

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, September 30, 2015 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

TAKING A STAND

“Standing Strong When Tested and Tried”

Ephesians 6:10-18, 1 Corinthians 15:58, John 17:15-19, Matthew 10:17-23, Luke 22: 31-34, 1 Peter 4:12-19, 1 Corinthians 3:10-13, James 1:2-4, John 16:33, Romans 5:1-5

JUST FOR REVIEW - Remember when we started with this study we set some goals for ourselves as we seek to take a stand in a world that definitely outnumbers us and usually opposes us... a world that is often antagonistic to the ways of Christ. It's hard to stand alone and respond with redemptive grace rather than react with defensiveness and perhaps protectionism.

Three Goals to Keep in Mind in Taking a Stand:

1. **That we seek to be *balanced*...** avoiding fanaticism.
2. **That we aim to be *positive*...** avoiding that which is needlessly negative.
3. **That we be *victorious*...** avoiding defeat.

Again, for review, for the purposes of our study we defined “taking a stand” as “going against the flow.”

Definition: “*Taking a stand is going against the flow*”

What happens when we go against the flow?

3 Things Going Against the Flow Potentially Does:

1. **It upsets the current** – By this we mean that the current doesn't like it, and the world doesn't like it when we go against its natural flow either. It is much easier to go with the flow, to coast along with everyone else and conform. The world is extremely upset when, out of God's great love for us, He calls us to a higher standard or one that contradicts what the world does.
2. **It creates hazards** – When an obstacle interrupts the current and flow of a river, it creates rough and choppy water... sometimes rapids and whitewater that can be extremely dangerous. Sometime the hazards created by an obstacle interrupting the current or flow can actually be something that those following the current can get caught up on and cause drowning. Going against the flow creates hazards for both those going with the flow and those going against it. This means that when Christians go against the natural flow of the world's ways and way of thinking it can sometime cause a violent reaction. It may cause ridicule, rejection, persecution... sometimes severe persecution, and maybe even martyrdom.

- 3. It provides growth** – Swimming upstream, against the flow is actually a great strength training exercise. It builds muscle tone, and strength and stamina (i.e. the wave pool). In the same way for a believer, going against the flow can actually create a great opportunity for spiritual growth and the building of one's faith. Certainly, going against the flow would entail really knowing what you believe and why you believe it, studying deeply in God's Word and establishing your convictions firmly on His Word.

G.K. Chesterton, an English-born journalist and Christian author, once stated, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult, and not tried." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What do you think he means by that statement?

Becoming a Christian is not difficult, but living the Christian life truly is. Standing strong day-by-day in the Spirit, refusing to fulfill the lusts of the flesh is difficult enough for most of us, but add to it the reality that a life that is truly sold out for Jesus Christ will face trial, opposition, struggle, and hardship from the hands of the world and the enemy can cause many to just want to throw in the towel and quit the race. Perhaps that is why the writer of Hebrews encourages us in Hebrews 12:1-3, "... *Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*" The truth is, it is hard not to lose heart, grow weary, and get discouraged in the Christian life as we face opposition from sinful men, trials from life struggles, and attack from the enemy of our soul. For a Christian, taking our stand and standing strong in the face of the tests and trials of this life can be a great challenge, but for those who endure and stand firm, there is great reward... not only for their life, but usually for the lives of others as well.

We sing the old gospel hymn this way as a reminder to us: (*sing this with me*)

FARTHER ALONG

Tempted and tried we're oft made to wander, why it should be thus all the day long,
While there are others living about us, never molested tho in the wrong.
(chorus) *Farther along we'll know all about it, farther along we'll understand why;
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine, we'll understand it all by and by.*

When death has come and taken our loved one, it leaves us our home so lonely and drear;
Then do we wonder why others prosper, living so wicked year after year.
(chorus) *Farther along we'll know all about it, farther along we'll understand why;
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine, we'll understand it all by and by.*

Faithful till death said our loving master, a few more days to labor and wait;
Toils of the road will then seem as nothing, as we sweep thru the beautiful gate.

*(chorus) Farther along we'll know all about it, farther along we'll understand why;
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine, we'll understand it all by and by.*

When we see Jesus coming in glory, when He comes from His home in the sky;
Then we shall meet Him in the bright mansion, we'll understand it all by and by.
*(chorus) Farther along we'll know all about it, farther along we'll understand why;
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine, we'll understand it all by and by.*

Now look, one more time with me, at our focus text in **John 17:15-19**... Jesus prayer for us!

