

# When You are Trying to Share Your Faith

*Decision Making & God's Will*

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This morning we are continuing our series on Decision Making & the Will of God. This is an expositional treatment of the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter and if you haven't been reading through 1 Peter on your own, I want to encourage you to do that every week. In that way, you won't miss the beauty and majesty of the forest when we focus in on a given tree on a particular Sunday.

In the big picture, Peter is writing to a group of people who have experienced challenges, who have experienced suffering in their lives and the Lord believes it was profitable not only for them, but also for us. In chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2, we saw the emphasis upon our redemption, our identity in Christ and the glorious inheritance in heaven. Along with that was a call to obedience, to holiness. In other words, to embrace the purpose for which God has designed us, to proclaim his praises in our hearts and in our behavior. Then, in the latter part of chapter 2 and the first part of chapter 3, we've seen how that purpose and that holiness are to be lived out in real relationships: in submission to our government, submission to our employers, our bosses, with those in authority over us. Wives are called to submit to husbands. Husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way, to show them honor. God has been helping us to understand that holiness and one's position in Christ is to be lived out in the relationships we have with the everyday people that surround our lives.

But it's not those relationships that are primary. Our relationships with other people are the vehicle through which we are to live out our love for God and in our text this morning, Peter encourages us further that a life lived along these lines provides opportunities for us to share our faith. With that in mind, I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, chapter 3. That's on page 182 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

This text is designed to help you when you're struggling to share your faith. Please listen as we read this text from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3. We'll begin in verse 8. Here's what Peter says,

“8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very

purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 10 For, ‘THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. 11 HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. 12 FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.’ 13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. 18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”

You probably realize there are a few twists and turns in that passage that we’ll go through this morning. We’ll try to explain some of those things along the way but you’ll notice that Peter does not say that you need to be a flashy apologist or a skilled debater in order to share the hope that is within you. What he says is that when you remember that Jesus is the chief cornerstone and the living stone and when you remember that you are called to declare God’s praises in your heart and in your behavior, then you will have opportunities. In order to evangelize, if we want to use that word, in the midst of trial, the believer must offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, proclaiming his excellences by living. Not by arguing or by clever speaking, but by living in three ways. These three ways, they are not sequentially presented in our text. Instead, Peter discusses them at multiple points throughout the text we just read. So, it’s not like the first point is found in verses 8-12, second point in verses 13-18 or anything like that. It’s more like each of these three points is discussed throughout this text.

The first way of evangelistic living involves fearing God which rescues us from fearing man. I’ll try to state it in a little bit different way: when I entrust myself to God, then I am delivered from the fears that come when people harm me. Please don’t misunderstand

me: I'm not saying that the hurt that other people might inflict upon me isn't real or isn't painful. What I am saying and what I believe to be an accurate representation of Scripture, is that our calling is to entrust ourselves to God, to the God of the Universe and then let the chips fall where they may. It's probably not good to use a gambling reference on Sunday morning, so let's put it another way. How about: we let his sovereign will be done in our lives as we entrust ourselves to him. This has been a theme in this section of Scripture. How do I submit to government? Especially when they irritate me or even hurt me? I'm not minimizing the frustration that can come. Government can and historically has placed horrible burdens on people. For evidence of that, we need to look no further than the language in the original version of our nation's constitution that allowed for the practice of slavery. Government can put a hurt on anyone.

So, the solution for some is to find any way to avoid being hurt by the government but what God says is this: entrust yourself to me as the King of the Universe, entrust yourself to me knowing that the government's authority is a derived one, derived from my authority. That's the government, but what about your employer? How do you submit to your boss because they can make your life miserable for a while, can't they? They sure can. I mean, imagine if your boss decided that he or she didn't like you but that they were powerless to fire you and so what they did was make your life miserable. They gave you the worst assignments, they asked you to do things that they themselves had never done or would ever be willing to do and you took all the steps that you could to do your work well and the bottom line is that you had only one of two choices: either leave or submit. So, what do you do? You entrust yourself to God knowing that your boss's authority is a derived authority. Maybe God is using that situation to move you on, in which case, you're demonstrating that he is the one in control over your life. Or maybe he's using the circumstance in part to show the world around you what it is like to live in a godly way in the midst of suffering. Either way, you entrust yourself to God.

