

connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Hunger for Holiness

LIVING PURE IN AN IMPURE WORLD

A STUDY OF 1 PETER

Tom Howe

Dustin Slaton

Jonathan Sullivan

Ed Jordan



GC2
PRESS

Dallas, Texas

Hunger for Holiness: Living Pure in An Impure World
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 11-12 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.gc2press.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
 - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
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- E. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available for \$10 at www.gc2press.org. under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
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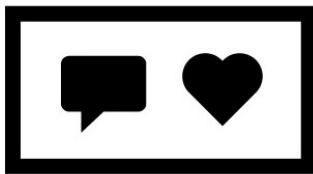
Introduction to GC2 Press

We've Changed Our Name!

BWP has now become **GC2 Press**. The name change reflects the alignment with our state convention's (BGCT) recently updated mission statement. **GC2** is a movement of God's people to share Christ and show love. Our driving passion is to follow the Lord's call to fulfill the Great Commission "to share Christ" and the Great Commandment "to show love." The Great Commission and the Great Commandment form the two "GCs," or GC2.

GC2 Press will continue to publish the undated **CONNECT 360** quarterly Bible study curriculum. **Connect 360** has gained a reputation for solid biblical teaching and will continue to be published as an undated quarterly study available in book form and/or digital downloads. **Connect 360** is currently being distributed in 38 states and 16 countries and has been translated into seven different languages.

For more information, please go to our website at www.gc2press.org.



GC2
PRESS

Introducing

Hunger for Holiness *Living Pure in An Impure World*

A STUDY OF 1 PETER

Background of 1 Peter

God formed a new community of people through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These people formed local communities in the geographical location of where they dwelled. Living out their faith constantly caused friction within the secular culture of the Roman Empire in the first century. When the church gathered, they were always asking pertinent questions. How do we live as people of God in a culture that is foreign to God's ways? What is our response during trials and tribulations?

First Peter is a letter written by one of the twelve disciples. Peter wrote this letter toward the end of his life. In 5:13, Peter indicated that he penned the letter in Babylon. There is much debate of the exact location. The letter was written toward the end of Peter's life, and it is believed Peter spent his last days in Rome; therefore, many choose Rome as the place the letter was written (in Revelation, Rome is referred to as Babylon). Peter wrote this letter to a collection of churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). The letter encouraged this new community of Christ-followers to endure suffering, trials, and tribulations, because the salvation of God through Jesus Christ guarantees their future. Peter desired for the church to know that any suffering in this life is temporary. Therefore, a person should live a life of hope grounded in a past event that promises a future reality.

Dr. Chris Curran

Holiness in Our Day

The word “holy” is one of the most common words in the Bible, and yet is one of the most misunderstood words in our language. God has called us to be holy, but how many people want to be described that way?

There are many Bible words that describe the character and nature of God. We read that:

God is Light...God is Love...God is Merciful...God is our Shepherd...God is our Provider...God is our Healer...God is the Almighty One...And many more.

And then there is one word that describes the character and nature of God more than any other in the Bible:

God is HOLY.

Holiness is the primary attribute of God.

Holiness is conforming to the Character of God.

Holiness is essential for living as a stranger in a strange land.

Holiness is the absolute key to living ***Pure in an Impure World.***

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Lesson 2	The Pursuit of Holiness	1 Peter 1:10-17
Lesson 3	The World's Greatest Quartet	1 Peter 1:18-25
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Lesson 6	The Ministry of Suffering	1 Peter 2:18-25
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Lesson 9	The Just for the Unjust	1 Peter 3:18-22
Lesson 10	Love Covers It All	1 Peter 4:1-11
Lesson 11	Rejoice in Suffering	1 Peter 4:12-19
Lesson 12	Dress for Success	1 Peter 5:1-6
Lesson 13	Standing Firm in the Faith	1 Peter 5:7-14

Additional Resources for the Study of 1 Peter¹

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NOTES

¹ Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writer or GC2 Press with all its comments.

Hunger for Holiness

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lesson 1

Hope That Lives

MAIN IDEA

Because of Jesus we have help for today and hope for tomorrow.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is my faith the real thing?

STUDY AIM

To understand that when the Bible uses the word hope, it is speaking of a certainty, not a possibility

QUICK READ

We have hope because God has allowed us to start over with a new birth, an inheritance of Heaven, and salvation that is secure and shielded by God.



Introduction

I officiated the funeral of a dear friend. His wife was one of the key church leaders and had been a faithful member for decades. Just before stepping out into the church, newly widowed, she grabbed my arm, turned to me, and asked, “is this real?” I misunderstood her question and nod and whispered, “yes, he is really gone.” She corrected me, “I know that; that is not what I mean. Is everything we believe real? Is faith real? Is there a Heaven and will there be a resurrection?” I was startled but replied, “yes” with a subtle nod. We did not have time for much else. Satisfied, she affirmed, “good, I thought so.” Sometimes, we need to have an examined faith to see if it is indeed real, and if it is based on the real thing. Peter wrote a general letter to the church to emphasize that we have a real hope based on a real Lord in all times, especially in difficult days.

Peter was writing to a church under increased persecution. The most severe persecution was still to come, but they were already being identified and marginalized as of the writing of 1 Peter. Peter, himself, was already in Rome where he and Paul would later be executed for the cause of Christ. In face of such persecution, Peter reminded his readers that God has a bigger purpose. This is not the world God created, it is tainted by sin. This is not the world God has waiting for His people. We are hopeful and anticipatory for what God will do. There will be a new Heaven and new earth. And even in this world, we can experience a newness of life when we put our hope in Christ.

1 Peter 1:1-9

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through

faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

A Permanent Hope (1:1-2)

We are strangers in this world. There are two terms in Greek for a non-resident. One means a temporary resident, traveler, or in a modern sense, a vacationer, usually translated “stranger.” The second means a permanent resident or an immigrant usually translated “alien” or “sojourner.” Peter used both terms through his letter: “strangers” in 1:1, “aliens” in 1:17, and “aliens and strangers” in 2:11. He used the terms to describe the very temporary life we have in this world compared to eternity. We are citizens of another world, God's Kingdom. Yet, if we are not careful, we can make the comforts of this world the priority over His Kingdom work in our lives and the world around us. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-2, the Apostle Paul also wrote of the temporariness of this world when he compared our earthly bodies as tents next to our heavenly bodies as eternal houses. Aliens and strangers do not have any power or privilege in a foreign land and never completely feel at home. Peter reminded Christians not to feel too “at home” in this world. We belong to a permanent world.

As strangers in this world, and holding onto a permanent hope, we walk in obedience to Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to continue doing a sanctifying work in us. There are three aspects of our salvation: past, present, and future. The three can be defined as our justification, our sanctification, and our glorification. We were justified in the past, are being sanctified in the present, and will be glorified in the future at the return of Christ. In the past, we were saved from the penalty of sin. In the present, we are being saved

from the power of sin. In the future, we will be saved for the mere presence of sin. Peter used a trinitarian concept of our being sanctified in this world in preparation for the world to come. We are chosen by God the Father, sanctified through the Holy Spirit for obedience to the Son.

First Peter 1:1 also indirectly gives a glimpse into God's plan to reach people when we see closed doors. Paul was kept from traveling through Asia, Bithynia, and Mysia. He had planned to go through that region, but the Holy Spirit would not let him and instead sent Paul to Macedonia to initiate the early church's European missions. Even though the book of Acts does not report who reached these areas, we know God had a plan to reach them. Peter addressed the churches in these areas, mentioning three by name: Galatia, Asia, and Bithynia. A glance at the maps in the back of your Bible would show that God indeed reached the churches Paul had planned to. God did it His way. We can have a permanent hope that God has a plan for us as well.

Aliens

There are more than a dozen verses in the Old Testament that give rules on how aliens, sojourners, immigrants, and foreigners are to be treated. Five notable verses are Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Numbers 15:15; and Deuteronomy 24:17-22. These are important verses because they are found in the part of the Bible that talks about when the Israelites were coming out of mistreatment in a foreign land (Egypt) and were sojourners as they wandered the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. They were told how to treat the aliens in their midst: do not mistreat them, treat them as native born, love them, and provide for them. They were also told why the aliens were to be treated this way: because Israel had once been aliens and they knew what it was like to be aliens. They were to be empathetic. Likewise, we should be empathetic to those around us who need Christ. Considering this lesson, we may know some around us that have no hope (for many reasons), can we have empathy for them in whatever they are going through?

A Living Hope (1:3)

Living Hope comes from two Greek words, *elpida zosan*. *Elpida* comes from *elpis*, which is the word for hope. It does not mean hope in the sense of some wishful option or uncertain possibility. Hope in a biblical understanding is a concrete certainty or an expectation of good, a confidence and trust in God's work and will. The greatest understanding of a Christian Hope is the expectation of eternal salvation. It is not "hoping we might receive a windfall of cash," instead, it is confidence in the hope that the sun will come up tomorrow, no matter what.

Zosan comes from the verb *zoa* which is to be made alive. *Zoa* is the same root word of the noun *zoe* (life). As a verb, it means to be living, animated, breathing, active, and vibrant; not lifeless or dead. Combined with hope, we have a living, breathing confidence in the work of God, not a dead, stagnant faith. We have an active, vibrant faith that leads to spiritual growth and action. The object of our faith, Jesus, is alive and is active in our world through the Holy Spirit.

We have a hope that is alive and that has an eternal reward and inheritance. It is fixed on a living Savior who loves us and will return for us. Let us flesh out a living hope regularly.

A Secured Hope (1:4-5)

People put their hope in power, beauty, fame, money, people, political causes, or a pursuit of pleasure or happiness. None of these will last beyond this temporary life. These "hopes" either fade or disappoint. Our hope provides an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade. It is imperishable. We live in a perishable, fragile world, but our hope is indestructible. It will not spoil. It will not decay and crumble. It is unfading. It will always keep its pristine luster and beauty.

Our hope is secured and shielded by the power of God. Peter listed two ways God protects our hope. God secures it (holds it). We can imagine His firm grip securing it for us. There is no assurance, insurance, or guarantee on earth as secure as our hope in an eternal life. It is sealed by the Holy Spirit within us (Ephesians 4:30). The second action Peter mentioned is that God

is shielding our faith. He doubles the effort to demonstrate His care for us, by holding us and then covering us with His shield. No father on earth has held, protected, or secured his child as much as our Heavenly Father does. His power is the ultimate power. Nothing can wrestle us from His grasp and care. We can have a great confidence in what God has in store for us because He, Himself, is holding it for us despite the storms that swirl around us.

An Enduring Hope (1:6-9)

There is a term used in military, business, and even educational circles. We live in a VUCA world. VUCA stands for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. The world is full of constant change that is hard or even impossible to understand at times. We may never fully comprehend the complexity of why things happen the way they do, or how we can anticipate what will happen next. There are too many causes of these changes to analyze and too many potential outcomes that can come from the many algorithms of the many change factors pressing on us and our surrounding. Yet, we can find one constant, Jesus Christ and place our enduring hope in Him. As the VUCA tempest storms around us, we have an anchor of truth in the One who is the Truth, the Way, and the Life. Our hope in Him can be permanent, living, and secured.

Even though we have this permanent, living, and secured hope, we may still suffer in this life. Christianity is not a problem-free guarantee, we are still aliens in this world after all. Suffering is a part of this world because we live in a sin-tainted creation. Peter would not do well on the prosperity-preacher circuit. He dealt with the painful but truthful reality that we may suffer trials. Jesus suffered and died for us; and it is unbiblical to suggest that as His followers, we would be given a cosmic magical charm to ward off all negativity, problems, or difficulties. Jesus said, “whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

Peter wrote that suffering adds to our faith. In fact, suffering is a crucible for faith. Suffering strengthens faith like growing muscles that have been worked and exercised. Suffering also will prove the genuineness of our faith, more precious than gold. The natural inclination is to avoid suffering, to run from it or flee it. In doing so, one may flee what God uses to grow us. Faith

in suffering develops and demonstrates endurance, perseverance, patience, and commitment. Faltering faith in the face of suffering can lead to any or all of the following: discouragement, sloth, apathy, anger, rage, selfishness, or emotional death, which leaves us vulnerable to Satan's tricks, temptation, and snares. Let us continue to grow and strengthen our faith and develop an enduring hope through all things in life.

Our faith is focused on the One we believe in, yet He is unseen. We trust Him and His purpose and plan for us. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (ESV). Paul adds, "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). We are assured and confident of the one who is the object of our faith in all the suffering and difficult times. Verse 8 says though we have not seen Him, we believe in Him. One day, we will see Him, stand up and shout, "I believe in Him!" as we point to our returning Savior, "That's the one I have known all along." We are aliens, travelers, and sojourners in this world, just passing through the seen until the unseen is revealed. Hope and faith will be actualized and realized for us in the One whom we have believed!

Faith Greater Than Gold

Who do you think of when you hear the phrase, "faith greater than gold" (from verse 7)? Is there a godly saint in your church now? Or do you recall the face of a dear church or family member who demonstrated great faith in years gone by? Those spiritual giants and their faith provide so much hope for many Christians who watched their witness. Likewise, we all have the eyes of many looking at us. Let us also have a faith greater than gold so we too may inspire those in our lives.

Implications and Actions

Living in a VUCA world, we can lose focus on what truly matters and what is of the utmost importance. Let us put our full hope and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, even more so as the world around us becomes more challenging and frustrating or as we may experience marginalization as Christians or perhaps

even suffering. There are many things vying for our attention and even our hope: money, power, influence, beauty, fame, popularity, likes or subscribers in social media, but for Christians, our hope is built on Jesus and His eternal power. We must anchor ourselves to the One who provides eternal hope.

Questions

1. Do you ever feel like a stranger in this world? How do we live well in this world (considering we are pilgrims), while also focusing on eternal life?
2. Do you think of salvation more as a past experience or an ongoing reality or a future event? Discuss with others the differences.
3. In terms of having a living hope, what does it mean for your hope or faith to be animated, active, or vibrant?
4. God secures our hope. What are the most secured things in our lives? How are they secured? How does that compare to how God secures our salvation?

5. Take a little time and think. Can you think of and describe something that has been unseen and then come into reality? What was it? How did you feel after finally seeing the unseen? Our salvation is not fully realized yet. Discuss what it might be like to fully see all God has done for us.

6. Which aspect of hope is the most meaningful to you right now: 1. a permanent hope in a temporary world; 2. a living hope in a stagnant world; 3. a secured hope in a fragile world; or 4. an enduring hope through suffering and trials?

lesson 2

The Pursuit of Holiness

MAIN IDEA

Being holy means living such a God-filled life of kindness and gentleness that your life becomes winsome to others.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do I hunger for holiness, or happiness?

STUDY AIM

To understand that holiness is a radical kind of lifestyle that makes you different from others; but it is a good difference

QUICK READ

As Christians we will not be judged to determine whether we go to heaven or hell. That has already been settled. This judgment is when God examines what we did with what we were given.



Introduction

Christians are called to pursue holiness. There are many other distracting pursuits that can draw us away from holiness. There are many things fighting for our attention: media, entertainment, money, acceptance, and success. We can even be distracted by doing good things. Each disciple ought to constantly consider all the moments of the day and how much time is spent on growing in faith and holiness, and how much time is lost on other pursuits. Jesus died for our sins. We must seek a radical kind of lifestyle as our response to Him.

1 Peter 1:10-17

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."^[a]

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

The Narrative of Our Salvation (1:10-12)

Peter wrote these verses like a narrative or play in a cosmic stadium. The narrative revolves around a mystery revealed by the prophets. They began to tell the story of God saving His people, revealing each part a little piece at a time. Those prophets were "searching intently with the greatest care." They

each studied the Scriptures they had available. Separately, they were trying to figure out the time when God would do something incredible.

Then the main character entered: Jesus. To a stunned audience the climax was not what many people thought it would be, the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. Peter, as one of the key witnesses, wrote that his readers were the ones this revelation served, not the prophets of years gone by. The readers were the ones who experienced the unveiling of the mystery. The plot, characters, and consequences were finally revealed, and Peter's generation was the one in the primary "now" of the saving work of God.

Peter mentioned two other players in the cosmic story. The Spirit-inspired preachers were the messengers of the revealed mystery. Peter also mentioned the angels who served as a greater audience. They watched as God created the world. They saw the falling away of their fellow angels who sided with Lucifer. They saw the story unfold in the garden, through the serpent, the fall, the redemption of Noah, the calling of Abraham, the leadership of Moses, David, Ezra, and the writings of all the prophets from Moses to Malachi. They heard the deafening silence of centuries between the Old Testament and when Gabriel was summoned to visit Mary. The Angels saw the narrative play out in the cross. Then they saw the true glory of Christ as He defeated sin and death for all humanity. The Angels knew of the magnitude of the story even if it took a while for humans to figure it out.

Practical Ways to Pursue Holiness (1:13-16)

Based on the work of Jesus, Peter gave a five-part action plan for how to pursue holiness: 1. prepare your minds for action; 2. be self-controlled; 3. set your hope fully on grace; 4. do not conform to evil desires; and 5. be holy. First Peter 1:13-16 is a good place from which to build a discipleship strategy.

"Prepare your minds for action." The word for prepare is the word for tucking the loose flowing parts of one's robe or tunic tightly close to the body in preparation for hard work or for running so the fabric is not in the way. It was a phrase like the modern idioms of, "make sure you are buttoned-up," or "batten down the hatches." It means to pay special attention to make sure everything is arranged properly for the task at hand. We are to demonstrate an intense scrutiny to detail in preparing our minds for action. Our disciple-

ship should not be haphazard or sloppy. We must be deliberate in both the planning and implementation of our spiritual formation.

“Be self-controlled.” There are numerous places in the Bible that say to be self-controlled. It is listed as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and to be an overseer or elder in the church (1 Timothy 3:2-3). Paul’s letter to Titus mentioned it several times, as a qualification for leaders (1:8), for the old men (2:2), young women (2:5), young men (2:6), and ultimately to everyone (2:11-12). Peter mentioned it in other places also (1 Peter 4:7 and 2 Peter 1:5-6). We must establish personal boundaries within our lives that regulate our appetites, emotions, actions, reactions, and activities like a damper within a chimney flue that controls the amount of smoke and heat that escapes a fireplace or the throttle or valve that controls the amount of air or fuel in an engine. This self-regulation is not a requirement for salvation, but useful in controlling what affects our spiritual health.

