

1 Peter 3:13-22

Guidelines for Suffering

Peter continues offering guidelines for living under the fire of persecution.

Verse 13

This verse naturally follows the OT quote (vv. 10-12). In other words, doing good most often yields favorable interactions with others. Those who live by God's standards are less likely to face persecution. It is generally the case that doing good to others will result in agreeable relations. No surprises here.

Verse 14

Lest someone is naïve to think that good behavior will always produce positive results, Peter states the obvious: What about unjust suffering? Why do bad things happen to good (i.e. Christian) people? The answer Peter gives is the same as before: Others may come to Christ (cf., 2:12; 3:1-2).

To Consider: Two important truths for us to remember in our suffering: 1) Others are watching you and 2) your response to suffering could be a stepping-stone on another's pathway to salvation.

Verses 15-17

There are two responses to suffering: Fear of the consequences of standing up for Jesus, or honor Christ by boldly proclaiming the hope of eternal life. We dishonor Christ when we fear someone else more than Him. To honor Jesus is to witness fearlessly for Him, confessing your allegiance to His kingdom principles and refusing to live by the world's standards. This entails all ethical conduct (1:15-16).

When Jesus is Lord in every sense of the word (Deity and Master, Creator and Ruler), all fear of others quickly fades (cf., Lk. 12:4-5). Jesus is the only One with inherent control and authority (Mt. 28:19; Jn. 19:11).

Note: This is an active defense, not passive. The "answer" or "reasoned defense" means to answer the charges of unjust persecution. However, our reply must be a testimony to the Gospel, not merely a self-defense.

How often and to whom are we to offer a defense for Jesus? Always and to everyone. Of course this assumes someone is asking and that we have the answers!

The questions unbelievers should be asking concern our "hope" that results from the good behavior that stands in marked contrast to the world. Lifestyle evangelism?

Our answers must be set in "gentleness and respect." When witnessing to the grace and unconditional love of God, there is no room for overbearing personalities or aggressive behavior.

Of course, a "clear conscience" is critical. Our words must mesh with our lives (the meaning of integrity) so as to give every opportunity for the Holy Spirit to convict (Jn. 16:8). More often than not, it is what you *are* rather than what you *say* that will bring people to the cross! In addition, it's "better" to live righteously (v. 17), not because it will make our situations easier,

but because it is God's will that we suffer. There is a subtle but important difference between the relationship God has to us as Teacher to student vs. Potter to clay.

The Example of Jesus Verses 18-22

Because Jesus suffered unjustly and rose victoriously and because we belong to Him, there is every reason to bear up under suffering. The main point of this passage: All who are joined to Christ by faith will share in the same experience, viz., suffering and victory! Just as Christ's death had a definitive purpose ("for sins"), so too does our suffering. Vindication is the major theme of this context and should guide us in addressing the following controversies. The following table is taken from Grudem, *First Epistle of Peter*.

Questions and possible answers surrounding the text include:

Questions	Possible Answer
Who are the spirits in prison?	-- Unbelievers who have died -- OT believers who have died -- Fallen angels
What did Christ preach?	-- Second chance for repentance -- Completion of redemptive work -- Final condemnation
When did Christ preach?	-- In the days of Noah -- Between his death and resurrection -- After his resurrection
What place does water baptism have in salvation?	-- It is necessary for salvation. -- It is not necessary, but reflects the reality of salvation.

While this is one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament, the following observations are offered:

1. The plural "spirits" never refers to human spirits in the NT. Most likely they are fallen angels "in the days of Noah" (see Gen. 6:1-4; 2 Pt. 2:4). The spirits are now in prison (NASB) but were disobedient in the days of Noah. "Through whom" (NIV) is a better translated "In which," viz., Christ's post-resurrection state. Moreover, 3:22 states that "angels, authorities and powers" are subject to Him.
2. Christ proclaimed victory, not the Gospel. The choice of verbs is significant (to proclaim/announce not to speak the good news as in 4:6). What Christ declared was victory over death and their final doom.
3. There is no indication in the verb "he went" of a specific direction (descent or ascent), contra The Apostle's Creed (literally, "having gone"). The phrase in the Apostle's Creed "He descended into hell" did not appear until the late 4th Century edition. Note that Peter clearly states in 3:22 that Jesus went (same verb) into heaven. The only direction explicit in the context is up!

Having said this, there are some ambiguities on the whereabouts of Jesus between his crucifixion and resurrection (cf., Acts 2:27; Lk. 23:43) and no final conclusions should be drawn.

4. Water baptism does not convey salvation. Faith alone saves. The analogy Peter uses has multiple points of identity for his readers and fits well with the overall context (taken, with some modification, from Grudem, *Peter*, pp. 160-161).
 - a. Noah and his family were a minority in a hostile world; so where Peter's readers.
 - b. Noah was righteous and Peter exhorts his readers to be righteous in the midst of wickedness.
 - c. Noah witnessed boldly in the face of persecution and Peter encourages us to do the same.
 - d. Noah proclaimed imminent judgment and we must not shrink back from speaking of Hell when presenting the Gospel.
 - e. Just as God was patient in Noah's day before he brought judgment, God continues to be patient to bring salvation to some (2 Pt. 3:9-10).
 - f. Noah was finally saved, albeit with persecution and suffering, and so shall we be.
 - g. The pledge or "appeal to God for a good conscience" is synonymous with that act of saving faith whereby the Spirit convicts and enables belief unto salvation, which is symbolically represented in water baptism. However, faith alone saves and water baptism is not necessary for salvation.

In Sum:

The path to victory is through suffering and those who oppose Christians will be defeated in the end. Because Christ is risen, he supremely reigns over all creation and brings ultimate victory. The hope and destiny of every believer is in God's sovereign and loving control.

"We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

'Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?'

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."