

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study – 1 Peter 3:13-22

Read 1 Peter 3:8-22

In our previous few studies in 1 Peter 2:11-3:12, we have seen that Christians should be living holy and righteous lives that are a good witness to the unbelieving world around them. In our last study in 1 Peter 3:8-12, we saw that such lives are characterized by unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, and humility (3:8). Further, we are not to repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but rather, to bless and do good to those who would mistreat us. And when others speak ill of us or slander us, we are to keep our own lips from wicked or deceitful words, and instead answer kindly. As we do this, we experience the fullness of a life that is blessed by God – one that sees ‘good days’, even in the midst of hardships and suffering (3:10ff).

Building on these thoughts, 1 Peter 3:13-22 begins a new section that deals with the Christian’s response to suffering.

Take a moment to re-read 1 Peter 3:13-22 to yourself.

1. What reasons might Christians have for being afraid to do what is good/right? Why do we not need to be afraid?

-Christians might fear rejection, ridicule, hardships or persecution when doing what is right, if what they are doing runs counter to the attitudes/values of the world around them

-we need not fear because

-the eyes of God are on those who do good (i.e. to do them good), and He hears their prayers (v.12)

-not many people would seek to harm those who are eager to do good (v.13)

-even if others do seek to harm us, they can’t do lasting harm because of what Christ has done → triumphed over death by dying and rising again and thus bringing us safely to God (v.18) – a reality portrayed in baptism (v.21)

-even if we should suffer for doing what is right, God’s blessing is upon us (v.14)

-similar thought as Matthew 5:10-12 – we are blessed when persecuted for righteousness’ sake; will be blessed as the prophets are blessed as we similarly endure persecution for righteousness

-similar also to 1 Peter 2:19-21 – when we suffer for doing good because we are conscious of God, this is commendable in His sight, as we follow Christ’s example of patiently enduring unjust suffering

-even in the face of suffering, God is still in sovereign control – He sometimes wills that we suffer for doing good (v.17) → makes us more like Christ, whose example we are following (v.18)

-even now, Christ rules from the right hand of God and over all things (v.22)

In 1 Peter 3:14-15, Peter quotes from Isaiah 8:12b-13, which reads, “Do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the one you are to dread”. The context of these verses in Isaiah was a crisis that King Ahaz of Judah was facing because of an impending invasion by Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Aram. To counter this threat, Ahaz allied himself with the king of Assyria. In this setting, Isaiah urged Ahaz not to fear men nor to trust in ungodly alliances, but to trust instead in the Lord Almighty for deliverance. (Unfortunately, Ahaz didn’t listen – you can read 2 Kings 16:1-20 for more.)

2. How should we respond when we face hardship or hostility while doing what is right? Why?

-don’t be afraid or troubled by it (v.14); rather, endure it and continue to do good (cf. 1 Pet. 4:19)

-sanctify/set apart as holy Christ the Lord in our hearts

-same word for ‘sanctify’ is used in the Lord’s prayer (“hallow”)

-i.e. seek to honor/exalt Him as holy in our lives – fear Him rather than fearing men

-as a result, strive to obey and please Him rather than men; thus, not to compromise what is right/good out of fear

-be prepared always to give an answer (*apologian*) to those who ask the reason for our hope

-could refer to a formal defense at a trial

-but also could refer to more informal inquiries about why we are doing what we are doing

-we are to speak of the hope we have in Christ; bring honor to Him, as the One for whom we are living (and suffering)

-opportunity to share the hope of eternal life we have in the Gospel

-respond with gentleness and respect – i.e. not repaying evil for evil or insult for insult (cf. 3:9)

-keep a clear conscience – i.e. through knowing that we have not done any wrong and therefore are not suffering for wrongdoing

-clear conscience comes through living in obedience to God; specifically in this instance, by not wronging those who may be wronging us

-a clear conscience empowers our witness (no reason to hold back), whereas a guilty conscience inhibits it

-Why?

