

1 Peter 3:13-3:22

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, ¹⁵but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ¹⁶and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

¹⁸For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, ²⁰who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. ²¹Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ²²who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

We ended the last lesson with talking about needing to have the desire for and to choose to do what is good. We continue the conversation about choosing to do what is good here at the beginning of our lesson for today.

The opening verse poses an interesting question. It almost sounds like Peter is saying “If you choose to do what is good, no one will harm you.” I am reminded of this verse:

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

It is easy to see that our lives today are not like that. People who do what is good and display the fruit of the Spirit get hurt all the time. Jesus, who was the prime example of choosing to do what is good, was beaten, mocked and killed. So, it is

safe to say that Peter is not saying that suffering will cease if we choose to do what is good. In a perfect world, we would not be hurt when we choose to do what is good, but we live in a fallen world that is full of sinful, selfish people. The idea of what is good has been greatly obscured in our day and age. We live in a time where the motto is “What is good for me is good for me and what is good for you is good for you.” We must resist falling into this way of thinking. God is the only true measure of goodness. His standards are what we should be striving to live by.

With Christ as our example, it is clear that it is completely within the realm of possibility that we get hurt or suffer for doing what is right and good. Peter tells us that if we suffer for what is good or for the sake of righteousness that we are blessed. This isn't the only time Peter mentions something like this in this very passage. In verse 17 he says that if God wills it, it is better to suffer for doing what is good than to suffer for doing what is wrong. We see many examples of people suffering for the sake of the gospel and what is good. From Jesus, Paul and many early Christians to modern day Christians who are killed for their belief in God and their faith in the gospel message, suffering for what is good has been a constant. Peter tells us that even though we suffer for the sake of righteousness, we should not be troubled or fear the intimidations of those who harm us.

We must not be troubled when we suffer for doing good. We cannot let the hurt and mistreatment deter us from doing what is good and right. Also, we are not to fear the intimidations of those who hurt us. This has at least two meanings to it. First, we should not fear those who will hurt us. We should not be afraid of those who will treat us poorly. Secondly, this passage is a quote from Isaiah 8:12:

...And you are not to fear what they fear or be dead in it.

This tells me that often times, we are hurt by people who are fearful. There is a popular saying, “Hurt people hurt people.” We typically do not act in an appropriate manner when we are afraid. Our fear can turn into actions that hurt others. We often fear what we do not know or do not understand. Those that do not understand the love that God has for us will act out in fear of that unknown.

We should not be afraid of the uncertainty that plagues the minds of the lost. Rather, we are supposed to “sanctify Christ as Lord of our hearts”.

What does it mean for us to sanctify Christ as Lord of our hearts? To sanctify means to set apart. In essence, Peter is telling us to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. As we discussed in the second lesson, Jesus is our living hope and we can hope in the things to come at the revelation of Jesus.

This passage tells us that we are to be ready to make defense or give an explanation for the hope that we have within us. As Christians we have put our faith in the work of Jesus on the cross, and we know God’s love, forgiveness, and where we are headed when our life ends here on earth. We must be ready to share that message with people. As we read on, we find a couple more instructions to go with this defense. First, Peter says that we should be ready to make a defense we someone ASKS about our hope. Why would someone ask about your hope? How would they know it was something different that they didn’t have? It is by your actions that they can tell a difference. We must remain true to the scriptures and act as God has commanded especially in times of hurt and suffering. Second, we are to defend our hope with gentleness and reverence. We aren’t supposed to angrily yell the gospel at our neighbors. We must present it with gentleness.

Think about it this way. When you are told you have done something wrong or someone is correcting you would you prefer to be yelled at or gently talked to? No one likes to admit they have done something wrong, and it doesn’t feel good to be told we have been doing something wrong. When sharing the gospel and where our hope is, we are basically telling people that they are sinners and have been living wrong. We must share our hope in gentleness and with respect.

Our behavior is very important. It is what will set us apart from anyone who is a non-believer. Peter on a number of occasions has talked about our actions and that we should choose to do what is right according to the scriptures. It has been said already in this lesson, but it is worth saying again. Christ is our example of how to live. He was the just person who died for the unjust. His actions are what have given us access to God. It is through Christ that we approach God. Think

about this. If Christ's actions bring us to God, what can our actions do as imitators of Christ? To be clear, our actions will NOT bring people to God. Only Jesus can do that. However, by choosing to do what is good we can at least point people in the right direction.

Verses 19 and 20 give some interesting text and have led to much debate among Bible scholars. There is not a whole lot of certainty as to what exactly these verses mean or refer to. That being said, I will give you what my take on them is. First, we must determine what it means to be a disobedient soul. My opinion is that the disobedient souls are those who did not believe in God. Those who do not believe in God go to hell which is an eternal prison. I believe it is to these people that Jesus went and made a proclamation. There is no indication at all of what Jesus said to them. It is possible that He went to reveal himself as Messiah to those who were alive before Him and did not know who He was. Jesus' message to them is a best guess scenario. There is no way of knowing for certain what was said.

We continue with the last two verses that correspond to what was just said about the days of Noah. The flood cleansed the earth of all those who did not believe. It was a baptism of the land. Peter tells us that it is baptism that saves us. It is important to note that it is not being dunked in water that saves us or the removal of dirt from the flesh as Peter puts it. It is the action that water baptism represents that saves us. It is the baptism or cleansing of our souls that saves us, and there is only one way to do that. Through Jesus Christ. As we petition God for a good conscience, or forgiveness of our sins, it is only the work of Jesus Christ that can accomplish the task. It is through the good works of Jesus who suffered on our behalf that we are forgiven.