



[1 Peter 3:13-22.](#) [Standing for What is Right](#)

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We face choices everyday, choices that expose our true nature, and choices that have consequences that impact our lives and the lives of others. As Peter writes to the early church, he is writing to a fellowship of believers that found their faithful world view to be in sharp contrast with that of their lost culture, a godless and hedonistic society that considered the piety and self-control of the faithful to be ignorant, foolish, and unenlightened. Though many Christians of earlier generations may find this contrast a little strange to clearly grasp, the 21st century has brought a return to ancient Greek thought. The fulfillment of personal base desires has overwhelmed the piety of self-control and sacrifice, with all manner of ungodly lifestyle choices becoming the accepted societal norm. With this has come a return of the derision and ridicule of the faithful. This derision takes form anywhere from direct and deadly persecution in some predominantly Muslim nations to ridicule and disrespect in western societies.

The pressure on the faithful to allow compromise is tremendous. It is easier to hide one's faith than it is to maintain a bold witness in the face of such ridicule. It is easier to remain quiet when witnessing injustice than it is to take a stand to defend those who are without defense. As Peter writes to a similar circumstance, he writes to encourage the faithful as they face the same choices. encouraging them to maintain a bold faith and to take a clear and uncompromised stand for the gospel so that through their testimony the world can see a testimony to the truth.

1 Peter 3:13. *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*

The Beatitude of Persecution

Though this verse starts a new direction in the letter, it is tied to Peter's last statement that the LORD rewards those who do good, and punishes those who do evil. The contrast continues as Peter observes the interaction between the two. It may seem odd that Peter would say, "who is going to harm you," when it is obvious that great harm was being experienced by the early Christians as is still the case today. The word translated *harm* refers to ultimate injury rather than suffering. Peter's statement is more eschatological in nature than may first appear. There is no ultimate harm

that can be done to a faithful believer since God's reward for faithfulness is sure and eternal. God has also "set his face against" those who do evil, so the faithful find a defender in God Himself.

The word *eager* is also translated *zealous*, or full of zeal and energy. In the first century a zealot was an intense patriot. One would never expect a zealot to compromise their beliefs in order to avoid personal harm. The testimony of the Christian should be an intense, uncompromised, patriotism towards the kingdom of God, a patriotism that is characterized by a bold testimony and an active engagement in doing those things that are good. The goodness to which Peter refers is an uncompromised righteousness¹ Peter's words are a positive appeal for Christians to take a bold stand for what is right.²

1 Peter 3:14 *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."*

The word translated *but* can also be translated *indeed*,³ making this statement a complement to the previous statement rather than a replacement. Peter's statement is similar to Jesus' eighth beatitude:

Matthew 5:10. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

What are some of the sources of suffering in this life? We suffer from illness. We suffer from the consequences of our sin and the sin of others. Note that those who are blessed for their suffering are suffering for righteousness sake only. Suffering for other reasons does not guarantee any form of blessing. Some individuals bring suffering upon themselves for suffering's sake only in order to demonstrate their piety or to seek a blessing. Both motives are in error. Suffering for righteousness' sake occurs spontaneously in response to the conflict that arises when one demonstrates true faithfulness in an unfaithful world. Those who experience suffering for their faith will find a real and tangible blessing that comes from the LORD who defends them in times of persecution.

Literally, "fear not their fear" or "fear not their intimidation" is an alliteration implying that Christians should not fear the threats of the unfaithful. Peter did not want his Christian friends to be troubled or disturbed by the taunts, jeers, and acts of reprisal that they were facing. There is no need for

¹ c.f. Ephesians 6.

² Isaiah 50:9.

³ Schreiner, p. 170.

Christians to fear what non-believers can do to them. Likewise, today's faithful should not be frightened by this evil world culture in any way. The faithful can draw upon the wisdom of God and find a spirit of confidence and security that is found only in Him. Being frightened is an indication of a lack confidence in God and His promises. One resource to draw from is indicated in the next verse.

1 Peter 3:15. *But in your hearts set apart 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,*

The first part of verse 15 is a response to verse 14. Our confidence and strength can come from God when He is the supreme authority in our lives and His Lordship over us is the only power and defense we have in the conflict. Peter points to the necessity of our holding the position of Lordship for Christ in our hearts without compromise. If we represent Him to the world, the capacity of the world to intimidate and overpower us is significantly diminished, if not defeated altogether. The faithful find no such defense when their own lifestyle is seen as compromised and worldly.