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." – John 17:15-19 (NIV/green)

Notice that phrase, **"protect them from the evil one (our enemy)"**, at the end of **verse 15**. That phrase tell us a couple of things about this earthly life for a Christian:

3 Truths About the "Evil One":

- (1) It tell us that the "evil one" is a real presence in this life -**
- (2) It tell us that we need "protection" from the "evil one" in this life -**
- (3) Implied, it tell us that the "evil one" is out to destroy believers (Christians) –** Though Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was the defeat of Satan, he is still alive and kicking at this time and orchestrating his evil system against believers. He seeks to destroy believers (1 Peter 5:8, "like a roaring lion"), as with Job and Peter (Luke 22:31,32), and in general (Ephesians 6:12, "our struggle is not against flesh and blood"), but God is our strong protector. He is our enemy!

Now, given these truths, let me ask you a couple of questions about Jesus' prayer on John 17:15-19 and the "evil one" he speak of. **(1) When Jesus prayed for our "protection" does that mean Christian should never have struggles with the "evil one"... never be attacked... never face trial or tests?** **(2) Does that mean that if Jesus' prayer is successful we (Christians) will be protected from ever being attacked, assailed, tried, tested by the evil one?** **(3) So what do you think Jesus is really praying for here?** Do you think he might be praying that in the midst of the test and trials of this life, that will certainly be thrown at us by the "evil one" at work, our faith and walk might be protected, we won't grow weary and lose heart (throw in the towel) as the writer of Hebrews puts it, we will persevere to the end in victory, despite the attacks from the evil one. We will, perhaps, not be protected from the attacks themselves, but from those attacked, trials, tests, destroying us spiritually... destroying our faith, our witness, our walk. That is what this study is designed to help us with... taking our stand and being able to stand strong when the certainty of test and trial come upon us. Let's begin by looking at the reality of it all... something that even some believers don't want to see, but can prepare us to take our stand and stand strong in the face of these times of testing.

I. THE REALITY OF OUR TESTS AND TRIALS

1. **Jesus warned us of the reality of our tests and trials in this life (Matthew 10:17-22, John 16:33)** – As chapter 10 of Matthew open, Jesus is sending out his disciple. The chapter is filled with many words of warning and preparation for what they would encounter at His followers. The chapter is filled with instruction on how to relate and react to a world that would be hostile at times to their message and life. Perhaps, some of Jesus most pointed and griping words appear in verses 17-22, where he speaks to the reality of the tests and trials that His followers would face:

“Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” -Matthew 10:17-22 (NIV/thick black)

Elsewhere in John 16:33, Jesus said, *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” -John 16:33 (NIV/green)*

Realities for Believers:

- (1) **Believers “will be” restricted and restrained** – The phrase *“they will hand you over” (v.17)* is a technical word in the Greek that speaks of handing over a captured and chained prisoner. It speaks of those who would want to restrict or retrain someone they perceive as doing harm. Certainly in this world we can see how believer (Christians) are often restricted and restrained. The gospel message is often today being restricted and restrained. **How are Christians/believers restricted and restrained today? (give examples)**
- (2) **Believers “will be” accused and maligned** – The phrase *“you will be brought before”* in **verse 18** speaks of one who is charged with a crime standing before a judge. **Does this happen to Christians today? (Saeed Abedini is an Iranian American Christian pastor imprisoned in Iran. He has been detained in Iran since the summer of 2012)** It is legal language that speaks of being arraigned, but in this case it implies being wrongly charged, unjustly accused and maligned before others. Are Christian today ever falsely accused and maligned in this world? Absolutely! Christians, today, are routinely accused and maligned in both television and print media as being narrow-minded, and bigoted because of the stands they often take on a whole host of social issues. When a believer boldly states the Bible truth that Jesus is the only way! he or she is immediately labeled a narrow-minded, bigoted, and prejudiced against other religions. On a more personal note, if you are bold enough to try to witness to a neighbor or friend... maybe even a family member, be ready to be accused or maligned with something along the line of, “You are not better than me! I know the things that you do, and your life is not

better than my life.” The “evil one” likes to stir up the world in order to malign and accuse Christians.

