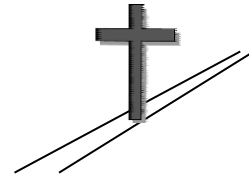




# The Path to Victory

1 Peter 3:13-22



## Our Suffering

- ❑ Read 1 Peter 3:13-17. It would seem that doing what is good should not bring harm. However, Christians who are committed to doing good sometimes suffer for what is right.
  1. Why does this happen? Why do Christians (Christ-followers) suffer for what is right?
  
- ❑ Peter writes, “But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed” (3:14, *NIV*).<sup>1</sup>
  - 📖 *Jesus said*, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...” (*Matthew 5:10-12a, NIV*).
  2. Based on 1 Peter 3:14-15, what should Christ-followers do (and not do) when facing opposition or mistreatment?<sup>2</sup>
  
- ❑ Peter writes, “Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear...” (3:15b-16a, *HCSB*).
  3. In what ways can Christians “give a defense”?<sup>3</sup> What can we say? What attitudes and behaviors are needed?<sup>4</sup> (3:15b-16)



## Christ's Suffering

- ❑ Peter writes, “For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than doing evil.” (3:17, *NIV*). Then he points to Christ’s example. Read 1 Peter 3:18-22. Verse 18 is central:
  - 📖 “For Christ also suffered [and died] 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” (*NIV*).

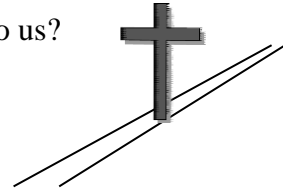
<sup>1</sup> Suffering *because* we are Christ-followers is a main theme in 1 Peter. Peter continually points to the blessings for those who suffer (1:3-6; 3:9) which is consistent with Jesus’ teaching (*Matthew 5:10-12*).

<sup>2</sup> Peter says, ‘Do not fear [those who oppose you]... But revere Christ as Lord.’ Peter’s words reflect Isaiah 8:12-13, which says, ‘...do not fear what they fear... The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear...’ (*NIV*). In the context of 1 Peter 3:15, the word ‘revere’ (*hagiasate*) means ‘honor...as holy’ (*ESV*).

<sup>3</sup> The word translated ‘defense’ or ‘answer’ is *apologia*, from which we get the term ‘apologetics’ which generally refers to a rational defense of the Christian faith. In modern times, the term ‘apologetics’ has been used to designate a specific academic discipline, which overlaps with scientific, historical, philosophical, ethical, religious, and theological areas of study. However, Peter would not be thinking about this kind of ‘apologetics’ when he wrote 1 Peter. Verse 15 refers more generally to the believer’s testimony among unbelievers. Of course, believers might use apologetics in explaining why they believe, but ‘giving a defense’ is much broader than apologetics.

<sup>4</sup> Peter mentions ‘gentleness’ (*prautētos*) and ‘respect’ (*phobou*). The Christian’s ‘attitude toward others [should be] rooted in one’s attitude toward God’ (Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 231). Peter also mentions ‘a clear conscience’ which relates to ‘good behavior’ (3:16). Our testimony involves our lives too!

4. What important points are made in verse 18?<sup>5</sup> How does it apply to us?



## Christ's Victory

- ❑ 1 Peter 3:19-20 is famous for being difficult to interpret. Questions include: *Who* are the imprisoned spirits? *What* message did Christ proclaim? *When* did he proclaim it? Over the years, many different interpretations have been presented and argued.
- 5. When we encounter difficult passages like this one, what should we do? (This question is about method. I am not asking anyone to explain or argue a particular interpretation.)<sup>6</sup>
- ❑ However we interpret verses 19-20, the main point of verses 18-22 is evident. Christ has achieved victory over evil, death, and opposing spirits, and has all things subject to him.

## Our Victory

- ❑ Peter's reference to "the days of Noah" leads to talking about how Noah's family was "saved through water," which leads to talking about Christian salvation and baptism (3:20b-21).
- ❑ As Noah's family was saved through the waters of judgment by being 'in the ark,' believers are saved through the waters of judgment<sup>7</sup> by being 'in Christ.' Through faith in Christ, we are united with him in his death and *also* in his resurrection and victory! (*Romans 6:3-10*)
- ❑ To clarify verse 21, one scholar paraphrases: "Baptism now saves you – not the outward physical ceremony of baptism but the inward spiritual reality which baptism represents."<sup>8</sup>

## Reflection & Application

- Do you believe the gospel (good news) as presented in verse 18 and footnote 5? Have you been "brought to God" through faith in Christ? Seek the Truth! As a believer, are you always ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that is in you? Seek to be ready. Seek to give an answer. Be encouraged in the path to victory.

<sup>5</sup> Christ suffered and died 'once for sins.' His sacrificial death was sufficient to take away our sins and cleanse us once for all (*Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:1-14*). Christ was sinless (*Heb. 4:15*) but he died for sinners, which includes all of us (*Romans 3:23*). 'Sin' may be defined as any attitude or action opposed to the authority and moral will of God. In our natural sinful condition, our relationship with God is broken. We are ashamed before God and separated from Him. Thus we need to be brought back into relationship with Him. Jesus suffered, died, and arose from the dead to remove our sin and shame and 'bring us to God.' His resurrection was essential (*1 Pet. 3:21b; 1 Corinthians 15:17*).

<sup>6</sup> We should start with prayer and plain reading of the biblical text, including different translations. We should also 'study' the biblical text (e.g., see 'How to Study the Bible' on the ICF website). However, we may still have trouble understanding some passages. Not many of us are biblical scholars, so we tend to rely on what others say. But even biblical scholars can disagree. I have numerous scholarly commentaries on 1 Peter and interpretations of 3:19-20 vary significantly. Thus instead of fully relying on one scholar's opinions, we should read about the different interpretations. Study Bibles (e.g., *ESV Study Bible & NIV Study Bible*) provide brief summaries of the main interpretations. We may be convinced to accept or favor a particular interpretation, or we may be confused! While we may not understand the details of every passage, I believe God has made His Word sufficiently clear. In 1 Peter 3:19-20, the general truth of Christ's victory is clear, which is the main point. By the way, I think the 'imprisoned spirits' are fallen angels (*2 Peter 2:4*) to whom Christ proclaimed his victory after he was resurrected from the dead.

<sup>7</sup> In baptism, when the believer goes under the water, that symbolizes death, including our union with Christ's death which resulted from God's judgment of our sins – the sins that Christ bore on our behalf (*Romans 6:3-4*).

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 163. We are saved *not* by the ceremony of baptism but 'by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'