



Session 6

ALWAYS READY

Believers honor God by sharing His hope with others.

1 PETER 3:13-22

¹³ And who will harm you if you are deeply committed to what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, ¹⁵ but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. ¹⁶ However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian life will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous



for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm.¹⁹ In that state He also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison²⁰ who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while an ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water.²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.²² Now that He has gone into heaven, He is at God’s right hand with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him.

Identify the attitudes encouraged by Peter in this passage. List the ways displaying these attitudes has a positive impact for the cause of Christ.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Be prepared! This advice applies to many areas of our lives. Sometimes we follow the advice; oftentimes (to our regret) we ignore it. For example, we know we should keep first-aid supplies at home: bandages, antiseptic, thermometer, etc. How about an emergency kit for your house? Items such as a flashlight, drinking water, battery-operated radio, and ready-to-eat food are recommended. How about your vehicle? Jumper cables and flares are some of the basics people carry. Then there’s a matter of being ready for the unexpected on the job: the boss makes a sudden request; you’re asked to make a presentation on a moment’s notice. Other areas of life surely come to mind as well. We need to be ready for whatever life throws at us in our families and other relationships.

What actions have you or your family taken to be prepared for the unplanned or unexpected?

Often we as Christians get nervous when we think about sharing our faith with others. We feel unprepared, afraid we'll say the wrong thing. Or we've heard that other people automatically "turn off" when they think someone is trying to evangelize them. Peter was no stranger to thinking about how to point others to Christ. On one hand, he once had the miserable experience of denying that he even knew Jesus. On the other hand, by the time he wrote this letter, he had been a leader and spokesman for the first Christians for decades. His first readers were persecuted believers who surely had questions about the right approach to defending their faith. In this week's lesson, we'll investigate what Peter said about the way believers honor God by sharing His hope with others.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Evangelism*

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 PETER 3:13-22

In this section, Peter returned to his overall purpose for the letter. He wrote to encourage believers who were being persecuted for their faith. He had already spoken of persecution in his letter (see 1:6; 2:12,15,19; 3:1,9). However, this is his most direct discussion of the topic to this point. How should Christians respond when others threaten them physically, emotionally, or economically? How can they respond in a way that honors God? How can their plight be used to further the kingdom of God and point others to Jesus?

If Christians are overly defensive or unprepared to offer a ready defense of their faith, they lose an opportunity to witness for Christ. If they get sidetracked by cultural arguments and neglect pointing others to Christ's work on the cross, they again lessen their effectiveness. If they cower to the persecutors and refuse to display their faith, Christians lose a tremendous opportunity for influence, even though it may come with a cost.



EXPLORE THE TEXT

READY TO DEFEND (1 PET. 3:13-17)

VERSE 13

13 And who will harm you if you are deeply committed to what is good?

Peter knew that believers would not be able to avoid dealing with relationships strained by the truth of the gospel. Those who would not embrace Jesus often worked to stamp out faith. He began his discussion with a rhetorical question. He asked who would *harm* them if they were *deeply committed to what is good*. The word translated *deeply committed* is the word from which we get the English word *zealous*. Peter's question was rhetorical. The expected answer would be, "Nobody." Yet as we will see in the next verse, he acknowledged there are exceptions to the predictable answer.

Do you think that people are shocked in today's world when they hear about persecuted Christians? Do you think believers are shocked or surprised when they experience persecution or oppression? Explain.

VERSE 14

14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed,

In spite of the fact that people would not expect to be persecuted for doing good, persecution was a reality in Peter's world—and also is in ours. The apostle proclaimed that those who *suffer for righteousness* would be *blessed*. The Christian is blessed in knowing that his or her suffering is righteous and temporary.

Alluding to Isaiah 8:12, Peter reminded his readers to put their trust in God alone. In Isaiah 7–8, Judah was threatened by Israel and Aram. Those nations sought to remove Judah's king and place their own puppet king on the throne. The nation of Judah trembled in terror, but Isaiah spoke the Lord's promise that He would protect them against those who threatened them. Peter reminded the Christians that God would also take care of them.

