

Sermon for 5-15-2011
1 Peter 2:21-3:7

When I was in New Mexico my friend coached baseball for the university. He told me about one of his players who recently had come to believe in Jesus. He told me how this young man's family rejected him, how his girlfriend ridiculed him because of his new faith. This young man suffered because of his belief in Jesus.

We come to Christ and receive new life. Our new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus affects our relationships. We have heard in Peter about being built together with other believers, relating to others who believe with deep constant mutual love and reverence to God. But this new birth by faith into the resurrection community makes us aliens and exiles. As aliens and exiles among those who don't believe, in our physical community, in our sphere of employment, within our family. Peter addresses these three areas of social tension that result from new life. We will face suffering for being called by Christ to follow him, called out of darkness into his marvelous life. How do we relate with those who don't believe?

At the center of this discussion is how Christ faced suffering and took away our sin. He lived his life trusting in God no matter the consequences. Jesus' life demonstrated suffering for us who were sinners. Though he lived among the sinful and deceitful, he did not copy their way of life. We have been invited to this way of life that turns away from sin, that does not purposefully speak hurtful things or deceive. This new way of life does not return abuse when one is abused. This new way of life does not threaten when faced with suffering. This new way of life is one entrusted to God living in ways that build up.

Jesus' suffering for us gives a living hope that our wrongs have been made right. [and that the wrong done to us will be made right.] We can turn away from sin and live in a holy way. We have been and will continue to be healed of the consequences of our sinful life. Jesus saw us when we had gone astray. He offered himself to protect us. He offered his life as a new way of living to guide us. We are transformed by faith in Christ.

Jesus enables us to resist falling into the same old patterns, going astray living life for self. When we believe in the resurrection we return to Christ who guides us and protects us in life and beyond death (even when there is suffering.)

Because of what Jesus Christ has done we can be faithful to our calling to follow Jesus even when those who impact our lives don't believe. Let's focus on the husband and wife relationship as an example. We are called to conduct ourselves honorably acting with love and doing that which builds up our spouse who doesn't believe.

Within the family order of the time Peter writes how we engage a spouse who doesn't believe. It can be difficult to know how to live when values are different. We face the suffering of not sharing in our closest relationship what is most important to us faith in Jesus. This passage is often misused in order to advocate unhealthy non transformed ways of living. Like rationalizing the wife remaining in an abusive situation. Promoting subservience to the husband in all things. Peter is not talking about sharing the suffering of Christ in a marital relationship by

taking physical abuse or obeying a husband no matter what. Or on the husband's side giving honor to one's wife no matter what she does.

How can it be faithful to Jesus to not go to church or do things that do not honor God in the name of submitting to one's husband 'to obey God?' As 1 Peter 2:16 says our freedom is not a pretext for evil.

As those who are part of the newly born community of faith we build up. We do not participate in evil. In the way of Jesus we do what builds up among those who don't believe. One who abuses degrades himself and the one he abuses. This violent self-focus is countered by the call of the husband to show consideration for the wife (who don't believe). A synonym of consideration is selflessness. In selflessness does a husband honor the wife for spending money on something clearly against God in order to be obedient to God? I don't believe so.

What this passage makes clear is that a wife submits to her husband's decision to not follow Christ. The husband gives space for his wife to not follow Jesus. The suffering a spouse endures is that the one closest to them doesn't believe. He doesn't share the living hope that she has. She is not being built into something more with him (and with other Christians) for the glory of God.

In this great suffering, like Christ we don't deceive, don't return abuse with abuse. The purpose of Christ's suffering and death is to produce new life. We don't accept needless suffering, but suffering that brings life. (This does not sanction physical abuse in marriage in any way!) If a spouse makes fun of our faith, we don't return the insult. Though it is painful for us to see one we love ignoring God we don't threaten them. We entrust them to Jesus doing what is good, not fearing their unbelief.

A wife can hold back spiritual growth by how they treat their spouse. Our society says to the wife attract him to your way by outward things. We think to attract our husband closer to God by our physical beauty. When a woman trusts in God, when her hope is in God, not in her husband she will adorn herself with inner beauty. This inward adornment is the change the Spirit is shaping in you because of faith in Jesus and his resurrection made visible.

It is easy to get caught in subservient ways of living that do not build up as we consider the phrase 'Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. We look at Sarah and Abraham's relationship and we see times where each got their way. The situation referenced in Genesis 18 is Sarah reaffirming her commitment to her husband when God brings change. As Sarah's daughters you do not consent to be an inferior person or lesser in importance. You are one who remains deeply committed to your husband, who does good and doesn't let your fears for his salvation overwhelm you.

Husbands can hold back spiritual growth by how they treat their spouse too. Society says use your power to force her to believe. The image is of a weaker vessel being crushed and broken. A husband thinks it is my job to make my wife worthy of life. When the husband tries to force things, there is often brokenness which hinders prayers. When a man trusts in God, he knows that his wife can be an heir to new life in Christ just as he is. He does good and builds her

up, committed to know her and honor her fragile places, even as he prays for her to have faith in Jesus.

We entrust all who do not believe to God in prayer, especially when they are close to us. We live a new quality of life in the midst of the situations that we are in. We will face suffering as we follow Christ. We are exiles/aliens, part of the new community of faith in relationship with those who do not believe. Let us honor God in those relationships by doing that which builds up. Let our love and reverence towards God guide us in those relationships. Let us continually hope that God will use this observable behavior which honors him so the ones closest to us will see and glorify God.