Suffer for Doing Good

1 Peter 3;8-22

Key Verse:8:17 “For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

Last week we studied how Peter instructed wives and husbands to live as God’s chosen people. Wives must respect their husbands and support them with a quiet and gentle spirit. Husbands must be considerate and love their wives as the Lord serves his church. Today Peter instructs the church how to build up the loving community for the Lord. His instructions always conclude with the example of Jesus.

First, being like-minded (8). The word ‘church’ has two names in Greek which is *ekklesia* and *koinonia.* *Ekklesia* means assembly or gathering and *koinonia* means fellowship. So, church is a group or a meeting where those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and have fellowships in his name. A church is an organism like a vine and its branches which are held to Jesus for life, more than an organization like a company which is connected for benefits. Therefore, unity in a church is required more than anyplace and any organization in the world. A church is the smallest unit next to a family which people can form. Satan who is hostile to God tries to destroy unity in a family and in a church. Therefore, Peter asked the church to be like-minded. Look at verse 8. “***Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.***” Here being like-minded means being united. In other words, it means having one mind for one goal with the same spirit. Paul said about the unity of the church in Ephesians 4:3-6 which says, “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; once God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*.” We are all different. In Peter’s day the churches which were scattered around Asia Minor were a gathering of those who grew up in different cultures, spoke different languages, and ate different food. How could they become like-minded? Even in a family there are differences between a husband and a wife and between parents and children. How can we overcome these differences and become like-minded?

This is possible when we all are united with Christ Jesus. Jesus compares the relationship between God and us to a vine and its branches. When the branches remain in the vine, they bear many fruits. When the branches are united with the vine, they bear the same fruits. In Ephesians 2:14-18 Paul said that Jesus Christ destroyed the wall of hostility between God and us and between us and others, and he created one new humanity. He meant that Jesus made all Christians one big family as a new creation. In Christ Jesus there is a true unity. Paul said about the unity in Christ in Philippians 2:1-2, “*Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*”

The United States of America started with diverse races, cultures, and languages. In fact, the immigrants from England, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, France, Spain and other European countries lived together in America and formed a nation. There were many differences among these people, but they fought with one spirit for one goal, which is the independence of this nation. All thirteen states became like-minded and fought for one nation. There are many different Christian denominations in S. Korea such as Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and so on. There was a big conflict between the Presbyterian churches in Korea. But when Dr. Billy Graham visited Korea in 1973 for spiritual revival of Korea, all these churches became united. There was no Presbyterian or Methodist in Christ. There was no Baptist or Pentecostal in Jesus. They all gathered and prayed with one mind for one goal, which is the spiritual revival for Korea. As a result, there was a great spiritual revival in Korea in 1970-1990s. Nothing is impossible for those who are united in Christ. It happened for a nation and for a church. It can happen in a family, too. There are many different voices and opinions in a family. But when all family members have been like-minded and show sympathy and compassion for each other, nothing is impossible with them. There is a saying, “United we stand, divided we fall.” I pray for the unity of our families and the unity of our church. When we become like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, compassionate and humble, God will surely bring his kingdom to Wash U and fulfill his will for each family. In order to do so, we must be humble. As Paul said we must consider others better than ourselves. We must show proper respect to everyone (2:17) Above all we must be united with Christ Jesus who is the head of a family and our church.  Amen!

