

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 3

“8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For “He who would love life and see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit.

11 Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace & pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” 13 And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

'Ready with the Right Words'

We did not plan things this way, but it turns out that Pastor Liberati and I will be tag teaming on evangelism! While he brought us a great challenge from his series on Mark, I had been pondering two things that had an impact on me in the past couple of months that I thought would be good to share as part of my topical sermons this year, especially since both had been very convicting for me.

As we saw last week, all that is required in sharing the Gospel is a knowledge of Jesus which can be quite simple or the result of a life-time of study and walking with Jesus. It can be bold, as Pastor Liberati was in confronting a hostile mob of baby-killings at the State Capitol last week, or very quiet in the way that my youngest daughter brought her two friends and later sisters, into the Kingdom with quiet stands for Jesus as they played out in our front yard. Sometimes we do not even realize the impact we are having on lives in our conversations [discuss lunch example]

And of course we must never neglect the call to disciple the covenant children that God has blessed us with so that we can see generation after generation of faithful Saints! [*contrast my testimony with David's ?*]

And that brings me to my first moment of conviction when the ministers of Anselm gathered for fellowship in Washington a few weeks ago. Pastor Gene Helsel came in to share what was on his heart and yes, it was evangelism with a special challenge to the CREC folks...

He pointed out that we are very good at worship and discipleship, but not so good at reaching out into the world with the Good News. He did not suggest any new programs for this but just reminded us that we now live in a post-Christian world here in America and that the fields are white unto harvest!

He pointed out that Reformed Churches often grew by attracting and receiving those saved at a church retreat or a crusade who hunger for more than just the “milk” of the word.

He suggested that rather than longing for more crusades, we should return to apologetics as pre-evangelism to help people start asking the questions that the Gospel answers! He challenged us as ministers to equip our people with methods that are Biblical, workable & simple enough to remember and apply.

- There is a worksheet at the end of this message with some of his suggestions that we can use for further study!

All of this ties in nicely with last week’s message and the ongoing work by Pastor Liberati as he teaches us to be better evangelists!

And of course that is the challenge from our text this morning where we read, “ 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.”

So yes, we want all of you to “be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you,” but I also want you to notice what surrounds that ‘call to action.’

- At bottom, we cannot share what we do not have...

Peter first challenges the Saints to sanctify the Lord in their hearts and then wants them to be ready to share the reason they have that hope.

- A proper sharing of the Gospel requires both knowledge and character!

We cannot share what we do not know and no one will listen to or take seriously something we are not living. Our knowledge can be pretty simple, especially with new converts as we saw with the demoniac last week. Or we can think of the thief on the cross challenging his fellow thief as they were punished.

Our knowledge should be quite different as we grow in Christ and as Pastor Hesel pointed out a lay person would still not be expected to know all that the ministers of the Church would know.

Sadly that sometimes becomes the excuse NOT to learn what we should learn. It is exciting to see a young convert share about his radical conversion out of sin...

- But after ten or twenty or thirty years he or she needs more to share than just the fact that they were converted way back when.

They should have both a life that has been changed, the character part, and they should more fully understand both the bankruptcy of unbelief and the power of the Gospel. Then they are ready to give an answer for the faith!

This is why Peter goes on to say, “with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience...”

So, my challenge on the knowledge front is to always be learning! Some may think they don’t have the time or the intellect, but please know that we can all grow and may be surprised to find out just how much can be accomplished.

At the center needs to be regular Bible study, not extensive theology classes, but just regular reading of the Word! *[explain a thousand chapters a year]*

The same can happen with outside reading or listening: *[share the example of the history lectures or asking Roger what books he and I have read over the past thirty years]!*

- Again the worksheet from Pastor Hesel has some great introductory suggestions.

I mentioned two convicting events and the second relates to the character side of my challenge to have knowledge and character.

My lovely bride shared a lecture from a women’s conference by Jen Wilkins some weeks ago where she discussed ‘ how we can and should be forming our children into Future Evangelists.’

