

LEARN IT:

INTRODUCTION: “We didn’t start the fire.” On July 19, A.D. 64 an urban fire broke out in Rome and caused widespread devastation. It was finally contained after six days, only to erupt with a vengeance and destroyed ancient landmarks, many of which were the pagan gods statues and temples. Many homes which were also destroyed left a significant portion of the population homeless. The people were upset and bitter. They took to the streets to protest because they knew who was responsible for the fire. Though, eventually the Christians would become the scapegoat, they, the people, initially looked to Nero as the guilty one who started the fires. It was even reported that some were hindered while attempting to extinguish the flames. An order later learned came from Nero.

Why would Nero want to burn down his own capital? For one, historians tell us that Nero had a passion for building. The population knew this to be true and that the fire was started by him with the effort to rebuild Rome. Because the prosecution against him was so damning, Nero needed a scapegoat and he had the perfect one, the Christians as noted by Roman historian, Tacitus.

The question then is why did Nero pick the Christians as his scapegoat? William Barclay provides these reasons:

1. Christians were already victims of certain associations and slanders.
2. Christians were connected in mind with the Jews (anti-semitism).
3. Rumors that Christians were cannibals because of their communion practice.
4. Christians were charged with tampering with family relationships, a religion that splits the home was unpopular.
5. Christians spoke of the world going up in flames.
6. Christians were being harassed by the Jews in the courts which eventually influenced Nero because of certain proselytes in his court (Aliturus, an actor and Poppea, his mistress).

Because of these and other reasons, the blame for the fire in Rome was placed on the Christians. Soon after the savage outbreak of persecution erupted like the fire in Rome against Christianity across the empire.

How brutal was this persecution on the Christians under Nero? For an example, Nero had Christians rolled in pitch and then set on fire while they were still alive and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He also would sew them up in wild animal skins and then set his dogs loose and watch them tear the Christians from limb from limb. Tacitus records that this persecution was not legal.

SETTING: It is with this setting that Peter’s letter to the churches scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) was written. It is a letter that provides hope and encouragement for believers undergoing persecution. The letter also provides instruction on holy living unto the Lord in the midst of fiery trials and a call to stand firm in God’s grace.

AUTHORSHIP: The author of this letter is the apostle Peter as noted in the opening greeting (1.1). It was probably written around A.D. 64 as the persecutions began. Peter tells us that Silvanus aided him in the actual writing as Peter dictated the content in the letter (5.12).

RECIPIENTS: The recipients noted in (1.1) are “aliens” (Christians in churches) scattered throughout Asia minor (Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia). There is some debate on what Peter meant by this description. Some say they were Jews who became believers in Jerusalem who relocated to this region during Jewish persecution on believers. Some scholars seem to take that Peter is writing to indigenous believers who no longer fit the pagan culture and were seen as strangers in their own land waiting for the promised hope of Christ, the rapture and eternal Kingdom of God. It is more likely that the churches were composed of Christians from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, though the majority of them would have been Christians converted out of paganism rather than Judaism (4.3-4).



Regardless the nationality and ethnicity of these recipients, they all had the basic problem of living in a society ignorant of the One true God. They were misunderstood and subjected to cruel treatment. Note some of which Peter wrote concerning of:

- They were in the midst of many trials (1.6)
- They will have to suffer for righteousness sake (3.14)
- They were falsely accused as evil doers (3.16)
- They were going to be tested by their fiery trials (4.12)
- They were to commit themselves to God while suffering (4.19)
- They will share with all Christians around the world their affliction (5.9).

PURPOSE: Thus, as Peter writes in (5.12) that his sole purpose for writing this letter was to exhort and testify to the true grace of God, to encourage them to stand firm in it and not lose hope in Christ and His promises. This would require patient suffering and holy living before God and all people as a testimony of God's grace in Christ. Peter encourages them to look to Christ as their example of suffering while under trial. Christ became an example for all believers how to "suffer being stranger in this world."

What about Christians and suffering today? Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington D.C. noted that the suffering Peter's first readers experienced was not the same kind we experience or think about today. He was not writing about suffering that comes from natural causes, man-made disasters like bombs, wars, lost jobs, pressures from work or a bad economy. His readers were being treated badly simply because of what they believed. Now that they had become believers they would face all kinds of trials (1.6). Even Jesus spoke about this before His crucifixion that the world would hate them because of Him (John 14.18.)

APPLICATION: In this letter, Peter points out why we suffer for our faith and two kinds of suffering. First, why do Christians suffer? Peter tells us sometimes, even if it is just for a little while, "*you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;*" (1.6-7).

What Peter is saying under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is that the cause of your suffering is not by earthly causes, they are from God. The reason God brings spiritual suffering is for the strengthening of your soul and faith. Because the most important thing to God is your soul. God wants to see what is important to you by where your faith lies. If it lies in the things of this world, then your love for God is small. If your love for God is small then your faith and soul is small (cf. Jms 4.4). Jesus stated that "*for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matt. 6.21). Your faith and soul is like precious gold Peter says. The Lord will test you to make it more pure and precious to Him.

Second, what are the two kinds of suffering that Peter mentions? First, we suffer for doing evil, like, murder, stealing, meddling in other peoples affairs. If you do these, suffering will follow (2.20; 3.17; 4.15-16). Secondly, we suffer for doing good. Christians suffer for doing good

because they have been chosen to be God's special people and desire to live holy lives for Him out of obedience. This contrasts the pagan culture we live in. The world thinks it strange that we do not take part in their evil behavior and thus mock and ridicule those who do not act like them. Like Christ, Peter encourages his readers not to be surprised or dismayed about the suffering they receive, for as Christ promised in His sermon on the mount, "*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great;*" (Matt. 5.10, 11b)

THESIS: The purpose of this letter is to encourage believers to endure suffering as they stand firm, live holy lives, be model citizens and families for the sake of Christ and His Kingdom.

THE LETTER:

Customary Greeting (1.1-2): Peter begins his letter with a first century customary greeting. In this he introduces himself to his readers and wished them God's blessing to prepare them for what he had to say. This letter was originally an "encyclical" letter that was written for circulation among the addressees.

