

“An Answering Witness”

Holiness

1 Peter 3:13-17

Dr. Bruce Bickel

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Bruce: Good morning, men!

Men: Good morning!

Bruce: Good to be with you, good to be with you. Brothers, do you want to set the tone for us? Let’s be quiet and know that God is the Lord and may we just have Him open our eyes that we might behold Him more clearly. So men, take us into His presence. (*Music.*)

Gracious and faithful Lord, great is Thy faithfulness! All I have needed Thy hands have provided. And may it be so for Jesus’ sake today that we would live that out according to Your Holy Spirit’s leadership in our lives. Guide us into all truth for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: We’re continuing in our study of this theme of holiness as recorded for us in the book of 1 Peter. I think I gave you this illustration some time ago. But when I went to the Naval Academy to become a midshipman, there’s a white line in Tacumsey Court. And when you step across that white line you’re no longer a C.W. You’re now a midshipman in the United States Navy.

The day that I entered into the Naval Academy as a student I came up to that white line and there was an upper class-man waiting for me to cross that line. And I turned and I said to my father, “Dad, what’s the last piece of advice you can give me?”

And probably one of the wisest, most profound things my dad ever told me was this. He said, “Son, wherever you go, ask the Lord to give you one brother to hold you spiritually accountable.”

I’ve taken that principle for the last fifty-five years of my life since my dad gave me that piece of advice. So that day before I crossed the white line and became a midshipman in the United States Naval Academy I said, “Lord, give me a brother who will hold me spiritually accountable.” And I stepped across the line.

Several weeks later I met the man whom the Lord was pleased to bring into my life to hold me spiritually accountable as a Naval Academy midshipman. And he is with me here today. I want you to meet John Bishop. (*Applause.*)

John: Men, it works both ways. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: All right!

Bruce: John and I have been holding each other spiritually accountable now for over fifty years. There’s a whole legacy of what we started in the Naval Academy, and it goes on. But I just wanted you to realize the value of how faithful God is, because all I have ever needed God has ever provided, including relationships with men who have held me spiritually accountable. And John, I just want to say thanks, buddy, for the years we’ve had together. I look forward to our future and our present relationship. So thanks very much. (*Applause.*)

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I've asked John to come back in July when his business time lets him do that, to give us some teaching on the warfare that we're engaged in as men, and how we need to take on the right mindset. You know, we are actually in war.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And it's a positive thing for us. We just need to understand what that means and how do we as men think about our warfare attitude that we need to have. That doesn't mean that we're aggressive. That doesn't mean that we're uncontrollable. That's not what we're talking about. It's just a mindset of who we are in this world. And I've asked John to come and teach us some of that stuff in July when he's back with us. So John, I'm going to look forward to sitting at your feet.

Let's turn in your Bibles, please, to 1 Peter. You have your handout, handout number 19.

I want to read the verses we're going to be looking at in 1 Peter chapter 3, beginning at verses 13-17, but I want to keep it in its right context because, men, it's very, very critical that when you're studying the Scripture, that you always take those verses that you're reading and keep them in their right context, meaning where do these verses that you're going to study fit into the major theme of that particular chapter and the whole theme of the principle of that entire book?

Keeping things in context does two things. It's our protection from misinterpretation. It's our protection from not interpreting the Scripture correctly, but it's also our instruction on how to apply it correctly. Sometimes we take verses out of context and we do not apply them correctly because we remove the context in which they've been written.

Now we've come to some passages today that are very, very critical to our understanding of how this book flows together. So if you'll open up your handout, handout 19, you'll notice that the entire book of 1 Peter deals with our holiness. Now I've kind of given you a little outline because I want you to understand that it all starts with our understanding the character of our salvation. The degree to which you and I understand the glorious and gracious salvation that we have in Christ is going to lead us to the next thing, and that is understanding the claims of our salvation. You see, the character of our salvation helps us to understand the claims of our salvation. And when you understand the character of your salvation and the claims of your salvation you understand the conduct of the person who is saved. But if you don't have your doctrine right, you're not going to have your practice right.

And notice how this flows contextually. The character of our salvation first, the claims of our salvation, and then the conduct of the saved.

In the last couple of weeks we've been talking about the confidence that we have because of our conduct, because of understanding the claims and because of our understanding the character of our gracious and glorious salvation.

