

Living in Community I Peter 3:8-22

Main Idea: Because we follow Jesus who suffered injustice to make us righteous, we should live life in Christ resolutely and with integrity no matter how we are treated.

When we were first introduced to our study of I Peter, we looked at the disciple Peter and compared him to the Apostle Peter. We saw him matured in the faith, grown into Christlikeness. Recently I was reading in Fox's Book of Martyrs about Peter's death, and it made me again consider the contrast with that impetuous, rash, headstrong, disciple who didn't want either Jesus or himself as Jesus' follower, to suffer. Listen to what Fox's Book of Martyrs says about Peter's death. Kids, sorry about the old English.

"Among many other saints, the blessed apostle Peter was condemned to death, and crucified... Hegeippus saith that Nero sought matter against Peter to put him to death; which, when the people perceived, they entreated Peter with much ado that he would fly the city. Peter, through their importunity at length persuaded, prepared himself to avoid. But, coming to the gate, he saw the Lord Christ come to meet him, to whom he, worshipping, said, "Lord, whither dost Thou go?" To whom He answered and said, "I am come again to be crucified." By this, Peter, perceiving his suffering to be understood, returned into the city. Jerome saith that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was."

Often trials and suffering reveal what is in our hearts. Peter's courage at his death reveals the change of heart Peter had in regards to suffering for the Lord! He had indeed learned to "...*share the sufferings of Christ*" as he would exhort the readers later in chapter 4 (I Pet. 4:13) of this letter. So when the Apostle Peter wrote to scattered and suffering Christians, he could speak as one having experienced the life he was calling Christians to, one of submission to the will of God in suffering.

Peter could indeed say, "*This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!*" (I Peter 5:12) Peter would testify to us that as we come to rely only on God, as we put our full trust in Him and in Him alone, He gives us His Spirit who applies the shed blood of Jesus to us and enables us to walk in the obedience of faith as He changes us into the likeness of Jesus Christ!

I Peter 3:8-22 NASB

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For,

*"THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,
MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.*

*"HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;
HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.*

*"FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS,
AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,
BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."*

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and 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. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

For 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; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who 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.

Corresponding 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, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

Again I want you to note that it is important to understand that the text we are looking at this morning, I Peter 3:8-22, is linked to I Peter 2:13 through 3:7. Our text starts with “To sum it all up...” which indicates it is the synopsis of a series of ideas coming before.

To see the passage in context, remember that we have been reading about the intrinsic responsibilities of God’s saints in chapter 2:11 through 4:11. In chapter 2, verses 11-25, we are exhorted to exhibit submissiveness in all our relationships to civil authorities and to our masters in the workplace (2:11-20). We should recognize that God has placed them in those positions of authority over us. We do this because the Lord Jesus was submissive (2:21-25).

Then the section on husbands and wives (3:1-7) continues teaching about the critical responsibility of Christians to submit to our sovereign yet loving God and His delegated authority in the marriage relationship. This brings order and beauty into that relationship, providing warmth and harmony.

So then the opening words of this section, “To sum it up...” continues the series about living in submission to God in all our relationships. Since this section sums up the previous instruction, we can expect to see more generalized or overarching principles about Christian submission.

How then does Peter sum it all up? He starts with, *“All of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit.”* Notice first of all that he is specifically directing this section of text to relationships inside the church.

In previous sections he addressed one party in the relationship: the believing alien in the world community; the believing slave with the unreasonable, presumably unbelieving master; the believing wife with the unbelieving husband. But now he addresses both parties telling them to live in harmony. You obviously can’t address both parties, pleading for harmony when one party isn’t even

going to read the letter. Peter says "...all of you be harmonious" because he is talking to members of the body of Christ.

What can ruffle the waters in the church? Let me name a few causes of conflict and tension in the church: Sin such as pride or selfishness in Christians' lives; false believers in the fellowship; persecution; financial or relational challenges; and of course Satan piling onto any of the above situations.

But it is in that context that Peter says to "be harmonious". It is clear that being harmonious means that each one's mind is not to be independently singing its own tune, its own agenda. Harmonious is not even descriptive of a church being of one mind in the sense of singing each note in unison. Rather, it speaks to a united church whose members' hearts, minds, and lives are all going the same direction, singing parallel lines that beautifully harmonize under the direction of Jesus Christ. How different that is from the discord that comes when we are not following Jesus together.

Then we are to be sympathetic, meaning that we should share the feeling of another. I find that hard to do when I haven't experienced what the other person is going through. I usually understand intellectually but struggle to translate that into feelings. Yet when I just think about stubbing my toe really hard or dropping a 4X12 header on my foot, I instantly feel the pain in the back of my neck. Let me remind you and remind myself that the Spirit of God connects us in one body so that we can share the feelings of our brothers and sisters.

The word translated "*brotherly*" is related to the Greek *fileo*. It speaks to loving each other as part of the family, as brothers and sisters.