Who is Peter? Peter is a Greek name (lit. Petros, meaning a stone or rock). There is no one else in the New Testament with this name, other than Peter himself calling Christians "stones" in this letter (2.4-5). In Aramaic, "stone" is the word "Cephas." This is the name that Jesus gave to Peter whose original Hebrew name was "Simon." It was given to him as a prediction of what this apostle would become (Jn. 1.42; Matt. 16.18). Peter introduces himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (v.1). The word "apostle" denotes one who is a messenger, one sent on a mission. So, as in the great commission from Matthew 28.18-20 given by Christ Himself, Peter, along with the other eleven original apostles were called out by Christ to be His messengers concerning the truth of the gospel to all the world. The authority given to Christ was handed to them to make disciples of all nations. To teach them to obey all Christ had commanded and to baptized them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Audience: Peter addresses his readers as "aliens [perepidemos]." The NIV renders the word as "strangers." In this letter Peter emphasizes that Christians are really citizens of heaven, and that our sojourn here on earth is only temporary (2.11; cf. Gen. 32.4; Ps. 39.12). The idea of the word Peter uses expresses alien nationality and/or temporary residence. That is to say, Peter is describing Christians as people who belong to some other land. Christians temporarily reside with people to whom they do not belong. More specifically he identifies them as living in Asia Minor (Modern Turkey) in the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Peter Davids estimated at the time of Peter's letter about one million Jews lived in Palestine, and two to four million lived outside it. Asia Minor held the third largest concentration of the Diaspora Jews after Babylon and Egypt.

Peter also addresses his readers not only as "aliens," but also as God's "elect/chosen" [Eph. 1.4; cf. Deut. 14.2; Isa. 45.4] (v.2). The idea of "election" originates in the eternal will of God the Father according to His foreknowledge and purpose. This speaks to the attribute of God's

omniscience. Meaning, that God knows all things including setting you apart for Himself by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit through the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus our Lord. Here, Peter not only introduces himself and his readers, but the complete unified Trinity of God.

In other words:

1. God the Father determined before the foundation of the world those who would believe the gospel (cf. Rom. 8.29-30; Eph. 1.3-6; 1 Thess. 1 4; 1 Peter 5.13).
2. God the Holy Spirit accomplished election when He separated the elect, and set them aside to a special calling (sanctifying work of the Spirit) that we might “obey Jesus.”
3. God the Son accomplished salvation for us when we were “sprinkled with His blood” thus aligning us with Him who purifies us by His work on the cross.

Peter had the Old Testament in mind when referencing the “sprinkling of blood” (cf. Ex. 24.4-8). The sprinkling of blood brings the person under the terms and blessings of a covenant with God, which introduces them into the priesthood and kingship of God (1 Pet. 2.9-10).

Peter’s Prayer: Peter concludes his greeting with a short prayer asking God’s grace and peace be poured out in the fullest measure. The reason for this request is that they will need God’s gift of grace and peace to endure the suffering they were currently facing.

Conclusion: Peter’s letter is written with designed purpose to exhort the church to remain steadfast, obedient, and patient as they wait for Christ’s return. To serve Christ faithfully under fire and live as aliens in a strange land. To represent Christ faithfully as His priests and ambassadors. To suffer well as Christ did as they serve God willingly to the end.

OUTLINE OF STUDY:

Lesson 1: Introduction and Customary Greeting 1.1-2

Lesson 2: Christian Identity 1.3-2.10

Our great salvation 1.3-12

Our new way of life 1.13-25

Our priestly calling 2.1-10

Lesson 3: Christian Individual Responsibility Part One 2.11-3.12

Our mission in the world 2.11-12

Our respect for others 2.13-3.12

Lesson 4: Christian Individual Responsibility Part Two 3.13-4.11

Our eventual vindication 3.13-4.6

Our love for one another and future hope 4.7-11

Lesson 5: Christian Universal Responsibility 4.12-5.11

The fiery trial 4.12-19

The church under trial and Conclusion 5.1-12

LIVE IT:

Since Adam sinned in the garden of Eden, humankind has face all sorts of suffering. But the suffering we all face universally is different than the suffering one faces for what they believe. Everyone doing this study could possibly testify to some sort of general suffering they faced in their lives. But, only a few of us can honestly say that we have suffered greatly for being a Christian in our western civilization. Still, whether you live in a free state or persecuted state, the teaching, encouragement, and hopeful exhortation found in Peter's letter is for all of us who know Christ. If we suffer for righteousness sake, we have a promised hope that is only found in Christ Jesus our Lord. May the study of this letter bring grace and peace in your life to the fullest measure in Christ.

Letters of Peter: Lesson 2
The Christian's Identity
1 Peter 1.3-2.10

LOOK IT UP:

■ **REVIEW:** What is 1 Peter about and who is it addressed to and why was it written? (1 Pet. 1.1-2).

■ **REFLECT:**

1. What is the source of the Christian's joy? (1 Peter 1.3-9)

2. How does this joy aid Christians when they are faced with trials?

3. What does Peter urge his readers to do as it relates to their duty to God? (1 Peter 1.13-16)

4. What are Christians then to put aside and why? (1 Peter 2. 1-3)

5. What is the Christians relationship to God and why? (1 Peter 2. 4-10)

■ **REVEAL:** What did you learn most concerning your identity as a Christian? How has this changed your perspective in your worship, walk, and witness?

THE LETTER

LEARN IT:

INTRODUCTION: What makes up our identity as people? Is it culture, ethnicity, skills, or abilities? Could it be your physical attributes, your gender or even your occupation, hobbies, values, or beliefs? Recently, my wife and I just submitted a DNA test to a well-known lineage organization to find out what our family heritage is. The fun anticipation of learning what makes us, us is like being a child waiting on Christmas morning to open up gifts to see what you got. You have some idea what you may receive, but the confirmation doesn't take place until you unwrap the gift. The same for us with our DNA testing. We have an idea what makes us, us, but we won't know until the we get that email informing what blood flows through our veins.

The same is true of Christians. The more you know who you are, the more you appreciate Whose you are and what you are. Many Christians struggle with identity crisis. They have some idea Whose they are and what they are, but their understanding is limited based upon their knowledge of the Bible. Clearly understanding what Scripture say who you are in Christ is the gateway to joy, peace and hope when faced with trials.