She raised the challenge for the moms present to be thinking of their covenant children as the future evangelists for God’s Kingdom and just what that would involve. She suggested that is must be more than just their favorite method or system.

This ties in nicely with the Psalms we will sing in response to the message this morning where Psalm 127 says that children are a heritage of the Lord like arrows in the hand of a mighty man. Or where Psalm 128 says children are like olive plants around our table to see the good of Jerusalem all the days of our lives, again those arrows for the battle.

Jen Wilkins reminded us that we must teach them to be good evangelists, and then got to the convicting part... She shared some wisdom on how to train up future evangelists that is not only vital for them but for all of us! She pointed out that the training, as with all things, starts out small and even with the youngest of children.

As they grow and take in the needed knowledge she stressed that we can train future evangelists by teaching them about the words that would be used in giving a reason for the faith within.

And yes we should see that words reflect both our knowledge and our character and as she went through her list of suggestions it was beyond convicting for me, so hang on.

Her first suggestion was to teach them to use kind words. Something children will not use outside the home if they are not found inside the home. Kind words seem to be absent today but central to the Gospel. Harsh words or clever words or in my case sarcastic words come easy in our fallen world.

Words of affirmation or encouragement or support require a lot of thought or crafting. Again, children will learn to use kind words when they see us using them in our homes and fellowship. Linda appreciated her mention of the lost art of sending thank you notes!

Next we and our children should learn words of reconciliation: Words of Forgiveness and repentance. This is an important part of their training & corrections where they learn to say I am sorry & I forgive you. Some object to having children do this if they do not yet understand the meaning of confession & repentance. She pointed out that we don't wait until they understand the full importance of respect before we teach them to say please & thank you.

But we must never forget that for them to truly learn about reconciliation, they must see it practiced in their own home. You see, love really does mean saying you're sorry when it is needed & often it should be done in the presence of the children especially if the offense was in front of them as well.

And as if I was not convicted enough at this point her next suggestion really hit home: She said we must teach our children to use slow words!

Proverbs 10:19 reminds us that "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise." King Solomon also explains why the Apostle James would later tell us to be slow to speak, when at Proverbs 14: 29 the King writes, "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly."

Thus, the Apostle James says, to the beloved brethren, "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

Teach you children not to interrupt each other and certainly not you or other adults. Then they as adult will have far fewer confessions to make then I have had to do over the years!

- **They and all of us must learn to think before we speak!**

And Proverb has another reminder for us as adults...

- **Proverbs 17: "27 He who has knowledge spares his words, And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. 28 Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive."**

This can also remind us that we always need to be good listeners so that we do understand what the other person is saying and to discern their need.

The next item she called eternal words: The Words of Scriptures: Just as I encouraged us to study the Scriptures we must teach and speak Bible in our homes! How many of you think it is pretty easy to memorize portions of the Bible? Don't think it is the same with children!

Children have a huge capacity to learn and so we must encourage Bible study and memorization, as well as all those other subjects they will spend hours and hours learning. There is great concern today for how many children in churches go on to leave the faith and Jen pointed out that in recent surveys about why children did NOT leave, the #1 one reason given was that they were taught the Bible!

She reminded me of another convicting time in my life when she next mentioned prayerful words. Linda & I years ago read a book by Andrew Murray entitled *With Christ in the School of Prayer* where he stressed the command to always be in prayer. [mention the Book of Nehemiah.]

And finally she mentioned the need for children to learn hospitable words! She pointed out that one of the most important evangelistic tools a child can have it to say, “do you want to come over to my house?”

Our children should learn, again by our example, to have a culture of invitation. Take them through the Gospel accounts looking for all the places that Jesus struck up a conversation or went to a home.

We are obviously the most ‘connected’ group of people in all of human history and yet we see today a loneliness epidemic. Your home can be an inviting place and it does not matter what type of home you have. Some might think that children will not be attracted because you do not have a pool or the latest video game systems. It should also be obvious that these are not the things that our world needs. What they lack is truth, and peace, and comfort and assurance that there really are answers to the BIG questions of life that haunt them even if they try not to think about them.