The word translated "*kindhearted*" in the NASB speaks to compassion or pity. It speaks to a compulsion to do something about the miserable situation of your brother. In that sense it goes beyond sympathy.

And we are to be "*humble in spirit*". The exhortation is to consider a brother to be better than one's self. Pride is the cause of most of our disputes. As soon as we start to feel disrespected, disregarded, misunderstood, or misrepresented, pride rears up in anger. We justify our anger, which of course we call "righteous anger", on principle. We claim to desire not revenge but justice.

So that is why Peter continues, "*not returning evil for evil* (repaying meanness with malice) *or insult for insult* (retaliating with a verbal blow for a verbal swipe), *but giving a blessing instead.*"

This begs the question, "Why would you give a blessing to the person doing you wrong?" Look at Peter's answer in the last part of verse 9. "*For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.*" Peter asks us to remember when we suffer unjustly, that we received blessing from God while at enmity with Him. God called us in order that we might receive a blessing instead of condemnation, because Jesus suffered for us. In light of what we have received from God through Jesus, Peter quotes Psalm 34:14-16:

"THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.

FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."

So Peter harkens back to the grace of God extended to mankind in Jesus. Jesus saved you so that God could enter into relationship with you and attend to your prayer; so that you could seek Him and enter His presence. He is against those who are evil, and that is what we are until the righteousness of our Savior is applied on our behalf. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the only means by which God is able to extend mercy to us. Now because you have Christ's life in you, you can bless those who exploit you!

After discussing suffering for righteousness in an imperfect church, Peter turns in verse 13 to a more generalized view of suffering for righteousness in the world. He starts off with a sweeping principle. *"Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?"* It makes sense that if you live doing what is good, nobody will stand in your way. You are not the backstabber or the con artist that they despise. You are not the depraved predator that they don't want to live near. They can trust what you say and you're a good neighbor.

Yet though you live righteously, you still might suffer unjustly. In that case, Peter has five things to tell us in verses 13-17:

- 1) Remember that we are blessed
- 2) Don't fear their intimidation or be troubled
- 3) Set God as holy in your heart
- 4) Be ready to give an explanation for your hope
- 5) Keep a good conscience

Let's go through these five points together. First remember that we are blessed. It's so much easier to get through a hard time if we can remember the blessing that we have in our relationship with the Savior. There is blessing in the moment but also blessing in knowing that there is just resolution coming when God completes our salvation. We indeed have a living hope!

Then Peter instructs us not to be fearful or troubled when there is an attempt to intimidate us. Our attitude should be that which Stephen and so many others of the martyrs had, accepting the opportunity to boldly testify to a living Lord Jesus while joyfully accepting suffering and even death as permitted by a loving Savior.

The third exhortation Peter gives is in verse 15a, to *"...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts..."* Set apart Christ as Lord. You might be thinking, "But isn't Peter speaking to people who are already Christians?"

Romans 10:9-10 teaches us that we have to acknowledge Jesus' lordship to be saved. We exalted Him as Lord of our lives when we first came to Him, but we frequently climb back on the throne, taking the role of lord in our own lives. We climb back on the throne when we want to follow our own will, often choosing the most comfortable path. It is impossible for us to submit to the suffering permitted by God when we are on the throne.

Examine your own heart this morning. Do you need to again set Jesus as Lord of your life? Peter says, "Christian, climb back down off of the throne and sanctify Christ as Lord again! Let Him rule your mind, your body, your heart, your will, and your emotions."

And then you can truly be ready "*...to give a defense to anyone who asks you to give account for the hope that is in you.*" You can tell them about God begetting you again, giving you a new birth to a living hope and an eternal inheritance! But if they see you instead of Christ on the throne of your life, they won't ask anything about your hope!

Let's look a little closer at what Peter says about this defense. From the text it appears that we are to be prepared to give a reasoned defense, a cogent explanation any time it is required. And then he qualifies that saying "...yet with gentleness and reverence."

Gentleness speaks of power under control. A picture of gentleness that often comes to my mind is the powerful, rough, calloused hand of a hard working farmer or construction worker, softly stroking the cheek of his newborn daughter! Remember the example of Jesus who was gentle, though as God in the flesh, He was also omnipotent. So there is to be gentleness born of restraint in the way we give our answer.

And then the word "reverence" invokes God in His absolute authority as well as a respect for others who are made in the image of God, no matter how marred that image is. Since we should regard all people with respect, our defense should not be given with an "in your face" attitude or as if we were cramming it down someone's throat. As recipients of God's grace extended to us in Jesus, graciousness and respect should characterize us in explaining our hope.

The reason Peter wants us to make sure that we are ready to give an answer for our hope is that when we go through suffering well, it is a testimony to those around us. As we submit to God in that suffering, it tells those looking on that our faith is authentic. Tertullian, the 2nd century church father wrote that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." In spite of all their suffering, Christians all through the centuries have lived and died so well that they opened up a door for the gospel to be preached to those who wanted to know the reason for the hope in them.