OVERVIEW: Peter begins his letter by reminding his readers of their identity in Christ. In this identity they have a hope and inheritance protected by God for them in heaven. Because of this they can face the trials of persecution with joy because their suffering is just for a little while in comparison to eternity (1.3-12). Peter then instructs them to prepare their minds for action and to live holy lives of obedience to God (1.13-25). Therefore, in respects to holiness, they need to see themselves as God's spiritual house for a holy priesthood because the Lord had chosen them as a unique race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people for His own possession so they may proclaim the good news of the gospel (2.1-10).

PURPOSE: The identity of the Christian is found in the salvation of their souls through Christ, a holy lifestyle before God, and their priestly calling by God. To know who one is in Christ is an occasion for joy regardless life's circumstances because we have a promise hope in Christ who the protector of our soul and guarantee in hesitance in heaven.

AS IT RELATES TO SALVATION (1.3-12)

As stated earlier Peter begins the body of this epistle by reminding his readers of their identity as Christians. He did this to enable them to rejoice in the midst of present suffering. They could "glory" in their sufferings since they would ultimately experience glorification. Therefore, the tone of this entire epistle is warm, pastoral, and full of encouragement. Here we see Peter fulfilling Jesus' instruction to him to "tend" and "feed" My (Jesus') lambs (Jn. 21.15-17).

The blessed hope of believers through Christ (vv. 3-5): - What makes one a Christian? Who are Christians? Christians are blessed in that they have been given a wonderful gift by God through His only Son, Christ Jesus our Lord. Why is this? Because Christians have been "born again" and thus have a "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (v.3) and

new birth by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3.3-8). Consequently, our hope is both alive within us and part of our new life in Christ because of His death and resurrection.

God has been exceedingly merciful in giving us this blessing (cf. Rom. 11:30-32; 15:9; Eph. 2.1-7; Titus 3.5). This gift of salvation is just one part of this the blessing. The blessing extends to the Christian's "inheritance" (v.4). Just as the Israelites anticipated their "inheritance" of the Promise Land, so we who are Christians should anticipate heaven as our Promise Land. Except that this promise is without decay and not subject to destruction from any source, defilement from without or within. Peter describes this "inheritance" as being "imperishable," "undefiled," and "unfading" (v.4). Nothing can pollute or ravage our inheritance, and it will not wear out or waste away. It is protected by "God's power" (v.5). God's power keeps us saved. Our 'faith' is the means by which we receive (the downpayment of our) salvation initially, and subsequently, our inheritance. All this, God promises to protect until, a "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (v.5). Meaning, the day of the Lord when Christ will be revealed and God makes all things new, where Christians will be with Him for eternity. This will be a time with Christ will be glorified and when God will glorify us from the presence of sin forever. This glorification will become ours at death or the Rapture, whichever event comes first (1 Thess 4.17).

The joy of the Christian (vv. 6-9): Peter writes that Christians can "greatly rejoice" (v.6) in this hope. Meaning that on that future day of the Lord we will "rejoice" and "praise" the Lord for the fulfillment of His promise. But, Peter does state that while we temporarily wait for that blessed day, Christians may have to endure suffering, "if necessary" until then. Why if Christians are guaranteed such a blessed hope in the future do they have to face "trials" here on earth? Peter explains that "trials" do to faith what "fire" does to "gold" (v.7). They (trials) "purify" it, and reveal its true and genuineness, what it really is (cf. James 1.3). God purifies our faith with trials, by helping us realize the inadequacy of anything other than trust in Him in these situations. By doing so, He shows that our faith is true and authentic as we demonstrated that our joy in trials rest solely on our confidence and faith in Him. Therefore, purity and proof bring "praise," "glory," and "honor" to God though they benefit us in the process. All this is based on faith especially those of us who have never seen Christ personally (v.8). In the end, the "outcome of your faith" will be the "salvation of your souls" (v.9). Since our salvation comes by faith, it is only consistent that we should continue to trust God now, even in the midst of trials and suffering.

The witnesses of the Christian's salvation (vv.10-12): In these three verses Peter summarizes the witnesses of the Christian's salvation. The witnesses he brings forth are the prophets who wrote about the Christian's salvation and their present suffering. He wanted his readers to be clear that "salvation" includes suffering. Jesus preached this same message (Matt. 5.10-12). Too long now have western Christians taken on the mindset that because they are saved that they will be immune to suffering and persecution. If anything the Old Testament and New Testament show that God's faithful have repeatedly suffer for being obedient to Him and trusting in Him alone. Cain, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, the prophets, Christ, and Christians, all have suffered for their faithfulness. The point of this, is that, Peter points out in verses 10-12 that Christians could

rejoice in their sufferings, even though they could not see exactly how or when their present trials would end. They should find encouragement by looking at the prophet's limited understanding of their own prophecies dealing with the suffering and glorification of the Messiah.

AS IT RELATES TO THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES (1.13-25)

In wanting his readers to live joyfully in the midst of sufferings, Peter outlines for his readers major responsibilities to enable them to see that their identity includes clear duties they could carry out. These responsibilities were duties to God, to other believers, and to the world.

The Christian's responsibility to God (vv. 13-16): - The Christian's first and main responsibility is "to be holy" because God is "holy" (v. 16). Peter is reinforcing an imperative found in the Old Testament (cf. Lev. 11.44-45; 19.2; 20.7). Peter stands out among the New Testament writers in quoting the Old Testament. 1 Peter contains the same number of OT references per unit of text as does Hebrews. Only Revelation contains more. The practice of living holy to the Lord involves a lifestyle change and mental preparation (v.13). This is not easy. It will take some work. The thought that Peter expresses here is to "make up your mind decisively" (Wiersbe). It is with the mindset that we are living for tomorrow when Christ comes again. Just as the Old Testament faithful looked to the cross, we live today with a view of heaven. Therefore, the Christian needs to be "sober in spirit" (v.13). This describes one who is in full control of his speech and conduct in contrast to the flesh. This speaks of the Christian's reaction in this world, especially to suffering and trials.

What is your response. Are you prepared mentally and spiritually to respond to trials in a way that reflects Christ and brings Him glory? Is your mind consciously on the "hope" when Christ returns? Present trials will not deflect us from obeying God faithfully now because of the hope we have in Christ. Therefore, "as obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance" (v.14). Be "holy" just as God who is "holy" called you(v.15). The Christian's responsibility to God is to act and be like Him. But, they must prepare themselves so they do not fall back to their former ways in the flesh. Responding in ways that do not reflect the grace of God in their lives.