Wives, how do you submit to your husbands? Again, entrust yourself to God. How do you husbands live with your wife in an understanding way when she does not want to be understood? I mean, you could be living with the Wicked Witch of the West incarnate, how do you handle that? You entrust yourself to God. Do you see how Peter is making that point through everything that we've seen up to the reading of the text this morning?

Now, in our lives we are tempted to fear man which encourages us to do whatever it takes to remove any suffering that we are experiencing which in turn, reveals that we have placed our trust in lesser forms of authority. "My life will be okay as long as I'm not hurt. As long as I'm not suffering." But God's advice is very different. He says, "I'm in this with you. We're in this together." He tells us that we need to deal with our trials and our sufferings and the fears that come from them by entrusting ourselves to him.

I've got three statements that I'm going to encourage you to remember this morning. You may want to write these down. The first statement is this and I've said it about a hundred times so far: entrust yourself to God. Say that with me. Entrust yourself to God. Now, listen as I highlight the number of times the original Greek version of this text is used to describe the concept of fear. 1 Peter 2:17, "fear God," talking in relation to government.

You honor the king and fear God. 1 Peter 2:18, “servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect.” Literally talking about the fear of God, not what your master’s can do to you. 1 Peter 2:23, “Christ entrusted himself to God.” Christ did not fear what man could do to him. 1 Peter 3:2, wives are called to submit to their husbands allowing them to observe their wives’ chaste and respectful behavior. That word “respectful” is literally “fear.” Later in that section, wives are instructed to do right without being frightened by any fear. 1 Peter 3:12, the eyes of the Lord are on you, the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. In other words, fear God instead of man. 1 Peter 3:14, “do not fear their intimidation.” 1 Peter 3:15, give an answer with gentleness and reverence. Literally talking about the fear of God.

The contrast is clear. You are to fear God, to entrust yourself to God as the highest authority for your life and I believe that Peter is using that concept of fearing God and entrusting one’s self to him in very similar ways. So, let’s ask this: what’s involved in the fear of God? What truths does a person who entrusts themselves to God need to think about? Well, fear of God includes the conviction that God is aware of all deeds amidst your suffering. He’s aware of all deeds amidst your suffering. Verse 12 of our text tells us that “the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears attend to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” Peter has alluded many times to the slander that these first century believers had faced and God was aware of this. See, times of suffering, they have a way of telescoping your vision, don’t they? Getting you to focus only on the challenges that you’re facing? They encourage you to think that no one, not even God, cares about what you’re going through and so Peter says, “Don’t fear man because God is watching.”

The fear of God also includes a conviction that God will not let ultimate harm befall you, especially when you have a clear conscience. Verse 13, “Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?” Verse 16, “and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.” Now, we’ve got to be very careful here. We’ve got to make sure that we don’t confuse these statements with ones from the prosperity gospel. Do you know what I’m talking about? We have to understand that we can be hurt. We understand that people can make existence very difficult for us. Many people die over their suffering so we’re not going to be simplistic here. It does no good to minimize the sufferer’s suffering. It does no good to minimize our own suffering. It does no good to simply compare sufferings. What is valuable is remembering that when you put your head on your pillow at night, that you can say that you were proclaiming the praises of God that day, that you were entrusting yourself to God that day, you were doing good to those around you. Your conscience was clear because your heart was fixed on Christ and your behavior was worthy of the name of Christ. That should be our goal every day regardless of the circumstances that come into our lives.

Just consider what the Psalmist has to say in Psalm 73. He looks around, he examines the lives of the wicked people in his view, individuals whose unrighteous choices seem to lead into the paths of luxury, to abundance, to ease and the Psalmist wonders, “What benefit is there for living for God?” And he says in verse 16-19, he says, “When I

pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment!” You see, he recognizes that both the wicked and the righteous will be called into account before the Lord and that living to honor God is the far superior choice than living to bring glory to one’s self.

Now, having a clear conscience, that’s good in an of itself but notice that the text goes further. God has designed suffering to result in blessing for his children with clear consciences. Let’s just take inventory of the amount of times Peter has said something like this. Chapter 1:7, he talks about the proof of your faith, tested by fire, will result in praise and glory. Chapter 2:17, for this finds favor if for the sake of conscience toward God you bear up under unjust suffering. Chapter 2:20, if you do what is right and suffer patiently enduring it, this finds favor with God. Chapter 3:4, wives, the gentle and quiet spirit exhibited while enduring the rebellion of a disobedient husband is precious in the sight of God. Then from the passage that we’re studying this morning, chapter 3:9 says, not returning evil for evil but giving a blessing because you will inherit a blessing. Then, verse 14, indeed, even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness you are blessed. Then, as we look ahead to passages that we’re going to be studying in a couple of weeks here, chapter 4:13, to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of his glory, you may rejoice with exaltation. Chapter 4:14, if you are reviled for the name of Christ you are blessed.