Furthermore, Peter is literally telling the community of the faithful to be prepared to give an apologetic for their faith. Here, the word apologetic means to give a reasoned, accurate, positive, and convincing response to the criticism that Christians receive. It does not mean to apologize for being wrong, it means to accurately and in reason defend what one knows as the truth.

Note that the faithful should be able to provide an answer for anyone who asks. The implication here is that one's faithfulness is open and evident all of the time to all who one encounters. Furthermore, their faithfulness is open and evident enough to encourage questions from others. How are others to be so inspired?

The Christian life is one that should be characterized by a true and abiding peace, hope, and joy. All three of these are sought by, but never found by, those who do evil. Peace, hope, and joy in the life of the faithful is a most powerful testimony to this wicked world. How do we express these? One expresses peace in a genuine serenity in times of conflict, a serenity that comes from a confidence in God. Hope is expressed when we are not overcome by circumstances, maintaining a confidence in God's purpose in

our future. Joy is expressed by a deep happiness and confidence in God that transcends circumstances.

However, note that Peter's imperative does not give the faithful a testimony of silence. Christians are to look for opportunities to give a reason for that peace, joy, and hope. That testimony is to be one that is consistent with the faithful nature, one that is bathed in love and respect for those to whom a testimony is shared.

The work of the kingdom of God can be grievously damaged by a zealous response that lacks gentleness, or does not show sincere love and respect for the one hearing the testimony. This is one criticism for the way many media evangelists (or stump shouters) present the gospel. Their presentation is often condemning and harsh, or elitist and soapy. Rarely does a media evangelist seem to present the gospel in a gentle manner, showing care and respect for the audience.

Our Best Defense: Genuine Christian Conduct.

1 Peter 3:16. *keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

As a third qualifying condition, Peter urged the faithful to back up the verbal defense of their faith with an exemplary Christian lifestyle that is beyond reproach. What happens when your verbal witness and your non-verbal witness are inconsistent? This inconsistency is the very definition of hypocrisy, a charge that is appropriately leveled against Christians by the lost world on a regular basis. Because of our bent to sin, the maintenance of a godly lifestyle requires deliberate and continual decision, a vigilance towards the negative impact that compromise has on our lives, the lives of those who we care for, and for our testimony. Peter describes the result of a godly lifestyle is one of clear conscience.

A clear conscience is found in one of two ways. First, one can use any manner of rationalizations and defenses to cover those sins that one foolishly considers "secret." This choice to cover sins in itself is a choice to allow sin, a sin that is evident to others in all other areas of life. A clear conscience that exists in the life of one with unrepented sin is a delusion. A true clear conscience is found in a retrospective analysis of one's life that reveals a sincere and uncompromised desire for godliness that is evident in spiritual fruit in many areas of life. It is found in a repentance

from those secret sins that one thinks nobody knows about. It found in a confidence in God's promise of forgiveness.

If one has built a good Christian reputation, how long does it take to destroy that reputation? The confidence that people have in you and your Christian testimony can be destroyed in a single act. If you do not have a good Christian reputation, how long does it take to gain one? People are generally slow to forgive, remembering acts of hypocrisy, making it difficult to regain other's trust and confidence. The most compelling defense of your faith is a true and uncompromisingly Christian lifestyle.

How can you maintain a Christian lifestyle on a continual basis? Peter states that you cannot be rightfully attacked when your lifestyle is unblemished by an ungodly character. Your demonstration of a true Christian lifestyle forms for you the breastplate of righteousness that protects you from the fiery darts of frontal attack.⁴ However, if there are blemishes in your lifestyle, these are chinks or cracks in the armor that God has made available to us, and we are susceptible to attacks from which we have no reasonable defense, and the suffering we experience is our own doing, a suffering that is not blessed by God.

1 Peter 3:17. *It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*

If we understand verse 16, the ethics represented in this verse are simply common sense.⁵ It is better to suffer for doing right, then it is to suffer for doing wrong. Peter already repeated Jesus' beatitude that those who suffer for righteousness' sake are blessed. Those who suffer from their unrighteousness receive no such blessing, but only the curse of the consequences of their acts.