Second, repay evil with blessing (5-12) There is a saying in Korea, “Your good words may set you free from the huge amount of debts.” This means that a fortune may come to you when you say good things. Proverbs 12:14 says, “*From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things*.” It is very important what you say and how you talk. Proverbs 18:21 says, “*The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*” Whereas some bring fortune and blessing to them by using their tongues wisely, others bring disaster and curse to them by using their tongues foolishly. James compares a tongue to a fire. James 3:6 says, “*The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself on fire by hell.*” James 3:8 continues about the misuse of a tongue. “.*..but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison*.” Therefore, in verses 9-10 Peter urged Christians to use their tongues to build up others not tearing them down. Look at verses 9-10. “***Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.***” We have a tendency to repay evil with evil. If someone curses you while you are driving, you want to pay back with a curse. You are a saint if you don’t do so. Peter said that we must repay evil with blessing. Jesus said, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.*” (Mt 5:43-45) How can we repay evil with blessing and pray for those who persecute us? Jesus did so. Jesus prayed for those who persecuted him and nailed him to the cross. Jesus prayed for them, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*” (Lk 23:34) Stephen in the book of Acts did so. When the crowd heard Stephen’s testimony about Jesus, they were furious and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them*.” When he said this, he fell asleep. (Ac 7:57-60) Stephen did not repay evil with evil, but with a prayer. Let us practice this. If someone curses you and persecutes you without any reason, bless them and pray for them. Then, wait and see what will happen to you and to them? Verse12 says, “***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***.” We must trust in God whose eyes are on his children and whose ears are attentive to our prayer. God will stand by our sides and give us final victory. Jesus trusted in God the Father who would raise him from the dead. Stephen believed in the Lord Jesus who would accept him and give him a final victory over his enemies. Do you want to love life and see good days? You must keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech. Bless others instead of curse. Pray for those who persecute you. Repay evil with a blessing prayer. Amen!

It is very important what you store up in your heart in order to say good things. This is because you say and you speak out what you stored up in your heart. Jesus said, “*No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit…A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.”* (Mt 6:43-45) In order to store up good things in your heart, we must think good things, hear good things, watch good things. Paul said in Philippians 4:8-9. “*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable–if anything is excellent or praiseworthy–think about such things*.” Those who always think positively say positive things. Those who always think negatively say negative things. Those who are full of Jesus talk about Jesus because what comes out of their mouth is what is stored up in their hearts and in their minds. So, if you are like-minded with Jesus, you talk like Jesus. If you are like-minded with Satan, you talk like Satan. So, James said that the tongues which are not tamed are restless evil, full of deadly poison. So, Proverbs 12:18 says, “*The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing*.” Proverbs 16:24 continues, “*Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*” Amen! Paul also adds in Ephesians 4:29, “*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*.” Amen!

Third, suffer for doing good (13-22) Someone says that our lives are the continuation of suffering. We suffer everyday one after another whether it is big or small. We suffer because of our own sins and by others’ sin. Suffering started since Adam had sinned against God. As a curse caused by sin, men must work hard for three meals a day and get sick and die. No one escapes from the destiny of suffering because we are descendants of Adam. But Christians are different from others in the view and the attitude toward suffering. We consider suffering as a prerequisite of hope and glory. Paul said in the book of Romans, “*Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*” (Ro 5:3-4) “*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*.” (Ro 8:18) So, we Christians must have a positive view and attitude toward present suffering.

Because we suffer on this earth for any reason, it is better to suffer for doing good. Look at verses 13-16. “***Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of your slander***.” In Peter’s day many Christians received opposition and persecution. They were scattered around the world avoiding persecution. But they did not lose their hope in Christ. Many of them lived with the hope of resurrection and the kingdom of God. They were joyful in the midst of suffering. Christian slaves were submissive toward their unbelieving masters. Their masters saw the hope which their Christian slaves had. Many masters might have turned to God through the good influence of their Christian slaves. To the Christian slaves suffering was not a curse for them anymore. Suffering was the prerequisite of their future glory and access to eternal home. Like them we must thank God for our present suffering. Our present sufferings make us strong and persevering like pure gold refined by fire. Our present sufferings make our heart pure and holy and devoted to God alone. Look at verse 17 again. “*For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*” It is better for us to be rejected and hurt on campus when we go out for fishing than to suffer at home from the sense of guilt and shame. It is better for us to control our anger and tame our tongue for the sake of the unity of the church than to suffer from shame and guilt by condemning others.

In this letter Peter, for the process of his statement, always concludes with the example of Jesus so that all may turn their eyes on Jesus and learn from him. Look at verses 18-22. “***For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits–to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also–not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand–with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.***” In these verses Peter said that Christ Jesus suffered not because of his sin, but because of our sins. He suffered and died for our sins. He suffered for doing good, good for the world.

In conclusion we must respect others. We must filter our thoughts, tame our tongues for the unity of the church and the unity of a family. We must fix our eyes on Jesus and learn from him who endured the cross for the joy set before him. Do not retaliate when you are offended and hurt. Rather pray for those who persecute you and bless them for the sake of the Lord. Repay evil with blessing as Jesus did. Amen!