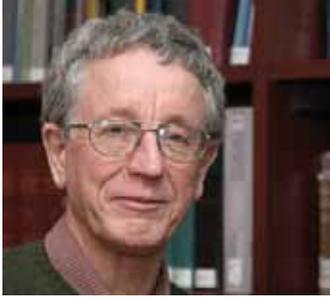


POINT

Sweet reasonableness: a meditation on 1 Peter 3:15

DR. JOHN PATRICK



JESUS TOLD US THAT WE ARE to be salt in society. Salt in the ancient world was extremely valuable; indeed it was used as a means of payment. It is from the Latin word for salt we get our word salary. Its function was primarily to preserve meat and fish for the winter rather than merely for flavour. We are to be preservatives for society. Paul also tells us that our conversation should be salty. So how does this fit with modern ideas of respect and courtesy? I think another misused word can help – meek. A horse, broken in, trained and ready for battle is described as meek. It is the steel hand in a velvet glove.

Peter is writing to refugees. He offers no false hopes but reminds them of the joy beyond words which has and will sustain them. He tells them that Christ will be with them not as a distant example but as a schoolmaster putting his hand over the hand

of the struggling pupil so that together they can complete the exercise. Then to comfort them further he tells them that more persecution is coming but they are not to fear their opponents. It is into this context we must place our text.

The first century of the Christian era was not a politically correct world, but it had ideas of justice and honour, which in some ways put us to shame. Those who were described as gentle were the powerful as distinct from ordinary folk. Peter and Paul knew that the ruling classes would feel threatened by this new religion and they did. Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit came He would convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgment and because of this His disciples would do greater works than He had! The overthrow of the Roman Imperium without the use of arms was surely just such a work. Because Peter

is sure of the outcome he can tell us that we should never fear our persecutors. They are doomed. They face superior forces – the Holy Spirit and the Spirit-filled church. The subsequent history of the church, like that of the Children of Israel, is more often of the world seducing us rather than us overcoming the world. I doubt that if Peter was here today he would be telling us to not to display our confidence too arrogantly. We hardly display any confidence at all. We, I think, would be more likely to be receiving the letters to the churches in Asia Minor, where John warned that if they did not repent they would die out. They did. Asia Minor has very few Christians today. The first part of Peter's instruction we need to heed; "Be ready to give reasons!" When did some one last ask you why you behave as you do and the answer was because I was redeemed and taught. I do

not think that it is respectful of someone made in the image of God to treat him or her as though they did not have a mind. Our young people leave home and leave the church and only about 50% return after many years. Why? Because they were not challenged to develop a Christian mind and be ready for the modern world's attack. Moral neutrality sounds good to them but it is impossible; some view of morality must dominate, of necessity and that is what makes distinct cultures. Boko Haram and the Mennonites both believe they are following God's will! Tolerance is a much overblown virtue. The more important virtue is to not tolerate what ought not to be tolerated and know why.

Jesus has a warning attached to his description of his followers as salt. He knows we can lose our saltiness. If we do we are good for nothing and we will be trodden underfoot by all men. ☞

COUNTER POINT

Be Christ-like in how we answer

DR. DAN REILLY



NOW, WHO WILL WANT TO harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats. Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! (1 Pet 3:13-17 NLT)

In a world of selfish materialists, those for whom Christ is Lord will be noticed for behaving differently. Those differences will be attractive to some and a source of frustration for others. Some will threaten us to try to force us to behave

differently. Those threats may not be empty and we will suffer. But when we suffer we won't worry or fear and that behavior will be a further difference that will be noticed.

When is the last time someone asked about why you live the way you do? If has been a long time, then perhaps your behavior is more consistent with selfish materialism than it is with Christlikeness.

When someone asks about your hope in hopeless circumstances (or some other way you are different) you need to be ready to explain. "Because I have been redeemed and taught" will work if you take the time to unpack what redeemed means and what you have been taught. Most people I rub shoulders with think redemption is something you do with coupons.

Of course, when you have a chance to explain is not the time to stop being Christ-like.

Gentleness is not weakness or simple courtesy. It is power restrained by love of the other. Christ on the cross, choosing to forgive the crowd rather than call on the armies of heaven to save Him, is our example of gentleness. When someone asks about our hope, they are often feeling hopeless. When they ask about joy, they are usually joyless. They are usually vulnerable. Their request may put you in a position of power. The opportunity may exist to manipulate or coerce. You may be able to overwhelm them with your intellectual prowess or big words. The command to be gentle means you must restrain from using your power in any manner that doesn't seek the best for the other out of Christ-like love.

To respect is to "admire deeply, as a result of their abilities, qualities, or achievements." When someone asks about your

reasons for hope they open up the opportunity for the focus to turn to you. But we must keep the focus on Christ and His view of the asker. Christ loves that person enough to die for her. She is created in the image of God and due the greatest respect because of that quality. As you explain why you behave as you do, you must continue to model Christ's love and so you must respect the asker.

Peter calls the reader to continue to live with Christ as the standard by which you judge what is good. It will be noticed. When it does bring questions, he exhorts us to be Christ-like in how we answer. Easy to write and yet so challenging to live out! 🙏