And so, as we've seen the last couple of weeks, beginning at verse 8 of 1 Peter chapter 3, we're beginning to realize that Peter was instructing us on the value of maintaining holy relationships. Now right after that he comes to another conclusion, and that is what we're going to study today. And that's what I'm calling an answering witness.

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But notice what happens first. He teaches us how to have holy relationships before you have an answering witness to your relationship to Christ. So let me go back and read, beginning at verse 8 all the way down to verse 17 to keep things in their right context, and then we'll explore this. Beginning at verse 8, 1 Peter chapter 3, reading from the English Standard Version.

“Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless. For to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good. Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”

“Now,”—critical word—“now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen and amen. Now let me give you a quick review. We've been talking the last couple of weeks about maintaining holy relationships, and you begin to see that in verse 8. Remember that word “finally?” It's sort of a summary statement, saying, look, guys. I've been teaching you a lot of this doctrine about holiness. Finally, here's how you begin to apply it.

If you don't understand 1 Peter chapter 1, chapter 2 and chapter 3 up to verse 8, you're not going to understand that word *finally* and what it means. He's been saying that I've given you some doctrine on the whole concept of holy living. Now finally here's how you begin to apply it.

And you saw from our previous studies that we talked first of all about two major principles he gives us—how to love one another. “Finally,” he says, “love one another.”

And there are five attitudes that we have with people who are inside the body of Christ, five attitudes that you and I bring to the people who are in the body of Christ. Those attitudes are harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion and humility. Now that's how he says that you need to have those attitudes with people inside the body.

But you're going to have some relationships with people outside the body of Christ. How do you maintain holy relationships with them? He gives us those instructions as we talked about previously in verses 10-12, and that is action with the outsiders. Attitudes with insiders, actions with the outsiders.

And the two actions are these. Don't overlook evil. Overcome evil. You don't overlook it. You overcome it. And how do you overcome it? You overcome it by doing .

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Men: Doing good.

Bruce: Doing good deeds. You and I are not slaves to the evil of this world. You and I are over-comers. We’re super nikes. You’re more than a conqueror in Christ. Christ has said, “I have overcome the world.” If you’re in Christ, what have you done? You’ve overcome the world. We just need to act like it.

And Peter says this. With the outsiders, the people who are not in Christ, the people of this world system, you don’t overlook their evil. You overcome it with acts of goodness because of the grace of God.

And the second principle that he taught us recently is this. Not only are we to love one another, but we’re to love life. Look at verses 10-12 of 1 Peter chapter 3. He says that here’s the way you begin to love life.

First of all, you control the tongue. Now what is it we control our tongue from? Evil speech, deceitful speech. Second, we do this. You hate evil and do good. The way that you love life is this. Control your tongue! When you control your tongue you’re loving life, because you realize that you’re going to maintain holy relationships with people inside the body of Christ and holy relationships with people outside the body of Christ.

Now the first thing I need to do to really express my love of life is this. Watch what I say. Control my tongue from evil words and from deceitful words.

The second thing he taught us was this. Hate evil and do good. We don’t overlook evil. You overcome evil. You overcome it by doing good.

And the third thing he said, if you’re going to love life is, control your tongue. Hate evil and do good. The third thing, if you want to love life, he teaches us, as we saw, seek and pursue peace.

And notice the conclusion of that in the last verses, in verse 12. “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are attentive to their prayers.” And the Lord’s face is against evil.

Now notice the next word. The first word in verse 13 is the word what? “Now!”

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Now what does that mean? I’ve just given you something! I’ve just told you how to live righteous relationships with people inside the church and outside the church, inside the body of Christ and outside the body of Christ. Now he says something. That means pay attention to what I’m going to say next now, because it’s a summary of what I just gave you in the previous verses.

You see, that’s why you don’t want to take things out of context. Notice what happens first. Maintaining holy relationships comes before you give a defense for the hope that is in you.

Participant: There you go.

Bruce: What comes first? Maintaining holy relationships, then you give an explanation for it. You don’t just shoot off at the mouth about your relationship to Christ. You give somebody the reason for asking you the question. “How do you do that? How do you control your tongue? How do you love life? How do you not say words that are evil? How do you not say deceitful words? How can you do that? How can you respond in this situation like that in a way that is so contrary to what the world says?”

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So we need to understand that what Peter is saying is this. Before you start giving a defense, which is a witness, you need to maintain holy relationships to give people a reason to ask you for the hope that’s within you. You’ve got to understand what comes first. And that’s all wrapped up in that little word *now*.

