

An Overview

Timely “How-To’s”

(3)

THE late J. W. Roberts said of 1 Peter 3, “It would be hard to find a chapter in the Word of God of more interest.” His statement is very broad and extravagant, but it has merit. This great chapter is of special interest to the Christian because of the timely, practical responsibilities it enjoins. It gets down to where we live.

In this chapter Peter gives three meaningful “how-to’s” concerning Christian living. First, he explains . . .

HOW TO SAVE YOUR HUSBAND (3:1-7)

Peter contemplates a situation in which the wife is a Christian and the husband is not, a situation which was probably not uncommon among good women in the early church (3:1, 2). It undoubtedly came about as a result of married couples hearing the gospel and becoming divided by it. This likely happened with some frequency in the first century.

Notice what Peter does not tell the wife to do: He does not tell her to leave him. Peter’s teaching coincides with Paul’s in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15. In both cases, the inspired writers enjoin upon the believer the responsibility of remaining with the unbeliever if at all possible.

By Submission

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior (3:1, 2).

How is this Christian to win her husband to Christ? For one thing, he is her husband; and she is to be in subjection to him. This reflects the teaching of Genesis 3:16. After the fall, God said, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he

shall rule over you.” Ephesians 5:23 also says, “For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, . . .” She is to live in submission to her husband. The unbelieving husband will witness her good life and be drawn to the message of the gospel.

When Peter says, “If any of them are disobedient to the Word,” he is referring to *the* Word, the message of truth. The phrase “be won without a word” does not indicate that a man can be saved without the gospel. It is saying that he can be won without *a* word on the part of the wife. He is won not by an incessant verbal barrage from the wife, but by her manner of life.

William Barclay has described this evangelism as the silent preaching of a lovely life. Guy N. Woods said, “The silent eloquence of the life is much more effective than vigorous and vehement debate.” Sometimes Christianity is better *demonstrated* than *debated*. What she says with her *life* will be much more eloquent than what she says with her *lips*. This does not mean that she should not study with him if he opens the door for a study of the Word. It just means that, in all probability, the most powerful weapon in her arsenal will be the force of her faithful example.

Though Peter talks specifically to wives who are joined to unbelieving husbands, this truth has a broad application. That is why Paul said to Titus, “In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, . . .” (Titus 2:7). We need to be careful about our examples. This is true of every Christian—wife or husband, man or woman. We must reach out to the world by the way we live.

By Spirituality

Submission, however, is not enough. Peter says,

And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God (3:3, 4).

Paul, in a similar vein, says,

Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness (1 Timothy 2:9, 10).

These two verses should not be seen as containing an absolute prohibition of everything mentioned. Peter speaks of braiding the hair, wearing of gold, and putting on apparel. The last expression of verse 3—“putting on dresses”—makes it clear that this is not an absolute prohibition. If it were, we would have to conclude that

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she is not permitted to put on apparel, which would be a ridiculous conclusion. Peter is saying that the braiding of the hair, the wearing of special ornamentation, and the putting on of apparel is not the Christian woman’s chief concern. She is interested much more in the dress of the inner person, which is to be attired with a gentle and quiet spirit. A form of this word “quiet” is found in 1 Timothy 2:12 where Paul said, “But to remain quiet.” It is likewise found in 1 Thessalonians 4:11: “And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands. . . .” All of this means that she is going to dress modestly, but the inner person is her major focus.

What is the inner person? Paul speaks of it in 2 Corinthians 4:16, 17 when he says, “But though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” Romans 7:22 has a similar phrase. A part of you is destined for eternity. The crucial question about life is not, “How do you clothe the outer person?” but, “How do you dress the inner person?”

What you wear outwardly is something of a table of contents of what you are inwardly. If men and women clothe properly the inner per-

son, we do not have to worry about how they are going to clothe the outer person. The inner ornament of a quiet and meek spirit will see to it that outward modesty is maintained.

Verse 7 mentions a reciprocal responsibility. One of the great marks of the gospel is its consistency. Children have a responsibility to their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), but parents have a responsibility to the children (Ephesians 6:4). Slaves have a responsibility to their masters (1 Timothy 6:1, 2), but masters have a responsibility to slaves (Ephesians 6:6-9). Peter says, “You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; . . .” (3:7). The woman is not the weaker vessel in the sense of any kind of spiritual, intellectual, or moral weakness. The reference is to the fact that the greater physical strength ordinarily belongs to the man. He is to live with her *considerately*.

Peter says, “And grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” The word for “hindered” means *to cut in on, to interrupt*. Our relationship toward God is affected by our relationship with others. This is true in the home; this is certainly true within the kingdom. For the vertical relationship to be correct, our human horizontal relationships must be correct.

Next, Peter tells us . . .

HOW TO SECURE A BLESSING (3:8-12)

Peter explains to us how to love life and see good days.

By Committing Ourselves to Unity (3:8, 9)

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 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.

We find the good life by being one. A plea for unity is given in verse 8. We are to be compassionate, sensitive, and sympathetic toward one another. In our day, a threat to these qualities is ever-present. We see a news broadcast that tells of the loss of hundreds of lives in a great tragedy and are sometimes unmoved. We are bombarded with such news day after day; and our capacity for compassion, pity, sympathy, and sensitivity can become dulled. The apostle is urging Chris-

tians to pursue unity through love and tenderness.

By Controlling the Tongue

Second, Peter quotes Psalms 34:12-16 as he says,

Who is the man who desires life, and loves length of days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

Proverbs 28:9 says, "He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination." In contrast, Peter says, "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer. . . ."

How do we inherit a blessing? How do we come to love life and see good days? By committing ourselves to unity and by controlling the tongue and refraining our lips from evil. We are to do good in our relationships with men. We are to seek peace and pursue it.

Third, Peter tells us . . .

HOW TO ENDURE SUFFERING (3:13-22)

We are given divine guidance on facing opposition and pain.

Remember Your Consolation

He says, "And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. . . ." This verse reminds us of Matthew 5:9, 10, where "blessed are those who have been persecuted" is part of the Beatitudes. Peter affirms that those who suffer for righteousness are blessed.

Fulfill Your Charge

Peter says, "And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, 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" (3:14, 15). This is a very sobering charge. The citizens of ancient Athens were expected to be so conversant with civic affairs that they could intelligently discuss them whenever they were brought into a discus-

sion. Now that is fine, but that certainly is not as vital as being ready to give an answer concerning your faith. The expression translated "being ready to make a defense" is from *apologia* which means to make defense, to give answer.

Maintain a Good Conscience

Peter says, "And keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 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" (3:16, 17). Live so that, if you must suffer, you will suffer for righteousness, not sinful living.

Imitate Christ

Peter says, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death

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in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (3:18). Hebrews 9:28 also stresses the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. His sacrifice was unique in that it was once for all. *Hapax* in the language of the New Testament is a term which expresses this decisive, once-for-allness of the payment Christ made for sin. The expression "bring us to" means to introduce us to God. We are reconciled to God; we are made friends again.

Christ suffered that men might be saved. When you suffer for righteousness, remember that your suffering is redemptive.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Peter has given us three timely "how-to's": How to save a husband, how to secure a blessing, and how to endure suffering. He has been practical and profound.

Christianity is not just for the sweet by-and-by; it is also for the difficult now-and-now, for time as well as for eternity. Peter has shown how down to earth and applicable to life Christ's religion is.

—Avon Malone