

A STUDY OF 1 PETER

Suffering for the Christian (1 Peter 3:13-17)

1 Peter 3:13 sets forth a principle that is generally, but not universally true. Generally no one will harm you for doing that which is good. Though there is great persecution in parts of our world today, most Christians live without facing daily persecution and suffering at the hands of the government or their fellow countrymen. Doing good brings less strife and less suffering in this world most of the time.

It is true however, that suffering can come and in fact it did come to the first recipients of Peter's letter. Peter instructs those enduring such suffering to "have no fear, nor be troubled" because God will bless them.



1. How can a Christian consider themselves blessed when suffering for Christ? (see also Matthew 5:10)
2. How does one avoid fear while suffering?
3. Describe what it means to suffer and what are some ways in which Christians around the world are suffering for Christ.

Advice to Those Enduring Persecution 1 Peter 3:13-17

1. Do not fear your persecutor
2. Do not allow yourself to be "troubled" (to be filled with grief, anxiety or distress)
3. Set apart Christ as Lord in your heart
4. Be prepared to defend your hope in Christ
5. React with gentleness and respect
6. Have a good conscience (Live in a Christ-like manner)

1 Peter 3:15 has caused anxiety for those who have taken the verse to mean that they must always be able to answer any question that any non-believer might pose. While we should continually grow in our faith and in knowledge of God's Word, this passage has to do with offering an answer to those who ask about the Christian's hope.

The form of the Greek word translated as "asks" indicates that the Christian should be able to provide an answer every time anyone asks about their hope.¹ Every Christian should know and be able to share why they are a Christian, what hope they gain from being in Christ, and what hope others can find in him.

¹ Smith, James E. *Teacher's Commentary: General Epistles*. Lulu.com. p. 73.

4. Define the word “reason” as it is used in 1 Peter 3:15.
5. What is the meaning of the word “revile” in verse 16? (NIV translates this word as “speak maliciously”)
6. In a few words or sentences write below why you have hope in Christ?

The answer of the Christian to his sceptics and persecutors is to be made with “gentleness and respect.” This may differ greatly from the attack of the accuser who may be hostile, loud, overbearing, and disrespectful. The Christian who answers his attacker in a gentle and respectful way, does so with a good conscience (he has nothing of which to be ashamed in his action or attitude). In fact, the gentle and respectful answer of the Christian brings shame onto the one who caused the suffering. Whether or not the attacker feels shame, their actions are shameful.

1 Peter 3:17 is a restatement of the teaching in previous chapter where Peter writes, “For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 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” (1 Peter 2:19-20).

7. How could it ever be God’s will that a Christian suffer for doing good (1 Peter 3:17)?

The Suffering of Christ (1 Peter 3:18-22)



Christ set the example in suffering when he went to the cross, dying on behalf of the unrighteous. As one who was completely sinless and righteous, he alone could pay the penalty for sin.

The cause of his suffering was man’s sin; the undeserved nature of his suffering is seen in his righteousness compared to the unrighteousness of man; the purpose of his suffering was to bring us to God; the cost of his sacrifice was his very life (v. 18).

8. Describe the ways in which Christ suffered?
9. What is the importance of the word “once” in verse 18? (See Hebrews 7:27; 9:11-28; 10:10)

10. According to verse 18, what is the purpose of Christ's suffering and death?

The word translated as “bring” in verse 18 “was sometimes used in a nautical sense of a ship or craft that is approaching land, particularly a harbor (Acts 27:27). How good it is when Christ, our Captain, pilots us out of the stormy seas of life into God’s serene harbor, the Church.”²

1 Peter 3:18-20 contain some of the most difficult verses in the entire Bible with many Bible teachers and scholars presenting many interpretations. First, what are the stated facts:

1. Christ was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.
2. Christ made proclamation to spirits who are in prison.
3. These spirits were disobedient in the days of Noah.

The first debate that arises concerns the period of time when Christ preached. A) Some argue that the preaching was between his physical death and physical resurrection. B) Christ preached to these spirits through Noah in Noah’s day. We know that Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) and that the Spirit of Christ was at work through the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1:10-11). C) The resurrected Christ, when he ascended to heaven preached to the spirits in prison. This would be a proclamation of his victory over death.

The second debate concerns the identity of these spirits. A) They are fallen angels. B) They are sinners who lived in the days of Noah.

The content of the message of Christ. A) These spirits were offered a “second-chance.” B) It was a proclamation of victory over the grave.

Whatever the case on these debatable matters, certain facts are inescapable.

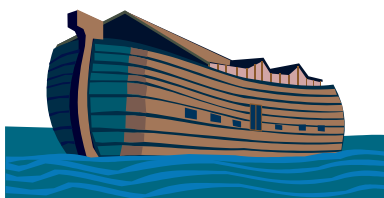
1. Christ died in the flesh, but was made alive in the spirit.
2. The spirits to whom Christ preached are “in prison” (confined so that they are unable to depart from where they are.)
3. There really cannot be any “second-chances” because as Hebrews 9:27 teaches, “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” Likewise, there is no reason to believe that fallen angels have any opportunity to repent (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).
4. In Noah’s day evil was so prevalent that Genesis 6:5 tells us, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
5. The only message that it seems Christ could preach to these imprisoned spirits is the message of their condemnation which was sealed by his death and resurrection.
6. Our God is a patient, but eventually his patience runs out and punishment will come to the disobedient.

² Oberst, Bruce. *Letters from Peter* in the Bible Study Textbook Series. College Press: Joplin, MO, 1962. p. 88.

1 Peter 3:20-21 addresses the important subject of baptism and sheds light on its significance and purpose. The illustration of Noah and the ark is most helpful. Noah was not saved by the rain or the flood, but was saved because he believed God, obeyed God, built the ark, and got into the ark when instructed to do so.

In the days of Noah only eight survived the flood. The water was the dividing line between those who were saved and those who were lost. The water cleansed the world of sin and provided a new world for Noah and his family.

**NOAH AND HIS FAMILY ARE
SAVED AS THEY OBEY GOD
AND GET INTO THE ARK**



**WATER WAS THE DIVIDING
LINE BETWEEN THOSE
WHO WERE SAVED AND
THOSE WHO WERE LOST**

**THE DISOBEDIENT WORLD
WHO REFUSED TO LISTEN
TO THE MESSAGE OF GOD
PERISHED**

Baptism is said by Peter to be like the event of the flood bringing salvation to man today. Peter teaches that baptism is not a physical bath. We know that there is no power in the water. The power comes from God when he cleanses the obedient person of their sin as a person submits themselves to God. It is here that the blood of Christ is applied to our hearts. Much like the water of the flood it is a dividing line between those who are saved and those who are lost.

Baptism saves because:



1. It is an appeal to God -- This is the manner in which a sinner calls out to God for salvation. In baptism God acts to provide cleansing. It is not a work of man, but a submission to the God who works salvation in our lives at the point of baptism. (See Acts 22:16)
2. It is an appeal to God for a good conscience. -- A person can have a clear conscience because God has cleansed him of his sins. His guilt is removed. (Romans 8:1) "God applies the the blood of Christ to our guilty souls and gives us forgiveness or remission of sins."³ (Hebrews 10:22)
3. Christ arose! -- Jesus Christ conquered death. Christ's resurrection validates all his claims and establishes his authority over all things.⁴ Following the resurrection, Jesus Christ "has gone to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him." (1 Peter 3:22)

³ Cottrell, Jack. *Baptism: A Biblical Study*. College Press: Joplin, MO, 1989. p. 151.

⁴ Ibid.