And he says this. “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for good deeds?” So let’s take a look at what Peter is going to teach us about an answering witness, what I’m calling an answering witness.

What Peter is basically saying is this. Before you give a witness to your faith in the Person and work of Christ in your own life, something needs to happen, and that is this. The Word needs to become flesh. And how does he do that? Maintaining holy relationships with people inside the body of Christ and people outside the body of Christ. How do you do that? By loving life, by controlling the tongue, by hating evil, by doing good, and by pursuing peace.

You see, what Peter is saying is this. When the Word becomes flesh in your life, now you can give some explanation for the reason for the hope within you. Let people see the Word become flesh in your life. And how do you do that? Maintain holy relationships.

Let’s explore the significance of that word *now*. Peter says, in effect, “Let the Word become flesh and then people are going to have a reason to ask you for the hope that is within you.” That’s what we would call our answering witness, as I am calling it.

Now we’ve got to face it, folks. It’s going to take more than just talking about Christ to convince people to believe in Him.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It’s going to take much more than just talking about Him and to believe in Him. That’s because our society is constantly bombarded with verbal claims. All kinds of promises are made.

I bought a car several years ago, a fifty thousand mile guarantee on the car. At two thousand miles I had a problem.

I took it in and I said, “Oh, can you fix this for free?”

“Oh, you didn’t read the small print.” (*Laughter.*) You see, our world is just besieged and bombarded with claims that people don’t believe anymore, because we’ve become so skeptical of the promises that we read in the paper. Promises have resulted in a very high degree of skepticism in our society on the part of most of us. We’re so inundated with verbal promises that we’ve become distrustful of words alone.

It’s even more so concerning our Christian faith. We’ve got to understand and deal with the fact that this distrust of words alone may cause people hardly to take our word for it. They just can’t take our word for it anymore because people are so skeptical about the use of words, and especially when it comes to the claims of Christ. “Well, that’s just your opinion. That’s your interpretation. That’s your perception.”

You see, they’re so skeptical about words! You’ve got to give them a reason to want to listen to your words.

And what Peter is saying is this. The Word is going to become flesh before you have an explanation for it. That’s why the word *finally* comes before the word *now*. *Finally*, maintain holy relationships. *Now* you’ve got something to say, because people are going

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to see that the Word has become flesh by the way that you respond to the system of this world. People may only pay attention to something in our lives and bodies to something that is so unusually different from the system of this world. That’s when they’re going to pay attention to us. And that’s Peter’s point today. The only witness that has a chance of making it into our highly skeptical culture is the witness that is first rooted in life, and then uses words to explain it and clarify it.

Finally, maintain holy relationships. *Now* you have an answering witness. Life is about relationships, men. Life is all about relationships. And when you and I maintain holy relationships that are so contrary to the system of this world, the skepticism of this world is going to say, “Explain that. How is that possible for you to live the way that you do in these relationships?” *Now* you’ve got an answer for it.

You see, men, Peter makes a wonderful point. You can’t take words out of context. He’s saying this. The words must become flesh before you put words behind it. That’s why you and I have an answering witness. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, when somebody is rude or speaks evil to us and we keep quiet with a good attitude, we take their power away. We take the steam out of their meanness.

Bruce: You’ve been reading my notes! (*Laughter.*) Hang on. That’s my next point! (*Laughter.*) Way to go! I’m glad you prepared your heart before you came this morning. (*Laughter.*) I’m going to sit down and let you finish. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Oh, no! (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: So let’s take a look at what Peter is saying to us. The manner in which we respond to a hostile world through holy relationships affords us the chance to explain the hope that’s within us because we are in Christ Jesus. Now because of the hope that is within us we have what I call an answering witness. It’s an answer to this, that hopefully by God’s grace and mercy and His faithfulness, we have demonstrated that the Word has become flesh. Now let me give you an answer for it. Let me give you an explanation for it. Do you want to know why? Do you want to know how? Let me tell you about it. That’s why the word *finally* comes before the word *now*.

So what does Peter say? Peter says that there are two things that we need to understand. First of all, there is the *protection* of the believer. “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?”

First of all, we need to have a right view of goodness. We need to have a right view of suffering. We need to have a right view of Christ. He says that you need to have these thought patterns in your mind before you have a valid answering witness.

You’ve got to understand this. Do you have the right view of goodness?

Participant: Come on, sir.