If you fear God, if you entrust yourself to God, then believe what he says about suffering. If we suffer for living as a Christian, if we make the sacrifice of doing what is good with a clear conscience, then that is a sweet smelling aroma before God. Just as the literal sacrifices of the Old Testament were made in faith and that was a sweet aroma before him. Fear of God not only includes those things but it also includes the fact that God has provided historical patterns of vindicating those who fear him. And, of course, the perfect example of this is Jesus Christ himself.

Now, here’s where we get into a bit of a tricky passage of Scripture. The example of Jesus as the perfect example of one who is vindicated for his suffering, who feared God instead of man in the circumstances of life, they are described in verses 18-22. Admittedly, it’s not the easiest passage in the world to understand. In fact, there is a fair bit of debate over this among theologians. Pastor Viars thinks that what John MacArthur says is right when he says that during the time before the cataclysmic flood, we’re talking about the flood of Noah, the Scriptures refer to a time of great demonic influence on the earth and that influence is, in part, why the world became so corrupt before the flood and after the flood, God decided that he was going to restrain the demonic activity by placing certain demons in captivity.

Now, our primary goal here this morning is not to discuss demonology. We’re simply not given the time to unpack all that this section has to say but here is what we can do: we can see how Christ’s example fits into Peter’s overall argument. Jesus Christ persevered in doing good deeds with a clear conscience. He is the just one described in 1 Peter 3:18. God, being so pleased with his Son, raised him from the dead and sent Jesus to do an in-

your-face to the demons in prison, a proclamation of victory. And now, Jesus Christ has been thoroughly vindicated as indicated by his position at the right hand of God over all of his former opposition, namely Satan and the demons. In other words, the slanderers have been silenced. Jesus is the champion and Jesus has been exalted and now the world has the opportunity to be drawn to him and not to demons. The ultimate example of evangelism started with Jesus Christ entrusting his own soul to the welfare of his Father who saw what all the spiritual forces and the human forces were doing harm to him, believing that no harm could ultimately befall him and believing that suffering with a clear conscience was the path to blessing, God the Father rescued him, exalted him and silenced the slanderers. And now, you and I are drawn to him as a result. So, friends, evangelistic effort is not done with fancy arguments or crafty words. Evangelistic effort is made when God's people entrust themselves to him, when they patiently endure suffering and do what is good. And the world simply doesn't have this.

There is one more example that is given in the text: it's the example of Noah. In the midst of Peter's statement about Christ and his in-your-face victory over the spiritual forces of darkness, Peter mentions Noah. The Scriptures specifically say of Noah that he found favor with God. That's been one of Peter's catch phrases: this finds favor with God. You see him saying that over and over again. Noah was the only one in his day who found favor with God and during his building of the ark, all were ridiculing him, "Yeah, right. A flood is coming. Wa, wa, wa. You've got to be kidding me, Noah." It was something akin to that. I doubt they used Charlie Brown's teacher's voice, but then because of Noah's conviction that God was watching, that no ultimate harm could befall him and because suffering was the path to blessing, God boxed Noah up with a slice of creation, namely the animals, and brought him through the flood of suffering, through the judgment and the slanderers were silenced. Today, according to Peter, corresponding to Noah's being rescued through the flood, baptism now saves you. Peter makes it clear he's not talking about water baptism but he's talking instead about a baptism of immersion into Jesus Christ himself, pursuing him with a clear conscience.

In order to evangelize in the midst of trial, the believer must offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, proclaiming his excellencies by living, not by arguing, not through crafty words, by fearing God which rescues us from fearing man and also by persevering in good works which results from fearing God. You see, the first point was one of the heart. Remember the first point? Entrust yourselves to God. That was the first point. Then the second point is one for the hands: do good works. So, let's review. Point one: entrust yourselves to God. Second point: do good works. Say that second point with me. Do good works. Alright, you've got them both now.