The Christian's reverence towards God (vv. 17-21): This section reads like Paul's letter to the Ephesians when he writes, "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5.21). Christians ought to have a reverent relationship to God. Peter begins with a conditional clause "if" which signifies that since we are all judged impartially by God and will one day stand before Him for an evaluation of our works, we should live now with a reverent fear of submission. It is good for the Christian to maintain this reverent respect (fear) for God as our judge, since He has this power (authority) over us (cf. Heb. 12.29). Why? Because Peter reminds his readers that they "were ransomed from the futile ways" imputed on them by their fathers (cf. 5.1ff).

Christians are redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb just as the Hebrew forefathers were liberated by the death of the Passover Lamb during the Exodus. They were freed from the

physical bondage in Egypt, the same has happen to us because Christ death frees us from the spiritual bondage of sin (cf. Ex. 12.5). The fall of man did not take God by surprises. He already knew “before the foundation of the world” (v.20) what He would do in view of the fall, and what Christ would do. Thus, our attitude towards God can and should be reverential and confident as we endure suffering for our faith because of God’s work through Christ (v.21).

The Christian’s relationship of love towards others (vv.22-25): Peter now turns his attention from the believer’s duty to God, to their duty towards one another. The first and primary duty of the Christian is to “love” one another (v. 22). Since by obedience to Christ they have “purified” their souls they are to exhibit “love” towards one another from a “pure heart” (v.22). The purification that Peter refers to occurred at conversion as a result in believing in the gospel (cf. Jn. 3.10). This cleansing makes it possible for us to “love” other Christians “fervently” and unremittingly. This love needs to be a “sincere (un-hypocritical) love” for the brethren from the heart. We do not need to love one another as though we were brethren. We can love one another because we really are brethren. The instrument that God uses to produce new brith is the “word of God” (v.23). This “seed” shares the character of its Source. It never fails (1 Cor. 13.8a) and never passes out of fashion, nor becomes irrelevant as Peter states by quoting Isaiah 40.6-8 (vv. 24-25). Thus, the duty of the Christian to one another is to love one another unremittingly. This is true for Christians regardless the state of life they are in. Whether in times of freedom or times of persecution and trials. We can and should do so because we are genuine brethren, and because we will abide together forever with the Lord who saved our souls.

AS IT RELATES TO THEIR CALLING (2.1-10)

In this final section of our study today, Peter continues with his explanation of the Christian’s duties while they joyfully endure trials. Here he calls his readers to do certain things in the world of unbelievers and reminds them of certain realities in this passage.

The Christian’s duty of putting off the old self (vv. 1-3): - Peter first instructs his readers to take off habits like garments. More specifically he points out “all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander” (v.1). Again, this list is similar to Paul’s list in his epistles (cf. Rom. 1.29-30; 2 Cor. 12.20; Eph. 4.31; Col. 3.8; 1 Tim. 1.9-10). The reason Peter points these fleshly vices out is because these are community-destroying vices that are often tolerated by the church, unlike the more grosser and perverted ones of immorality. Thus, Peter is calling on his readers to put into practice what they professed in Christ.

Next, he urges them to do something positive. Since they have experienced the new birth in Christ (1.3, 23) they should do what babies do, “long for pure spiritual milk” so they might grow up “into salvation” (v.2). Milk here is not represented by elementary truths in contrast to advance Christians truths (cf 1 Cor. 3.2; Heb 5.12,13), but in contrast to “guile, hypocrisies” (Jamieson). We should all long for the simplicity of Christian doctrine in general like a childlike spirit. To do so, Peter urges his readers to develop an appetite for the word of God (v. 2). All this again is based on the condition, “if” they have “tasted that the Lord is good” (cf. Ps. 34.8).

The Christian's duty of growing up in God (vv. 4-5): - Not only is Jesus Christ the source of the believer's spiritual sustenance, He is also their Foundation, "a living stone" (v. 4). Christ is alive and able to impart strength to those who suffer for His sake. A "Living stone" is a figure of speech in which Peter points out that Christ is the church's Foundation. This stone to God the Father is "chosen" by and "precious" to Him. On this "Foundation" are the essential stones that enables the whole structure to fulfill its purpose. Peter saw the church as a "living temple" (a spiritual house), to which God was adding with the conversion of each new believer (living stones). This, Peter would know to be true because of his confession as to Whom Christ is in Matthew 16.13-20.

The emphasis in verse 5 is on the Christian being a building for priestly service (a house for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices), namely, "a temple" (cf. Rom. 12.1-2). This verse helps us to appreciate how much we need each other as Christians. God has a purpose for all of us individually (Eph. 2.10). The Christian who is not working in relationship with other Christians as fellow stones cannot fulfill God's complete purpose for him or her. We not only have individual purposes, we also have a corporate purpose that cannot be fulfilled unless we take our place in the community of Christians, that is the church (v.5)

The Christian's rest and honor in Christ (vv. 6-8): - Some scholars seem to believe that these verses and some portions of it are quotes from early Christian hymns. Some dispute this hypothesis, but in either case it has no bearing on the interpretation of the text. The first quote elaborates on the foundation of the church. "Zion" here refers to the heavenly Jerusalem that John describes in Revelation 21.14. The "cornerstone" refers to the main stone on which the building rests. In light of this, the "rock" to which Jesus referred in Matthew 16.18, was not Peter, but Himself. Jesus, not Peter, is the "Foundation upon which God has promised to build the church (cf. 1 Cor. 3.11). To build the church on the foundation of man would and has become unstable and fractured. But to build the church on the foundation of Christ who is God and who is the creator of all things. The first and last of all is sure to last and will not falter. So this building is for those who believe (v. 7a). But, in contrast, for those who do not believe, this sure foundation will become to them a "stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" (v. 8). Peter once again uses Old Testament imagery. The "builders" were Israel's religious leaders (cf. Ps. 118.22). When they disobeyed Old Testament commands to accept their Messiah, they stumbled spiritually and would suffer destruction (Isa. 8.14). This was true of Israel corporately, and it is true of every unbeliever individually. Those who would disobey the truth of who Christ is, Christ will become to them as crushing stone of destruction. Their destiny will not be with Christ in heaven, their destiny would be eternal torment separated by God and His people.