“Set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Think about what you “set” in your life. We set a clock. We set the table for a dinner. We set a fence post in the ground. To set something is to be very intentional about making sure something is appropriate and right. We must be intentional about setting our hope on something specific: the work of Jesus. We set our hope *fully* on Jesus, not partially on Jesus and partially on other things. We are committed to Him and the salvation He brings. The New Testament balances the “already, not yet” understanding of the beginning of salvation but not yet fully realized salvation. The Kingdom of God has been initiated but it is not quite yet fully manifested. This phrase demonstrates this “already, not yet” principle. We already set our hope fully on the grace that is not yet revealed fully and will not be until the moment Jesus returns.

“Do not conform to evil desires.” The “already, not yet” principle lives even within each of us. We are saved from the power of sin but not yet from the presence of sin. If we are not careful, we can succumb to the power of sin. Peter gave a several-step process to battle the evil desires that rage within us. Besides prepared minds and self-control, we must seek to be obedient children. We once lived in ignorance, but we no longer have that excuse. We are aware of our sin, and we are aware of the power of Christ in us to overcome that sin so we must seek out how to not conform to the evil desires that are

still present in our lives. If we are honest, we know most of the temptations and problem areas in our lives that cause us to sin. The regret and sorrow we feel for our actions, words, attitudes, sins, uncontrolled and ungodly responses are the spiritual gauges to let us know when we have messed up and conformed to the evil desires within us. We must be intentional about placing protections in our lives to avoid those triggers ahead of time while seeking ways to grow so those desires diminish within us.

“Be holy, because I am holy.” Peter quoted Yahweh’s command to the Israelites in Leviticus 11:44-45 and 19:2. Christians are called to holiness. The word for “holy” means set apart, separate, distinct, different, dedicated, or consecrated. Most families have “everyday” dishes, but then also have the dishes used for special occasions like holidays, parties, and big events. Those dishes are set apart as unique and dedicated for a special purpose. We are not to like the world around us. Our hope is eternal and set on things unseen, waiting for Jesus to be revealed. Our lives should reflect that we are not like those who live for the temporal. We are to be holy in all that we do. Our faith must mean something. How we act and live should be derived from our faith, and we must be a distinct people among a lost world. If we look, act, and talk exactly like everyone around (who do not know Jesus), what evidence is there of a powerful transformative Holy Spirit living within us?

How Should We Live? (1:17)

There are five truths in verse seventeen. 1. We have a Father to call. 2. God judges each of us. 3. We are judged impartially. 4. Live as Strangers. 5. Live in reverent fear.

Peter stated that we have a Father who hears our calls and cries even better than an earthly father. The tenderness and intimacy of our relationship with our Father affects how we should live. “Since” is a conjunction connecting our relationship with God as the reason for our lifestyle.

We cannot see God as just a doting Dad though. He is the perfect Father who knows even our innermost hearts. He would not be a good Father if He allowed sin to rule in us or in His creation. He will judge all people. Those who do not belong to Him will be eternally judged at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15) and those who do belong to Him will give an account

of themselves before the Judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The difference between the two judgments is that the first will be for non-Christians to an eternal punishment separated from God. The latter will be for Christians who have served Christ well or not after having received His mercy and grace. First Corinthians 3 describes this judgment as a burning of all that we have done with the freedom we have in Christ and the first will either burn the wood and hay (or temporary things) but refine the gold or silver (things done for eternal purposes). We will not be destroyed by the fire, but we may suffer great loss (1 Corinthians 3:15).

We will be judged impartially. There are no favorites in the Kingdom of Heaven. God does not have a privileged or first class and those who will barely make it into Heaven. We think in those terms, but even Jesus cut off the discussion of who would be greatest in His kingdom by redirecting the conversation to service (Mark 9:33-36). Impartiality also means there are no comparisons either. We will not be able to say, "Well, at least I was better than Sarah or Frank." God will not judge us against each other but against the holiness to which He called us.

Peter revisited a theme from verse one. Based on God being our Father, we are to live as strangers in this world. This world is not our home, we are just travelers here. We are not to seek false martyrdom, but if we have a choice between eternal impact and purposes or creaturely comforts and safety; our choice must be for the eternal.

Based on the impartiality of our Judge, we are to live in reverent fear. The word fear (*phobos*) can be translated too harshly or too softly. Biblical fear is not a trembling terror before an angry Judge. God loves us and does not want us to be in a constant state of dread, worrying that He will drop lightning bolts down on us. In reaction to that, though, many translate fear as nothing more than a healthy respect or awe of God. In that lighter translation, God is to be revered like a respected authority figure in our lives. In reality, a healthy biblical fear is a balance of the two. We have a fear of fire, sharp objects, and driving recklessly, which are established boundaries of how we approach those things. We respect the power of explosives or the properties of gravity when standing near a canyon's edge. The reverent fear we are to have is very

similar of that of a small child who is obedient to its parent, just as Peter said in the previous verse.

Angels

Angels are not humans who have died. We will not become angels after this life. They are created beings that existed before humans. They are servants of God and not to be worshiped (Colossians 2:18-19; Revelation 19:10; Hebrews 1:6-14). Angels assist us and always point our lives and focus to God. Even though it seems most pictures and Christmas ornaments depict angels as female, all Angels have male names, and they do not procreate (Matthew 22:30). Daniel (and other books of the Bible) shows an active supernatural world around us in which the angels take a significant leading role. The two best-known Angels in Scripture are Michael and Gabriel, though there are others. We are lower than the angels now (Psalm 8:5; Hebrews 2:5-8), but later we will rule over or judge them (1 Corinthians 6:3).

Discipleship

How can you be proactive and intentional about growing in discipleship in a practical way in the following areas?

- Your family
- Your vocation
- Your finances
- Your faith
- Your crisis

Implications and Actions

The biblical narrative is clear. God had a plan to redeem His people from a sinful and broken world. He used prophets to call His people, proclaim His message (piecing it together over time), and develop the story of redemption that culminated in Jesus Christ. We, who are recipients of His salvation, are called to live worthy lives as obedient children, not conformed to evil. As Chris-

tians, we will not be judged to determine whether or not we go to Heaven or Hell, but we will be judged based on what we did with what we were given.

Questions

1. Is it helpful to imagine salvation from God as a cosmic narrative? Explain.
2. Which of the five parts of pursuing holiness is the hardest? Which is the easiest?
3. Discuss what it means to be holy? How achievable do you think truly being holy is?
4. How do you hold in tension the fear of God and the love of God?

lesson 3

The World's Greatest Quartet

MAIN IDEA

The world's greatest quartet is made up of Faith, Hope, Love, and the Word of God.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do I practice "agape" love?

STUDY AIM

To understand that for faith to be a saving faith, it must be faith in God. It is the object of our faith that is important.

QUICK READ

There are many great books. All kinds of books. But there is one major difference about those books and the Bible. The Word of God will stand forever. All other writers and writings will one day be forgotten, but His book will never be forgotten.



Introduction

A singing quartet is measured by their abilities to stand out individually while at the same time being able to hit perfect harmony. Peter covered four themes in these verses that all stand-alone very well but when finely tuned together, they produce a sweet harmony in the life of a Christian: Faith, Hope, Love, and the Word of God. Without any of the four, discipleship would be incomplete.

1 Peter 1:18-25

¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, ²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

We Do not Have an Empty Faith (1:18-19)

Peter contrasted two religious' worldviews. Most of the surrounding nations worshiped gods and religious items made of silver and gold. Even though these elements are valued because of their ability to withstand decay, Peter called them perishable as compared to the eternal nature of Jesus. They also represented a perishable faith that really was just an empty way of life. Most of his readers came from a Gentile background and would have come out from religions that had such gods or religious objects but had been redeemed from those religions. Instead, our faith is based on the precious blood of Christ. He

met all of the ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic Law, but His sacrifice was perfect and final because of His perfect divine-human nature.

The most important point of this passage is that Jesus is the object of faith not religious activity. We must be careful so we do not forget that truth. Every religion, denomination, or church runs the risk of developing its own “empty way of life.” What a shame it would be to enter Heaven having lived an empty life. Nothing can replace the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

The Precious Blood of Christ

Hebrews 9:22 says, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” Jesus’ blood is the only provision for the sins of the world. Moses initiated the Old Covenant with the sacrifice of animals. Jesus’ blood closed out the Old Covenant and initiated the New Covenant. Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-12 says that the sacrifices of the Old Covenant had to be repeated over and over but was impossible to take away sins permanently (10:4, 11). Jesus offered Himself one time for all to permanently take away all sins (10:12). He was the perfect High Priest and also the perfect Lamb that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19). Some people feel that Jesus is one of many paths to God, but Jesus did not shed His blood as a multiple choice. There is no other way to receive forgiveness than through the blood of Jesus Christ.

We Have a Solid Hope (1:20-21)

Our faith is based in the blood of Jesus, and our hope is based on the resurrection and glorification of Jesus. Peter knew Jesus the man. He did not write as one who heard second-hand. He knew Jesus’ mother Mary and brothers James and Judas and presumably the others, but Peter knew Jesus was far more than a man. Jesus existed before the creation of the world. God’s plan was that Jesus was chosen before even the beginning. Peter knew well both the humanity and divinity of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews said that Jesus is the one through whom the universe was made (Hebrews 1:1-3). Paul also wrote that Jesus is the Creator of all things including heaven and earth (Colossian 1:16). First, our hope is built on the person of Jesus who is the Creator of all things.

Secondly, our hope is also built on the plan of God. God's purpose and plan is not random or arbitrary, but it was specific and deliberate. The first rudimentary mention of God's chosen plan is found in Genesis 3:14-15, when God told the serpent that Eve's descendant would crush the head of the serpent. The Chosen One was always Jesus. There is no other name by which salvation can be found (Acts 4:12).

Additionally, our hope is also built on the power of God. God's plan was never in doubt for one second. It was an elaborate plan of love and sacrifice that was based on the power of God, which raised Jesus from the dead and returned Him to a glorified state. Jesus knew of His mission throughout His earthly ministry, going back as far as when He was twelve in the Temple (Luke 2:46-50).

Therefore, our faith and hope are in God, not in other empty world religion but also not in ourselves. The object of our hope is not in any religious activity and most certainly not in ourselves. Our hope in God is far more important than the "way we do church." Generations come and go and with them a changing of how we do church. The one constant though is that our hope is in the plan of God through the person and work of Jesus.

We Must Love One Another (1:22)

We are purified through obedience. Our salvation is not a simple one-time event that is a golden ticket to Heaven. That is a shallow faith, if even a faith at all. Faith is a track record over time, proven through the ups and downs of life. The ongoing part of salvation is sanctification, which happens as we seek to be obedient to Scripture and the Holy Spirit within us. We must yield to the Holy Spirit who guides us and teaches us as much as we allow Him. Our purity of life is a direct result of our prayer life, Scripture study, and the time we give to the Holy Spirit. As we grow in spiritual maturity, certain biblical principles must be growing within us, most notably, our love.

Our obedience must also be focused on truth. Truth is objective, not subjective. There is a God. There is an eternity awaiting all people (in Heaven or Hell). Jesus is the life, the truth, and the way; there is no other way to Heaven (John 14:6). We live in a generation that sees truth as subjective or relative. What is true for one person is not true for another. But the reality is that

God exists for those who believe in Him as well as those who do not. There is an eternal destination for everyone, whether they want it or not. In the era of the “micro-narrative,” truth is not even the same for one person. Micro-narrative is the collection of sayings, quotes, ethics, and cute ideas gathered from politics, religions, television, books, and even social media. Some may post a series of these and fail to realize that within just a few such quips, they may be disagreeing with themselves. A better approach is to submit to the one overarching biblical worldview (known as a “meta-narrative”), and fully understand the details of it. Christians need to be better students of the specifics of biblical truth.

The end goal of obedience to biblical truth is that we must love one another. We do not need to know more about God, His plan, or the Bible just for the sake of knowing more. There will not be extra points in a heavenly trivia game. We must know and trust God’s Word so it impacts our daily living, most notably how we treat others. Jesus gave a simple answer to what is the most important command, love God with all that we have and your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). Peter used the Greek word *agape* to describe the love we are to have. It is good to be reminded that we are to love unconditionally without a selfish concern but with a desire for others to be blessed. This is one of the best-known Greek words and yet, we live in a time that this kind of love does not exist as much as it once did. Rifts and ruptures now exist in churches and Christian families over all sorts of issues, some of which seem trivial while others certainly are very important. Politics, cultural issues, church traditions, worship styles, national and international events, or personal family issues lead Christians to be divisive and uncivil with one another as well as those outside of their cultural bubble.

Peter would be appalled. He tripled down with three adjectives that our obedience to the truth should directly lead to how we treat others. First, we are to have a sincere love, not a fake or shallow one. We cannot have a veneer of love, but a genuine one. Secondly, our love must be a deep love, which could be translated as a pure love, uncontaminated by selfishness or ulterior motives. Finally, our love is to be from the heart, the deep-seated center of emotion and the will.

GC2

GC2 stands for the Great Commission (Matthew 28) to share Christ and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22) to love God and love others. There should be a healthy balance between demonstrating the love of God to the world around and making disciples. Each of the two are doors that the church must go through while navigating a complex and challenging world. Churches need to look for ways to demonstrate practical, helping, personal love to their communities without foregoing the call to win people to Christ and lead them to true lives of holiness.

We Have an Eternal Word (1:23-25)

The eternal Word of God is the seed by which we are born again. Faith comes by hearing the message through the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). There have been many people who have helped to plant that seed in each believer. There are many others who water it and care for it until it grows enough to come to faith and then continues to grow to spiritual maturity. Anyone who has done any gardening or farming knows what seed they sow will turn into what produce is grown. If you want bell peppers, then you must plant bell pepper seeds. Squash seeds will not produce pumpkins. To have an eternal spiritual life, one must have the correct seed planted within them. We were born of perishable seed (mortality), but by the Word of Christ in us, we have been reborn imperishable (immortality).

The eternal Word of God is living. It is not static; it is alive! I worked in construction as a teenager. We used power tools often. On some job sites, we were able to use the electric boxes on the home we were working on, if the electricity had been completed. On other job sites, we had to run extension cords to the electric box at the road or perhaps from the neighbors' house (it helped if they had a cooperative neighbor). On rare occasions, we had no other choice but to take a generator to the construction site. It made all the difference whether the power source we plugged into was alive or dead. As Christians, we are plugged into a living power source if our faith is plugged

into the living Word of God. We must be alive too, animated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The eternal Word of God is enduring. The Greek word for enduring can be translated “remaining” or “abiding,” and means to dwell or to continue being with someone or in one place. A helpful image is a group of voyagers who decide to settle down somewhere. As a people born again in Christ, the eternal Word of God has settled in us. Peter quoted Isaiah to illustrate the temporary nature of this life to the eternal nature of the Word of God. Long after the libraries of this world have crumbled away, the Word of God will never be forgotten.

Implications and Actions

God’s plan for us always included salvation from an old way of life into His purpose. What God has done for us should affect how we live. We must be obedient to live lives based on the truth, and we must also demonstrate our faith by how we love others. If we have been redeemed from an empty way of life by the precious blood of Jesus, then we should walk in obedience and love from the heart. Many people have treadmills in their homes that serve as nothing more than clothes hangers. There once was an intention to exercise and either maintain or lose weight. That original purpose was lost when coats, clothes, and other items were draped over the treadmill. Likewise, we are not accomplishing the purposes God has for us if we return to an empty way of life.

Questions

1. Have you ever lived an “empty way of life?” What changed so you could live a life of meaning and purpose?

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2. Can you describe specific ways you live out your faith in practice?

 3. In terms of having a living hope, what does it mean for your hope or faith to be animated, active, or vibrant?

 4. Do you practice “agape” love?

 5. Describe in your own terms what it means to be born again.

 6. Expound on the concept that all men are like grass, but the Word of God stands forever.

lesson 4

The Living Stone

MAIN IDEA

Jesus is the only true foundation upon which to build your life.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Am I a living stone?

STUDY AIM

To understand that Jesus is both the foundation (Cornerstone) of your life and the crowning achievement (Capstone) of your life

QUICK READ

Jesus will either be a stepping-stone that gives you access to God, or He will be a rock that causes you to stumble over the truth about Jesus.



Introduction

My wife and I bought a new car a couple of years ago. We keep vehicles for a while, and it had been about nine years since we had bought one. The newness of the car was obvious. The engine ran smoothly. The interior was in pristine condition. The updated media was very nice and helpful. It was certainly an upgrade for us and gave us enjoyment and confidence for driving for years to come. Peter wrote of newness in several areas: newborn baby, new house being built, and a new calling or purpose for God's people. We should experience newness in our faith. Paul wrote that we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). If we can get excited or enjoy a vehicle that would be old in just a few years, how much more excited should we about being a new creation ourselves.

1 Peter 2:1-10

¹Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ²Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

⁴As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

⁷Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

⁸and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

New Identity (2:1-3)

This is the third time Peter equated our faith to having a new birth (1:3, 23 and 2:2). With new birth and new creation comes a new identity. We should no longer be known by our vices. Peter said we should get rid of that former way of life, including malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. It is interesting that this list includes interpersonal attitudes and actions, not what is going on inside of a believer; and also, not how the new Christian is to interact with God. If we have an eternal hope and are called to holiness (Chapter 1), then how we treat others matters. Christian who cannot rid themselves of these traits are seriously harming the cause of Christ and are simply spiritual babies. They have not grown up into a new spiritual identity. All of us sin and continue to make mistakes, but our spiritual life should provide a trajectory of emotional and spiritual growth.

Babies grow the most and the fastest in the first months and years of life, mostly from the nutrients of milk alone. Peter said we must get that same spiritual milk, focusing on spiritual nutrients to jump start our discipleship into spiritual maturity. There does come a time we move from spiritual milk to solid food to continue growing (1 Corinthians 3:1-2) or we risk being spiritual babies forever. We must grow up into salvation. Part of the salvation experience is ongoing sanctification. It has been a joy to watch my children grow up. They are all nearly adults now. I have watched them develop skills as well as personalities. I watched them change from having baby faces to children to adolescents and finally now develop adult faces. I have enjoyed each step, but it would be odd for an adult man to have a baby face or even that of a pre-teen. We must grow into sanctified lives and look more like our Heavenly Father always.

So many people are trying to find their identity today, in many different places. People define themselves by their interests, their sexuality, the groups to which they belong, political parties, national or societal organizations; but for Christians, our identity is first and foremost found in Christ. We do not even belong to ourselves anymore; we were bought by Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20), and we have to be put to death with Christ and no longer live except to live in Him (Galatians 2:20). Being a newborn Christian means that we belong to Him and allow Him to raise us into what He wants us to become.

New House (2:4-8)

Peter made five imagery uses of stones in these five verses: 1. living Stone (Jesus), 2. living stones (us), 3. cornerstone, 4. capstone and 5. stumbling block. There is no mistake that Peter was playing off of the new name Jesus gave him. His original name was Simon, son of Jonah (also, John). Jesus gave him the new name Peter early in His ministry (John 1:42), but normally called him Simon. It was not until Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, that Jesus truly put the name upon him (Matthew 16:16-19).