Is it God's will that we suffer? We might argue that, since God ultimately wants what is good and best for us, that suffering should not be a part of our lives. However, the first chapter of James reminds us that the conflict of suffering is a necessary part of our growth and is therefore permitted by God so that it can do its perfect work in our lives.⁶

We might find a metaphor in the example of parenting. Does a parent want their children to experience hurt and suffering? Of course not, but when children disobey or demonstrate behavior that is worthy of discipline

⁴ Ephesians 6:12, ff.

⁵ Phillips

⁶ James 1:14,17.

some measure must be properly taken, a measure that a child might interpret as a form of suffering. When children step outside the boundaries of reasonable conduct, they must be corrected and brought back. The same is true for Children of God. When a child must be corrected that correction comes only from a willful transgression and the child is ultimately responsible for the price they must pay.

Consequently, there is a clear difference between the suffering that is blessed by God and the suffering that is not. The blessing is found when one suffers at the hands of others in response for doing good. Peter reminds us that the faithful should not be discouraged from doing good because of the threats or intimidation of the evil one, but rather to remember the ultimate blessing that obedience to God brings.

Christ is our example of suffering.

1 Peter 3:18. *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,*

The supreme example of one who suffered and did no wrong is Christ. The word for "died" in many of the older manuscripts is the identical word that is also rendered "suffered unto death." There is only one letter difference between "died" and "suffered" in the Greek. The quote clearly identifies that the death of Christ was a death that came with great suffering.⁷ The New Testament writers declared that Jesus' suffering was the one final sacrifice that provides the full atonement for the sins of all those who place their faith and trust in God. Jesus did not die for His own sins, but for the sins of all others who would trust in Him. Christ's death on the cross is not an event to be repeated:⁸ the work of grace is done. Christ's death on the cross was once for all time. His sacrifice also was once for all sin and once for all people, giving all the opportunity to find forgiveness by trusting in God.

The next phrase literally means, "the just for the unjust" This refers to the vicarious nature of Christ's death on the cross. He took our place, suffering on our behalf, though He did nothing to deserve that suffering. We should never forget that we all have an unjust nature, and all of us deserve God's wrath for our continued sin.

⁷ Similar quotes 1 Cor 15:3, Gal 1:3-4, 1 John 2:2, Heb 5:1-3 & 7-10.

⁸ Hebrews 9:26-27.

The word "***bring you to God***" refers to bringing someone to the throne of one in great authority.⁹ Only Aaron and his sons were allowed to come to the door of the tent, only "righteous" Jewish men were allowed to enter the inner court of the temple. Only Jews could go past the court of the Gentiles. Each of these rules serve as a metaphor of one's worthiness to access the throne of God. Jewish traditions stratified access to God. Jesus' death did away with all of that stratification, even though modern religions have sought to recreate it.

Jesus died. He did not go into a coma or faint, but was alive in the spirit immediately upon his physical death.

Christ's Preaching to Imprisoned Spirits.

1 Peter 3:19 *through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison*

This is probably the most difficult passage in the letter, and it is numbered among the most controversial passages in the entire New Testament. Martin Luther admitted that he did not understand what Peter meant in these verses. These verses have been used to defend the Catholic tradition of purgatory. Here is a summary of the primary modern viewpoints:

- Jesus went to the realm of the dead, Sheol or Hades, between his death and resurrection. This was part of his suffering for the sins of his people.
- Jesus demonstrated, through His death, the truth of the gospel to all those who are under the bondage of sin, including those who had already died.
- Jesus made this journey to proclaim his Lordship over the dead. His goal was to obtain release for the righteous people who had died prior to the cross.
- Jesus went to the realm of the dead to validate what God had been saying throughout history: God's redemptive work now had been accomplished in Christ's death on the cross. The damnation of those who had refused to respond to the truth was confirmed.

⁹ c.f. Exodus 29:4.

- Jesus went to preach repentance and salvation, providing all the dead with another chance to be saved.
- Jesus became eternally present at the actual time of His death. It was that eternal spirit that called people to repentance.
- These verses refer to the apocryphal book of Enoch, which is not part of Christian doctrine.