Bruce: Do you have the right view of suffering? And do you have the right view of Christ as Lord, as holy? Now when you think like that, you’re now in a position to give an explanation for the Word that has become flesh in your holy relationships. See how it works?

Remember that the word *finally* comes before the word *now*, and that’s by design. It’s by design so you understand this. Doctrine precedes practice. *Finally* is doctrine. *Now*

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is practice. Don't take them out of context. You'll remove the power of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life which is revealed to us in the Scripture.

So first of all, what does it mean to have a right view of goodness? Scripture says that if you and I have a zeal for goodness, in verses 8-12 which we just read, who can harm you?

Who can harm you if you understand verse 12? “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous.” Who can harm you? “And His ears are open” to your prayers. Who can harm you? Here's your protection. “But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”

You see, when you and I have the right understanding of goodness, we don't overlook evil. We overcome evil by goodness. You and I have to have the right understanding of what goodness means. And he has already given us how we do that. Yes, Don?

Don: I think that we have to look at the big picture because in this world, and we see it all over the world, there are people who are going to harm the righteous.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: But, you know, in the ultimate picture, with the way things are going to end up, we do have the protection of the Lord and His eyes are on the righteous. His ears are open to their prayers. And the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. And that will manifest itself when Christ comes. But till then we're to keep that in view because if we don't, we'll be overwhelmed and discouraged.

Bruce: Amen to that. You and I might be hurt. We may be hurt by the system of this world. But the Scripture says this. You can't be harmed.

Participant: That's right.

Bruce: You may be hurt but you can't be harmed. And why not? Because “the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous.” You might be hurt but you can't be harmed. And why is that? Because the ears of the Lord are attentive to your prayers. And you may be hurt but not harmed. And why is that? Because “the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.” You're protected! You're protected by the grace and sovereignty of God.

Notice Romans 8:31. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Brothers, be realistic. You may be hurt by the system of this world, by the evil of this world. But you can't be harmed because God is our protector.

Participant: And that's what's so amazing about grace.

Bruce: Absolutely. It takes you through that.

Notice the word *eager*. Some of your Bibles might translate this as “Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for good works,” for that which is good? It might be *eager* or *zealous*. I prefer the word *zealous* because here is what the word *zealot* means. It's a fanatical patriot who was pledged and sworn to liberate his native land by every possible means. That's what the word means historically. It means that they were people who sacrificed their own lives. They sacrificed their ease and they sacrificed their comfort. They sacrificed their homes. They sacrificed their loved ones in a passionate love for their entire country.

Now Peter says this. Love goodness with a passionate intensity like the fanatical patriot who loves his country. Do you and I love goodness just as much as we love our

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country? Are you zealous for good works? Are you willing to sacrifice your pride when you're hurt for the sake of goodness? Are you willing to sacrifice your reputation when you're hurt for the sake of goodness? Are you zealous to overcome evil by doing acts of goodness? You see, Peter says, be zealous! Be like those historical patriots who had such a passionate love for their country that they sacrificed everything for their cause.

You see, men, our cause is this. We don't overlook evil. We overcome evil. How do you do that? Because we're zealous for acts of goodness. What are we doing? We're setting ourselves up to demonstrate this: that the Word has become flesh in my life. The Word has become flesh in your life, and as a result, I've got a reason to explain that to you, and now I've got a reason to explain the hope that is within me. The Word must become flesh. You and I have to have the right view of goodness before we start talking about God's grace in our lives.

There's a divine protection and a zeal for goodness, because God's favor is thus secured to us, and man's enmity is to a large measure disarmed. Goodness robs the world of any good reason to treat us meanly.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Do you realize that? Goodness robs the world of a reason to treat you poorly. Now they may do that. The best example of that is the Person and work of Christ.

Look at the good things that He did! He removed all their reasons for them to crucify Him, so what did they have to do? They had to conjure up different reasons. It wasn't because of His goodness. That removed their possibility of doing anything against Him. They had to conjure up some other reason.

You see, when you and I are zealous for goodness, it robs the world of a reason to come back and harm us. Who is in control of evil?

Participant: Satan.

Bruce: We are! Why is that? Because we're zealous for good. I have the right view of what good can do.

I told you my own life, about building the orphanage in Vietnam. In a war zone it's evil! But a couple of us decided to do something to overcome evil by doing an act of goodness, and we started the orphanage in the city of Huey to overcome the evil that we were involved in and participated in because of a war. We overcame it by doing something that was good. And the Lord has been pleased to do that, and you are all a part of that now. Forty-five or fifty years later you're a part of that, in the little Tin Lahn Church in the city of Huey. That church is still functioning because we overcame evil with goodness. Yes, please?

