

THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS

"Part LVII: 1 Peter - Functioning Effectively In Christian Institutions In A Spiritually Hostile Environment"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) It is an accepted belief in the Evangelical community that our nation is at odds in many ways with our Christian faith:

(a) D. A. Carson's book, The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism as advertised in the familiar Christian Book Distributor's catalogue out of Peabody, Massachusetts teaches as much. Its ad runs: "Our increasingly pluralistic world is constantly challenging Christianity's exclusive claims."

(b) D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe have a new book out, What If Jesus Had Never Been Born? in which they note that "Christian bashing' has become a popular indoor sport . . ." where Christians face "the caustic charges of often misinformed critics."

(2) However, the Evangelical community is at odds as to **how** to respond to the problem:

(a) Jim Wallis has a book out, Who Speaks for God? in which he **attacks** the **Christian Coalition**. Wallis states, and I read from the ad, "the ideas and methods of the Religious Right are actually contrary to the Bible and historic evangelical evangelism."

Well, if the Christian Coalition is doing it the wrong way, what IS the proper way to respond to legalized abortion?

(b) Evolution is now taught in our public schools **often** as a **fact** where **creationism** is treated as ignorant "non-science." A teacher in our Church once was accosted by teaching colleagues at her institution where they openly challenged her ideas of creation, pointing to the Cro-Magnon man as evidence of evolution. Interestingly, the Cro-Magnon man along with Neanderthal man are properly categorized as **modern** man, as *homo sapiens* by A. Montagu of Princeton University (The Origin of Species Revisited, W. R. Bird, p. 231). In reality, American education textbooks shouldn't even be **using** Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal as examples of evolution--they're just **not** unbiased examples of evolution **at all!**

But, with the preponderance of educators flowing with the swell of evolutionary ideology, how is the Christian to be godly and stand for the truth in the educational field?! How can we live as "salt and light" against cultural apostasy so as to be righteous and sensible as God desires?!

(We turn to the "Need" section of the sermon . . .)

Need: "Though I may know from Mark's Gospel how to live at the PERSONAL level in a world that is hostile to my faith, I am at a loss to know how to function in the INSTITUTIONS of marriage, family, business and church in this challenging environment!"

- I. **The GROWTH of the Early Church's INSTITUTIONS of marriage, family, business and local churches created the need for an addendum to Mark's Gospel on functioning within Christian INSTITUTIONS in a world that was hostile to Christianity!**
- II. **Mark's mentor, Peter, provided that handbook in his first epistle (Bible Knowledge Commentary, Nwe Testament, p. 96, 101):**
 - A. When Peter wrote 1 Peter, Roman Emperor Nero had either just begun or was about to start persecuting Christians, Ibid., p. 838.
 - B. Peter revealed that he wrote about the **true grace of God**, 1 Pet. 5:12.
 - C. In so doing, he **testified** (*epimartyron*, Ibid., p. 857) that this faith was **VALID** and thus **worth** one's **loyalty** even under Roman persecution that aimed to drive believers **FROM** it, 1 Pet. 5:12.
 - D. He also wrote to **exhort** (*parakalon*, Ibid.) believers, to encourage and appeal to them **HOW** to **FUNCTION** in **GRACE**, 1 Pet. 5:12.
 - E. Since Peter deals with living in **institutions** (government (2:13-17), slavery (i.e., the workplace, 2:18-25), marriage (3:1-6, 7) church roles (5:1-4, 5-7, 8-11)) in the **context** of persecution (3:8-4:19), 1 Peter is a handbook on living uprightly in **INSTITUTIONS** in a hostile world.
- III. **We examine 1 Peter for insight on godly living in Christian institutions which exist in a hostile world environment as follows:**
 - A. Every Christian who lives in a hostile world environment must **orient** his **thinking** to God's **ETERNAL PURPOSE** for his **EXISTENCE**:
 1. According to God's **eternal foreknowledge**, every Christian was chosen for a holy **lifestyle UPON** the **godless earth**, 1 Peter 1:1-2.
 - a. Peter is writing to **Jews** as the word "scattered" (*diaspora* in v. 1) is the **technical** word for **persecuted Jews**, Ibid., p. 839).
 - b. Now, **Jews** recognized Peter's "sprinkling" and "obedience" terms to picture Moses' sprinkling the Jewish **people** in Ex. 24:8 to ratify a covenant for **living RIGHTEOUS lives on earth!**

c. Thus, God's will for believers who are part of His **eternal** plan is that they live **righteously** in their **current** earthly sojourns!