The specific meaning of these verses may elude us, but the basic message is still very clear:

1 Peter 3:20. *who disobeyed 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,*

Jesus' death was not myth or make-believe. If we ascribe to Jesus' descending into the realm of the dead, this scripture clearly states that he descended into Hades. Jewish tradition held that the realm of the dead was divided into two sections: Hades was a waiting place for the righteous, often referred to as "Abraham's Bosom." The second section was Gehenna, or hell, which was reserved for the wicked. Its name was based on the name of the Valley of Hinnom, just outside the walls of Jerusalem where the city's refuse was burned.

The New Testament does not specifically state that Jesus descended into Hell. However, the implication here is strong that Jesus descended into Hades, where he would have met Abraham, Moses, Elijah, etc. We may recall the mount of transfiguration,¹⁰ where Jesus met with the patriarchs, clearly demonstrating their state as a living being. The Jews would have held that the patriarchs ascended from Hades for this event, whereas many hold that they stepped into time from eternity as Jesus Christ did.

The Gospel of Matthew, gives witness to the dead rising during the period between Jesus' death and His resurrection, lending credence to the timeless efficacy of His saving grace.¹¹ Whether these who were raised ascended from Hades or descended from Heaven's eternity, Christ's triumph over all times and places is universal. God's message of grace in Christ reaches out to touch all mankind so that no person is excluded from the scope of God's love and concern. In Noah's time, the ark was the instrument of salvation for the righteous. The water lifted the boat and held it safe during the destruction of the wicked. In the same manner, Jesus

¹⁰ Matthew 17:1-9.

¹¹ Matthew 27:52.

lifts up all those of genuine faith, saving them from destruction. Peter is laying the groundwork for his statement concerning Christian baptism.

Christian Baptism: Symbol of the Resurrection.

1 Peter 3:21. *and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,*

The Greek word, ἀντιτυπον, *antitupon*, rendered as the word *symbolizes*, is also used in Heb. 9:24, and refers to that which is represented by the type of another, and is grammatically linked to the word translated, "saved." This verse does not mean, as it may literally appear, that salvation is obtained through water baptism, but rather, that water baptism is a symbol or archetype of that salvation. Those who hold to the literal interpretation that water baptism is necessary for salvation can find through the actual Greek grammar a context that is in agreement with the basic doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. Peter uses Noah's deliverance by the floodwaters as an antitype of the Christian believer's deliverance which is symbolized in water baptism.

Furthermore, the verse continues to say that salvation is by the "pledge of good conscience." This is far more consistent with our understanding that God looks to our heart, and not to our outward actions. However, a misunderstanding of this verse can lead one to believe that baptism alone saves. Infant baptism was a tradition started in the third century due to a misunderstanding about baptism and a subsequent thought that since it is the act of baptism that saves, then one should be baptized upon birth to assure one's security against an early death. This mistaken interpretation has become a stalwart tradition that has greatly contributed to the persecution of the church. Many Anabaptists (re-baptizers) were tortured and killed during the next twelve centuries in the name of doctrinal correction by the Catholic and Anglican churches. There is no religious ritual or rite that can provide a means of salvation. There is no single work, or set of works, which can make one righteous. This verse states that the power of salvation is found only through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, His work, and His authority.

1 Peter 3:22. *who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

Peter has identified that baptism is not a bath that cleanses one of dirt, but a symbolic act that is an archetype of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. In being baptized, the new Christian is making an open pledge, or vow, of consecration to God, declaring repentance from sin, and allegiance to the LORD, Jesus. This public proclamation indicates that the believer has heard the truth, and has turned to God for salvation through Christ's resurrection. Being buried in the water symbolizes Christ's being buried in the tomb. Rising out of the water symbolizes that new life that one now, upon their previous profession of faith, will experience.

In baptism we identify ourselves publicly with Christ. We state unashamedly that we have died to the old life and arise to a new life in Christ. Second and third century Christians illustrated this quite graphically. They removed their old clothes prior to baptism, were baptized, then they put on new clothes. Since baptism is a testimony of repentance, it is not appropriate that one carry an unrepented sin through the waters of baptism.

Verse 22 also affirms the ascension of Christ and his eternal status as the reigning Lord. He holds the position of ultimate authority over all creation. If angels, authorities and powers are in submission to Him, our very first step in understanding what Jesus is doing, is to accept his complete authority over us. Jesus is not a symbol or icon to be worshiped, He is the Lord to be loved and obeyed. Only when we accept the position of Jesus as our personal LORD, can we experience the salvation He died to give us. It is from that perspective we then seek to obey Him, and show evidence of His lordship in our lives.