Is Peter the Rock Upon Which the Church Is Built?

It is incorrect to understand Matthew 16:16-19 as Jesus establishing Peter as the foundation of the Church. There are two separate Greek words used in Matthew 16:18: *Petros* and *Petra*. Simon was called by the masculine name *Petros*, which means a single stone or small rock. *Petra* is feminine and means a large rock formation, bedrock, mountain, or landscape. If Jesus intended for the church to be built upon Simon Peter personally, he would not have used the feminine *Petra*. Jesus was referring to Simon's confession as the foundation of the church (not Simon the person); but he obviously tied Simon to the confession, giving him the name *Petros*. Sometimes, Simon Peter was also referred to as Cephias, which is just the Aramaic word for Rock. The New Testament was written in Greek so we know Simon better as Peter, but the primary language of Jesus and the disciples was Aramaic, so he would have probably heard the Aramaic Cephias more than the Greek *Petros* in his lifetime, though he would answer to both.

Jesus is the living Stone, the foundation upon which everything is built. He is living because He was resurrected. We can imagine Jesus as the foundational slab upon which everything else would be constructed. He would be the strongest material without defect, flaw, or weakness. We are the living stones laid upon that foundation to be built up into a spiritual house, a reference to the Temple. We are the new Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). How can we be called living stones if Jesus is the living Stone? We are living stones in as much as we are being remade in the likeness of Christ, no longer belong-

ing to ourselves but belonging to Him. We are living too because we have the living Spirit of God within us once we received Christ as our Lord and Savior. We are living in the same way that He is living because we are connected to Him, remaining in Him (John 15:1-5).

Jesus is the Cornerstone, which is similar to but not exactly the same thing as the living Stone. The latter is the marble slab upon which everything is built. The former is the first large stone put in place to begin the building process. Wherever it is placed sets the location and angle of the rest of the building. It must be strong enough to hold the weight of the rest of the building. It must be true enough to support a straight building. The Cornerstone is the first and alpha piece that initiates the work and sets the course of action. Jesus is such a Cornerstone for His Church.

Jesus is also the Capstone, which is the top of the construction that holds it together. The location and weight of the capstone allowed an archway, a hallway, a wall, or a roof to be stable and secure. A modern rendition of the capstone is a keystone that is above a door or archway. As the Capstone, Jesus is the completion of the work that holds all things together. There is no need for any work once He completes His part. If the cornerstone is the alpha stone, then the capstone is the omega stone. Putting the two together, Cornerstone and Capstone, we can say Jesus is the beginning and the end, the initiator and finisher, and the Alpha and Omega. He is everything!

Unfortunately, for some people, Jesus is not the living Stone, Cornerstone, or Capstone. Peter understood that not everyone would see Jesus as Savior. For those who reject Him, He will be a stumbling block. One can imagine a quarry or a construction site with all these stones strewn about. There must be care and special attention paid for those working with such heavy blocks. Imagine someone unfamiliar with the site or who is carelessly going where he should not. That person could easily trip over a stone that they did not see or understand fully. Peter declares some will fall by the very stone that is the beginning and end for those who believe, a not-so-subtle reference to the salvation of some but judgment of others by the very same Jesus.

We are indeed building a new house with Jesus as the living Stone, Cornerstone, and Capstone and His people as the living stones. The house is a spiritual house, which is the Church itself, wherein we are replacing the Old Testament Law. We are not keeping the minute details of the Law but the

overarching principles of loving God and loving one another. We serve as priests to one another and live sacrificial lives of offering ourselves before God.

New Purpose (2:9-10)

We have been given a new identity and a framework (spiritual house) in which to operate. We also have a new purpose. Peter used four descriptions of our new reality and purpose: 1. a chosen people, 2. a royal priesthood, 3. a holy nation, and 4. a people belonging to God. The title “chosen people” certainly referred to the children of Abraham in the Old Testament from their earliest calling (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; 14:2; and 26:17-19, and many other places). It is also a reference to those going into exile, but that God still had a purpose and plan to bring them back to Him (Isaiah 43:20). Peter declared that the followers of Jesus were the new manifestation of that calling of God. Christians are now a chosen people through whom God will bless the world.

The church serving as a royal priesthood would have been quite a shift in theology and practice. First of all, the priests were a unique tribe set aside for the sole purpose of serving in all priestly matters. The tribe of Levi had no other function. The other tribes could not serve as priests. Secondly, they were not allowed to be royalty. The offices of priest and royalty were separated into two distinct roles. Yet, Jesus brought them together as the King of Kings and the Great High Priest (Zechariah 6:9-15). As His followers, we serve under Him in a priestly capacity to the world around us.

We serve as a holy nation, a people set apart for the purpose of God. A fully functioning disciple is one who is set apart to do the will and work of God, not serve self. A fully functioning local church is a full gathering of mature disciples who seek collectively to do the will and work of God. Peter was not writing of any particular country or group of people in his time and no nation since can claim this title for themselves. It is meant for Christians throughout the ages wherever it might be. We serve at the local church level to accomplish the Church Universal purposes of God.

The final description that Peter used was that of belonging to God. The prophet Hosea had an unfaithful wife who bore several children. He named the oldest, a girl, “Unloved” and the second, a boy, “Not Mine.” The Hebrew

names are Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi (Hosea 1:8-9). What tragic names these children had to carry around. They literally told of the illegitimacy and disconnect that Hosea had for them. They also spoke of how God felt about His children (Israel) at the time. He later reversed their names to “Loved” and “Mine” to demonstrate his love and acceptance as well as the renewal of the covenant of God (Hosea 2:23). Peter said the same thing about us. We belong to God. We are His. We are called for His purposes to be loved by Him. Since God has done a work in our lives, we must sing His praises and be prepared to share His light in the darkness around us.

Priesthood of Believers

The priesthood of believers is a Protestant doctrine that declares all Christians have access to God through our High Priest Jesus Christ and do not need a mediator between us and God. Jesus accomplished the Levitical requirements of the Law (Hebrews 4:14–5:10; 8:1–10:18). There is no need for a human or Angelic priestly mediator to serve as a go-between for Christians to God. Though there are separate roles of the ordained clergy and the laity (the people), neither has a more direct path to God. The offices of people in the Church are not a hierarchy, but of function or service. We worship together, plan together, intercede for one another, support one another, and together we accomplish to purpose of the Church. Each Christian has the right and responsibility of reading, understanding, and teaching the Scriptures personally. The priesthood does not diminish the need for Christians to be in each other’s lives, it increases the need to serve one another.

Implications and Actions

Jesus is either a foundation stone for us or a stumbling block. If He is a foundation stone, what have we built on Him and His work in our lives? Are we building permanent things or are we wasting an eternal foundation by building things that will not last and will not matter? Think of a fifth-grade science fair. Imagine the project of the child who put a great deal of time researching her project, paying close attention to specifics of science, math, and material. She practices her project until it’s perfect in her eyes. Now imagine the proj-

ect of the girl who woke up and scrambled to put something together at the last minute. How different are those two people? Likewise, we can be very careful and pay close attention to build something meaningful and honoring to God upon the foundation of Christ or we can hastily try to pull together something that is obviously poorly planned and executed. Let us be diligent to grow into our salvation and build a worthwhile spiritual house.

Questions

1. How far do you think you have grown in your faith? Are you still on spiritual milk, or have you grown into solid food, perhaps even something better? Have you thought of salvation as something to grow into?
2. Which description of Jesus as a stone is more meaningful to you: the living (foundation) Stone, the Cornerstone, or the Capstone? Why?
3. How do you respond to being called part of the Chosen People?

4. Have you considered being part of a priesthood of believers before? How does it change how you think of the way the church is structured or the roles of each church person?

5. Read 1 Peter 2:10. Respond to “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.”

lesson 5

Christian Citizenship

MAIN IDEA

As Christian citizens we must understand God's purpose for government, but we must speak up to maintain the moral standards that have allowed God to bless our nation.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Have I committed the sin of silence?

STUDY AIM

To understand how we as Christians can be good citizens

QUICK READ

Freedom is a right, but it also carries responsibilities. We are free, and we gladly submit to our government leaders as long as we do not have to dishonor God.



Introduction

Christians are citizens of Heaven (Philippians 1:27; 3:20) and have that future home to look forward to. At the same time, however, he or she is also the citizen of an earthly nation with human rulers.

Walking the line between our two citizenships can be difficult, because we must honor our Heavenly King, as well as our earthly government. Peter tells us to obey both, but what do we do when the expectations of people conflict with the expectations of God? Believers, in all nations and under all types of government, must learn how to obey God completely, while seeking to be the best citizen he or she can be. To do so is to honor both God and people, while also (hopefully) pointing people to salvation in Jesus.

1 Peter 2:11-17

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Civic Witness (2:11-12, 15)

Every time I turn on Netflix, Amazon Prime, or Disney+ to find a movie for our family to watch, I am reminded of the conflict between biblical values and our culture's values. Media today approaches entertainment with a moral agenda to change the way we perceive life and to mold us to their values. What is true of media in a subliminal way, can also be true of government in

a coercive way. This is true in almost every country as governments move in a secular or non-Christian religious direction. As we live in societies that promote different beliefs, practices, principles, and laws than what we see given in the Bible, Christians must balance being faithful to words of their primary authority, Jesus, while being subject to their earthly authorities.

As Christians, we are often reminded to be in the world, not of the world (John 15:19; 17:14-16). The phrase is usually a reminder to live by biblical principles rather than cultural beliefs that are non-biblical. As today's passage begins, Peter reminded us of the same thing. He called us sojourners, indicating that we are simply "passing through" as temporary residents in this world, and he called us exiles, indicating we are stuck here for a period of time.

Exile

In 2 Kings 25:1-21, we see the story of King Nebuchadnezzar capturing Jerusalem and carrying many Israelites into exile in Babylon. This period, from around 587-539 BC, was known as "The Babylonian Exile" throughout Jewish history. The events found in the book of Daniel take place in this time period and capture a living picture of what Peter was describing: God's people living in a civilization at odds with God's instructions. Psalm 137 provides a vivid example that life in the exile was a time of intense anguish and suffering for the Israelites as they experienced extreme pressures and influences from their pagan captors. Daniel, and his three friends, provide a clear example of how to live in such a climate, and their example would have resonated with Peter's Jewish audience, who considered the Roman rule they were under to be similar to their ancestor's Babylonian captivity. The exile was not, however, a period without hope. The history of the exile, and God's sovereignty in the midst of it, became a reminder to first century Israel that God can determine events and leaders for His will.¹

Peter used this description to indicate where our true allegiance should lie. Since we are now primarily citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20), our ultimate authority is with God. Allegiance to Him requires us to keep ourselves from caving in to worldly and cultural temptations that are all around us.

Peter even pointed out that those temptations are not benign. Rather they are actively seeking our spiritual destruction!

In his book, *Atheism Remix*, Dr. Albert Mohler points out that the modern secular culture is not content to allow Christianity to co-exist alongside its naturalistic beliefs. Rather, it sees Christianity as "...a deadly toxin within the culture at large."² Peter's response to such an accusation and attack is found in verse fifteen: We should live in such a way that our life proves them wrong and silences their accusations.

Our civic witness leads to opportunities to share the good news of Jesus. Peter said your good deeds could lead to non-believers around you glorifying God (an echo of Jesus words in Matthew 5:13-16, which implies our living witness aids our evangelistic effectiveness). The Greek word use here for "honorable" is not the common word for "good," but rather a word that implies an attractiveness, "a goodness that commends itself to the beholder. It causes them to want it for themselves."³

While Peter does not mention it specifically here, we must remember that our civic witness is not the only witness people need. They also need the verbal witness of the Gospel. Romans 10:17 reminds us that faith comes by hearing the Gospel. Believers must speak the good news of Jesus as we display the living effects of that good news.

St. Francis of Assisi

St. Francis of Assisi is often attributed with saying "Preach the Gospel always. Use words if necessary." While this quote has a sound of piety, it is actually an awful description of evangelism. It is also not something St. Francis ever said or lived out. He was a man who was a devout follower of God, an incredible servant (meeting needs of those in poverty), and a strong evangelistic public preacher. His words were supported by his actions.⁴ How can believers be intentional about both sharing the verbal Gospel, but also demonstrating a life transformed by the Good News of Jesus?

Civic Obedience (2:13-15)

As we live out our gospel-affected lives in the midst of a broken society, situations will inevitably arise where our beliefs (biblical and preferential) do not align with what we see promoted by our government. We consider things such as certain taxes, laws, regulations, or prohibitions as being oppressive, wrong, or beyond the scope of the government's responsibilities. There may also be areas where we feel the government should be doing more to regulate or offer protections in certain areas.

In decisions that may go against our convictional preferences, but which do not violate biblical principles, Peter said to submit ourselves to the governing authorities. We must remember that Peter wrote this while living in a society governed by a ruling emperor who was considered to be a god. This is likely why Peter's language specifically addresses "human institutions." His point was that we are to submit to human governments, not institutions of false religion because institutions are in place by the will of God for the good of the people.⁵ Romans 13:3-4 tells us that the role of government is to justly deliver punishment and justice when necessary. This is not a promise that it will be distributed rightly, but simply that it is the purpose of the government.

Peter gave two reasons why we should live submissively under our authorities. The primary (which he mentioned second) is it is God's will that we should do so. In other words, submission to God is the primary motivation to submit to authorities. Living submissively means we are not unnecessarily disruptive to society. It means, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18), because this is God's will for us.

The second reason (which Peter mentioned first) is that our civic obedience brings honor to the name and reputation of God. I recently met a church planter who is living this out in the Northwest part of the United States, a place where only 5% of the population claim an evangelical faith. His church has intentionally engaged the local neighborhood government in a way that submits to their leadership while establishing their new local church. As they have served their community, the neighborhood leaders have come to realize the little church is a tremendous ally in making their community a better place. Consequently, they have asked the church to help them in connecting

new people to their neighborhood community, in essence asking the church to be community “missionaries” to help people connect. Their submissiveness to and availability for the local leaders has elevated the view of the church and, consequently, the reputation of Christianity and God in that area.

All believers, regardless of government type, can submit to their leaders while remaining effective witnesses to the goodness of God.

Civic Disobedience (2:16)

Peter emphasized in verse 16 that believers have a freedom in Christ, but that freedom does not free us from obeying the government. In other words, we cannot use our religious beliefs as an excuse to ignore or deny government’s authority. If we use our faith as grounds to ignore or disobey the government, then we are using our freedom, as Paul says, in a sinful way (Galatians 5:13).

However, an exception that often arises is when the governing body requires something that is clearly against the teachings of the Bible. When the government demands its citizens to do something that contradicts the Scripture, it is the duty of believers to humbly stand in opposition.

The Apostles give us an example in Acts 5:29 when, after being commanded not to teach about Jesus, Peter answered, “We must obey God rather than men.” Martin Luther King, Jr. identifies other similar biblical examples as civil disobedience. He wrote, “Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire.”⁶ King’s example, and the example of those he notes, demonstrates there is a time and a method for standing on the Word of God in opposition to unbiblical government mandates.

Baptist Civil Engagement

Baptists are active in humble, biblical, civil engagement, and have resources to both engage leaders and decision makers in the public square, and to equip believers with resources to help as they engage in their civic responsibilities. Texas Baptist's Christian Life Commission has a mission of being "agents of transformation, speaking to Texas Baptists rather than for them, equipping them to apply their faith to life in Ethical Conduct, Public Policy, and Community Ministry from a Biblical Perspective."⁷ The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has the goal of "engaging the culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ and speaking to issues in the public square for the protection of religious liberty and human flourishing."⁸

Civic Relationships (2:17)

Peter summed up the section with a summary of Christian citizenship. His first admonition was to respect everyone. For believers coming out of the "us vs. them" mindset of the first-century Judaism, this was a radical departure. They were used to, at best, tolerating people who were outside the Jewish community. This shows that regardless of the structure or norms of our society, we are expected to show all people the respect they are due as individuals created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

Second, Peter encouraged believers to love their fellow believers in the church, a repeat of his statement from 1:22 to "love one another earnestly from a pure heart." John tied love between believers with the authenticity of our love for God (1 John 4:20-21). Our deepest earthly affections should be found among the citizens of our Heavenly home because we are truly followers of the true King, and members of His own family (Romans 8:17).

Third, Peter instructed believers to fear God, the strongest of the terms used in the passage. To fear God brings to mind Proverbs 1:7, which, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." In the context, fearing God represents a complete understanding of who He is, what He has done, what He is capable of, and the respect, honor, and devotion motivated by these

truths. God is our ultimate authority, and worthy of supreme devotion, more so than our neighbors, our church family, or our civic leaders.

Finally, Peter told his audience to honor the emperor. It is worth noting that Peter did not place any qualifier on the honor. We do not honor our leaders because they are honorable people, because they deserve honor, or because we agree with the leadership. Honor is due because of the position they hold, and because this is the will of God (2:15).

This section effectively allowed Peter to extend us giving respect and honor to God and to every person with whom we come into contact. It is an excellent summary of the Greatest Commandment, which tells us to love God above all else, and love others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39).

Implications and Actions

When we live as good citizens of Heaven and earth, our witness is enhanced, and our God is glorified. We do not always have to agree with governing authorities, but we do have to respect them, as this is the will of God. Even when we disagree, our disagreements can be voiced in a way that shows honor. The hope of living in such a way is that our conduct will honor others and ultimately honor God, causing others to have a higher view of Him as well. Our actions can lead people to be open to, and hopefully receptive to, the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Questions

1. There are many influences in our world that make it difficult to live as representative citizens of Heaven. What influences are the most difficult to stand against, in order to be faithful to the Word of God?

2. In today's world, no matter where a Christian lives, he or she is probably at odds, in some way, with the governing authorities and their laws. How does the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) help us navigate our relationship with those with which we do not agree?

3. Have you ever engaged in or witnessed biblical civic disobedience? What biblical principles did you allow to guide you, or see someone else guided by?

4. In the public square, it seems very few people show any respect for those who disagree with them. Why is it so difficult to respectfully disagree and dialogue with others?

5. What do you believe is the greatest civic responsibility we have as believers? Why do you feel that way? Would this responsibility be applicable in any governmental situation?

