

1 Peter 3:8-22

Week 5 - Smiling Through Suffering

Learning Objectives

- Gain a better understanding of how we are called to inherit a blessing through unity in Christ.
- Christians must seek peace in love and humility even in the face of evil, persecution, or suffering. We are called to be righteous even when opposing unrighteousness.

Pray for your time together as a group.



Can you share about a time when you or someone else disarmed a potentially volatile situation in a clever way?

Leader's Note: If no one has a personal example, perhaps you can think of one from a TV show/movie.

Optional Transition: As Christians, we can expect to face volatile situations, both with others in the church and those outside the church. This week, we're looking at Peter's advice on how to deal with these situations in a way that honors God.

Read Out Loud: 1 Peter 3:8-22 (NIV)

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. 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.

A Christ-Centered Response

? Peter lists a series of behaviors/actions in verses 8-12. How do these behaviors help us reflect Christ?

Possible Answers: Christ exhibited all of these behaviors in His time on earth and by coming to earth. His ministry shows many examples of compassion, sympathy, and love (healing the sick and lame, showing grace and mercy to sinners, etc.). In addition, the very act of descending from His heavenly throne to become human and to die for our sins shows ultimate humility (as well as again showing compassion, sympathy, and love.). [Ephesians 5:8]

? In verse 9, Peter explains how we should not repay evil with evil. In what ways have you been tempted to respond to evil in the past?

Possible Answers: Anger, frustration, disappointment, etc.

? What kinds of evil and insults should we expect to see in the world? How can we seek peace as a response to those kinds of things?

Possible Answers: We're told that the Gospel is "foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18), and thus we should expect to be considered fools by the world. Certainly in our country, we can expect a certain amount of mockery and possibly active opposition; globally, Christians can expect outright persecution. In all these things, it is important for us to respond positively, continuing to present the good news in a non-confrontational manner. We can also devote ourselves to good works in the community, as that seeks peace by both improving the world and showing that the Gospel really changes our lives and how we act.

The Spiritual Big House

Verses 18-19 are a bit cryptic, and scholars have debated Peter's true meaning for centuries. Who are the spirits in prison? Why were they imprisoned? Where exactly did Christ go when He preached to them? Scholars have interpreted these verses in a number of ways over the years. Peter may have been alluding to fallen angels in these verses. Some have suggested that Peter is saying that between the crucifixion and resurrection, Christ descended to the underworld and preached to deceased human souls. Another interpretation speaks to how the pre-incarnate Christ may have spoke to Noah, preaching repentance from sin. Ultimately, Peter's true meaning may be lost to us, but we can take comfort in the fact that Christ's work on the cross justifies us before our Creator. This is incredible news that deserves to be shared, and even Christ wants people to hear about it, so that more people can draw closer to Him. For more: See Faithlife Study Bible

? How can we better trust God with ultimate justice when we see evil in the world?

Possible Answers: We can understand that our treasure is ultimately in heaven and not in this world, and thus even those who benefit from doing evil will eventually receive justice. We can understand, too, that we are all sinners, and that the wages of sin is death, but those found in Christ have had their penalty paid already at the cross.

Suffering and Sharing

? Verses 13-18 deal with the topic of suffering. Peter and many early Christians suffered and were challenged because of their beliefs. How does Peter encourage them to respond in this passage?

Possible Answers: He encourages them to not be frightened, revere Christ, be gentle, respect others, and be willing to suffer. In general, Peter instructs believers to welcome suffering that comes about from doing good.

? In verse 14, Peter says that we are blessed if we “suffer for what is right,” which seems counterintuitive. Have you ever felt blessed after suffering for Christ? How did it compare to how you might have expected it to feel?

? How can we hold tighter to our blessings in the midst of suffering?

Possible Answers: We can remember that Christ suffered as well, and knows what we are going through. We are instructed elsewhere (James 1:2-4) to count trials as joy, because suffering produces steadfastness, and that (Romans 5:3-5) that suffering ultimately produces hope.

? In verse 17, Peter talks about how we can actually suffer more in this life for doing good than if we just indulge our evil impulses. Can you share about a time in your life when this has happened to you?
Optional Alternative: Can you think of any examples of how this is true today?

? Peter says that we should share our faith with gentleness and respect (vs. 16). What does this look like, practically? Why is it important?

Possible Answers: Both matter and manner matter, and the way we share our faith (and the way we live our lives) can be just as important as what, exactly, we share. Practically, this looks like not being argumentative and not tearing people down in order to convince them, even if they attack, malign, or mock us for sharing. Rather than trying to score an intellectual victory or explain why everything the person we’re talking to believes is wrong, we explain the Gospel positively, showing that the worldview contained in the Gospel both makes the most sense and contains the most joy. To steal the old saying, we try to win people, not arguments.

? Optional: Verse 15 talks about giving “an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”. Have you ever had to share the reason for your faith (hope) with others, specifically non-Christians? What happened?

Or

How would you share the reason for your hope with someone?

A Side Note...Verses 20-22

“A comparison is drawn between salvation in the ark and baptism. In both instances, believers are saved through the waters of judgment. The mere mechanical act of baptism does not save, for Peter explicitly says, ‘not as a removal of dirt from the body’, meaning that the passing of water over the body does not cleanse anyone. Baptism saves you because it represents inward faith ... Christians have generally agreed (irrespective of denominational differences) that water baptism is an outward sign of the inward reality of regeneration, which is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit and which may be received only by grace through faith.” - ESV Study Bible

How has baptism been a meaningful and important part of your Christian life (if you have been baptized)?

For Discussion And Accountability

? 1 Peter 3:8-22 lays out the Gospel message of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and eternal promise in heaven. How can you better prepare to give an account for that hope in your own life?

? Think about your upcoming week. In what situations, relationships, or interactions can you behave as Peter describes in verses 8-12?