In verses 16-17 Peter exhorts us to maintain a clear conscience in doing what is right because it is better to suffer for doing what is right than for what is wrong. It is true that there are some who will even speak evil of you for doing what is right, but in the end, they will be put to shame. If you are going to suffer, make sure that it is for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

The main focus of verses 18-22 is to point to the Christian's model for conduct, Jesus Christ Himself! Jesus is the righteous One, the absolutely just One, and He died once for all for us, the decidedly unjust ones. He took the penalty of our sins upon Himself, submitting to death on the cross. He did this to bring us to God as He was put to death but made alive in the spirit. He suffered injustice to make us just.

I'm not planning to do a complex exegesis of verses 19-22 which contain some sections that are hard to interpret. Rather I'm going to just give you my understanding of the next few verses, admitting that other good Christian scholars have differing opinions.

Though verse 18, with its focus on Jesus suffering injustice, seems to be connected to the central point of the passage, in verses 19-22 Peter seems to take us on two rabbit trails, which though they are not insignificant, seem to diverge from the central emphasis of the whole passage.

The first speaks to Christ preaching to spirits who were in prison. We saw at the end of verse 18 that Christ died but was made alive in spirit. Remember that He told the thief on the cross, "today you will be with me in Paradise." It wasn't until three days later that He was raised from the dead. But Jesus' spirit and the thief's spirit were very much alive that very day in Paradise, even before the respective resurrections of their bodies. So before it was united to His resurrected body, Jesus' spirit was in Paradise, a part of Sheol which was the Old Testament the place of the dead.

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:22-26, we see that Sheol was divided into two sections, and there was a great separation between them. There Jesus made proclamation to some spirits in prison, presumably not in Paradise but rather in the other part of Sheol where the rich man of Jesus' story was confined. Peter explicitly says that these were disobedient spirits, specifically citing the sin-filled time of Noah, when only eight people were saved "through the water". It would seem that Christ was declaring His victory over sin and death to those spirits who had disobeyed, gone astray, and even led others astray in the days of Noah.

Then in typical Petrine fashion, he takes another rabbit trail as he speaks about the eight people saved through the water. That called to his mind the relationship between baptism and salvation, so Peter then says in verse 21, "corresponding to that (Noah and his family being saved through water), baptism now saves you."

Peter clarifies right away that he is not saying the act of ceremonial baptism saves us. He clarifies that our salvation is not by the physical act of water hitting our skin and removing dirt.

"Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh..." Rather he clarifies that he speaks of what baptism pictures or symbolizes, that appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus.

Because we have a risen Savior, in faith we can ask God for a conscience cleansed before God. That is only because Jesus died on the cross with the guilt of our sin placed on Him. And as we in faith come to Jesus, He is our advocate with the Father. Because Jesus lives, He cleanses our sin and we stand righteous before God on the basis of our identification with Him in His death and resurrection. So baptism pictures or symbolizes our cleansed conscience that comes as a result of our identification with Him in His death and resurrection.

We serve a resurrected Lord Jesus Christ who is in heaven, having subjected all angels and authorities and powers to Himself. This is the one whom we have set apart as Lord, the Holy One who is enthroned in our hearts and to whom we are willing submit.

So how do we go through suffering with grace? Let me point you back again to the verse where Peter explains what this letter is all about, I Peter 5:12. "*This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!*" As we come to rely only on God, as we put our full trust in Him and in Him alone, He gives us His Spirit who applies the shed blood of Jesus to us and enables us to walk in the obedience of faith. And He changes us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, the one who willingly took on suffering to give us a living hope and an eternal inheritance!

Let's sing "Praise the Savior Ye Who Know Him!" Think of Christians in the Roman Colosseum with the lions approaching singing this hymn of praise, giving an answer for the hope that was in them! May that same hymn of praise be on our lips when we suffer doing what is good in Jesus' name. This is our response of praise to Jesus and it tells the reason for our hope!

Living in Community I Peter 3:8-22

Main Idea

Because we follow Jesus who suffered injustice to make us righteous, we should live life in Christ resolutely and with integrity no matter how we are treated.

- Vs. 8-12 – A Christian’s conduct – primarily in the church
 - Characterized by:
 - V 9b – The purpose of our calling

- V 13-17 A Christian’s perspective on his conduct
 - V 13 Logical protection for those doing what is good.

 - V 14a – Inherent blessing even for those who suffer for doing right

 - Therefore:
 - V 14b – Don’t fear or be troubled.

 - V 15a – Set apart the Lord in your heart

 - V 15b – Be ready to make a reasoned defense

 - V 16-17 – Keep a good conscience

- V 18-22 A Christian’s model for conduct
 - V 18a Jesus as our model

 - V 19-20a – Rabbit trail #1 Preaching to spirits

 - Vs. 20b-22 – Rabbit trail #2 Baptism saves us

- Conclusion: I Peter 5:2