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Marten Krijgsman, “Babylonian Exile,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos.
- ² Albert Mohler, *Atheism Remix* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 37.
- ³ Sam Storms, “1 Peter,” in *Hebrews-Revelation, ESV Expository Commentary Series*, Vol. XII, ed. Ian M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), Logos, 1P2:12.
- ⁴ Mark Galli, “Speak the Gospel: Use Deeds When Necessary,” *Christianity Today*, May, 21, 2009, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/mayweb-only/120-42.0.html>.
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- ⁷ “Christian Life Commission,” *Texas Baptists*, Accessed March 12, 2022, <https://www.texas-baptists.org/ministries/christian-life-commission>.
- ⁸ “About the ERLC,” *The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission*, Accessed March 12, 2022, <https://erlc.com/about/>.

lesson 6

The Ministry of Suffering

MAIN IDEA

As Christians we may not have any control over the suffering we face, but we do have the ability to control the way we react to suffering.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How do I react to my suffering?

STUDY AIM

To understand that Jesus is our pattern to react to suffering

QUICK READ

Jesus gave us the example of how to deal with suffering. He refused to strike back at those who hurt Him. He embraced the pain, and He turned His terrible suffering into the pearl of great price, our salvation.



Introduction

Christians in today's world often suffer at the hands of those who disagree with them. In cultures where there is a freedom of religion, that often comes from those who choose to deny the existence of any divine being. Believers are often ridiculed, misrepresented, and ostracized by atheistic and agnostic antagonists. In other cultures, where a state-sanctioned, non-Christian religion exists, or where Christian evangelism is outlawed, persecution exists that may even be encouraged by the state. In these situations, Christians face economic and physical persecution with no hope of legal recourse.

Jesus gave us the example of how to deal with suffering. He refused to strike back at those who hurt Him. He embraced the pain, and He turned His terrible suffering into the pearl of great price, our salvation. As believers, He is our model of how to deal with those who choose to cause us trouble because of our faith. Peter gave a brief treatise on the value of suffering, elevating the value of suffering in four views.

1 Peter 2:18-25

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Forced to Suffer (2:18, 1 Samuel 24:11-12)

When it comes to authors who wrote on suffering from their personal experience, few are more qualified than Richard Wurmbrand. His book, *Tortured for Christ* tells his experience of persecution at the hands of Communists following World War II. In one example, during one of his imprisonments, he writes, “It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners. It was understood that whoever was caught doing this received a severe beating. A number of us decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so we accepted [the communists’] terms. It was a deal; we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy.”¹

Wurmbrand on Suffering

Last week, we studied about Christian Citizenship, specifically how to submit even to immoral authorities. Wurmbrand gives an example of how to submit to authority, endure suffering for the sake of the Gospel, and how do it all with joy. He writes, “Often, after a secret service, Christians were caught and sent to prison. There, Christians wear chains with the gladness with which a bride wears a precious jewel received from her beloved.”² What is your attitude when people use their authority to try to stop your witness? How do you endure persecution for your faith?

What Wurmbrand experienced at the hands of the atheistic Communist regime in Romania, many still experience even today. We commonly hear stories about Christians being persecuted by religious extremists from other faiths, often while government leaders stand idly by.³ We also are used to hearing stories about modern day Communist societies, such as China, which create legal prohibitions against Christianity and other religions, sometimes even committing genocide based on religious prejudice.⁴ However, in today’s world, we are even beginning to see Christian persecution within nations with Christian foundations. In 2019, Finnish Parliament member Paivi Rasanen posted a tweet questioning the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland’s choice to be the official sponsor of a gay pride day, when its own doctrine is consistent with biblical teachings. Two years later, Rasanen, was

asked to recant by the police, and later prosecuted by the Finish Prosecutor General, who said it is acceptable to quote the Bible, but it is illegal to believe what it says.⁵

Christian suffering and persecution come from many different sources. We cannot control the sources of our suffering, but we can control the way we respond to those sources. In this first view of suffering, Peter told us to be respectful toward our authorities, even when those authorities are unjust and force suffering upon us. The Greek word for “respect” here is *phobos*, from which we get our word “fear.” Many verses in Scripture instruct us to “fear the Lord,” but Proverbs pairs that command toward the Lord with our attitude toward our authorities as well. Peter drew a similar distinction, having just told his readers to fear the Lord in verse 17, and now using the same word in reference to masters in verse 18. The point in both passages is that submission to authorities is linked to submission to God, not to an authority’s worthiness.

Encouraged to Suffer (2:19-20)

Suffering in faith is not without consequences. The negative consequences may be the most expected and the most obvious, but there are positive results as well. Peter told his readers that we experience grace when we endure suffering with our relationship with God in mind. In other words, when we are focused on Christ, enduring suffering draws us closer to Him. In this second view of suffering, Peter encouraged his readers to view suffering as a blessing not to be avoided.

Paul wrote in Romans 5:3-5, “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” He understood through his own experience that suffering is an important aspect of the Christian’s sanctification process. Just as the strain of a workout builds an athlete’s muscles, the strain of suffering builds character and Christlikeness in a believer.

Most western believers, having lived a life of relative ease, view suffering as something to be avoided. Yet, Wurmbrand, understood the value of suf-

fering in the life of a Christian. He wrote, “Persecution has always produced a better Christian—a witnessing Christian, a soul-winning Christian. Communist persecution has backfired and produced serious, dedicated Christians such as are rarely seen in free lands. These people cannot understand how anyone can be a Christian and not want to win every soul they meet.”⁶ Imagine, if you can, what would happen in the world if every believer saw suffering for Jesus as something to be embraced rather than something to be avoided?

Called to Suffer (2:21-23; Hebrews 12:2)

In the next few verses, Peter elevated the view of suffering not simply as something to be embraced, but as something we are called to. Believers are called to be like their Savior Jesus, who “For the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Tim Keller says, “Suffering is at the heart of the Christian story.”⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died a martyr for his faith, famously wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁸ These men capture what is a core element often forgotten in the Christian life: suffering is not optional. Jesus said, “In the world you *will* have tribulation” (John 16:33, emphasis mine). He also said, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me *cannot* be my disciple” (Luke 14:27, emphasis mine). He left no question about what it meant to follow Him.

Peter reminded us that believers are called to follow the example of their suffering Savior, even though our suffering may look much different. As Wurmbrand says, “Not all of us are called to die a martyr’s death, but all of us are called to have the same spirit of self-sacrifice and love to the very end as these martyrs had.” Jesus suffered with meekness and endurance, while entrusting his care to his Father, who is the “just and the justifier” (Romans 3:26). Believers can do the same, knowing they are answering the call to which they have been called by God.

Jesus Our Example

Peter described Jesus as our example to follow. The Greek word used here (and does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament) *hypogrammon* refers to a document or illustration belonging to a master that would have been reproduced by a student. It specifically referred to a stencil pattern that could be used to reproduce an exact copy.⁹ The picture is that Jesus is the master example of how to accept the call to suffer and how to endure the suffering. We, as His students (disciples), are expected to perfectly reproduce His example in our own lives. This is only possible by the grace of God, as the Spirit makes us more like Christ, and will only be fully realized when Christ returns. Peter's point here was that Christ's suffering is our example, and that our suffering is a tool of God's grace, used to help us be made into the image of His Son.

Perfected by Suffering (2:24-25)

Peter moved from suffering being forced upon us as believers, to encouraging us to endure it, to describing suffering as a calling from God. He finished with the reminder that suffering was required to win our salvation. Peter quoted from Isaiah 53, the messianic prophecy that the Messiah would suffer on behalf of the people, in order to bring them salvation. Jesus' wounds brought about our perfect, ultimate, and eternal healing.

This is the Gospel, the good news of Jesus. He suffered and died for us taking our sin, so we could gain His righteousness. This is the Gospel Paul spoke of in Romans 1:16-17, when he said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." Peter's summation points out the distinction between earthly suffering at the hands of earthly persecutors, and the spiritual redemption we receive from Christ. Even though we may suffer on earth, we are spiritually under the eternal protection of our Shepherd Savior, who willingly bore our sins.

Turning, one last time to Wurmbrand, he writes that Jesus gladly bore our sorrows on our behalf, and he adds, "If the only Man who ever could

choose His fate on earth chose pain, what great value He must have seen in it! So, we observe that, borne with serenity and joy, suffering redeems.”¹⁰ Just as Jesus’s suffering perfected us by His grace, the suffering He leads us to, and leads us through, helps us become more like Him.

The Good Shepherd

Shepherding was a core occupation of ancient near-eastern cultures, so it makes sense that shepherding is a motif often used to describe the relationship between people and their leaders. The idea of deities and kings as shepherds of their people has ancient roots in Judaism, and in cultures throughout Jewish history, such as Egypt, Babylon, and Rome.¹¹ In Ezekiel 34:15-16, God promised in the future He will tend His sheep and shepherd them. This links to Jesus’ words in John 10:11, that He is the Good Shepherd, who “lays down his life for the sheep.” His sacrificial act, and Peter’s explanation that through Jesus’ suffering, believers have returned brings Ezekiel’s prophecy to conclusion. The sheep are finally reunited with their Good Shepherd.¹²

Implications and Actions

Suffering is a fact of life, and for Christians, that suffering often comes because of our faith in Jesus. Rather than avoid or bemoan our persecution, we should endure it with joy, because we know that it is a part of the maturation process as we become more like Jesus. We become even more aware of the grace of God in our lives when we face the trials in His strength.

In today’s world, almost every culture functionally lives in opposition to Christian values and the people who hold them. That means we will face more and more persecution. It is wise for us to prepare our hearts and minds for those moments so we can face them with the guidance and protection of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. What types of persecution and suffering do you face on a regular basis? How have you responded in the past? How could you respond better?
2. How have you grown in your faith through suffering?
3. In what ways can we prepare our hearts and minds for suffering?
4. How does our Good Shepherd shield us from suffering or help us through suffering?

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books Co., 1998).
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Jeffrey Gettleman and Suhasini Raj, “Arrests, Beatings, and Secret Prayers: Inside the Persecution of India’s Christians,” *New York Times*, December 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/22/world/asia/india-christians-attacked.html>.
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- ⁶ Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ*.
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- ¹¹ Matthew Montonini, “Shepherd,” in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Berry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).
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lesson **7**

Marriage Made in Heaven

MAIN IDEA

Marriage is not a 50/50 proposition. It requires 100 percent from both partners.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Am I willing to make my marriage a priority?

STUDY AIM

To understand that every marriage that follows God's plan for marriage is a marriage made in Heaven

QUICK READ

The key to having a healthy marriage is to continue to learn how to be a better wife or husband. A marriage license is just a learner's permit.



Introduction

It is interesting how passages in the Bible that relate to marriage are often controversial. Peter and Paul both talked about wives submitting to their husbands. They both spoke to the men about honoring their wives with sacrificial care and concern.

We would all like to have a marriage made in Heaven, one that is perfectly blissful, like the end of a 20th century Disney cartoon. While that may be a fairy tale of the big screen, a marriage that is happy, healthy, and holy is definitely possible. The key to such a marriage is to focus on loving your spouse and fixing yourself. Why is it we often get those two things backward?

As we work through today's study, the body of the text will emphasize the truths of the passage and how they relate to both the men and women in a marriage relationship. Pay attention to the first sidebar, which addresses the topic of submission in marriage.

1 Peter 3:1-7

¹ Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ² when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵ For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

⁷ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

An Evangelistic Spouse (3:1-2)

In a survey asking the question, “What Person Led You To Faith In Christ?” Gary McIntosh gave seven categories to respondents from which to choose. Forty-three percent of respondents said they came to faith through a family member. The next two largest groups chosen were church staff members (17%) and friends (16%).¹ Obviously, family carries much more influence in someone’s spiritual life, and it is clear why: proximity. We spend more time with our family, so their viewpoints and conversations weigh heavily in our minds. When it comes to relationships, no connection (hopefully) brings us together more often than a marriage.

In this passage, Peter leaned into that relationship and encouraged women to live with their un-believing husbands in a way that would hopefully lead them to faith in Christ. Paul said the same in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, encouraging both husbands and wives to remain with their unbelieving spouses as an opportunity to influence their spouse and children to embrace faith. He concluded with the question, “For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”

Now, we may come to the conclusion that the believing spouse should take every opportunity to continually share the Gospel with the other. Peter did not picture that as the most productive practice. As one popular preacher once said, “No one was ever nagged into Heaven.” Peter pointed out the issue was that the unbelieving spouse did “not obey the word.” So, apparently more “words” is not the answer. But what is this word he was talking about?

Paul said, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the *word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17). Hearing and responding in faith to the Gospel is necessary for salvation. It is non-negotiable. Yet, Peter made clear that sometimes the simple word is not enough to convince someone. Yet, he said the word, plus an example of a life changed by that word, just might lead them to faith.

Submission in the Bible

The topic of submission is not the focus of this lesson, but it is obviously a major theme in today's passage. The Greek word *hupotasso*, "submit" or "obey," (in its noun and verb forms) is used twice to describe the wife to husband relationship. It is a combination of the words "arrange" and "under," and is the same word used by Paul in numerous passages where he instructed wives to submit to their husbands, and when he spoke of mutual submission in the church. In the Bible, submission is used in numerous contexts to designate a divine ordering of relationships and responsibilities. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul compared three different submissive relationships that are supposed to signify similar submission, one of which is Christ submitting to God. Obviously, Christ's submission to God the Father in no way diminishes His value within the Trinity, but rather delineates the roles of responsibility within the relationship.² The same can be said of the relationship between husband and wife.

An Authentic Spouse (3:3-4)

Peter next turned to how a woman fixes herself up. At first glance, it may appear that Peter was encouraging women to remain plain in their appearance, with plain hair styles, not wearing jewelry, and fancy clothes. The CSB provides some clarity by using the word "beauty" instead of "adornment." It helps the reader understand the focus is not on the items used to enhance beauty, but the actual presence of beauty in the person. The comparison is between the value of external and internal.

The Greek grammar ties the topic of beauty back to verse two's point of having "respectful and pure conduct." If we could reword this, we would see Peter's point was that women should seek to win the hearts of their husband by aspects of internal beauty, such as respect, purity, gentleness, and "a quiet spirit" (not brash in speech or a gossip). All of these things, Peter said, are precious in God's eyes.

It should come as no surprise that these things were encouraged by Peter and valued by God. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-con-

trol.” These spirit-empowered aspects of a believer’s life are the same that Peter said will be effective in a wife’s relationship to her unbelieving husband.

Of course, the fruit of the Spirit are not only to be seen in a woman’s life. They are supposed to be found in every believer’s life, whether male or female. Thus, we see here that Peter’s admonition to women can be just as applicable to men. Believers need to live lives of authentic faith in front of their spouse, so their spouse will hopefully begin desiring the same fruit for their own lives.

But, what about fixing yourself up? Was Peter actually prohibiting believers from being fashionable? Of course not. Consider Lydia, one of the founding members of the Philippian church. She was described in Acts 16:14 as a vendor of purple fabrics, an extremely expensive fabric at the time. In other words, she was in the middle of the fashion industry, and there is no indication that she left the industry. She allowed the Philippian church to meet in her home, which means she would have had to maintain her lifestyle and finances.³

Peter’s purpose in contrasting outward beauty and inward beauty is that outward beauty is fleeting. It is not a solid enough resource to employ in the attempt to win people to Christ. If a believer wants to dress well, then great! Someone who takes care of themselves is simply practicing good stewardship of the body God gave them. The goal is not to rely on your appearance to win favor with people. Live Godly lives before others and let that be what draws them to faith. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven.”

A Grounded Spouse (3:5-6)

Peter continued his discussion of a woman’s beauty to the way faithful women have been viewed. He highlighted “holy women,” and specifically mentioned Sarah, Abraham’s wife. It is likely he would have had other matriarchal women such as Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah in mind, although this cannot be known for certain. These women, Peter said, adorned themselves in the way’s he has been describing through submissions, respect, purity, gentleness, pleasant speech. He specifically mentioned when Sarah called Abraham

“lord” in Genesis 18:12, where she said, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” This was nothing other than a symbol of respect for Abraham, not a statement indicating she was subservient and he ruled over her.

Some of these women are famous for their beauty. Sarah was so beautiful Abraham feared kings would kill him to have her (Genesis 12, 20). Rebekah was so beautiful Isaac had the same fear and came up with the same lie (Genesis 26). Jacob desired Rachel enough to work for her for 14 years because she was so beautiful (Genesis 29). Leah, of all these ladies, is the only one not described by her outward beauty.

Leah

While Rachel was honored in the Old Testament narrative for her beauty and Jacob’s love, Leah’s honor came from God Himself in three ways: 1. He gave her children first and gave her more children. 2. Leah had the honor of being buried with the Patriarchs near Mamre (Rachel was not). 3. There was a moment where Leah understood her value truly came from God, not Jacob’s love. As she gave birth to her fourth son, she said, “This time I will praise the Lord” (Genesis 29:35). She named him Judah, which means “Praise Yahweh.” Of all twelve of Jacob’s sons from Rachel and Leah, it would be Judah—the one born when Leah focused on God rather than Jacob—through whom the Davidic dynasty and the Messiah would come.⁴

Yet, Peter’s focus was not on their outward beauty but their willingness to live within the divinely ordered roles in the family. He was highlighting the stories of the past because this grounded what he was instructing in the Hebrew Scriptures and history. In other words, he was grounding his argument on God’s Word and calling the women in his audience to ground their own conduct on the word of God as well.

Again, Peter gave a truth that is relevant for all believers. All of us, male and female, should ground our conduct on God’s plans, purposes, and designs revealed in the Bible. Both men and women of the Bible give us examples of that conduct. And if we live faithfully before God, then our testimony, like theirs, will show that we truly are children of God.

A Supportive Spouse (3:7)

This last point is truly a summation of the whole passage. Peter's whole discourse was about how men and women fulfill their divinely ordained roles in the marriage. In this final verse, Peter turned to the men. He instructed men to love their wives with understanding and honor, making it clear at this point that honor and respect are a mutual necessity in a marriage.

The word for understanding is *gnosin*, a form of the word *gnosis*, from which we get the word "knowledge." Peter was instructing men to live with wisdom, understanding, and a sense of reality. In other words, do not fantasize about what your wife could be. Love her for who she is, flaws and all... because isn't she doing the same?

Peter also instructed men to show honor to their wives because they are "the weaker vessel." Women are generally physiologically weaker, but Peter here likely also had in mind an intellectual weakness. This is not a slight to all women, but in his culture, women did not have access to the educational, societal, and occupational opportunities men had. Thus, their living situations were much less stable than their male counterparts. Thus, the husband is to care for his wife in her weaker situation because we are all equal in dignity in the family of God (Galatians 3:28).⁵

Showing Love

A 2019 article from The Gospel Coalition provided six ways for men to love their wives. Like Peter's admonitions, these ideas can go both ways.