Participant: What was that statement you just said? Goodness robs the world of a reason to what?

Bruce: To treat us poorly. It robs the world of a reason to treat us poorly. They've got to conjure up other reasons.

All right. What's an example? You do an act of goodness and it robs them of the possibility of treating you poorly. So they have to come up and say, "That's your opinion!"

Participant: Or we're bigots.

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Bruce: Or we’re bigots. Or “You’re not open-minded.”

Participant: You’re not tolerant.

Bruce: I get blasted all the time! The world tells me this. “You’re not open-minded.” I say, “I’m open-minded, but not at both ends.” (*Laughter.*) You see, they’ve got to conjure up another reason to come after you. It can’t be because of goodness.

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: You see, men, it starts with this. Do you really have a right view of goodness? Are you really zealous for good works?

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, Ted?

Ted: It’s interesting what you just said, and I don’t want folks to miss it. You used humor to blunt that criticism.

Bruce: Explain that, please.

Ted: Well, you just said, “You’re not open-minded,” and you said, “Not at both ends.” And people laughed. That, rather than coming back and saying, “Oh yes, I am open-minded,” or however you would respond in that fashion. You used humor to disarm the attack.

Bruce: Thank you. That’s a good point, Ted. I appreciate you pointing that out. I didn’t realize I’d done that. (*Laughter.*)

Ted: (*Unclear.*) The person criticizing you would have to laugh too.

Bruce: That’s right.

Ted: What would they say? You just made a joke.

Participant: You disarmed them.

Bruce: You disarmed them. That’s correct. Now Peter is going to give us some insights on how you and I give explanations. We’ll probably get into that next week. But Ted just really highlighted something about the fact that we do it with respect. We don’t do it defensively! We’re the last people who have to defend anything!

Participant: Amen. That’s right.

Bruce: We can’t defend God. We can’t defend Him. Does He need our defense?

Participant: No.

Bruce: My ego says, “Yes.” Scripture says no.

It’s interesting. Who was the one who took his sword out and cut off the ear of the high priest’s slave?

Men: Peter.

Bruce: Peter!

Participant: Yup!

Bruce: And Peter is the one who is saying that you don’t need to do that, This is after he did that because what did Jesus say? “Put away your sword,” because “he who lives by the sword will die by the sword.”

Now here is just my interpretation, my understanding, of what Peter was doing. He was asleep before that occurred. So all of a sudden he wakes up and here is the situation. Jesus, his Mentor, is being taken captive, and he says this. “I’ve got to defend God!”

Participant: There you go.

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Bruce: “I’m going to do it myself. It’s up to me.” And he does that. And Jesus says no. (*Paraphrase.*) “Put your sword away because there’s a better way of doing it, because how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?”

You see, men, the last thing you and I need to do is to take the posture of thinking that we need to defend God. You *explain* God. You give an answer to the Word becoming flesh in your life. But you and I do not ever need to be defensive in how we live our lives, as long as the Word is becoming flesh. Peter is going to teach us that you’ve got a reason to explain it. And he’ll teach us how to do that next week.

Participant: I think it’s interesting, too, that Peter knew there was going to be trouble because he didn’t usually walk around with a sword.

Bruce: Correct.

Participant: He took a sword with him. He and one other guy had swords and they slept rather than staying awake.

Bruce: Right. They responded out of trepidation. They responded out of fear. Fear is the feeling of losing control. Peter thought he was losing control and had to take care of himself.

But if you and I should suffer, we might be hurt but we won’t be harmed for doing good. We may have to suffer, as the Scripture says, for righteousness’ sake.

Now what does righteousness’ sake mean? Righteousness means this—living a life that is consistent with the nature and character of God. So not only do we need to have a right view of goodness and how we do not overlook the evil of this world; we overcome it with acts of goodness. Secondly, Peter says this. You’ve got to have a right view of suffering.

Take a look at verse 14. “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed.” You will be blessed. Is the world going to understand that? Absolutely not. That makes no sense. How can you suffer and be blessed? You can’t do that, friends, unless you understand this. I have a right view of goodness. If I have a right view of goodness, I’m going to have a right view of suffering for righteousness’ sake. There will be a reason behind it.