The Christian's true identity summarized (vv. 9-10): - Finally, Peter proceeds to clarify the Christian's nature, place, and duty. One has to be careful not to read these verses as replacement theology. Replacement theology simply teaches that because Israel rejected Jesus Christ as Messiah, God created a new body of people, through whom He now seeks to accomplish the same purposes He formerly sought to achieve through Israel. Though it may be true that Israel did in fact reject Jesus, God did not replace them with gentile believers. Again, a rule of thumb in

proper hermeneutics is if God promises one thing, then His Word cannot negate that promise. Thus, the covenant that God made with Abraham (Israel) beginning with Genesis 12 is still current until the day of the Lord. Paul emphasizes this in Ephesians 2.11-22 that God grafted the gentiles into the branch and covenant of Israel so that together, impartially “being joined together, grows into one holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2.21).

Therefore, Peter clearly identifies Christians (the church) as God’s people who will serve Him to make Him known by the proclamation of the gospel to all the world. Peter selected words such as (chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people for God’s own possession). Originally exclusive for the people of Israel, but now incorporated with the grafting in of the gentiles so that God can complete His good work in us all while still fulfilling His covenant with the children of Israel.

- As God’s “chosen race,” the church is God’s spiritual race represented by the shared common characteristics of faith in Christ. Racially impartial. Both for the Jew and Gentiles. Christians are now spiritual descendants of Abraham.
- As a “royal priesthood,” the church is a nation of priest (Ex. 19.6) who stand between God and the rest of humanity, representing people before God. This function is lived out today by every believer through worship, prayers, and by the practice of ministry.
- As a “holy nation,” the church is the beacon of light to other nations, holding the light of God’s revelation up for all to see. This is the mission of the church, to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28.20).
- As a “people for his own possession,” this is an allusion to Exodus 19.5. Literally, Peter is saying “a people for possession.” Like Israel in the Old Testament, the church now as a whole represent God as His people. This describes an intimate relationship with God. What is being emphasize here is that the Christians now have a relationship to God which is different from that of non-christians: they are God’s people and are completely dedicated to him. This is why Christ, and Paul often refer to the church as the Bride of Christ. When a bride submits herself to her groom, she no longer belongs to anyone else but the groom. The same for Christians. We belong to Christ. He possesses us. We are the people of God.

In closing, Peter reminds his readers that they were once not belonging to God (v.10). This is now no longer true. They now belong to Him and have received His abundant grace and mercy and now they are His own possession for all eternity.

LIVE IT:

Some years ago there was a song that we use to sing in church. The title of the song was, “The People of God.”

*“With out lips let us sing one confession
With our hearts hold to one truth alone
For He has erased our transgression
Claimed us and called us His own,
His very own.*

*We’re the people of God, called by His name
Called from the dark and delivered from shame
One holy race, saints everyone
Because of the blood of Christ, Jesus the Son.*

I pray as you read through this study that you will have a greater appreciation for who you are in Christ. That, you are not merely a lay believer, waiting for life to be over so you can retire to a mythical heaven. No! If you have obeyed the teaching concerning Jesus Christ and received by faith that who He claims to be, and long for the true Word of God, and desire to follow Him all the days of your life here on earth, then you are identified as someone special in God’s eyes.

To summarize:

1. Make sure your salvation in Christ.
2. Live in the peace of God in Christ.
3. Rejoice daily because what God has done, even in the midst of trials.
4. Be ready for action and keep your focus on the revelation of Christ.
5. Put off the former things of this world, keep your behavior holy to God.
6. Walk with the knowledge that you belong to God and have received mercy from Him.

Grace and peace in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Letters of Peter: Lesson 3
The Christian's Individual Responsibility: Part 1
1 Peter 2.11-3.12

LOOK IT UP:

■ **REVIEW:** Why is a Christian uniquely different than other people in the world?

■ **REFLECT:**

1. Why should Christians keep their behavior excellent in this world? (1 Peter 2.11-12)

2. To whom should Christians submit to? Why and how should they do this? (1 Peter 2.13-20)

3. Who is the Christian's example for suffering? Why is knowing this important? (1 Peter 2.21-25)

4. How are wives to relate to their husbands and why? (1 Peter 3.1-6)

5. How are husbands to relate to their wives and why? (1 Peter 3.7)

6. How are Christians to relate to one another and why? (1 Peter 3.8-12)

■ **REVEAL:** Why is submission difficult? How is submissiveness being demonstrated in your life?

THE LESSON

LEARN IT:

INTRODUCTION: Most, if not all corporate companies have an office code of conduct by which all employers and employees must abide. If not observed, a person could be written up on report and after a few warnings, may even lead to the termination of their employment. Why is there a need for such a document? A code of conduct has value as both an internal guideline and an external statement of corporate values and commitments. If written well, the policy clarifies the organization's mission, values, and principles that links them with standards of professional conduct. It is a central guide and reference for the employees to support day-to-day decision making. It encourages ethics and compliance, and to promote unity and purpose. It serves as a public statement of what the company stands for and its commitment to high standards. One final benefit for the company is that a conduct policy helps reduce financial mitigation associated with government fines and to prevent illegal acts.

OVERVIEW: Peter explains what the Christian's conduct should be negatively and positively (vv. 11-12). He then clarifies what it means to function obediently as God's people in a hostile world. This includes how a Christian ought to conduct themselves before governing authorities (2.13-17), how Christians ought to work under the authority of others (2.18-25), how Christians husbands and wives ought to conduct themselves during times of suffering (3.1-7) and then concludes with instructions on respecting others and loving our enemies (3.8-12).

PURPOSE: The Christian is to walk in this world in such a way that is worthy of the Lord, bringing glory to Him in the midst of suffering for His sake.

The Christian's General Responsibility in the World (2.11-12)

After teaching his readers to know who and whose they are, Peter now focuses on the Christian's primary responsibility while sojourning in this world as aliens. Because of the high calling that believers received by God, their standard of living and behavior ought to reflect not only the Lord, but the calling to which they have been called. This, in a sense, is the Christians particular vocation in the world. Thus, a certain code of conduct is required for Peter's suffering readers.