1. Ask Good Questions
2. Serve Your Wife (or Husband)
3. Make Time for Your Marriage
4. Study Your Wife (or Husband)
5. Learn and Grow Together
6. Be Intoxicated in Her (or His) Love⁶

In today's culture, this admonition could go both ways when considering intellectual, economic, occupational, or political strength. Women have much the same opportunities as men do in many areas, and thus they may

find that, in the marriage relationship, they are the stronger “vessel” in certain areas. If so, then they should show the same care for their husbands that Peter mentioned here. Whatever the case may be, husbands and wives are supposed to live in such a way that they encourage and lift each other up in their mutually held faith.

Implications and Actions

A marriage relationship is strengthened by mutual faith, mutual respect, and mutual encouragement. In today’s lesson, we saw many ways spouses can encourage one another as they seek to love one another in a biblical way. And, while various responsibilities and roles exist in marriage for both husbands and wives, all of us are called to love each other in the same way.

Some, however, may find themselves in a situation where their spouse is not a believer. While it may be difficult, we are called to be a living testimony every day. Living out the good news of a changed life will hopefully encourage the unbelieving spouse to consider Christ.

Questions

1. Let’s talk about the elephant in the room: submission. Wives being submissive to their husbands is grounded in the biblical ordering of creation in the garden and is modeled after the submissive roles in the Trinity: Holy Spirit to Christ and Christ to God. How has sin marred the idea of biblical submission? How can Christian wives redeem the biblical view of submission in marriage? How can men live in a way that their wives are more excited to fulfill their complimentary role?

2. Peter grounded the instructions to live respectfully, in purity, gently, etc. not in our spouse's worthiness, but in God's own personal joy. Why is it so hard to live out these characteristics when your spouse does not reciprocate?

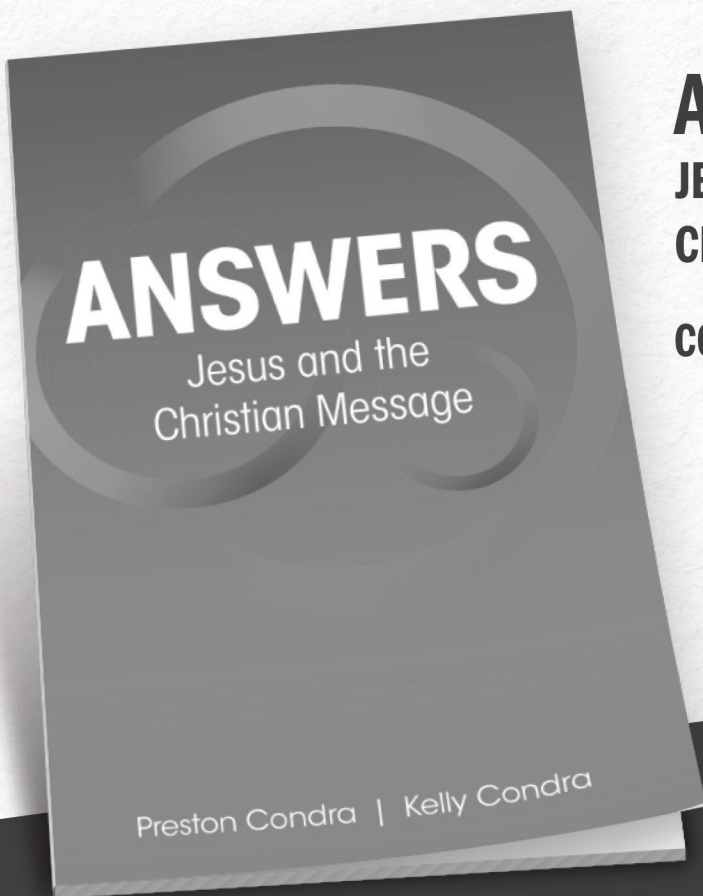
3. Proverbs 31:30 says, "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." Why is it difficult, in our culture, for both women and men to live a life that seeks the approval of God rather than living to seek the approval of the world? How can we combat the pressure to find our value in other people's approval?

4. What does your spouse do (or what are things you hope your future spouse will do) that make you feel loved, appreciated, and valued? How do you reciprocate those things?

5. How has your spouse impacted your spiritual growth?

ENDNOTES

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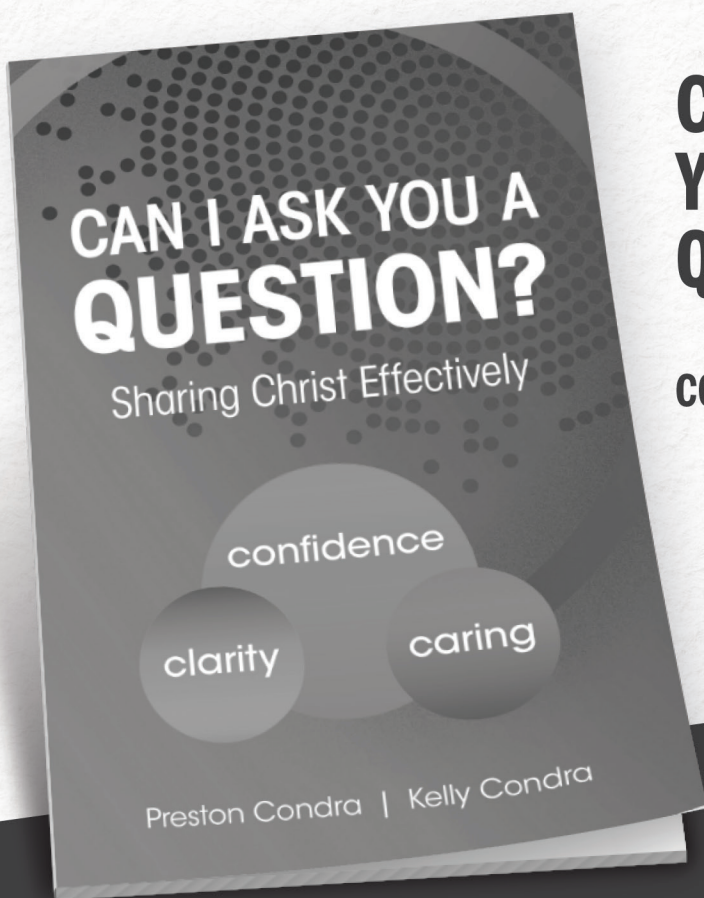


ANSWERS

JESUS AND THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

COST: \$13.⁰⁰

The Gospel of Christ is a message which claims to save from damnation those who believe it. The Christian message purports to reveal the Savior, Jesus Christ, what He did and why, how salvation is gained, and where to find reliable information about it. The Gospel, however, is widely doubted, disputed, and denied. Using Bible verses, *Answers: Jesus and the Christian Message* addresses objections to the Gospel and allows Christianity's source book to speak for itself.



CAN I ASK YOU A QUESTION?

COST: \$13.⁰⁰

Christians commonly express concerns regarding evangelism. *Can I Ask You a Question?* is an evangelism handbook that solves the barriers Christians face in sharing the Gospel of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 provides **clarity** regarding what to say. The Index of Objections quickly directs users to Bible verses to answer objections with **confidence**. The companion book, *Asking the Question*, helps Christians develop **caring** ways to initiate “no-pressure” evangelistic conversations. By relying on what God says about salvation, every Christian can be an effective evangelist!

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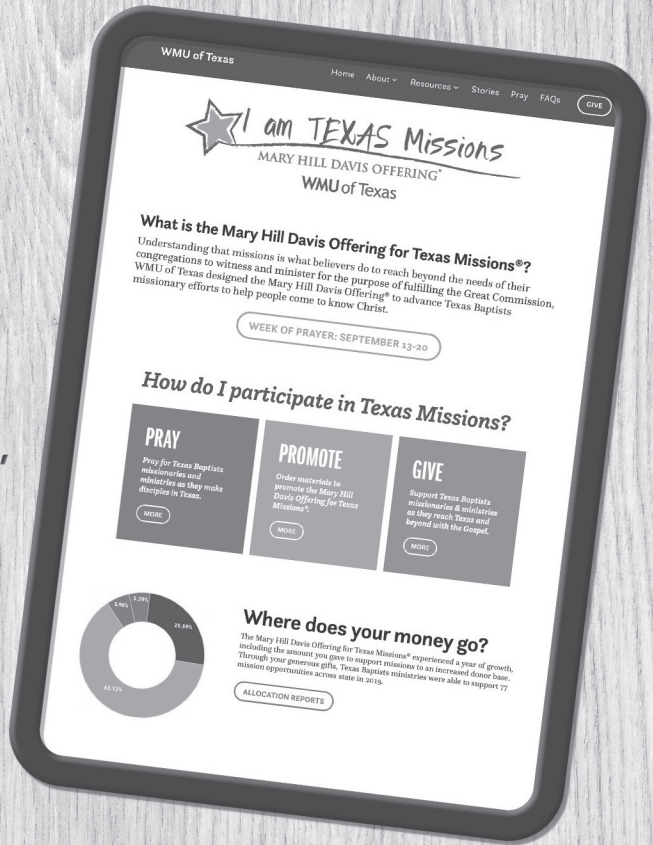



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lesson 8

Hope When Life Is Unfair

MAIN IDEA

God tells us that sometimes we can do everything right and we will still experience suffering.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is Jesus Lord over my tough circumstances?

STUDY AIM

To understand life is not fair, but God is good

QUICK READ

It is human tendency to “fear the worst.” When we are going through difficult times, the enemy tries to sabotage our minds to think the worst. But we must realize that painful circumstances in our lives can produce positive results and can give us a wonderful opportunity to share our hope.



Introduction

Randy and Roberta were on a mission trip to India with a group from their church. They had made this trip many times before. The team would minister to children in a small school and offer basic medical treatment to people living in impoverished communities. Exhausted from the eighteen-hour flight, the team began making their way through customs. As usual, each person in the group had an extra bag filled with medicines and school supplies that were difficult to find in the poorer parts of India. The first few missionaries made it through without incident, but on Randy and Roberta's turn, the customs agents were more inquisitive.

One agent asked Roberta, "What is all this medicine for?" Exhausted from the flight and frustrated from the hold up, Roberta curtly remarked that they were brought to share the love of Jesus. Immediately, the agents gathered up their bags and ushered the couple down numerous hallways and stairwells into a small room in the basement of the airport. By this point, Randy and Roberta were growing more and more frightened. "Are you Christians?" one agent asked abruptly. "Yes, we are Christians," Roberta responded. The agents then asked for names of those with them, the names of those they were visiting, and the names of the organizations that they represented. Finally, the agents told the couple that their visas were being denied and they were to board a plane returning to the U.S. They were no longer welcome in India. "We were treated terribly all because we were Christians," Roberta would later say when recounting the story to her home church.

Sometimes, as Christians we are surprised when suffering and difficulty creep into our lives. Especially in Western culture, we have grown accustomed to certain advantages the title Christian might afford. Yet, God's Word reveals to us that suffering comes even to those who live good and holy lives. In this lesson, we find that in painful and challenging circumstances, a testimony of hope can shine forth for all to see.

1 Peter 3:8-17

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Hunger for Holy Relationships (3:8-12)

Peter began this section of his letter with the word "finally" (3:8). He was likely concluding his central argument for "living good lives among the unbelievers" established earlier in the letter (2:11-12). In the first few verses of our reading, Peter offered a thumbnail sketch for holy living within a community.

It is challenging to live holy lives as individuals, but adding others into the mix makes living holy, godly lives nearly impossible. The many personalities, preferences, wants, and needs vying for attention within community is like a tinder box ready to ignite. If, as believers, we leave a trail of broken relationships and traumatic encounters in our wake, the hope of a Christ-formed life and community is unrecognizable. Yet, many times we avoid taking responsibility and allowing God to shape our relationships, instead we blame God or others for bad circumstances perpetuating a toxic environment that overshadows hope in Christ.

How to Have Holy Relationships (1 Peter 3:8)

- Harmony—being of one mind is the common call for unity in early church evidenced throughout the epistles. (Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:2)
- Sympathetic—attuned to the needs, troubles, and joys of others.
- Brotherly love—common term in the epistles pointing to the church body as “family.” (Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:9)
- Compassionate—attending to the needs and hurts of others.
- Humble—putting the needs, troubles, and joys of others before our own.

The church is to be the place where holy, Christ-formed relationships are experienced and evident. This experience, then, overflows into the surrounding community and others experience these wholly different relationships. By not repaying insult for insult or evil for evil, believers testify to a different kind of living to which the world is unaccustomed. Each and every time a Christ-follower chooses to bless others, even others who curse and insult, the cycle of hurt and trauma is broken. God’s call to be a blessing to others goes all the way back to Abraham. God promises to bless Abraham so all people will be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). In Christ, we as believers have inherited this blessing and promise as we live out our faith as Abraham did. Peter made clear the blessing of salvation inherited through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is meant to benefit all the world.

“Blessing,” in verse 9, is the Greek word, *eulogountes*, akin to the English word eulogy. If you have ever attended a funeral, you may have noticed that the eulogy is usually a favorable, gracious word about the person who has passed. Similarly in Scripture, “blessing” is customarily viewed as God’s Word of favor or grace spoken over someone. Peter contended that the blessing one has in relationship with God should overflow into all earthly relationships instead of with words of insult and evil as is the custom of this world. When God’s people bless others, regardless of how we are treated, we live as evidence of God’s blessing. Nevertheless, living according to this blessing is no guarantee against suffering.

Suffering for What Is Right (3:13-14)

One cold morning, a pastor and church member were driving to the hospital to visit a sick friend. Shivering, the passenger asked the pastor if he could turn on the seat warmer. Jokingly the pastor replied, “I did not get the seat warmer package. Sometimes we just have to suffer for Christ.”

Peter seemed to be joking as well when he asked who would harm a person for doing good? But the recipients of this letter in Asia Minor were likely suffering tremendous persecution. They were being treated horribly by others simply because of their faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some of them eventually fell away from the faith and others responded to ill-treatment in kind. But Peter exhorted those who are living right and holy lives in the face of unfair suffering with the claim, “you are blessed.” (3:14).

Suffering unfairly is one of the hardest lessons for us as Christians to learn. We are always looking for the easier way. We want to “have our cake and eat it, too.” Yet, suffering is always a possibility for the Christian life. As one of Jesus’ disciples, Peter knew first-hand what it looked like to suffer unfairly. Peter not only watched as Jesus suffered unfairly, but he also joined in with curses and insults when his own comfort was threatened (Mark 14:71). Furthermore, by the time Peter wrote this letter, he was likely in a Roman prison for preaching the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. He had learned that the call to a holy, righteous life can include unfair suffering.

We often want to pull back from living holy lives when the threat of suffering seeks to disrupt our comfort. Living right is hard enough on its own but adding in the insults and suffering brought about by those living according to worldly standards is hard to swallow. Peter seemed to tell us that when we live good and holy lives, yet are treated unfairly, we are on the right path, the same path Jesus walked. “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you...because of Me ... For your reward in heaven is great” (Matthew 5:11-12). We do not desire this suffering, but we do not fear suffering as the rest of the world does because the holy path, we walk leads to a greater reward than this world has to offer.

In the early church context, it was common for unbelievers to intimidate Christians with insults and other evil. Living holy lives would have been like gathering moths to a flame. Peter reminded believers that God’s blessing

will always trump worldly intimidation. The blessing believers inherit as we live right and holy lives cannot be taken away or thwarted by people. This is not to advocate a works-based system, yet there is a tie between faith and good works throughout the New Testament. We cannot earn God's grace, but those who have received the gift of grace through Jesus Christ are always prepared to give an answer for the hope we have.

Living as a Defense for Hope (3:15-17)

Life can be unfair; yet we stand ready to tell others about our hope in Jesus. When Christ is Lord of our lives, we set Him apart with reverence in every circumstance. **In times of suffering, who or what a person depends on becomes evident for all to see.** We should quickly recall those experiences when Jesus has comforted and strengthened us in times of trouble. And we must always be ready for the opportunity to share and show others how Jesus can bring them comfort and strength.

APOLIGETICS: Giving a Defense Without Being Defensive

Apologetics is a term you may have heard. Its use is becoming more and more common in Christian circles. The word "answer" (NIV) or "defense" (NASB) in verse 15 comes from the Greek *apologia*. In Greek culture, this word is often used in legal matters where one gives a defense for one's actions. The practice of apologetics, then, is to give a defense for one's faith. However, apologetics does not mean to give an apology (a different word) for the faith or to become defensive or argumentative when one's faith is under attack. Christians are to be prepared to give an answer to the questions the world does not even know how to ask. How have you responded when your faith was questioned? For more info on apologetics, check out <https://christianapologetics101.com>.

Hope seems like an odd word for Peter to use here in verse 15. Why did he not use the word faith? He is obviously pointing back to the inherited blessing referenced earlier (3:9). Any current suffering pales in comparison to

the greater reward we hope for and anticipate in Heaven. The hope, therefore, is in Christ as the fulfillment and evidence of God's expected promise. The gamble of this unseen promise (or faith as we call it) is surprising and hard to swallow by unbelievers who may respond with insult. Especially if doubt is met with similar insult by the believer. However, when doubt is met with gentleness and patience, some may ask for an explanation for this hope we possess.

In the end, Peter claims it is better to do good now, even if it leads to suffering, for greater is God's blessing to come. This is obviously a reminder of God's final judgment for all. Good conduct identifies God's righteousness at work in the believer. Even in suffering, God's will is working. Not that God desires anyone to suffer, but as is evident in Christ's suffering, God's will can produce good out of tough circumstances (Romans 8:28). Therefore, we suffer for the Gospel, but our hope is in Him, and His will being done.

Implications and Actions

Living out the Gospel is to give public proclamation of Christ's work in you, this is the hope you have in times of joy and times of suffering. Even when others insult you and life seems unfair, God is for you. You are blessed. Why endure suffering? Because Christ suffered for you, bringing about the blessing of God's grace in unfair circumstances. When we choose to hunger for holiness in circumstances that may be painfully unfair, we give testimony to a hope far greater than anything the world can find apart from Jesus Christ.

Questions

1. Who has encouraged you to live more like Christ? In what ways did they inspire you to live more holy?

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2. Peter used the words harmony, sympathy, compassionate, and humble to describe how we should relate to others. What words would describe how you relate to others?

 3. Has God's will ever included challenging circumstances in your own life? Share this testimony with the group.

 4. Have you ever been defensive regarding your faith? What about a time when you were gentle in sharing your faith?

lesson 9

The Just for the Unjust

MAIN IDEA

Every person must consider facing the floodwaters of God's judgment against sin. Noah was safe in the ark, and when we are in Christ, we are safe.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Does baptism demonstrate my faith?

STUDY AIM

To understand that Jesus is the ark who delivers us through the waters of God's judgment

QUICK READ

Noah listened, obeyed, and trusted God. Noah was not saved by the ark, he was saved by faith, the same way you and I are saved.



