, our behavior affects our prayers. This section is in the form of Hebrew antithetical poetry. We see this style of poetry often in Proverbs.

Proverbs 11 has many examples:

verse 1: The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. Verse 3: The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. Verse 16: A kindhearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth. Verse 18: The wicked man earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward.

Here Peter is saying, “The Lord is attentive to those who do good and seek peace, but he sets his face against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:12) The difference here is that of “the look” a parent gives his/her child when they seek attention. One look is attentive to see the snail crawling on the wall to the delight of your little one, or the attention you give to his early drawing or writing attempts. God is deeply interested

in our “writing practice” as we learn to copy His example. But when a child throws a tantrum or has colored on the wall, the “look” is one of displeasure or impending intervention! The Lord seeks all to come to repentance. His attention to His children is very different than his “look” against those who choose evil behavior.

The Lord hears the prayers of the righteous, but he is not answering the petitions of the evil doers. “What Would Jesus Do?” Throughout this lesson, Peter has challenged believers to live a life that will draw people to Christ, when he visits them to convict them of their lost state. Jesus desires to hear the prayer of the sinner who repents and asks for God's mercy. His ears are always waiting to hear that prayer from unbelievers. But as believers face unjust accusations and treatment from unbelievers in this world, the Lord will be our avenger. Paul put it this way: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:7-9)

At the conclusion his book *In His Steps*, Charles Sheldon described the character Pastor Henry Maxwell, being shown a vision of the church as they chose to walk in Jesus' steps in the future. “He thought he saw the church of Jesus in America open its heart to the

moving of the Spirit and rise to the sacrifice of its ease and self-satisfaction in the name of Jesus. He thought he saw the motto, “What Would Jesus Do?” inscribed over every church door, and written on every church member's heart.” Then he envisioned Jesus and he broke into prayer, “Yes! Yes! O my Master, has not the time come for this dawn of the millennium of Christian history? Oh, break upon the Christendom of this age with the light and the truth! Help us follow Thee all the way!” And so I leave you today/tonight with this vision. “What Would Jesus Do” in our relationships?