So what does Peter mean when he says a right view towards suffering? The word *blessed* does not mean to *feel* delighted. Here’s what it means: to be highly privileged, and therefore calm. To be blessed means this. I am highly privileged to suffer for righteousness’ sake. And when you understand righteousness and suffering in those terms, the consequence in your inner spirit is this. You calm down. You just calm down, because you have a right view of what’s going on in your life. You have a right view of suffering. Yes, Don?

Don: What kind of suffering are we talking about here? Is it specifically talking about persecution, or is it talking about all kinds of suffering, whatever suffering comes our way—bodily suffering or whatever?

Bruce: It’s suffering for righteousness’ sake. It’s suffering for living a life that is consistent with the character and nature of God. We need to understand that you suffer for righteousness’ sake, not for health reasons, but for righteousness’ sake. It’s how you

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live. If you suffer because your life is at a higher level or standard, and you suffer for that, that’s what he’s referring to. We need to have a right suffering for that.

Why is it that they wanted to crucify Christ? Because he upset the curve. He was holy! Why is it that people will want to hurt us? Because you upset the curve. What do they say? “Well, you’re holier than thou, aren’t you?” And the answer is, “Thanks for reminding me.” (*Laughter.*)

Now you don’t say that proudly. (*Laughter.*)

Ted: Humor again, Bruce. (*Laughter.*)

Bruce: There you go. Humor again. You don’t say that with pride or ego. You say it with a great sense of dignity.

Participant: Sure.

Bruce: A great sense of respect. A great sense of realizing the high privilege that I have at this moment, to take a bullet for the Lord.

Participant: If you would.

Bruce: To take a bullet for him, because I’m living a life that is righteous and the world can’t understand it. All they can do is react against it. And what do we do? We continue to overcome it with acts of goodness.

So we need to understand that Peter says that we are not only to have a right view of goodness but a right view of suffering. Suffering for righteousness means the kind of life that conforms to God’s standards. When you suffer for that, you will be blessed. You will be engaged in a high privilege of suffering for the cause of Christ. And the result of that, in your inner spirit, is that you will be calm.

Not only do we submit to some loss or disadvantage in defending a good cause, but also to suffer unjustly when you are right and they are wrong.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Notice 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 24. Go back to 1 Peter chapter 2. Look down at verse 20.

“For what credit is it, if you sin and are beaten for it you endure it? But if when you do good and suffer for it and you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you might follow in His steps.”

Now here’s the example, men, and we’ve talked about this at some length. Here’s the example. “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.”

Men, there’s a difference between submission and entrusting. We are told in previous verses in 1 Peter to be submissive. It doesn’t say to entrust yourself to the authority. It says to submit to authority. You take that act of submission and you entrust that to Him who judges justly. There’s a difference.

That’s the example we have. Yes, you can be submissive in a situation. And you take that act of obedience, of being submissive, and you entrust that to a God who judges justly and you let Him deal with it. That’s what Jesus did. That’s the example for us.

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So you and I *can* suffer for righteousness’ sake. You may be hurt. But you can’t be harmed when you and I understand this. The example is that I’m going to entrust my submission to God who judges justly and let Him work it out in His grace and sovereignty, because I know this. I have the high privilege of suffering for the cause of Christ. And when you understand that view of suffering, you just become calm, because you realize that there is something bigger than just you and your hurt.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It’s about God and His glory. Because what’s happening? The Word is becoming flesh, and that’s going to be your answer. You’re going to explain that. When somebody says, “Bruce, how are you going to do that? How can you handle that situation at work?”

“Well, come on into my office and I’ll explain it to you.” And you just explain the hope that’s within you. That’s what Peter is saying.

You’ve got to understand this, men. Don’t forget the word *finally*. It comes before the word *now*.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: The word *finally* comes before the word *now*. The right view of goodness. The right view of suffering. A zeal for goodness and a calmness in suffering comes about when we have another view—a right view of Christ.

Notice that. “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is within you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

Notice this. The person whose mind is on earthly things, the person whose mind is given to his or her possessions, to his or her positions, to his or her power or pleasures, is the person who is most vulnerable.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: Because you can lose it at any moment. Do you realize that? When you and I focus on the pleasures of this world and the positions of this world, the power of this world, the property of this world, the possessions of this world, that’s when you are most vulnerable, because that can happen in a moment. It can be removed. You’re vulnerable!