Introduction

There is nothing like a clear conscience. One time while out shopping with my family at a large wholesale club, my three-year-old son picked up a pop-up book without notice. As we were loading the car my older, college-age son exclaimed, “We didn’t pay for the book!” Frazzled from the whole shopping experience, I simply responded that it did not matter. My adult son’s jaw dropped at my words. “How can you say it does not matter? You constantly tell us that what we do matters. You do all this ministry at our church, but stealing does not matter?” In a moment, my witness for Christ had been tarnished.

In his letter, the Apostle Peter reminded us that what we do and say matters. It matters to other believers, to non-believers, and it matters to God. Yet no matter how hard we try to do the right thing; we falter and end up failing to live up to these expectations. Our conscience is tarnished.

The path of righteousness is marked with such sufferings. Not because God requires anyone to suffer but because the powers of this world will not allow anyone to escape untarnished. Thus, we are left to wonder how God will judge our missteps. Thanks be to God that our right standing before Him is not based on our own accomplishments or abilities but by the triumph of Christ Jesus, through His death and resurrection that we find deliverance through the waters of God’s judgment.

1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Salvation for the Unrighteous (3:18-20a)

Like so many before us, our attention is drawn to a few odd statements made by Peter in this text. First, however, we must clearly understand that Peter's purpose was to remind those who are suffering that Christ also suffered. If you have ever suffered in life, you are in good company. Everyone suffers at some point of their life. But for the believer, there is no need to fear suffering. The path to glory, or God's righteousness, is marked with suffering. There are, of course, different degrees of suffering some will face, but Peter reminded his readers that Jesus suffered unto death. Yet God, by the Holy Spirit, brought Jesus to life giving Him victory over death.

Jesus painfully suffered and died. His suffering was intense beyond anything we could imagine. The pain Jesus experienced should be ever in front of the believer. Righteousness has a cost; a cost we cannot afford but was paid for us. The uniqueness of Jesus' death is that it was "once for all" (3:18a). We see in Christ's suffering and death, God's deliverance of the unrighteous. Jesus lived a perfect life, free from sin, and was righteous before the Father (2:21-22). Yet He suffered and died so all imperfect, tarnished humanity would have the opportunity to draw close to God.

This great chasm that separates God and humanity, the righteous and the unrighteous, has been bridged by Christ's suffering and death. But God did not stop there. In the midst of suffering, the Spirit of God acted, bringing life out of death. Though the cross may have bridged the chasm between God and humanity, it is by the power of the resurrection we are able to walk across.

It is by this same power in the Holy Spirit that Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison (3:19-20a). This odd statement has created centuries of debate. Where did Jesus go to preach and who or what are the spirits in prison? St. Augustine supposed Jesus went all the way back to preach through Noah to those caught in sin about to die under the floodwaters, especially the "Nephilim" (Genesis 6:4). Others held that Jesus went back to preach freedom to the faithful who died long before He came to earth or to the sinners who did not get the chance to believe. The most popular theory reasons that through His death and resurrection, Jesus proclaimed judgment over evil spirits and powers. Supporters of this theory add that Peter made a similar statement in his second letter (2 Peter 2:4).

While we should welcome hearty discussion about Scripture with others, we should also be careful not to miss the forest for the trees. This mysterious statement by Peter was not his main point. If the context is Christ's victory in the face of suffering, then the powers of this world or the fallen powers of other worlds or realms have no say, no proclamation over Him. As the crucified and risen Lord, Jesus proclaims victory over all who are shackled and enslaved.

Could the Nephilim Be the Spirits in Prison?

The Nephilim have been a hot topic throughout Ancient Hebrew literature. However, we find the term only twice in the Bible. In Numbers 13:33, these "descendants of Anak" were like giants to the spies in the land of Canaan. While Genesis 6:4 claims the Nephilim were heroes of old that joined with daughters of men inciting God's judgment in the ensuing flood. The word Nephilim is related to the Hebrew word that means "to fall."¹ Thus, the "fallen one's" were a mysterious, powerful group that lived long before the flood and even after according to the Genesis and Numbers accounts. We find references to them popping up in ancient Hebrew writings other than the Old Testament, which could have been known to Peter. Similarly, Jude 6 contains another odd reference to fallen angels bound in chains that some believe are these same Nephilim.

For Peter to mention "those who disobeyed long ago," signifies the enormity and lasting effects of sin and God's resulting judgment on, not only the world, but even the heavenly realms. Yet in the face of all this suffering, God's patience is fully displayed. Once again, it is difficult to interpret Peter's meaning behind God's patient waiting (3:20a). Was he claiming God was patient with the spirits who disobeyed? Additionally, that Christ's proclamation to these spirits was in the hopes that they might repent and submit to Jesus as Lord of all? Instead, could Peter have been setting up the illustration of Noah and the ark as it relates to God's patience displayed through faithful people like Noah? Or is it that in both cases of deliverance, Jesus and Noah, God's judgment was slow to come in the face of suffering? We have no definitive, clear answer to Peter's meaning in these odd statements, but we do find a

clear path forward: In the midst of suffering, God saved Noah just as God saves you and me.

Security in Suffering (3:20b-21)

Peter continued to remind us of God's faithfulness to Noah. As God's judgment was poured out upon the whole world, Noah and his family were delivered through the ensuing floodwaters. Many died in judgment, but only a few were delivered carrying forward the righteousness of God (Hebrews 11:7). Many choose to live their lives today on their own terms hoping that suffering never comes.

There is coming a day when all will face God's judgment. Just as Noah and his family found safety and security on the ark, we find safety and security in Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and our deliverance comes only through Him (John 14:6). It is alarming, however, that the same waters that bring God's judgment upon the many who resist Him, are the same waters that establish God's salvation for those who receive Him. In Noah's time of suffering, the floodwaters were at once the vehicle of judgment and the circumstance of salvation.

Case Study

Maddie and Brandy were having coffee one day when Maddie began to describe her struggles with her faith. "How can I trust a God who wiped out the whole earth in a flood?" She went on to share about her recent cancer diagnosis and what her husband and young children would do if the worst happened. Brandy tried to console and encourage her friend that God would see her through, but Maddie's fear in the current crisis was overwhelming. How can we share with others that God is both a God of mercy and judgment? Is this important to understand in our faith journey?

Peter could not help but tie this act of deliverance through the floodwaters to the believer's baptism. In the act of baptism, one is submerged under the floodwaters, symbolizing death, then delivered unto new life carrying

forward the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4). It is not the water that judges or saves us, but it symbolizes God's deliverance and provision when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. Also, we do not use the baptismal water to scrub ourselves clean from the dirt and filth of this world. We do, however, recognize and identify with Christ's suffering and death as we proclaim His righteousness already at work in us. In baptism, we publicly submit to Jesus' continued work in and through us as well as our security in salvation no matter what sufferings we may face.

Peter further pointed to a connection between "baptism that now saves" and "the pledge of a clear conscience toward God" (3:21c). The original Greek statement, once again, makes translation difficult. Some have taken this to mean that baptism is required for salvation. However, Peter pointed to a pledge or appeal of a clear conscience that identifies one who has already found life through the resurrected Jesus Christ. It is often said that baptism is the outward action of an inward change. Baptism serves as a covenant promise between us and God. Most Baptist churches practice public baptism as way of involving the church community in this promise, so we all take seriously the responsibility to encourage and help disciple the new believer. God promises security, and we promise to live together proclaiming the Gospel—God's glory evidenced in the suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even in judgment, those of good conscience are secure but those who slander will be ashamed (3:16).

Supremacy of Christ (3:22)

For Jesus, the Son of God, to suffer is hard for many to accept. The Greco-Roman culture that surrounded the recipients of Peter's letter believed that gods do not suffer but inflicted suffering upon humans. The Gospel message of Jesus' suffering and eventual death in order to bring humanity closer to God the Father would have been preposterous to those living in this culture. Proclaiming this belief brought ridicule, shame, and persecution upon these Christians throughout Asia Minor. Peter encouraged them to stand firm in the face of suffering and evil.

Jesus suffered for a time, but His victory is far greater. He now stands at the right hand of God, in power, assuring all those who suffer for His sake

victory as well. The ascension of Jesus calls us to trust God's plan far above anything we might depend on in this world and that any suffering we may face, pales in comparison to Christ's own suffering. Any victories we can experience, are only a taste of what Christ has in store for us. All who suffer on the path to follow Jesus can expect to be lifted up and exalted with Christ as well. Suffering leads to victory, but all who doubt or put to shame those who suffer with Christ will one day be put to shame themselves.

Implications and Actions

Even in our suffering, Jesus reigns. When things are darkest, when floodwaters are highest, God's deliverance and salvation are at hand. Even in judgment, those with a good and clear conscience, brought by the grace of God in the power of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, need not fear. The victory has been won. Jesus stands at the right hand of God. Proclaim His name. Tell the world of His glory in the hopes that some may still be saved.

By the way, I did go back and pay for the pop-up book. How grateful we are for the people in our lives who encourage us to live by the faith we profess in good conscience.

Questions

1. How has remembering Jesus' own suffering encouraged you in times of crisis? Share about a time when your story encouraged someone else in the faith?

2. Have you ever felt like your questions about difficult Bible passages were dismissed or ignored? Did you give up on these questions or strive to find answers?

3. Have you ever been dismissive of others who had difficult questions? Why did you dismiss their question?

4. If you have been baptized, do you remember this event? How has your own baptism affected your faith? How has your public proclamation affected your friends or family? Do you feel comfortable explaining baptism to people who have never been baptized?

5. How do you feel knowing Jesus stands at the right hand of God advocating for you?

ENDNOTES

¹ Joseph L. Trafton, "Nephilim," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 253.

lesson 10

Love Covers It All

MAIN IDEA

Our job is to work, preach, and pray with a sense of urgency.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Who do I know that needs my love and my prayers?

STUDY AIM

To understand that we should give our lives away to others in God's strength

QUICK READ

Pray like never before because God's clock is winding down. Show love to others so deeply that you welcome strangers into your life.



Introduction

Living pure and holy lives in an impure world is sure to bring notice. Strange looks, questions about certain behaviors, even targeted insults and ridicule are sure to come from those that live according to the patterns of this world. However, the faithful follower of Jesus should strive to serve, preach, and pray in preparation for Christ's return for He could come at any moment. In God's strength, live out love for those around us knowing that judgment is coming for all.

In the fourth chapter of his first letter, Peter addressed how challenging it can be to live as a stranger in a strange land and to love those who live counter to the holiness of God. It is with the same attitude of Christ that we stop wasting time with worldly living and love one another deeply according to the will of God. In this lesson, we will seek to discover ways to love and pray for those around us who are in need.

1 Peter 4:1-11

¹ Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. ² As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴ They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If any-

one serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Wasted Time With Worldly Living (4:1-3)

Peter began this section summarizing his previous statements regarding the suffering of Jesus Christ and the blessing that comes to the unrighteous through Him (3:18-22). He claims that “since Christ suffered in his body” (4:1), the righteous dying for the sins of the unrighteous (3:18), those who follow Christ should be done with sin too. Believers, thereby, should resolve themselves to the fact that following Jesus involves suffering and pain. Dying to sin and living a new life in Christ can be a painful experience.

Dying to self, to our old way of life and surrendering to God’s will, a new way to live, is not easy. In fact, Jesus told His disciples that in order to follow Him, they must deny themselves and take up the cross daily (Luke 9:23). This instrument of suffering is required for the new way of living so we can have power over the sinful, old way of living. When we submit to suffering and arm ourselves with the attitude of Christ, the power of sin has no hold upon us. For the One who overcame sin has shown us the way to live for the will of God rather than evil human desires.

We know this is no perfect life. Sin and temptation still creep into those dark corners we have yet to sacrifice to God, but anyone who takes on the attitude of Christ is sure to live differently than unbelievers. Peter reminded believers of the old life in the hopes they will see a marked difference, a before and after picture of their life. The list Peter offered includes some general sins as well as particular sexual sins that come from drunkenness and carousing. These accusations may have made the recipients of this letter a bit uncomfortable to hear. Often, letters written by the Apostles or other church leaders, would be read aloud to a small gathering that made up the church. He addressed what most of the members who came from a pagan, Greco-Roman culture had experienced prior to becoming a Christian. These practices were not only acceptable but expected by those outsiders who made up the community at large.

Living out fleshly desires and sowing wild oats was part of their culture and was often tied to pagan religious ceremonies and “unlawful idolatry” (4:3). But Peter concluded that, for the believer, this old way of living is over. Instead, Christians are to be hungry for holiness, which may seem strange to those living according to worldly ways.

CASE STUDY

Kellie spent a few weeks wrestling with the request to be a new small group leader for young adults at her church. Finally, she decided to turn down the opportunity. She said, “Most of my business is conducted around certain social functions that some church members might question. I just cannot give this up at this time. Maybe in a few years when my business improves, I will reconsider.” In what ways has God called you to sacrifice something of this world in order to live for Him? How would you respond to Kellie?

Stranger Things (4:4-7)

Abnormal behavior, according to Peter, is the life that does not participate in the patterns of this world. There is to be a marked difference, for the Christian, from the old life and the new. The lifestyle of the Christ-follower is counter-cultural. This new, Christ-inspired behavior can surprise those living according to the ways of this world, especially those that knew us before we became a Christian. These changed values bring strange looks and even insults and abuse by some.

I spent one summer coaching my son’s T-ball team. I did not know much about T-ball, but I was a warm body that could at least keep the boys running toward the right base. During one particular game, our head coach was getting more and more angry. His profanity was getting louder and more frequent as the game progressed. At one point, I pulled him aside and said that he was getting out of hand and keeping our integrity in front of the boys was more important than winning. For the rest of the season, he would refer to me as “Mr. Integrity” and ask if his behavior was appropriate for a T-ball coach.

Being known as Mr. Integrity or Ms. Goody-two-shoes is a minor form of abuse or persecution for holy living. But make no mistake, living counter to this world will make you a target. Nevertheless, holiness is essential for living as a stranger in a strange land. Many people wonder why we would choose to suffer through holy living rather than live according to our own desires. To join the “flood of dissipation” is much easier than struggling to live a holy life according to God’s will. This social separation likely leads to social isolation. Participating in the old way of living made us part of the community. But now, in Christ, we become a target, a social outcast.

Baptist Heritage

Contemporary Baptists often take for granted religious liberties afforded in the West. However, in the seventeenth century, Baptists suffered tremendous persecution for religious convictions. John Murton, a Baptist minister, suffered imprisonment in London for preaching against state-sponsored, socially accepted religious liberties. He advocated, instead, for religious freedom for all. From his prison cell, Murton continued to encourage his church members and stand by his convictions with secret writings. He wrote with milk on crumpled paper used as a stopper on the milk jugs. The jugs were then smuggled out of the prison and the paper was browned over a candle to reveal his work entitled, *A Humble Supplication*.¹ Have you ever had to take an unpopular stand for your religious convictions?

It can be tempting to form a new community that is separated from worldly living. Christians, especially in the West, can isolate themselves from those who live differently even to the point of perpetuating their own abuses on outsiders. In his book, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling*, John Stott reminds us how to live as strangers in a strange world. “We are neither to seek to preserve our holiness by escaping from the world nor to sacrifice our holiness by conforming to the world.”²

Peter contended that all must give an account at the final judgment for the way we live. This new life in Christ may threaten social advances and worldly rewards but the future rewards by God through Christ are far greater. We often fear living holy lives because of the favor and privileges we stand to

lose. No longer will we be able to sit at the cool kids table, but we might have to eat lunch alone deemed the “weird girl” or “Mr. Integrity.” But for Peter, setting aside a new life in Christ and the future reward that goes along with it in order to be socially accepted is hardly a fair trade-off.

Some argue, however, that in the end we all die. So, what is the point in living a holy life? Why not just have fun and enjoy life? This is likely the point Peter was countering in verse 6, that even those who die a physical death find hope in the resurrection and life in Christ. Just as we see in Christ’s suffering, suffering in this body is not the end for the believer but great is the reward for those who live according to God. Judgment by God is far more important than judgment according to people especially with the end so near.

Living with the judgment in mind is to be ever in front of the believer. Peter carried on the theme of judgment into verse 7. Throughout the New Testament, judgment was most often discussed in an effort to encourage believers toward godly living rather than to induce fear. I have a close friend who, as a child, was deeply troubled after her church showed a movie predicting what could happen during end-times apocalypse. Now, as an adult, she is overwhelmed with anxiety and fear when someone mentions the return of Jesus. Peter’s desire was for believers to be “alert and of sober mind” as they live, prayerfully, with the end in mind (4:7). When we pray, we demonstrate our reliance on God in all ways and all circumstances.

Loving Others With the End in Mind (4:8-9)

When everything we know is coming to an end, Peter called us to pray and prioritize love. He used the Greek, *agape*, which means a gracious, sacrificial love. This Christ-like love is the foundation and covering of our lives. Sacrificial love protects, sustains, strengthens, and “covers over a multitude of sins” (4:8).

What did Peter mean by the statement in verse 8, “love covers a multitude of sin?” Was Peter referring to God’s love for the believer in the time of judgment? Or was Peter admonishing the believer to love others, even unbelievers, as the judgment approaches? There are many differing views regarding this verse, but it is plain to see that forgiveness was Peter’s focus. Christ-like, sacrificial love reaches past sin and offenses in order to transform

hearts. This love does not pay back evil for evil or insult for insult but proclaims God's blessing for all who are far away.

Offering undeserved and unwarranted love is not the same thing as ignoring sin but instead, understanding that two wrongs do not make a right. The writer of Proverbs encouraged this kind of love long before Peter. "Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers all wrongs" (Proverbs 10:12). Peter trusted that as the end draws near, God will handle judgment. It is God's people who exemplify lives covered by a love so gracious that it has changed the way we speak, serve, and care for others.

Hospitality is a practical expression of this sacrificial love in the life of the believer as we relate to others. Hospitality, or welcoming the stranger, has long been a hallmark of God's people. (See Genesis 18; Leviticus 19:33-34; Hebrews 13:2.) Yet Peter added that believers should serve in this way without complaining. A grandfather once said regarding his grandchildren, "We love to see our little angels come to visit, and we love to see those little devils go home." Hospitality can get wearisome in the best of circumstances. Caring for others without grumbling, on the other hand, is a visible act of sacrificial, Christ-like love.