Have you observed how many times Peter has said "do good"? Chapter 2:12, keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles. Chapter 2:15, in your doing good, you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Chapter 2:20, but when you do what is right and suffer. Chapter 3:1, wives you may win your husbands without a word by your behavior. Chapter 3:13, who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? Verse 16, keep a good conscience. Verse 17, it is better if God should will it so that you suffer for doing right. This right here is what absolutely kills me about people who want to act like

grace and the law are diametrically opposed to one another. No, no, no, no, no, grace and legalism are opposed to one another. Grace and the law fit together like hand in glove. God, according to Peter, expects obedience from us to his law. When I fear God, when I entrust myself to him in the ways that I've described, that motivates me to turn away from evil, to do good works.

But what are the good works that we ought to be doing? Peter sums up what he has been saying by exhorting us and he uses two separate clauses. The first one is longer, you notice there are a lot of commas and semicolons in the text. It seems to emphasize that the Christian community needs to do good works since believers will not have the same mind. However, many of these statements in this passage also relate to the treatment of the hostile world.

Let's first talk about doing good works within the Christ-centered community. We are called to be harmonious, to think the same as one another. Division in the church is exactly what the devil wants. I mean, after all, how attractive is that? It makes it hard to evangelize and it makes it easy for a person who is witnessing that kind of division within a church to reject the message of that church. No amount of programs, no amount of outreaches will overcome the testimony of dissent in a church like that. We are also called to be sympathetic. We are to share the same feelings as one another. Now, while it might be true that we should do more than offer sympathy to one another, we should not do less than that and there are people on the prayer list, people in your ABF, maybe people who are sitting in the very row in which you're sitting, who may be hurting. Are you asking yourself: who's reaching out to those people? I hope you understand that we've got a great group of pastors here and I count it a privilege to serve with them. They can't do everything and God has called pastors to equip the saints to carry out the work of the ministry so I hope that you are asking: who is ministering to the hurting people around me? And I hope that you're asking yourself: is that something I could do? Could I meet that need? Could I be a blessing to that person?

We also need to be loving, giving and serving one another. You know, I looked at the calendar the other day and do you realize it's October? I mean, where on earth did August and September go? Did I just miss them? The holiday season is fast approaching. Now, of course, during the holidays there is all kinds of opportunity to serve. In fact, in your bulletin this morning, you're going to find an insert for the Living Nativity, believe it or not. It's October and we're talking about Christmas, although I think Hobby Lobby has had their Christmas trees up for a while. But if Hobby Lobby is going to do it, then we need to do it, right? In your bulletin there is a form for the Living Nativity. Now, sometimes we kind of let these sign-up processes just kind of drag on like it's this never ending sign-up vortex we've wound up in. I want to encourage you, go ahead and sign-up to serve in the Living Nativity today. You say, "Well, I don't know what I'm going to be doing at Christmas time." If you sign-up you will know. Okay? Let's just get that handled today.

In addition to that, this text says that we are to be kind hearted. Compassion should come from deeply sharing one another's feelings. Over the years, we've had a number of

people share testimony about the trials that they've been through, testimony about the death of loved ones, about bouts with cancer, about prolonged joblessness and though all of those situations are very painful, what is joyful in them is to hear how they've been served, how others within the body have ministered to them and showed kindness to them through their struggle. We also need to be humble, thinking of others as more important than ourselves.

Now, those are some of the ways that we ought to engage in good works within the community of believers but we also have to be careful to engage in good works with all, returning good for evil. Now, I don't have to tell you this, you know that is extremely hard. After all, the last time I checked, evil hurts. I mean, sometimes it's annoying, sometimes it's irritating, sometimes it's just downright painful. Rather than responding with revenge, we are called to return good for that evil. Let's return to our work scenario: let's say the boss is just hammering you, giving you extra assignments, trying to make it miserable for you to continue in that position. What you need to do is return excellence. That's returning good for evil. Doing your job well in that situation. Husbands, wives, the applications here abound for marriage. Even if you would say that you're at a place in your marriage where marriage takes work but it's not hard work. Evil is still possible in that context and what God says is to give good instead. Wives, if your husband whines about your cooking, don't make something that you know he hates. "You want to fuss about the meal last night. Well, baby, let's see what I've got planned for tonight." No, don't give him that. That's not the way to return good for evil. Husbands, if your wife is letting you have it because you are an incompetent handyman and I count myself among you, then take her to her favorite restaurant anyway. That's returning good for evil.