Keep your behavior excellent (v.11-12a) - Peter begins his conduct policy by first "urging" his readers as "aliens and strangers" not to live like this world. This is the second time that Peter identifies his readers as "aliens." The reason for this description is that they have no right in the land where they live. They are "strangers." As such, they are only temporary residents (cf. 1.17; Gen. 23.4; Ps. 39.12; Eph. 2.19; Heb. 13.14). Christians are temporary residents in this world. Just like the gospel song states: "*This world is not my home, I'm just passin' through.*"

I have lived and pastored in smaller communities. In those communities, unless you were born there, you were essentially a stranger, no matter how long you have resided there. I had a godly gentleman in my church who taught at the local school for over 30 years. It was the only school he taught in his career. Yet, the locals still viewed him as an outsider because he was neither born there nor had any family connections in the community.

Peter is reminding his readers that they are outsiders. They should refuse the desire to indulge in “fleshly lusts” that are contrary to God’s will. “Fleshly lusts” are selfish natural appetites that appeal to the sinful nature (cf. 1 John 2.16). We all experience temptation to satisfy bodily desires in ways that are contrary to God’s will and conduct. These desires, Peter describes, “wage war against the soul.” It is a war of the will between your flesh and God’s will for you (cf. Gal. 5.17).

Bring glory to God (v.12b): Stating the positive, Peter then urges his readers to “keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles” (v.12a). Part of the suffering that Peter’s readers were experiencing was due to slander from unbelieving Gentile pagans. They accused them unjustly of doing evil. This unjust accusation could have been influenced by Nero’s persecution of Christians in Rome. Therefore, Peter urged his readers to give the critics no cause for justifiable slander. If their behavior was excellent, then their accusers would have to glorify God by giving a good testimony concerning the lives of the believers when they stood before God “in the day of visitation” (meaning the Rapture). This is similar to Paul’s writing in Philippians 2:10-11, when unbelievers will bow before God and glorify Him.

Conflict with our culture is not won by aggressive behavior towards it. It is won by “good conduct” or “good works” that is in accordance with God’s will and His gospel. Peter’s vision for all Christians is that their exemplary behavior will change the minds of their accusers and in effect “overcome evil with good, making the gospel and Christ a more pleasing witness (cf. Acts 2.47).

The Christian’s Specific Responsibilities to All (2.13-3.12)

Peter’s letter clarifies what it means to function obediently as God’s people in a hostile foreign land. It contains the code of Christian conduct. This section is similar to Paul’s letter to the Romans (cf. Roms. 13.1-7). Peter is concerned about how Christians react towards suffering, thus reminds them to follow Christ who is “an example for you to follow in His steps” when it comes to suffering for His sake. This section looks at the Christian’s specific duty to governing authorities, their employers, their marriage and their relationships with others.

Governing Relationships (vv.13-17) - Some Christians, even today, have taken the position that believers are free to disobey their governments if the government permits conduct that is contrary to God’s will (Francis Schaeffer). Thus, Peter states, “submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (v.13). The Christian’s relationship to the state and to state officials is clear. Submit! We submit, not because they are worthy of submission, but for “the Lord’s sake,” because by submitting to them, we honor God by obeying His Word (cf. Matt. 22.21).

Peter points out that those who are in the position to rule over us are first, appointed by God and that their purpose is “the punishment of evildoers and the praise of who do right” (v.14). God has ordained governing institutions for keeping the peace. Whether they are corrupt or not, should not blind us to their legitimate role of govern. Now, Peter did believe that there was a proper

place for civil disobedience (cf. Acts 4.19-20). This takes place when the laws of human government make it illegal to obey and worship God (forcing Christians to violate their spiritual conscience, i.e. John Bunyan not being allowed to preach openly in homes, or laws that force abortions, or worship a different “god”). In such case, we should obey God rather than man. But, by disobeying the law there will be consequences.

Regardless of the Christian’s experience with governing authorities, they should always “act as free men” (v.16). They are free because they are already accepted by God because of what Christ did for us, therefore they do not need to earn God’s acceptance. They are “free” from the tyranny of Satan. No longer his slaves. Yet, they should not use their freedom (liberty) to sin, but refrain from sin and serve the living God.

Peter then summarizes four social obligations (v.17).

1. Honor all people: if only because they reflect the image of God.
2. Love the brotherhood: our primary responsibility to other Christians is to show them “love” (cf. 1.22; John 13.35).
3. Fear God: our primary responsibility to God is to show Him “fear” (reverence - cf. 1.17).
4. Honor the king: Christians were not to place the king (emperor) on the same level as God, thus they are to “fear” God and “honor” the king (Nero). Citizens in Asia Minor were encourage to view the emperor as God. Thus, Peter clarifies for Christians the two distinctive offices and persons. That is to “revere” is to have a high view of someone. To “honor” is to acknowledge the governing office that was ordained by God We may not respect someone, but we can still and should honor them.

Vocational Relationships (vv. 18-20) - Peter then addresses the situation of Christians working under authority of others. Peter not only urges his readers to “submit” to their “masters (employers),” but also to “respect” them. We are to respectfully submit whether they are “good and gentle” or “unreasonable” (v.18). The reason we should do this is because this “finds favor” before God when a person is able to “bear up under sorrows when suffering unjustly” (v.19). This is God’s will for you (cf. vv. 13, 17). If you are asking why should I respect an unreasonable employer, the answer is, because this is how God wants us to behave. Our conscious is to be committed to God first. It motivates us to do the right thing, which will result in a clear “conscience” and will receive “favor” (grace) in God’s sight.

Suffer like Jesus (vv. 21-25) - Part of the Christian’s calling (1.1; 2.9) includes suffering (cf. 2 Tim. 3.12). Christians are to “follow” Christ’s example when it comes to suffering (v.21). The Greek word translated “example” (hypogrammon) refers to a writing or drawing that someone placed under another sheet of paper, so he or she could trace on the upper sheet (A.T. Robertson). Thus, the Christian here is urged to trace (follow) the steps that Jesus left for us in His suffering.