Using Gifts Responsibly (4:10-11)

Peter concluded this section of his letter with a very brief discussion of spiritual gifts. He did not offer a full list of gifts as found elsewhere in the Epistles but included the more general categories of speaking and serving gifts offered in ministry to others (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:9-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11). These gifts are not to be held back for personal gain but faithfully offered, in hospitality, for the benefit of others. To be good stewards with the different gifts God has given is a responsibility rather than a right or privilege. This is how we live with the end in mind. Serving others in God's strength becomes the privilege. In His love that covers all, we humbly speak God's Word rather than our own. This responsibility is no longer a burden to suffer when it is lived out in God's strength and for His glory, all with the end in mind.

Implications and Actions

When the faithful follower of Jesus strives to serve, preach, and pray in preparation for Christ's return, we begin to lovingly endure suffering. In God's strength, we live out His love for those around us. We know that even in judgment, God's love covers it all for those who have placed their faith in Jesus. Live this life committed to speaking God's Word and walking in His strength that all may know Jesus and praise Him on the day of His return.

Questions

1. What strange Christian behaviors have non-Christians noticed about you?
2. If you had one day to live, what would you say to people? Would you say something different to those you love versus acquaintances? What would you say to your coworkers, neighbors, or classmates?
3. How do you feel when thinking about "the end of all things?" (fear, anxiety, confidence, concerned for someone else)

4. In what ways does your church or small group offer hospitality to those in need? What are some other opportunities for hospitality (welcoming strangers) in your area or community?
5. What wrongs do you have difficulty looking past in order to show the love of God to those in need?

ENDNOTES

¹ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), 106.

² John R. W. Stott, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 17.

lesson 11

Rejoice in Suffering

MAIN IDEA

We have little control over the suffering we encounter. The only thing we can control is how we react to it.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can I suffer with a smile?

STUDY AIM

To understand that we, as Christians, are meant to have the same vocation as Jesus. We are to be cross bearers.

QUICK READ

When Peter wrote this letter almost 2000 years ago, Christians in Rome were arrested, tortured, and executed simply because there were followers of Christ. While we are not facing that level of persecution, we still must deal with suffering.



Introduction

What comes into your mind when you hear the word “suffering?” Does it conjure up pictures of physical suffering, emotional suffering, or spiritual suffering?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation that sounds like what Peter called “a fiery ordeal” in 4:12? Was the suffering hurtful and prolonged, or a quick blow that left you stinging?

While we cannot always avoid suffering, we can choose to rely on God to help us endure it, and perhaps even be able to smile for Jesus in the midst of such suffering (Acts 6:15; 7:54-60).

1 Peter 4:12-19

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though *something* strange were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that at the revelation of His glory you may also rejoice and be overjoyed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, and of God, rests upon you. ¹⁵ Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; ¹⁶ but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. ¹⁷ *For it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? ¹⁹ Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God are to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

What Are Some Purposes of Suffering? (4:12)

Have you ever wondered why we experience difficulties or suffering? Often, our first reaction to something “bad” happening to us is to ask “Why” questions. We say: “Why did God let this happen?” or “Why me?” or “Why now?” Our first question is almost always: “Why?”

As Peter wrote to Christians who were being persecuted or attacked for their faith, he answered the questions they had on their minds. He told them to stop being surprised at the fiery trials they were experiencing. Perhaps he was remembering the teachings of Jesus, like the one in Matthew 5:11-12: "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Peter basically said, "Don't be surprised when these things happen; Jesus said this would happen as we live for Him."

Peter described these suffering as fiery ordeals, or painful testing. There is both a literal, and a metaphorical interpretation of the concept in the word "fiery" or "painful" ordeal. In the literal sense, Christians in Rome probably instantly thought about being literally burned at the stake. Those were definitely fiery and painful ordeals.

However, the Greek word used here for "fiery" is predominately used to describe the refining or smelting process by which extreme heat was applied to separate the gold from other substances in ore, thereby purifying the gold. This word picture fits the sentence and context well, since verse 12 speaks of the fiery ordeal coming upon you to "test" you. Test means to reveal what you are made of. Suffering reveals the purity or quality of our faith and life values. Suffering causes us to hang onto what is valuable, and to jettison what is secondary. What is pure and lasting will survive the fires of testing.

In 1 Peter 1:6-8, Peter also spoke of this theme. He said we should rejoice when we find ourselves in all kinds of trials, because the trials will prove the genuineness of our faith, which is more valuable than gold. So, trials test and stretch our faith, and also test whether our life values will keep us faithful in painful circumstances.

There is one other purpose of fiery ordeals mentioned here, which is that when we participate in suffering with Christ, we also participate in His supernatural joy. The early disciples rejoiced during and after their suffering for Christ (Acts 5:40-41; 16:25). People who share painful experiences together form a bond, much like soldiers do today. Going through suffering because of our commitment to Jesus produces joy. We are honored to suffer for Jesus, who suffered worse things on our behalf.

The Greek word translated as “share” in 4:13 is *koinoneo*. It is the sharing of mutual experiences of each other in a shared event. The word is often translated fellowship. Here it is sharing Christ’s suffering with Him. Suffering with Christ provides a deepening of our lives and a dependence upon Christ that surpasses the pain and suffering we go through (Romans 8:16-18). When we are God’s children, and heirs of His kingdom, we share in both Christ’s sufferings, and Christ’s joy. The early Christians, when persecuted, rejoiced to be considered worthy to suffer for Jesus (Acts 5:40-42; 16:22-25).

Listed Below Are Some Ways God Uses Suffering in Our Lives.

- To prove the quality of our faith (1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12).
- To strengthen our faith and perseverance (1 Peter 1:6-7; James 1:2-5).
- To test and improve us by removing impurities from our lives (1 Peter 4:12).
- To share in Christ’s glory now (1 Peter 4:14), and at His second coming (1 Peter 4:13; see also: Romans 8:16-17; 2 Corinthians 1:5-7; Philippians 3:10).
- To reveal the priceless value of faithfully living for God and becoming like Jesus (1 Peter 4:14).

All of these outcomes or purposes are more valuable than gold. As we allow God to shape and purify us through fiery ordeals and trials, we become more like Jesus, are more impactful in God’s kingdom, and lack nothing (1 Peter 1:6-7; James 1:2-5).

Whose Suffering Is It? (4:13-16)

It is important for us to realize whose suffering we are experiencing. First Peter 4:13 says that to the same degree we share in Christ’s sufferings, we are to keep rejoicing during that suffering. The sufferings are Christ’s sufferings, which we share in from time to time. If we love Jesus and are persecuted for reminding people of the reality and presence of God, then we are blessed (4:14) because the Spirit of God’s glory and presence rests upon us. His pres-

ence and glory can be seen in our lives, so we rejoice that we are reminding people of Jesus (4:12-13).

When Jesus walked among us Satan tested Jesus and moved some people to attack Him to try to prevent God's kingdom from spreading. Now that Jesus has physically ascended into Heaven, Jesus lives within believers and works through us, continuing the growth of God's kingdom. Therefore, Satan continues to attack Jesus by attacking His representatives. It should not surprise us. It means we are making a difference for Jesus and His kingdom.

Notice another great truth in 4:13. This truth is that to the degree you share the sufferings of Christ, and keep on rejoicing, you will also share in Christ's glory at His return, rejoicing with exultation. As mentioned earlier, the Greek word translated "share" is *koinoneo* meaning to share one another's life and experiences. So, when we suffer with Christ during our lifetime, we will proportionately share in His glory at His revelation, i.e. His glorious return. Therefore, we keep on rejoicing because the glory at His return will make any suffering seem like nothing (Romans 8:18).

However, in 4:15-17, Peter reminded us that if we are suffering as a result of sins or crimes, we ourselves commit, then such suffering is of our making as a consequence of our actions. Such suffering will produce shame rather than glory at Christ's return. In this suffering there is nothing blessed, nor to rejoice about. It is self-induced suffering, and further it gives Christ a bad reputation.

Several By-Products of Suffering Presented in Daniel 3:14-30

In Daniel 3:14-30, we find four ways God is revealed through a believer's suffering:

1. Awareness of God's presence: Suffering reveals God presence with us in that suffering (Daniel 3:14, 13-18, 27-28).
2. Increased strength: Suffering fortifies our faith (Daniel 3:17, 26).
3. Refining or purifying our faith: Suffering deepens our relationship with God (Daniel 3:16-18, 27).
4. Increased fellowship: Suffering increases our fellowship with God (Daniel 3:24-25).

But if we suffer for being a good representative of Jesus, then our witness becomes a source of blessing and joy. In such a case, rather than complaining or quitting, we should instead keep on being a witness and keep on rejoicing because we are being allowed to share in the sufferings of Christ, and therefore later will share in the glory of Christ.

Is Suffering Judgment? (4:17-18)

When we hear the word “judgment” we usually assume it means punishment by the wrath of God, or a painful payback for what we have done. However, to be judged is also to be evaluated. This is in fact often the case today in competitions. Judges taste chili, observe gymnastic routines, or compare flower gardens, make evaluations, and then choose or rank the participants.

Contestants go through many gauntlets, each accompanied by risks bringing their own forms of suffering, pain, or pitfalls. At the end, the judges “judge” one as the winner.

There is some sense of this in 4:17, where believers are evaluated for their actions, character, grace, perseverance, and representation of Jesus. Some judges hate us because we remind them of Jesus, so they try to derail us or punish us, or get us to quit. Other judges love us because we remind them of Jesus. The word “time” in verse 17 is closer to the word “season.” The moment we become a Christian; we enter into a life that is being scrutinized. We are constantly being evaluated/judged as to our relationship with Jesus and will one day share in His glory to the proportion that we suffered for being obedient to Him in life.

Living for Jesus is often hard, uncomfortable, and risky. But He lives within us. Whatever we are going through, He is going through it with us, and will reward us for our faithfulness in revealing Him to others.

However, there is another side of judgment, which will occur for those who reject Jesus, those who are destructive, self-absorbed despisers of God. If we Christians struggle to please God, and only make it because God’s grace is in and upon us, how brutal will the final day of evaluation be for those who hated Jesus, despised God, and tried to erase every indicator of God from their lives and societies? Peter in 4:18 contrasted the difficulties and suffer-

ings believers endure with how terrifying the final judgment will be for those who reject God their whole lifetime.

Implications and Actions (4:19)

We have spent much of this lesson on the reality and painfulness of suffering in life. But there is no need to live our lives in despair, doom, or gloom. The gospel is good news to all who believe!

One of my favorite Bible passages is Isaiah 43:1-2, which says: “But now, this is what the LORD says, He who is your Creator, Jacob, and He who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you.”

So how can we graciously go through suffering? As a Christian, the way through suffering is to live like you belong to God. You are in His hand. He created, shaped, salvaged, and redeemed you. You are His, and God knows how to take care of you. There are many things that are scary or threatening in life, but with God we always come through them.

Regarding Christian suffering, the word “through” means you begin outside suffering, you enter into suffering, you make the journey through suffering, and you come out the other side. Through means you come out the other side. As Christians, God is with us before any crisis we encounter, with us in every crisis, journeys through the crisis with us, and brings us out the other side.

In 4:19, we are given five simple steps for getting through any suffering that comes our way. We are told to live our lives doing God’s will, and because of that, consider what is happening to be a part of what God is doing in and through your life. Always surrender to God’s will, as Jesus taught us to pray and live: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth (in me, my life) as it is in Heaven” (Matthew 6:10). So, embrace God’s will for your life.

Next entrust yourself to your faithful Creator. The word “entrust” here is a banking word, to deposit your life into God’s care and protection like you deposit your money into a bank. Your life is now God’s, in His hand, and surrounded by His protection and power.

Trust God. He is your Creator. He knows His plans for you. He knows what you are capable of enduring and accomplishing by His power. Trust Him. Rest in Him.

Remind yourself that He is faithful. He is not just your Creator; He is your faithful Creator. God keeps His word. God stands with us. God stands by us. God will carry us through whatever comes our way. He has all power to change anything He chooses to change.

Having done these things, keep doing good. Keep choosing God's way, God's will, and God's good purpose. Pray for those who misuse you and do good to them. Continue manifesting God's goodness even in the midst of suffering. Keep on rejoicing! God will carry you through!

Questions

1. What has been a very painful suffering, or fiery ordeal, that you have experienced?

2. What was the subject of your conversation with God, and what "Why" questions did you ask?

3. Think of your above-mentioned fiery ordeal. What did God teach you in that event? What did He do in your life during that time? What good things came out of that fiery furnace event?

4. Reread the Implications and Actions section. Using a short phrase to describe each step, write down the five steps found in 4:19, which can help you move through a fiery event with God.

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lesson 12

Dress for Success

MAIN IDEA

God rewards those who are humble.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Am I a well-dressed Christian?

STUDY AIM

To understand that the greatest of leaders have servant hearts

QUICK READ

When you humble yourself under God's hand, nobody will walk over you. Self-promotion is a formula for failure but wearing the garment of humility means you will be successful in God's eyes. And He has promised to lift you up.



Introduction

The main thrust of today's passage is instruction on humility, and leadership within the church. Even though Peter is writing to the elders (pastors) of the church, do not skip this section of Scripture because you are not a pastor. Biblically, all Christians are priests, called to serve by God (see 1 Peter 2:9-10). Further, God gives at least one spiritual gift to each believer, to be used for the common good of the whole church (see 1 Corinthians 12:7).

Each one of us is both a leader and a follower. We follow Jesus, and we pass on to others what we have learned (2 Timothy 2:2), thereby making disciples of Jesus wherever we go (Matthew 28:19-20).

Having said this, there are some specific instructions given in 1 Peter 5:1-4 that address the pastors or elders of the church. In 5:5-6, Peter expanded the application of much of this passage to apply to "all" in the church. So, we will examine what this passage specifically means for church leaders, and then make application of these truths to all our lives as well.

1 Peter 5:1-6

¹ Therefore, I urge elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, *and* one who is also a fellow partaker of the glory that is to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but voluntarily, according to *the will* of God; and not with greed but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as domineering over those assigned to your care, but by proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT HE GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time.

Whom Do We Serve? (5:1-4)

Peter exhorted the elders to remember that they are serving God in all their decisions and interactions (5:2). Sometimes we get sidetracked into thinking that the task of leaders is to please the people. But the leader's first responsibility is to obey Jesus. The flock is God's flock (5:2). We don't belong to ourselves, we have been bought with a price, so we are to glorify God through our lives, which are His (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Once we realize God is the prime person we serve, it is also important that we serve one another. As members of one body, we help the body function better when we serve each other. Peter called himself "a fellow" elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ. In Jesus we are connected to each other and should treat each other with dignity and mutual respect. In Matthew 20:25-28, the disciples were maneuvering to see who would be the greatest in God's kingdom. Jesus put a stop to it, then taught them that the greatest in the kingdom of God is the one who serves all the others.

Elders, pastors, and all other church leaders must realize that while they carry out functions of leadership, they are still sheep at heart. To Jesus, we are all sheep who need to be humbly following Him, the Great Shepherd. (See 5:2.)

Why Do We Serve? (5:1-6)

What motivates you to love Jesus? If someone saved your life, would you be motivated to express considerable appreciation to that person?

Peter told us that one reason he served Jesus is that he was a witness to the sufferings of Christ (5:1). He spent three years listening to the profound truths Jesus taught, saw His goodness and how He cared for people.

He saw Jesus' innocence and perfection, then he saw Jesus suffer, be rejected, falsely accused, betrayed, and turned over to be crucified.

Peter experienced his personal denial of Jesus, although he had sworn he would never do such a thing. Just as Christ had told him he would, when Peter heard the rooster's third crowing in the morning, he realized what he had done. But he also experienced the love and forgiveness of Jesus.

Peter was a witness to both the suffering and the love of Jesus. This love and forgiveness motivated Peter to spend the rest of his life serving Jesus and telling others how they too can be forgiven and given eternal life.

In 5:1, Peter stated that he served Christ as a fellow partaker in the glory which is to be revealed. Peter had been on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8), when Jesus began to shine with glorious, heavenly light, and when a voice came from Heaven emphatically saying: “This is My beloved Son; listen to Him!” (Mark 9:7). This event was a foretaste of the glorified Christ, who dwells in light unapproachable (1 Timothy 6:16).

Peter was among the first disciples to witness the empty tomb and resurrection of Jesus, another foretaste of the coming glory in God’s Kingdom, where death is conquered forever. And on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came with power to transform the disciples into apostles, making them all partakers of the coming power and glory that awaits believers.

Each of us who has received Jesus are also partakers of the resurrected Jesus, eternal life, and His transforming power and kingdom (John 3:16; 1 John 5:11-13). Because of this, we also want others to know God better and partake of His glory as well (5:1).

We are motivated to serve Jesus because He set the example for us, as He laid aside his robe, to wash the disciples’ feet (John 13:4-15). We serve because of Jesus’s love for us, loving us when we had nothing to give to Him (John 13:34-35). He demonstrated His love for us by dying in our place, forgiving us our sins, filling us with His Spirit, and reuniting us in an eternal love relationship with God.

We serve Him, and others, because Jesus said this is what He expects us to do. To become great in God’s kingdom, we must become the servant of all (Mark 9:35).

How Do We Serve? What Clothing Do We Put On to Dress for Success?

We are to pastor or shepherd the flock in love (5:2). In John 21:15-17, Jesus asked Peter three times, “Peter, do you love Me?” Three times Peter answered: “Yes, Lord.” All three times Jesus had used the Greek word translated as “shepherd,” “tend,” or, “feed” My sheep. In 1 Peter 5:2, Peter used this very

same word as he instructed us to “shepherd the flock of God.” Good leaders care for God’s people with love. Jesus said this love would be how the world recognizes us as followers of Jesus (John 13:34-35). We are to love others in the very same way as Jesus loves us. Good leaders love the people they lead, and those people will love such a leader.

Peter also stated that we should lead in line with the will of God (5:2). Man’s ways are not God’s ways, and God’s ways are not always man’s ways (Isaiah 55:8). We should lead God’s people in the way God directs, by following God’s will in any particular situation.

Elders (overseers) must have good vision (5:2). They need to see the individuals, groups, and ministries who comprise the church, and how to coordinate their efforts. They need a clear perspective on where God is leading the church, then must equip the sheep to have what they need to stay healthy and productive, while also being alert to pitfalls or enemies that threaten the flock. Oversight requires multifaceted interaction at all levels. Overseers (the literal meaning of elders in 5:2) regularly scan the flock, keep tabs on the groups and individuals, identify threats or dangers, provide spiritual food and healing for God’s people, as well as lead them on God’s path.

Leaders need to remain leaders, while still living among the flock (5:2). Jesus did this. He experienced life with the disciples and saw to their well-being and leading them on the way forward.

Good leaders do not lord it over those in their care but lead by example (5:3). Jesus’ general methodology was to actively show or do something, and then teach what it meant. He did not ask the disciples to do something He would not do.