-because we were called to this (3:9)

-puts to shame/silences those who might slander our good behavior (and perhaps bring them to God) (v.16)

-because the Lord sometimes wills it for His good purposes (v.17), as He did for Jesus Christ Himself (v.18)

-He suffered while doing good, in accordance with God’s will, in order to bring us to God → greatest good came out of His most unjust suffering – He died for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous

-just as Christ had to suffer to bring us to God, so also we may sometimes also need to go through suffering in order to help “bring others to God” (e.g. through our witness, when they ask the reason for our hope)

-honors Christ by following His example

- He was the greatest example of a righteous person suffering for doing good – and that for the sake of the unrighteous
- as we follow His suffering, we also share in His reward – He is now exalted to the right hand of God – a position of power and privilege
- cf. 2 Tim. 2:11-12 – if we endure, we shall reign with Him

3. Has anyone ever asked you “to give the reason for the hope that you have”? If so, what was the context, and how did you answer? (were you prepared “to give an answer”?) If you’ve never been asked, why do you think that might be?

- if our lives are no different from the world around us (e.g. as per 1 Peter 2:11-3:17), people would have no reason to ask about our hope
- if never been asked, question we need to ask ourselves is whether that’s because we are not living as we ought
- “lifestyle evangelism” only works if our lives are noticeably different from the world around us

4. 1 Peter 3:20-21 says that “baptism... now saves you”. Does this mean that the physical rite of water baptism confers salvation? Why or why not? According to these verses, what does baptism portray?

- no, the physical rite is not what saves/confers salvation
 - “not as a removal of dirt from the body” – i.e. not the physical rite/washing with water
 - not the external sign, but rather, the inward reality that it represents
 - i.e. “as an appeal to God for a clear conscience” – faith that results in asking God for forgiveness
 - results in right standing with Him and thus, in a clear conscience
 - aside: NIV translates “*eperotema*” as “pledge” (instead of “appeal”), which is an alternative meaning; but this gives more the sense of pledging to lead a life of obedience that results in a clear conscience; a little problematic - shades of salvation by works?
 - alternatively, focuses on sincere response of the heart to God (in faith)
 - our salvation is “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (ESV) which baptism depicts
- baptism here portrays being saved through the judgment of God
 - corresponds Noah’s ark passing through the Flood
 - waters of the Flood were the judgment of God on the earth
 - Noah and his family passed through the same judgment that everyone else did (had water all around them), but did so in the Ark, which they entered by faith
 - they were thus kept safe through the judgment and enabled to enter into new life on the other side
 - i.e. those entering the ark “did not avoid the judgment. Rather in the ark they were saved through the very water which drowned others, and, because of it, they thus passed out of the old world into a new world.” (Stibbs, p. 139)
 - this figure ultimately fulfilled in Christ, and is depicted in baptism
 - baptism
 - witnesses to the righteous judgment of God due our sin – i.e. death
 - depicts our entry by faith into Christ’s death (cf. Rom. 6:3-4) – He becomes our ‘ark of safety’
 - as a result, we pass safely through the judgment in Christ, because that judgment falls on Him
 - He “died for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous” (3:18)
 - as a result, we emerge on the other side saved, as sharers in His risen life

For further study:

What is the meaning of 1 Peter 3:18-22? Who are the “spirits in prison”? What was proclaimed to them, and by whom? How do these verses contribute to Peter’s message and provide encouragement to us today? (see extra handout for more on this.)

Toward the Goal...

When faced with hardship or opposition while doing what is right, we as followers of Christ should not waver or give way to fear. Instead, remembering that Christ Himself willingly suffered and died while doing good in order to bring us to God, and bearing in mind that He watches over and blesses those who suffer for righteousness’ sake, we should continue setting our hearts on honoring Him as Lord in our lives. As we do, our lives bear powerful witness to the glorious hope we have in Him, perhaps causing others around us to ask us for the reason for this hope, and thus providing us opportunities to bear witness to Him also with our words. Having ourselves been brought to God through the sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our sufferings may then become a means through which others are brought to God.

What does the way you live say to others about the hope that you have? Does your lifestyle show clearly that your hope is in Christ, or does it suggest that your hope is really centered somewhere else? Does the way you live (and in particular, the way you handle hardship and suffering) cause others to ask you about your faith? And when they ask, are you ready to answer?