- (3) **Believers “will be” denied and spurned** - Verse 22 says, *“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.”* These speak of close relations... trusted relations that are always supposed to love, support and protect us. The warning for believers here is that often those we trust and depend on the most will turn on us. We may find ourselves spurned by their love and their associations with us denied... perhaps much like Jesus was denied by Peter and spurned by the other disciples on the night he was arrested and taken to a cross. We may face the trial of rejected friendships, and even family kin in some cases for a totally committed faith.
- (4) **Believers “will be” hated** - Jesus said, in verse 22, *“All men will hate you because of me...”* Sounds harsh, but the reality is that, as the world so quickly turned on Jesus it will also turn on believers too. Remember that one day the crowd was shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” and throwing coats and palm branches on the street in front of Jesus to celebrate His arrival and the next day they were shouting “Crucify! Crucify!”

Observation: *The point is that the reality for believers is that being Christian is not always popular and the message we preach even less. The “evil one”... our enemy will bring about all sorts of trial and test to dissuade you from proclaiming the message of salvation both verbally and practically in the way you walk. If necessary he will bring the “fire trial” of persecution to silence you!*

2. **Peter experienced the reality of our tests and trials in this life (Luke 22:31-34)** - Perhaps one of the most vivid New Testament examples of what we are talking about, the reality of this testing and trial, can be seen in the life of Peter. In Luke 22, Jesus has just observed the Last Supper with his disciple and he about to be betrayed and taken to the cross, when an interesting conversation takes place between Jesus and the disciple, Peter in Luke 22:31-34:

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brother.” But he replied, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.’” –Luke 22:31-34 (NIV/thin black)

3 Helpful Truths for Believers:

- (1) **If Satan can sift a Peter, he can sift you... that’s humbling**
- (2) **If Jesus prayed for Peter, he prays for you... that’s strengthening**
- (3) **If Peter can fall and rise again, so can you... that’s encouraging**

II. THE REASON FOR OUR TESTS AND TRIALS

The reality is, nothing that happens in the life of a believer is amiss with God. Now, what do I mean by that? I mean, God sees, and know all! You are never out of the care of the God who holds you in the palm of his hand. What Satan may mean for evil, God means for good in the life of believer. Remember Jesus prayer in John 17:15-19, *“My prayer is not*

that you take them out of the world but that you *protect them from the evil one*. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” Despite the tests and trial that come our way, God is “sanctifying” us... that is “setting us apart for His purposes. There is actually a “sanctifying” reason that can emerge in the face of the tests and trials, that the “evil one” may seek to bring about to destroy us. Let me give you to good ones:

2 Reasons Behind Tests and Trials:

- (1) **Our spiritual growth and maturity in the Christian walk** - *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” – James 1:2-4 (NIV/red)*
- (2) **Our intensified hope and deepened relationship with God** - *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” –Romans 5:1-5 (NIV/white)*

III. THE RESPONSE TO OUR TESTS AND TRIALS

Standing strong in the face of our test and trials is never easy, and perhaps no one understood that better than the Apostle Peter. As we discovered earlier, Peter provided one of the most poignant (distressing) New Testament examples the reality of this testing and trial that we as believer often go through as Jesus warned him that *“Satan wanted to sift him.”* We know that that “sifting” took place in Peter’s denial of Christ. We too face the reality of being called to stand strong at those kind of dark and challenging moment in our life when the trials and struggles descend on us. How can we respond victoriously!

Years later a restored, and spiritually mature Peter... leader of the early church would write these words that might help us in 1 Peter 4:12-19, *“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trials you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or another kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, ‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’ So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” -1 Peter 4:12-19 (NIV/thick black)*

A Healthy Christian Response to the Tests and Trials of this Life:

- (1) **Don't be caught off guard by them** – It truly rains on the just and the unjust. Christians are not immune to the difficulties and distresses in this life... as a matter of fact Peter knew that we are guaranteed them.
- (2) **Learn to see the silver lining in them** – God can actually grow us more through the trials than through the more pleasant moments of this life. We seem to depend and look to Him more in those moments.
- (3) **Strive to stay faithful, because He has is so faithful to you** – Listen, for a believer, when we look at what God has done on our behalf through Jesus Christ and the promises that are ours now and in the life to come, our trials and struggles in this life.. no matter how heavy they may seem right now... are worth it all! We could never pay Him back for all that He has done for us!