B. Well, the **righteous lifestyle** of a **CHRISTIAN** who is saved by **grace** must mirror the **grace** of God in **saving him from sin**, 1 Peter 1:3-10.

C. Applied to **INSTITUTIONAL trials**, God wants Christians to **mirror** the Gospel's **unmerited favor** in their **institutional roles** as a **witness**:

1. Toward hostile **government officials**, Christians are not to react by **self-help retaliation**, but at **even sacrificial** cost of their **rights** to **submit** to government to **silence** charges of **lawlessness** from **ignorant** evil officials to thereby **exemplify** the gospel's **unmerited favor** directed toward such officials, 1 Peter 2:11-17.
2. Toward hostile marketplace **overseers**, believers were to mimic Christ's example of **non-retaliatory acceptance** of mistreatment incurred when He graciously bore man's iniquities, 1 Pet. 2:18-25.
3. Toward unsaved husbands and wives who abuse due to one's faith, the godly were to **absorb** persecution and sustain **godly, kind** responses to mirror the gospel's **grace** to spouses, 1 Pet. 3:1-6, 7.
4. Toward hostile laity under persecution, elders were to **forbear self-serving forcefulness** and lead by **gracious example**, 5:1-4.
5. Though feeling insecure under governmental persecution, the laity were to forbear arrogant insubordination toward church elders, but **submit** to their lead and trust God's sovereign oversight, 5:5-11!
6. Adjusting to institutional persecution this way, believers would become living witnesses by their **reactions to abuses**, 3:13-4:19.

IV. **1 Peter adds to the "thread of redemption", showing God can USE EVEN institutional persecution of the godly to promote evangelism by DISPLAYING His G RACE via their gracious RESPONSE!**

Application: *If facing hostility toward Christianity in an institutional role, be SURE we already (1) believe in Christ for salvation (Jn. 3:16) and (2) fellowship with God via (a) confession of sin (1 Jn. 1:9) and our (b) dependence upon the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23) to (c) obey Scripture, 1 Jn. 2:3-6. (2) Then, (a) instead of retaliating to institutional persecution that only reflects the world's own self-help carnality to no lasting value, (b) VIEW the trial as God's permitted OPPORTUNITY to promote the Gospel and (c) respond to the abuse with its OPPOSIT--with goodness! (c) Via our unusual REACTION, persecutors will understand the concept of God's UNMERITED FAVOR to believe the Gospel we proclaim!*

Lesson: *When facing INSTITUTIONAL persecution, God does not want believers to retaliate defensively and thus discredit the Gospel, but to view the trouble as God's ALLOWED opportunity to display a GRACIOUS RESPONSE toward abuse to influence observing unbelievers for Christ!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

The former president of Wheaton College in Illinois, a nationally known Evangelical College, tells of the book Through the Valley of the Kwai by Ernest Gordon in his own book, Leadership, p. 72. It is the account of British Christian servicemen who had been captured by the Japanese during World War II and who sought to live godly lives in this difficult time.

On occasion, when a shovel had been misplaced, the Japanese commander asked who had stolen it, but no one replied. At that point, the whole group was threatened with severe punishment. Believing that a Christian should be willing to lay down his life for his associates, one Christian serviceman in the group stepped forward and offered to take the punishment for the group. The furious commander consequently proceeded to beat the defenseless prisoner to death on the spot.

Later, the shovel was found. It was only missing--no one had stolen it. The brave Christian seemed to have died in vain!

However, this Christian man's **example** had a profound effect on his whole group of comrades. Later, when they all had been rescued from their imprisonment, these men found themselves at a train station where a load of wounded Japanese soldiers had been brought in on train cars. Feeling the need to obey Christ's admonition about treating one's enemy with love, these former prisoners of the Japanese went through the boxcars, tending to the needs of their wounded enemy. They left an amazing impact for Christ all because of the willingness of a Christian buddy to give his life for his friends over a missing shovel.

This type of grace-based reaction to institutionalized abuses, especially against the Christian faith, will do much to instruct an ignorant world about us on what the Gospel's **grace** is in **life**!

Thus, we do not attack abortion clinics, we do not make a public scene in schools on the errors of evolution. Rather, (a) we follow 1 Peter 3:13-15 to get the facts down so we know how to answer men when they wonder WHY we believe what we do, and (b) simply go about patiently bearing up as a minority group in a world that is OPPOSITE us! Holding to a meek DEMEANOR in spite of our TENSION against evil demonstrates the GRACE the world needs to learn! Then they can believe our Gospel of grace!