As a result of entrusting ourselves to God, we're called to do good works while submitting, finding your place in government, employment, family, even and perhaps especially, while suffering because that posture finds favor with God. Let me say that again: as a result of entrusting ourselves to God, we are called to do good works while submitting, finding your place in government, in employment, in family, even and perhaps especially, while suffering because that posture finds favor with God. Let's review our key phrases: phrase 1. entrust yourself to God. 2. Do good works. 3. We're called to evangelize by seizing opportunities to proclaim the gospel which arises from persevering in good works.

1 Peter 3:15 says, "but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." Fear of God. Fearing God leads to persevering in good works in the midst of suffering and this does something to the sin-dulled senses of this world. Peter assumes that people will begin to scratch their heads. He assumes that they will begin to wonder, why on earth are you continuing to love me when I treat you that way? Why are you continuing to serve me? Why would you do that for me? Isn't that the heartbeat of our community ministries around here? Now, we understand, some people are going to say, "Cool. You have a skate park. Took you long enough." Other people will say, "You mean I have to be a member to use that pool in there? You guys are a bunch of money hungry Christians who are just concerned about your Beamer payment."



Some people are going to say, “Well, I only get five days worth of groceries from the food pantry? That’s not serving me.” Some people will say that. We understand that. We’ll call that group of people “group 1,” but other people, “group 2,” other people ask, why do you do this for us? Maybe some will ask, “Why is it that you love me more than anyone else does?” And understand that the people in group 1 sometimes become the people in group 2.

Now, the temptation in our minds is to think that no one will ever ask us the kinds of questions that allow us to talk about Christ but God encourages us to sanctify Christ in our hearts. This is a very similar idea to that of entrusting yourself to God. When we sanctify Christ in our hearts, we are saying that he is number one. We need to make Jesus first and here’s where that leads, this is our third statement: be ready to talk about Jesus. Say that with me. Be ready to talk about Jesus. When you regularly and continually do good works, it stimulates the sin-dulled senses of this world and it encourages people to ask questions. We want to be known as people of salt and light, don’t we? When you live out what we’ve been talking about in 1 Peter, you are salt, meaning that you are a preserving feature in this world that grows ever rotten. And if you do not live this out, then your saltiness will be gone and so is your influence in a rotten world. When you live out what we’re talking about, you are light in a very dark place. In utter darkness, a little light can be seen a long way and we are called to be salt and light because we are people who entrust ourselves to God. We do good works and we stand ready to give an answer. We’re ready to talk about Jesus.

We also see that good works show that you have hope in a hopeless world. We’re talking about the gospel here. And the hope that we’re able to share is this: God sent his Son to die for me when I was treating God and his Son so wickedly and Jesus willingly continued to do good even to the point of giving his life for me when I was sinning against him. Jesus did that so that I could be brought into a relationship with God and that’s the only hope I have right now and because Christ persevered for me, it’s the least that I can do to love others, to serve you, even when it’s hard sometimes. And I know that I will be with God because of Jesus Christ and so I don’t want any of my actions to hinder you from being with God through Jesus Christ.

Then, you get to ask this question: would you like to know how you could also have this hope? This all reminds me of John 9, you remember the story when a blind man, a man born blind, was given his sight by Jesus? And people were all up in arms, especially the religious leaders, and the man was able to say to the religious leaders that questioned him, “Hey, look guys, I don’t know all about your theological squabbles that you’ve got going on but one thing that I do know, I was blind and now I see.” The testimony of our actions, it opens the door for our verbal testimony and this may lead others to repentance. Over and over, Peter has given us the possibility that because of this way of life, others may glorify God and may come to know him. Listen again: regarding Christ, chapter 2:24 says, “By his wounds you were healed.” Chapter 3:18, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God.” “Likewise you,” chapter 2:12 says, “Keep your behavior excellent as they observe your deeds that they may glorify God.” Chapter 3:1, wives, you may win our husbands without a word. Chapter

3:16, “keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.”

Let’s summarize everything by saying this and you’ve heard me make this statement a few times throughout the message: in order to evangelize in the midst of trial, the believer must offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, proclaiming his excellences by living, not by arguing or by clever speaking. And I gave you three statements, let’s see if you remember them: 1. Entrust yourself to God. 2. Do good works. 3. Be ready to talk about Jesus.