BIBLE SKILL: *Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.*

The Greek word *apologia* is the basis of the word “apologetics,” the term referring to reasoned arguments in support of or defending a position. It is found eight times in the New Testament (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11; Phil. 1:7,16; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:15). Read these passages and look at the various uses of the term. Make notes of any findings that help you better understand the term.

VERSE 15

¹⁵ but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Instead of cowering in fear, Peter encouraged Christians to set apart Jesus as Lord in their hearts. This is an acknowledgment that Jesus, not the opponents of Christianity, is sovereign. Jesus will have the final word. Though at the time suffering was difficult and life was uncertain, Jesus was Lord of the situation. To ***honor Christ as Lord*** is to treat Him as holy and to reverence Him.

Honoring Jesus as Lord did not mean that Christians ignored their enemies. Rather, they were to have a ready ***defense*** for ***the hope*** that they had. The word *defense* can refer to a formal response in a court case where the defendant responds to accusations from the prosecution.

What keeps believers from being prepared to share Jesus with others? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the greatest, how prepared do you think believers are to defend their faith in Christ?



VERSE 16

16 However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian life will be put to shame.

Peter encouraged Christians to make a ready defense of their faith, but he did not encourage them to do so with arrogance or callousness. He encouraged them to respond to their accusers with gentleness and respect. By doing this, they could prove their accusers wrong when they accused them of only wanting to stir up trouble. Keeping their conscience clear ensured that their testimony would speak to those who were outside the faith.

The emphasis in this section is on evangelism—reaching those who are outside the faith. The way a Christian responds to suffering and mistreatment speaks volumes to unbelievers.

VERSE 17

17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

Sometimes suffering is caused by wrong actions on our part, and sometimes it is caused by us doing the right thing. Peter explained that it *is better to suffer for doing good* than for doing wrong. Sometimes it is within *God's will* for innocent people to suffer (for example, Jesus). God is never surprised by our suffering, and He will see to it that good and not evil will result from suffering for the right reasons (Rom. 8:28).

Why is suffering for one's faith a powerful witness to those who do not believe in Jesus?

POINT TO CHRIST'S WORK (1 PET. 3:18-20a)

VERSE 18

18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm.

When we suffer because of cultural conflicts, we may become distracted and forget what is ultimately most important. Fighting cultural wars is extremely complex, but the ultimate goal is to point others to the One who can change hearts from the inside out.

Peter pointed to the example of Christ. Jesus *suffered for sins*, but those sins were not His. He suffered *once for all*. His substitutionary death on the cross paid for the sins of others. The innocent suffered for the guilty. In the Old Testament, sacrifices were repeated daily; Jesus' death was once for all.

Why did Jesus die if He was innocent? He died *that He might bring you to God*. Jesus' death was all that was needed to bring unrighteous people into a relationship with holy God. Nothing needs to be added to Christ's death. It is not a work of man but a work of God. God intended and allowed Jesus to be put to death in the earthly realm, and also made Him alive through resurrection from the dead. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the central component of Christians' faith, and it gives us hope in the midst of suffering.

VERSE 19

¹⁹ In that state He also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison

Verses 19-20 are among the most obscure in the New Testament. The first dilemma is the identity of *the spirits in prison*. Were these unbelievers who died? Were they Old Testament believers who died and were awaiting the coming of Christ? Were they fallen angels awaiting judgment? The most likely explanation is that they were fallen angels. Peter spoke of sinful angels being imprisoned and punished (2 Pet. 2:4), and Jude 6 provides a similar picture. Those fallen angels were awaiting punishment and were held by God for that end.