Peter said that elders and other leaders must prove themselves as examples of Christ to others (5:3). In John 13:4-15, the night He was to be betrayed and arrested, Jesus girded Himself (the same word used for “clothe yourselves” in 1 Peter 5:5) to serve the disciples by washing their feet. Jesus, the Master, washed their feet, and then informed them that He had given them an example for them to follow. Even if you are in a situation where you are perceived to be the boss, you need to get down with others and serve those people. Good leaders lead by example.

Good leaders serve willingly because they love to serve, not because they are coerced to serve. Good leaders serve because they *want* to, not just because they *have* to.

When Peter discussed clothing yourself in humility (5:5), he used the word used of Jesus as He tightly wrapped the towel around Himself to wash the disciples' feet (John 13:4-5). The way we can best get ready to serve one another, is to wrap ourselves in Jesus, draw close to Him, and allow Jesus to shape our attitudes, perspectives, actions, and methods (see John 13:4-5).

The last instruction in this passage regarding how to serve, involves humbling ourselves (5:6). Pride damages our desire and ability to trust God. We are all prone to choose pride and try to become a self-made success, instead of choosing humility, and thereby trusting God with life's outcomes.

Pride Is Destructive Because:

- Pride shifts our trust onto ourselves, instead of trusting God alone.
- Pride, coupled with mistrust, puts distance between God and us.
- Pride also puts distance between us and other people, straining mutual trust needed in those relationships.
- Pride puts us in an oppositional position with God (5:5-6).

Most of us wait for life's circumstances, or something or someone, to knock us down and humble us. But God encourages us to continually humble ourselves, to continually put on humility, surrendering our lives and blessings to the wisdom and power of God. Humility gives us a clearer perspective of ourselves, as we see ourselves the way God sees us. Humility lowers our estimate of ourselves, instead of inflating and distorting it. Humility is having a proper view of ourselves. Humility confesses: "I am valuable. I am not more valuable than others, nor am I less valuable than others. We are all valuable to God, and to the task at hand."

When we are full of pride, we actually are in opposition to God (5:5). We are trusting self instead of trusting God. God opposes (comes against, pushes down) the proud, because they are living like they do not need God. Pride cuts us off from God, and from real life.

What Does God Promise to Give to Those Who Serve? (5:4-6)

When the Chief Shepherd appears, those who serve as shepherds/elders/pastors of His flock, will receive the unfading crown of glory (5:4). The image here is from the Greek word meaning “a circle.” Often it was a floral victory wreath, put on an athlete’s head for winning the competition. Sometimes it was a crown, made of precious metal and gemstones.

Whatever comprises this crown mentioned in 5:4, there are two things that characterize it. First, it is something that does not fade, so it is representative of a life that was not wasted, that will last, and not fade away. Secondly, it is associated with glory, and biblical glory is always associated with God. I had a Hebrew professor who would say: “Glory in Hebrew is ‘God’s-stuff,’ something infused with God’s majesty.” Is the crown made of glory, is the crown shining with glory, or is it the reward of eternal glory? We do not know. But we do know that it will be something amazing and lasting, given to us by the God of Glory.

In 1 Peter 5:5-6, what are some promised benefits for those who clothe themselves in humility?

- They will lead and tend to the sheep as Jesus asks, and therefore will receive an unfading crown of glory at Christ’s return (5:4).
- They will receive God’s grace (and graciousness), and the church will function better as people treat each other with dignity and worth.
- They will experience God’s empowering grace to be successful in their life and service (5:5, cf. Philippians 2:13).
- They will position themselves under, and in, the miraculous active power of God.
- Those who humbly serve and submit to God will be exalted by God at the proper time (5:6).

Implications and Actions

Humility is always the way to dress for success with God. Those who refuse to humble themselves will find themselves out of favor with God. God opposes the proud (literally “God presses down upon the proud”) but gives grace to those who humble themselves. God recommends that we humble ourselves before Him, so we are not brought low by other forces. When we bow before God, honoring Him for all He is, He lifts us up and empowers us to serve Him. The choice is ours to make.

As we dress for success, clothed in humility and service, we will become leaders who successfully serve Jesus in whatever we do! Serving others as Jesus serves us, will change us, change the church, change our families, our neighborhoods, and change the world!

Questions

1. In Peter’s letter, why do you think that Peter kept using words that were the exact words Jesus had spoken to him?

2. Describe a time when you saw someone relate to you just like Jesus related to someone in the Gospels.

3. Who do you frequently lead in your daily or weekly activities? Do you tend to lead by telling others what to do, or by gently showing them how to do it?

4. In what area of your life do you need to humble yourself? How would being a servant, change your interactions in your marriage? In your parenting? In your workplace? In your interactions at church?

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lesson 13

Standing Firm in the Faith

MAIN IDEA

The grace of God enables you to stand firm in the faith even though you experience temporary suffering.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Is my church energized by encouragement?

STUDY AIM

To understand that the grace of God enables you to encourage others who suffer

QUICK READ

The Bible teaches that our God is the God of all grace, and Peter wrote about the true grace of God. He finished his letter by summarizing some of the main themes he had already addressed.



Introduction

If you were looking for some advice about how to have a great marriage, who would you talk to? To several people who have been happily married for many years? Or to someone who has never been married?

In this study, we will hear some sound advice from Peter on how to remain strong in our faith during difficult circumstances. Peter was sometimes a little too self-confident and impulsive, but there was no doubt in anyone's mind that Peter loved Jesus.

In Luke 22:31-34, we read of such an interaction between Jesus and Peter. In Luke 22:31, Jesus warned Peter that Satan had demanded permission to sift Peter like wheat. Jesus then encouraged Peter, saying: "but I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Jesus then warned Peter that he would deny he knew Jesus three times. Sadly, Peter did just that, and felt crushed as a result. How could Jesus still love him? How could Peter ever serve Jesus again? Jesus forgave Peter and made sure Peter knew he was forgiven, restored, and he was instructed to strengthen his brothers when they needed encouragement. In this letter Peter wrote to strengthen others being sifted by Satan, about how to resist Satan, and to stand strong in our faith at such times.

In 5:7-14, Peter spoke from what he had learned in his life experiences with Jesus, and about how God's grace can protect us, empower us, encourage us, strengthen us, and if needed, bring forgiveness and restoration so we are refitted to serve Jesus anew.

1 Peter 5:7-14

⁷having cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you. ⁸Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹So resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brothers and sisters who are in the world. ¹⁰After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, *and* establish you. ¹¹To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹²Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard *him*), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! ¹³She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

Remain Trusting in God, and Alert to Satanic Attacks (5:7-8)

The first step in going through spiritual attack is to cast our anxieties onto God. Anxieties pull us in many directions, and Satan loves to capitalize on that when we are anxious and vulnerable. So, to take that weapon out of Satan's hand, we need to entrust our anxieties to God. Throw them onto God and ask Him to do what is best in our lives. Many of Peter's teachings in these verses are Peter bearing witness to things Jesus taught the disciples.

Jesus had much to say about not being anxious, but rather to trust God to provide what we need (see Matthew 6:25-34). Anxieties and worries are self-defeating. We are to cast our concerns and worries onto God. Have you ever thrown a baseball to someone else? Once you throw it, the ball is no longer your concern. Throw your worries to Jesus and leave them there!

Peter then reminded us of another mindset that can help us withstand the spiritual attacks of Satan. Peter was telling us in 5:7 to embrace the truth that God cares for you. Oh, how we need to camp in that truth. Do you believe God cares for you? In everything that God did in sending Jesus to save us, God is shouting to us: "I care! I love you! You are valuable to me!"

This truth is so important for us anytime we are encountering the lies of Satan. Satan's number one lie he tells us is: "God doesn't care about you." Satan always undermines God's love and care for us. In Satan's dialogue with Adam and Eve, he implied that God was cheating them of something they deserved, and therefore He did not really care about them.

Whenever something really bad or painful happens, what is the first thought that Satan injects into our minds? It is "God does not care about me. If God cared about my life, this would not have happened." So, before you get in any fiery ordeal or battle with the devil, solidify this truth as a core value in your life: God cares for you (5:7). Then since He cares for you, cast every

struggle onto Him, be it large or small, for He cares for you. Throw it to Him in prayer, and then like the baseball, leave it there.

Next Peter told us to be alert (sober), knowing that we have an adversary who is a voracious lion, always on the prowl, looking for any signs of vulnerability or weakness that he can take advantage of so he can devour us. As a believer, we are not in danger of losing eternal life; we are in danger of being chewed up, wounded, or turned into a wounded animal that will lash out at God or other believers and inflict wounds on fellow believers.

So, the threat is real. Peter was warned that Satan wanted to thresh him like wheat being beaten to pulp between stones. Peter then warned others, be on the alert. We have an enemy lurking about, seeking opportunities to gobble us up.

Resist Satan by Standing Firm in Your Faith (5:9)

Once we spot the enemy's activities or are jumped by unexpected attacks, we are told to resist the devil. Satan, or the devil, both mean adversary, a court term similar to the oppositional attorney, the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10), a slanderer. We are to resist him (5:9). Resist means to stand up to him, do not give way. He is a liar, so counter his lies with God's truth. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, Jesus always answered: "It is written" and then quoted what the truth in God's Word said on that subject (see Matthew 4:1-11).

Resist him by being firm in your faith. Faith is taking God at His Word. Stand in God's Word, stand on God's Word, and use God's Word to counter the lies. Stand firm in what you believe. Peter then reminded them to remember that this was a common experience for Christians. Recall that the same endurance and victories in the face of suffering are being lived by other Christians as well (5:9). You are not alone in this experience.

Receive God's Grace, Restoration, and Refortification (5:10-14)

These verses offer us great encouragement in times of spiritual warfare. First, we are reminded that these sufferings are short-lived. After you endure this

brief time of distress, the God of all grace will overflow your whole life with all you need. Your time in the difficulty will seem like a drop in a bucket in an ocean of God's eternal light and love.

Grace comes from the Greek word "gift." It refers to God being all we need, and God giving us all that we need, and more. By God's grace, He lives within us, and one day we will live with Him in His eternal glory (see 4:14-16 and 5:4). Those who suffer with Christ will also experience His glory for eternity. It is God who has called you to partake of His eternal glory in Christ.

At this point, Peter came full circle. Drawing on Jesus' promise to strengthen Peter in times of testing (Luke 22:31-34), Peter encouraged us with four things God provides to us, and within us, in our times of trial (5:10). God restores us, then makes us strong, firm, and steadfast.

Peter then introduced a new listing of three promises to God.

First, God Himself will perfect you. The root word used here was what fishermen did at the end of each workday as they mended their nets and restored them to wholeness again. Spiritually, it means to perfect in the sense of to restore, to bring to completeness, or to reach your full potential.

Add to this, Christ Himself will "confirm" you. The Greek word here is related to our modern word "steroid," a muscle builder or grower. This is the word "strengthen," which Jesus used with Peter in Luke 22:31. Trials make us firmer and stronger, perhaps more like "tone your muscles" to be solid and able to withstand stress. Here Peter was strengthening the people through his letter, and two thousand years later you and I are being strengthened by it as well.

The third promise is that the God of all grace will strengthen, meaning to provide stability and stamina. The fourth word is that God will establish you. This has to do with being built upon a strong foundation, having deep roots that anchor you in the midst of the storm. You will not just stand; you will last and endure.

How Should I Pray for People Under Spiritual Attack? (Luke 22:32; 1 Peter 5:6)

- Pray their faith will not fail.
- Pray they will know God cares for them.
- Pray that the God of all grace will strengthen them, firm them, anchor them, to be able to resist Satan and stand strong.
- Pray for God's dominion to manifest itself in the person and situation.
- Pray that when it is over, they will strengthen and encourage others under attack.

As Peter moved toward the closing of his letter, he mentioned several other aspects of God's grace, gifts that can encourage us during difficult times. In his doxology (5:11), Peter reminded us that in Jesus, with Jesus, we win. Jesus is the One to whom all dominion (rule and power) belongs forever and ever. We are in Jesus, and He in us. Satan is no match for Jesus, and it is Jesus who already reigns and rules, and always will.

Peter affirmed that what he wrote in this letter is the truth, stand firm in it. Jesus is the real (true) grace of God. Stand firm in Jesus. This is reality; believe it and live it.

Peter reminded these Christians they were not alone in difficulties. The church in Rome, which was living during Nero's persecutions (i.e., "she who is in Babylon") sent affirmation and encouragement to you. Mark (John Mark, the person who wrote the Gospel of Mark) also sent you greetings. Peter reminded the readers of the letter they are not alone, nor the only ones going through hard times. We are all in Jesus, and in this together.

Greet one another with a kiss of love (5:14). Many European Christians still do this today, kissing a believer on both cheeks as they meet, or to say goodbye, when the church is gathered. It is a gesture of love and respect. Worshiping together strengthens us during times of trial.

What Does “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you” Refer to in 5:13?

- Babylon was a cryptic reference to Rome, where Nero was persecuting Christians, and where Peter was living while writing this letter. At that time, both Christians and Jews referred to Rome as Babylon, and John used this symbolic name for Rome in Revelation 18:1-5.
- Some think “she who is in Babylon, chosen together with you” referred to Peter’s wife, living in Rome with Peter. Therefore, Peter sent his greetings from his wife. This is possible, but not likely.
- Most believe that “she who is in Babylon, chosen together with you” refers to the church in Rome, i.e., the Christians in Rome. This is the best explanation because churches were often referred to as “she,” i.e., the Bride of Christ. Christians in Rome and in Jerusalem, and any other location, were chosen together to be Christ’s church.
- She who is chosen with you, meaning Christians who are now a chosen people (1 Peter 2:9-11).

Peter closed with “Peace be to you all who are in Christ.” This is both a reminder, that when you are “in Christ” you are surrounded by His peaceful presence, and it also is a prayer that you might experience His peace. As a prayer it means: “May you experience the fullness and completeness of Christ.” Shalom in Hebrew means peace, but also includes the concept of wholeness or completeness. It is both a statement and a blessing or prayer.

Implications and Actions

When we belong to Christ and live for Christ, we will meet opposition from Satan. Satan tried to hinder Jesus from rescuing people. Satan is always on the prowl to catch someone off guard or unaware and try to trip us up. We need to recognize this reality. We are not to live in fear, but we are to live by to the reality that we have a crafty enemy who is always looking for a way to disarm us.

So live being aware of the danger zones and avoid them or be extra alert when passing through them. Try to spend a little time each day reminding

yourself that God really does care about you. He cares for you, He loves you. Fill your life with God's Word, so you will recognize Satan's lies when they come.

Live in the truth and live in God's grace. When Satan attacks, stand firm, resisting him, his lies, and his tactics. Draw upon God's strength. God's is the power, glory, and dominion forever and ever! Amen.

Questions

1. List several experiences you have had that remind you of how much God cares for you.

2. What are several of your favorite Bible verses that affirm God loves you and cares about your well-being?

3. Why is it important to exercise your muscles in order to strengthen them?

4. What are some ways you can exercise your faith "muscles" to make it grow stronger?

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Prayer for this Study

Pursuing Holiness

“But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16, ESV).

Father,

The whole earth is full of Your glory, for You are holy and almighty. I praise You for Your everlasting love and faithfulness. I bow my heart in humble adoration to You and thank You for sending Your precious son, Jesus, the righteous King, into the world to redeem me from the penalty of my sin.

You have called me to be holy because You are holy. Help me, Oh God, to live a spirit filled life and be so in tune with You and the truth of Your Word that I will recognize when sin’s empty promises and fleshly desires try to lead me astray. Give me steadfastness to never tolerate sin to reign in my heart. I invite You to peer deep into my soul and reveal any worldly treasures or idols that have deceived me. May I clearly see my own sin and take responsibility for it, never casting blame on others or even on circumstances in my life.

Your Word says in Micah 6:8, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (NIV). Lord, I will never grow too old for You to sanctify me and make me more like Jesus. Continue to develop in me a heart that yearns for righteousness and obedience to Your commands. I pray, that Christ will abundantly dwell in me and that I will reflect Your holiness in my life. Give me a compassionate heart that loves and willingly serves others, and a heart that always shows kindness, generosity, and patience. Because You are a merciful God and have forgiven me of the depth of my sinfulness, may I be quick to forgive others and pray for them.

Your Word calls me to offer myself to You as a living sacrifice, Romans 12:1. I ask that You help me live a holy and pleasing life to You, giving You all of me, my thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. May I discipline myself for the purpose of Godliness and Holiness, persevering in my faith and I ask You to help me do all things with a good attitude and without complaining, so I can shine among people like the stars in the universe, Philipians 2:14-15. Give me inner strength to keep my character free from the love of money and may I be content and grateful for what I have. May I never practice self-righteousness to elevate myself or feed my own pride, but may I offer to You a heart that is contrite and surrendered to You.

I am thankful I can stand before You completely justified because Jesus is my righteous Savior. Give me courage to press on and persevere in my pursuit to live a life that glorifies and honors You until You return and take me home to live with You forever.

In the strong name of Jesus,

Amen

DLB

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The Final Days of Jesus

A Study of John

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But not now.

Have you wandered away in your walk with Jesus? Here's the good news. Jesus will restore you if you meet Him at the Cross. That's what happened to the Apostle John. He ran away. He deserted the Lord, but he met Jesus back at the cross. And Jesus restored John...and Jesus also restored Peter...and Jesus can restore you too.

Do you want to be restored? Like John, you may have known the Lord for a long time, but something caused you to slip away from the side of Jesus. It's time for you to come back. The Bible says, "Come near to God and He will come near to you" (James 4:8, NIV).

Come to the cross. It is only there that you can witness how wide and long and high and deep is the love that Christ has for you. And when you meet Him there, the first thing Jesus says to you is, "I'm glad you are back. I've missed you. I want to restore you to a place where you lean on Me. Now, I have a job for you. Take care of my people. Serve me again. I have a cross for you. Take it up and follow Me" and discover *The Beauty of Restoration*.

Lesson 1	Hitting Rock Bottom	John 18:15-18, 25-27
Lesson 2	What Is the Truth?	John 18:33-40
Lesson 3	The Day He Wore My Crown	John 19:1-5
Lesson 4	Here Is Your King!	John 19:5-16

Lesson 5	Standing by the Cross	John 19:17-27
Lesson 6	The End of the Beginning	John 19:28-30
Lesson 7	The Blood and the Water	John 19:31-37
Lesson 8	The Burial of Jesus	John 19:38-42
Lesson 9	Death Was Arrested	John 20:1-18
Lesson 10	Breath of Heaven	John 20:19-23
Lesson 11	The Only Scars in Heaven	John 20:24-29
Lesson 12	Breakfast With Jesus	John 21:1-14
Lesson 13	Jesus Restores Us	John 21:15-23
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