Peter uses the Old Testament prophecy to apply Jesus’s suffering (Isa. 53.9) by showing his readers that Christ suffered unjustly because He committed no sin, and there was no deceit found in His mouth (v.22). Peter could testify to this because he walked with Jesus for three years and

observed closely Jesus' sinless life. Peter also observed Jesus' trials and suffering and testified that He "uttered no threats" and kept trusting the Father who "judges righteously" (v.23). Then Peter reminds them how Jesus "bore our sins" with His own body on the cross so that "we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (v.24). Meaning this, that the sufferings of Jesus reached its' climax on the cross. Without this suffering the penalty of our sin would not have been paid if Jesus had not laid down His life. He became the substitutionary sacrifice. Why did Christ do this? Peter explains, because we "were continually straying like sheep" (v.25a). But, now because of what Christ has done, and because we have come to Him, we like sheep have "returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your (our) souls" (v.25b). Like the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23 who protects His sheep from pending threats and enemies, even through the valley of the shadow of death, His rod and staff protect them. Jesus guards us from hostile adversaries. Enemies may assail our bodies, but the Lord would preserve our souls (whole persons) safe (cf. 1.3-5).

Marriage Relationship (3.1-7) - Having explained before how Christians should conduct themselves in the world, Peter gives directions now how Christian wives and husbands should behave. He does this to help his readers to identify and choose to practice appropriate conduct in family life during times of suffering as well as other times.

The Christian wife (vv. 1-6): - "In the same way" refers to what Peter had already stated. Just as all Christians should "submit" to governing authorities or their employers, the same for wives ought to be "submissive" to their own husbands (v.1). A Christian wife has a special relationship to her husband that is different to other men in her life. She "belongs" to him and he "belongs" to her. But, this is more applicable in the subject of "suffering." What if the wife is married to an "unreasonable" or unbelieving husband. "In the same way" a Christian maybe under the authority of an unreasonable king or master, the Christian wife still should be submissive to her unbelieving husband. This is in the context of suffering. The only reason Peter gives for submission in this context is that by her excellent behavior (her chaste and respectful behavior), her husband might be won to the Lord, even "without a word" (v.2).

What if the husband directs his Christian wife to sin? Should she still submit to her husband? Some evangelicals say yes and appeal to Ephesian 5.24 for support. Others say no, but argue that submission should extend to everything except sin. Peter's examples of suffering did not involve sinning (cf. 2.13-25). He simply states that they should submit "in the same way (3.1). Thus, the wife's behavior is to be "chaste" or morally pure (3.2).

Peter uses Abraham's wife Sarah as an example (3.6), not because she submitted to Abraham even to the point of sinning in Genesis 12 and 20, but because she submitted to him. She called him her "lord" in Genesis 18.12. Thus, Peter urged Christian wives to obey their husbands. This is the primary responsibility of every Christian, that is to obey

God and His Word. This demonstrates trust in God and His holiness, separation from sin to God's will.

The Christian Husband (1.7): Peter next, writes about the husband's responsibility. The husband is to cultivate "understanding." They should dwell with their wives in an intelligent and reasonable manner. This requires listening to the wife, as well as studying her temperament, emotions, personality, and thought patterns. This is a tall order for a man to understand his wife. But, in doing so, will allow his prayers for her to be unhindered (v.7b). This understanding or knowledge is better guided by using God's Word on how to properly treat one's wife. In light of this treatment, the husband is to treat his wife with special consideration. Peter describes the wife "as with someone weaker, since she is a woman" (v.7b). Peter is not implying that wives or women are inferior to husbands and males, or that they are weaker in every way or most ways. Peter is simply saying that men tend to be like iron skillet and wives like fine china, being more delicate. Husbands need to be careful not to smash their wives with words, but to handle them with care with the knowledge of God's word. To understand her and speak the truth in love. Both the husband and the wife are vessels of God. Both are unique and have unique purposes. Both are equally important, yet are different.

Christian Relationships in Summary (vv.8-12) - In this final section, Peter sums up by giving instructions concerning respect for others, especially, loving our enemies.

1. Christian relationships towards one another ought to be "harmonious" (v.8). This implies cooperation when there are individual differences.
2. Christians ought to be "sympathetic" towards one another. This means suffering with another by entering into, and sharing the feelings of others, rather than by having compassion on another person from a distance. It implies bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6.2).
3. Christians ought to be "brotherly." This is a special love that unites believers and their fellowship (cf. 1.22; 2.17).
4. Christians should be "kind hearted." Meaning, they should feel affectionally, compassionately, and deeply for someone else.
5. Christians should be "humble in spirit." This describes the person who is willing to put someone else's interest and needs before his or her own (cf. Phil. 2.3-4). This would apply to God's purposes as well, not just the needs of other people.
6. Christians should not seek revenge by "not returning evil for evil" (v.9). We need to remember that vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12.19). We should instead, return positive, good deeds by "giving a blessing" for evil ones (cf. 2.23; Matt 5.9; 1 Cor. 4.12; 1 Thess. 5.15).

Peter conclude by quoting Psalm 34.12-16 to strengthen and clarify his case. This Psalm appropriately summarizes all of Peter's instructions concerning proper Christian conduct during persecution (2.11-12).

LIVE IT:

The subject of Christian suffering is quiet often written by the epistle authors. As stated in an earlier lesson, the reason Peter, Paul, John, and James write about Christian suffering is to encourage the Christian. But more specifically to help the Christian to understand that suffering and Christianity will always be. Why do Christians suffer? Because of the evil one, Satan, because of sin, because this world hates God for no cause. Since, Christians, like Israel are in a elected relationship with God exclusively, they are indirectly hated by this world. This world is not our home. We are strange to this world. We are aliens and sojourners.

I find that many Christians and churches try with great effort to fit in. This seems to be anti-Biblical according to God's will. God has never called us to act like, to be like, nor assimilate into the culture and views of this world. If anything, God has called us to be uniquely different in our walk, speech, and beliefs. We are His and He is ours. We belong to Him and He belongs to us. Thus, the goal of every Christian is to walk worthily to please the Lord and not the world.

Another reason we suffer as Christians is because God is testing the validity and authenticity of our relationship with Him. This suffering we feel is like a salmon swimming up stream. This is a good thing because even though the salmon dies, there is fruit in it. Life comes from death. It spawns new life. The same for Christians. When our faith is being tested, we feel the current pushing back down stream. But, we must keep pressing on towards the upward call of Christ. Not to be accepted by God, but to prove our faithfulness to Him. Thus, we rejoice, not because of anything we have done. But, because we know what is laid up in heaven for us. A sure inheritance that is being kept safe as a guarantee by God, through Christ His Son, sealed by the Holy Spirit.

