

expound

EXPLORING THE
TRUTH OF THE
WORD OF GOD

1 Peter

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God's Grace in Suffering (Part 1)

1 Peter 3:8-22

Peter wrote this letter to the Christians in what is today modern Turkey, preparing them for the "fiery trials" that were headed their way. Yet, his message is not one of gloom and despair. His approach was optimistic and positive. In the remainder of chapter 3, we will examine his Christ-exalting advice and look at one of the most difficult passages of Scripture to interpret.

This passage introduces the final and largest section of Peter's Letter – GOD'S GRACE IN SUFFERING.

Preparing Your Heart for Difficult Days Ahead

3:8-12

Peter introduces this section with an admonition to get your heart ready. (3:8-12)

"Finally" indicates that this is a bridge passage connecting submission with suffering.

Five key virtues (v. 8)...

1. Harmony – *single-mindedness*
2. Sympathy
3. Brotherly love
4. Compassion
5. Humility

Peter stresses the call to not return evil for evil but to return good for evil. (vv. 9-12)

In this passage, Peter moves to the subject of suffering for Christ.

v. 8 was about how we love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

v. 9 is about how we love our enemies.

This is the second time Peter writes "to this you were called." (See 2:31)

Here Peter adds, "that you may inherit a blessing."

Not only are we called to love fellow believers and to love our enemies, we are also called to "love life." (v. 10)

See Psalm 34:1-16.

Practicing the Lordship of Christ 3:13-18

Peter stresses that Christians must practice the Lordship of Christ. (vv. 13-18)

The key to not being afraid of what man may do is to "fear" God more than you "fear" man.

See Isaiah 8:12-13.

"Set apart Christ as Lord" is Peter's way of saying, "Let there only be one to whom you bow, whom you regard was the Holy One, who is sovereign in your life, and that one being Jesus."

When Christians practice the Lordship of Jesus in the face of persecution, questions will come from the unbelieving.

Peter urges Christians to be prepared to give answers.

The manner in which we give our answers must be respectful and gentle so that our conscience is clear.

It's not only what we say, but how we say it that matters.

Once again, Peter uses the suffering of Jesus as our model and example. (vv. 18)

Pondering the Illustration from the Life of Noah 3:19-22

Vv. 19-21 is one of the most difficult passages of Scripture to interpret.

In order to gain some insight into this passage, we have to ask some questions...

Who are the spirits in prison?

When did Christ "preach" to them?

What was the content of the message preached to them?

What does this have to do with Noah?

What does this have to do with preparing God's people for coming persecution?

Three interpretations that have been offered.

1. Christ, between his death and resurrection, descended into Hades (the place of departed lost souls) and preached to the souls of the wicked who had lived in Noah's day.
2. Christ, between his death and resurrection, descended into Hades and announced to the exceedingly wicked angels who had somehow "married" human women and produced a "super-race"

called the Nephilim that was the cause of growing mass wickedness on the earth. (Genesis 6:1-8).

The purpose of this announcement was not for salvation, but condemnation

See 2 Peter 2:4-6 and Jude 6.

3. By the Spirit, Jesus "preached" through Noah for 120 years to the mocking, wicked, disobedient world. (See 1:11)

These are the "spirits" who are "now" in the prison of Hades awaiting final judgment.

This brings encouragement to Christians ...

This assures the greatness of Christ who is not bound by space and time.

It's better to obey than to disobey and be cast into the prison of v. 19.

It is no disadvantage to be a small rejected minority. If you are a minority with God, you will be saved and the tables will be turned.

The meaning of baptism strengthens us for suffering. (vv. 21)

The flood waters of Noah's day reminds Peter of Christian baptism.

Inward baptism, symbolized by outward immersion, is what saves us.

To the statement "baptism now saves you," he adds, "Not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience."

Baptism is a way of saying to God: "I trust you to apply the death of Jesus to me for my sins and to bring me through death and judgment into new and everlasting life through the resurrection of Jesus."

There is now no condemnation. We have already died that death in Christ and been raised in him. Therefore our present suffering is not the wrath of God.

Peter closes this chapter with this thought: In preparation for your suffering remember ... No harassing, oppressing, deceiving, accusing demon is free to do as he pleases. All angels, authorities, powers, devils, evil spirits, demons, and Satan himself are subject to Jesus Christ. (v.22)

Questions for Table Conversation

1. Imagine you are living in a place in the world where to be a Christian will more than likely bring severe persecution – loss of your job, mockery, beating, imprisonment, or martyrdom. How would you do evangelize in such a place where you could not make any promises to people that things would get better for them on the earth but that if they believed what you offered, it may cost them their lives?
2. Why is participating with a loving, support body of believers crucial if we are to endure difficult times well?
2. How should Christians prepare themselves to give answers for their faith before the unbelieving and skeptical?
3. Of the three possible interpretations of 2 Peter 3:19-21, which do you feel best interprets the text and why?

Before Our Next Session

Before next week's session, read 1 Peter 4:1-19 – once a day if possible.

Use the following questions to assist you as you reflect on your reading:

1. According to vv. 1-6, how is a Christian different from a pagan?

2. What specific instructions does Peter give suffering Christians who are aware that the end of all things is coming (vv. 7-11)?
3. According to v. 10, do all Christians have a spiritual gift?
4. How should a Christian use his/her spiritual gift (v. 10)?
5. According to vv. 12-13, what should be the reaction by Christians when they face suffering for their faith?
6. What did Peter say those who suffer according to the will of God should do? (v.19)