A second question centers on Jesus' *proclamation*. What did He proclaim? Fittingly, this word is not the word for evangelism, but the general word for preaching. Jesus was not preaching so that they might be saved. He was proclaiming judgment on them for their fallen nature. Some see in this a reference to Genesis 6:1-4, when the angels had sexual relations with women in Noah's day and were imprisoned for their sin. According to this view, Christ did not descend into hell to preach to Old Testament saints, but He traveled to a place where demonic spirits were held and proclaimed victory and judgment over them.



VERSE 20a

^{20a} **who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while an ark was being prepared.**

The reference to Noah in this verse strengthens the view that Genesis 6:1-4 is in the background of this passage as it was in Jude 6. The angels were disobedient and fell, initiating a new dimension of wickedness on the earth. Their actions did not leave God without a plan. He *patiently waited* for Noah to build an ark so that he and his family could be saved. God could have ended the world at the time of Noah, and He would have been just in doing so. However, He waited to save Noah, and He likewise waited to bring judgment on the *disobedient* spirits. These verses do not teach that people have another opportunity to be saved after the grave; rather, they teach that the pronouncement against fallen angels was sure even though it awaited its final proclamation.

Rather than getting caught up in the various interpretations of this passage, it would be wise to remember that the point of these verses is to show how Christ's work is to be the focus of those who suffer persecution. As God patiently waited, so those who endure suffering should also wait for God to save them from their distress.

How can a good or noble cause become a substitute for pointing others to Christ? How can it become a vehicle for pointing others to Christ? What is the difference?

DISPLAY YOUR FAITH (1 PET. 3:20b-22)

VERSE 20b

^{20b} **In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water.**

During the days of Noah, eight people *were saved through water*—Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives. The flood waters that brought death to the wicked were the same waters that held up the ark. Like Noah, the Christians Peter addressed were a minority that faced persecution from the ungodly around them. Peter reminded them that God had spared Noah's family, and He had not forgotten them.

VERSE 21

²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Peter compared the floodwaters in the days of Noah with the baptismal waters that represented death. If Noah had succumbed to the floodwaters, he would have died like all the others in his day. However, he entered safely into the ark. Baptismal waters also represent a death. In fact, many pastors say, “Buried with Christ in baptism.” But like the ark in the flood, the resurrection of Jesus Christ also allows us to rise from the dead.

Peter did not intend to indicate that the physical act of baptism saves a person. In fact, he said as much. Baptism does not remove *the filth of the flesh*. What baptism does is to provide *the pledge of a good conscience*. What has happened inside a person (cleansing from sin) is represented outwardly by the washing of baptism. Baptism functions as a sign or symbol of the faith in Christ that one confesses at the time of baptism. If baptism removed sin, then a person would have no need for faith. But this was not Peter’s intention when he said that baptism saves. Baptism, like the floodwaters of Noah’s day, represents death. But the resurrection of Jesus, like the ark, causes the believer to rise to new life.

VERSE 22

²² Now that He has gone into heaven, He is at God’s right hand with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him.

While believers are enduring suffering on earth, Jesus has gone into heaven, where He sits *at God’s right hand*. Everything is subject to Him and His authority. Because Jesus is at God’s right hand in heaven, those enduring suffering should set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts. The world is not spinning out of control but is pushing toward His purposes. A day will come when all suffering for believers will end and where everything will be made right.

How does the authority of Jesus bring you comfort and courage to faithfully stand for Christ?



IN MY CONTEXT

We can face suffering with confidence, knowing that we do so to bring honor to God. All life situations include opportunities to point others to Christ. Christ died on the cross to secure salvation for all who are willing to accept Him.

Discuss actions your group can take to support and encourage each other to share Jesus with others. How can your group support other Christians who are enduring unjust suffering around the world?

What steps are you taking to better defend your faith against those who do not believe in Jesus? List goals and actions for accomplishing those goals.

Examine your spiritual life. If you have not accepted Jesus, look at the information on the inside front cover and discuss this decision with another group member. If you have accepted Christ, identify one person with whom you can share Jesus this week.

MEMORY VERSE

But honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. —1 Peter 3:15