

Loving your Enemy

We meet, with our visitors, for morning prayers at 8 a.m. Usually we sing one traditional hymn and one modern song, as well as our own music. The singing is accompanied by those in the community who play guitars. Three mornings each week we have a short talk, given by a Sister, on a set Bible passage.

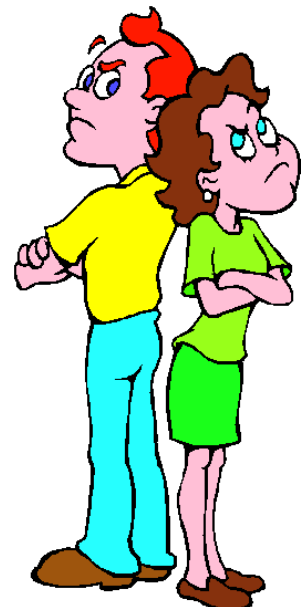
Recently we have been working our way through the first letter of Peter. It has been both hard work, for those who had to prepare, and helpful to ourselves and our visitors. This week we came to Peter's directions on how we handle suffering caused by others. He rules out difficulties that we may have brought about ourselves! We are getting our just deserts. What do we do when it is completely undeserved?

First of all, he writes, we are to follow the example that Christ gave us. He suffered the whole of his ministry, carping criticism from the Pharisees and Sadducees, misunderstood by his own followers and his family, until finally, after an illegal trial, torture and rejection he was crucified. Jesus came through it all without retaliating in any way. He did not strike back when they hurled abuse at him and 'when he suffered, he made no threats'. Peter was an eye-witness to this fact. The Lord lived what he taught, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you".¹ The apostle urged his churches to, "follow in his steps" - in other words to take Christ as our example and be like him. Of course, in many parts of the world today Christians are doing just that. Our trials come in much lesser ways but they do come.

Our instinct, when we are attacked, usually it is verbally, is to retaliate. Our pride is hurt. We can be hurting all over. For those of us who are articulate there is a huge temptation to justify ourselves. The words can be out of our mouths before we can stop them. Anger may well up, or we huddle in a corner filled with self-pity. Resentment creeps in and eventually controls our life. Yet all our lack of a Christlike attitude has done is to draw us firmly into the darkness, already inhabited by the perpetrator.

In suffering, Jesus did not threaten those who opposed him. In a subtle, or not so subtle way, we can be quite good at threatening behaviour. Some of us have been to church meetings where someone is crossed and immediately they say that they are resigning. It may not be as obvious as punching someone on the nose but it is nevertheless threatening behaviour. We can all have our quiet ways of hitting back by not co-operating or withdrawing.

Peter says that behaviour like this is not good enough. He is writing to churches which had their fair share of problems and no doubt, problem people. Persecution was on the horizon and they knew it. Peter was anxious that they learn to face suffering in a Christlike way. Looking at Jesus, without sin, in the face of huge suffering, how do we who fail so often, in our much lesser situations, behave like him?



The answer is given: Jesus, “entrusted himself to him who judges justly”. In our own situations, we are to do the same. There is no way that we can react in a Christian way to unreasonable criticism, unless our trust is in God. He is judge and not us. Sometimes his judgement can come swiftly even in this life. On several occasions we have seen the Lord intervene almost miraculously when criticism, fuelled by gossip, has come our way.

There are other situations, and these are not personal to us, when we say, ‘why does the way of the wicked prosper?’² For years, the Christians in North Korea, the most difficult country in the world to be a Christian, have been in our prayers and in our hearts. With them we say, “How long, O Lord, how long?” The North Korean Christians pray for the salvation of Kim Jong Un, the North Korean Leader. It is God to whom the North Korean leader will have to answer. When we once truly apprehend that our loving God is also a just Judge, compassion begins to creep into our heart for, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”³. We can pray as Jesus taught us.

The love of God is not a sentimental loving that condones evil; it is strong and it is in that strength that we find strength when we are wrongly accused. We don’t threaten, or retaliate, because, “by his wounds we are healed”, from living an aggrieved life.

¹ Luke 6:27,28 NIV

² Jeremiah12:1NIV

³ Hebrews 10:31 NIV

All other quotes are from 1Peter 2:21-24 NIV