God has revealed the Truth about Himself, His Son and the hope of salvation which we can all know.

And we are called upon to share that Truth with our own words...

Kind words...

Words of reconciliation

With slow words

Knowing the eternal words

With prayerful words

And hospitable and inviting words.

We see all of this in the earliest Church just after Peter’s sermon at Pentecost that we celebrate in a couple of weeks. Luke gives us a description of that life at Acts 2:46 “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”

Communion Meditation: Genesis 9

“12 And God said: “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” 17 And God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Every week God remembers the Sacrifice of Jesus at this Table, and every rainbow gives us an opportunity to be ready with the right words to share!

Personal Apologetics Summary: Presented by Pastor Gene Helsel at Anselm Presbytery April 19, 2022

Taking the strengths from these four books:

- CS Lewis': Mere Christianity

- Big Picture
- Wading in from the shallow end
- Word pictures and illustrations

- Greg Bahnsen's: The Impossibility of the Contrary

- Explanation of the presuppositional approach to apologetics.
- Helpful tools for identifying the fallacies of unbelief

- Greg Koukl's: Tactics

- Helpful tools for identifying and refuting the fallacies of unbelief.
- A method that favors questions to engage and "salt" unbelievers.

- John Frame's: Apologetics

- Endorses and helpfully critiques Van Til's transcendental argument.
- Helpfully presses the importance of God's ultimate personality.
- Two excellent chapters on "the problem of evil."

Tactics: - The Columbo Method

- What do you believe?
- How did you reach those beliefs/conclusions?
- May I ask you a few follow up questions?
 - Help for "What do you believe"?
- Where did everything come from?
- How did things go wrong?
- How can things be put right?
- What will it look like when things are put right (the afterlife, etc.)

The Impossibility of the Contrary

- How do we know what we know?

- Four problems with unbelieving thought: Arbitrariness; Inconsistency; Reductio (bad fruit/consequences)
The preconditions of intelligibility

Mere Christianity: [and for heavier lifting the Abolition of Man]

- Over time/history we have determined two things:

- There is an ultimate standard of right and wrong: Revealed in our speech and insistence on being treated fairly .
- And we don't keep it: - Disabusing people of their "standards" for right and wrong:

Lewis gives many practical examples of why we need an ultimate standard and not just moral statements:

o It's wrong to deprive someone of a good.

- Seat on the train accidentally and purposefully taken.

o It's wrong to injure someone.

- A man accidentally tripped (and hurt); a man who avoided someone trying to trip him.

o Good is when you do something helpful for another

- The traitor who helps another country.

o Herd instinct: A Man drowning in a river, evokes two "instincts" in conflict

- Instinct of Self-preservation & the instinct to Help another
- And a third instinct that tells you to favor the weaker of the above (which you should)

o Majority rules: Ultimately is just might makes right.

o Successful societal morality requires Personal moral health; Moral interactions with others; All fulfilling a grand moral scheme/purpose.

- Illustration: Requirement of a successful Ship convoy
 - o Ships that are internally sound
 - o Not bumping into other ships
 - o Arriving at the proper destination

o Illustration: Musical instrument

- An instrument in good shape and in tune
- Playing music in time/concert with other instruments
- Playing the right kind of music [Not a polka at a funeral service and not a dirge at a football game]

NOTE: In applying the illustrations of ships and bands to society, most agree on the first two, but not the third.

The impossibility of science comprehending God or even His Creation.

- Our understanding the Triune Nature of God would be like a three dimensional ball touching down in a two-dimensional world: It would appear as a dot (or at most a circle).
- While we can study and know God's orderly universe, there is no way for us individually or collectively to fully comprehend the infinite number of facts available for us to observe.

And we should use all of these, as Greg Koukl advises, "To put a stone in their shoe."

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