What Peter is saying is this. You don’t need to be vulnerable in this world.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: And the way you do that is to have a right view of Christ as Lord. You have a right view of Christ as Lord. But the person who sets Christ as Lord is the most secure because he’s protected.

Now “set apart Christ as Lord” does not mean that we position Him there. It literally means to show respect and honor. We honor Him in His position. God has already made Him Lord. You and I don’t make Him Lord of anything.

Men: Yes. Amen.

Bruce: You don’t trust Him for your salvation, then make Him Lord later by some second decision. He’s already beat you to the punch, guys. (*Laughter.*) He has already made Him Lord. You and I recognize that, and you honor that as His position. I recognize that Christ is Lord and I honor Him in that. The word means to sanctify, to set

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apart. It means this. You regard Him as holy. You regard Him as Lord. You treat Him in a manner different than you treat anything else. That’s what it means to sanctify Christ as Lord. You treat Him differently than you do anything else in your life, because you’re setting Him apart. You’re sanctifying Him. You don’t make Him anything. It’s how you view Him!

That’s why I call this a right view of Christ. You treat Him in a manner that’s different than anything in your life. You have a holy regard for Christ always, and in everything you do. If Christ and all His glory is the focus of your heart, then He Himself becomes your protection. When you set Christ apart as Lord and holy in your life and view Him differently than you do anything else in your life, then you are no longer vulnerable.

Who has the power of the world? We do. Jesus says, “I have overcome the world.” (*Paraphrase.*) “If you’re in Me, you have overcome the world system.”

Friends, we do not need to be afraid, because when you and I set Christ apart in our hearts as Lord and as holy, we treat Him with all respect and honor and reverence for the position that He has. That’s when you get protection. That’s when you’re no longer vulnerable. All of our fears of insecurity and insignificance are repelled. Yes, Jim?

Jim: Bruce, my translation of verse 14 says, “Be not afraid of their terror.” And in light of what you’re saying, the terrorists use the word *terror*, and their whole approach of terror is precisely to gain control.

Bruce: Absolutely. Absolutely they do.

Jim: And this is the opposite reaction.

Bruce: Notice what it says. That’s a good point, Jim. “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who” gives you a reason for it. Before that he says, “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled.”

You see, when you have a right view of suffering and you have a right view of Christ, you’re no longer going to be troubled because you’re going to be blessed, and you’ll understand that by suffering for righteousness’ sake, you’re in a highly ordained position and calm. Therefore I don’t have to fear their terror. I don’t have to fear them, as the Scripture says. “Have no fear of them.” I’m no longer vulnerable. “Nor be troubled.” I’m calm because I have a right view of goodness, I have a right view of persecution, and I have a right view of Christ.

When your conduct and mine are so unusual amidst the world system because you and I are demonstrating that the Word has become flesh, then the world is ready for an answering witness.

Notice the next verses, verses 15-17. Let me read those for you. I’ll give you your outline because this is what we’ll study next week.

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”

Next week Peter is going to give us characteristics of an answering witness. Let me show you what they are. You have it in your outline. It’s a respectful answer. It’s a

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prepared answer. It’s an answer of a clear conscience. And he’s going to tell us that this is how you give an answer. You don’t just go blurting out at the mouth.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant:

Sticks and stones may break my bones,
But my words can really harm me.

Bruce: That’s true. There’s our poet laureate. (*Laughter.*) Thank you, sir.

Now notice. We’ll come back next week. Peter’s been telling you this. The whole concept of these last couple of chapters has been this. When you maintain holy relationships, the Word is becoming flesh. And in a very skeptical world which does not believe just mere words, you and I give them a reason for the hope that is within us. We give them a reason for the explanation of how we live. We now can explain what we give them in the word of Christ. You now give them a reason for how you live.

That’s why I say that we have the most powerful witness and it’s this. It’s an answering witness to holy relationships.

Remember this. The word *finally* comes before the word *now*.

Let’s pray. Father, all I can say is thank You for the way that You have laid out Your sovereign word. It’s so practical. Help us, Father, not to dissect it inappropriately, taking it out of its context, but understanding the sovereign flow of Your grace as found in these words. And Father, while we get excited about our Christian experience and we get excited about Your word, give us an excitement about who You are in all of Your glory. Let us see You, Your nature, Your character and Your attributes behind the words that we’ve looked at today. May it be so, Father, that You will continue to open our eyes, that we might behold You more clearly for Christ’s sake. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen.

Bruce: See you next week. (*Applause.*)