The next time you feel the current of the world going against your faith. Stay on track. You are going in the right direction. Just remember to be faithful, loving, patient, and most of all joyful because all this is for the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Letters of Peter: Lesson 4
The Christian's Individual Responsibility: Part 2
1 Peter 3.13-4.11

LOOK IT UP:

■ **REVIEW:** How did you practice submission this past week?

■ **REFLECT:**

1. Can anyone harm you for being faithful to Christ and His righteousness? (1 Peter 3.13-17)

2. If a Christian is to experience suffering, what should they suffer for and what is the source of their suffering? (1 Peter 3.17)

3. How are Christians vindicated by their suffering among pagans? (1 Peter 3.18-22)

4. What must Christians abstain from and why? (1 Peter 4.1-3)

5. What sort of reaction might Christians expect from pagans concerning their faithfulness to God? What will be the pagan's demise? (1 Peter 4.4-7)

■ **REVEAL:** What are Christians to be prepared for? List how Christians should live out their lives on earth (1 Peter 4.7-11)

THE LESSON

LEARN IT:

OVERVIEW: In the beginning of chapter 3, Peter writes about the Christian's responsibility in regards to marriage, work, and their love towards one another (3.1-12). Now, Peter focuses on the Christian's relationship with the world in regards to Christ and their salvation in Him. Though they suffer for Christ, Christ will vindicate them in the end (3.12-22). Because of this vindication in Christ, they are to cease from sin and living like the Gentiles. They are to live in the Spirit according to the will of God (4.1-6), practice godly living while they wait patiently for the Lord whose coming is imminent (4.7-11).

PURPOSE: Those who suffer for Christ's sake will be vindicated in the end. Christ suffered in the flesh, thus Christians must die to flesh and live in the Spirit waiting patiently for the Lord's imminent return.

LEARN IT:

Christians are to live with the mindset of victory, not defeat (3.13-22)

Therefore, suffer for righteousness sake to silent your accusers (vv. 13-17) - Peter begins this section of his letter with a question. "Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?" (v.13). What Peter is about to emphasize is that a Christian can have inner confidence in Christ while experiencing persecution for their faith. He builds upon his previous statement and carries on what the psalmist said (Psalm 34.12-15) in the quote just cited in verses 10-12. If God will punish those who do evil (v.12), "who" will "harm" those who do "good"? God will certainly not, is the implication, and under normal circumstances no other person will either. This is similar to what Paul wrote in Romans:

"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8.1)

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8.31)

"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;" (Rom. 8.33)

"Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes who was raised," (Rom. 8.34)

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ?... (v.35)...nothing - "will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39b).

This is the mindset Christians ought to live in. Not in fear, but in the confidence of Christ Jesus who saved us. Therefore, Peter states that *"even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed" (v.14a)*. Because Christians are blessed in Christ, there is no reason for Christians to be "intimidated" by the world, but instead should *"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" (v.15)*.

The word "intimidation" in the Greek is (phobos). It's where we get the english word, "phobia." It means to be put to panic or flight. The causing of fear and terror. The Christians during Peter's time had great reasons to be "intimidated" because of Nero's and the pagan's persecution upon

the Christian community. But, Peter encourages his readers not to be “intimidated” but to live in the hope of Christ by “sanctifying” Christ in their hearts daily.

The word “sanctify” (*hagiazō*) means to make holy, or to set apart by living a consecrated life for Christ. Peter had already urged his readers to “be holy” in all their behavior as the One who called them to holiness (1.14-15). To “sanctify” Christ in one’s heart is to have a purpose to live for Him. This action of holy living is not only demonstrated by action, but also by words. Peter states, *“always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you”* (v.15). Our defense in Christ should always be at the tip the Christian’s tongue. Whenever the opportunity arises, we can explain why we behave as we do (cf. Acts 22.1; 25.16). Peter is certainly speaking from personal experience (cf. Acts 4.1-26).

How do you silence your accusers? Peter says, by keeping *“a good conscience”* so your accusers *“will be put to shame”* (v.16). What Peter is instructing is that Christians ought to live in such a way that they take the wind out the sails of their critics. What does Peter mean by “good conscience”? Wiersbe notes that the “conscience may be compared to a window that lets in the light of God’s truth. If we persist in disobeying, the window gets dirtier and dirtier, until the light cannot enter. This leads to a ‘defiled conscience’ (Titus 1.15). A ‘seared’ conscience’ is one that has been in sin so long that it no longer is sensitive to what is right and wrong (1 Tim. 4.2). It is even possible for the conscience to be so poisoned that it approves things that are bad and accuses when the person does good! This the Bible calls ‘an evil conscience’ (Heb. 10.22). A ‘good conscience’ is one that accuses when we think or do wrong and approves when we do right” (from the “The Doctrine of Conscience”).

If you find yourself being persecuted for doing right, then it may be God’s will. Peter states that in this case *“it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong”* (v.17). Christians are much better off suffering for doing good than the evildoers who oppress us.

Therefore, suffer for Christ’s sake Who vindicates and saves His own (vv. 18-22) - Now Peter strengthens the resolve of those who are being unjustly persecuted for their faith. He urges his readers to rededicate themselves to follow God’s will wholeheartedly and confidently. He also assures them of their ultimate triumph in Christ Jesus the Lord.

This passage (vv. 18-22) contains some of the most difficult verses in the Bible. My goal here is not in figuring out what scholars have attempted to do for centuries, but instead to explain what the passage is and is not saying. First, let’s talk about what the passage is NOT saying.

- Peter is not saying that everyone is going to be saved, but that Christ’s death on the cross was the only sacrifice needed to save those He came to redeem (v.18).
- Peter is not saying that there is a second chance for those spirits who Jesus proclaimed to in prison, whether the place was hell or not is debatable, and so are the spirits (vv.20-21). The message Jesus proclaimed was not of good news that is found in “preaching” (*kurruso*). Preaching the good news of the gospel is always done with the intent to save. Jesus did not

“proclaim” to these spirits in prison to save them, but to make a statement of who He was so that at His name *“every knee will bow, of those in heaven and under the earth”* (Phil. 2.10; 1 Peter. 3.22). Unfortunately for these, it is too late. They had their opportunity and are without excuse.

- Peter is not saying that baptism saves a person (v.22). The statement made by Peter is speaking of one’s statement of faith that separates them from others. When believers are baptized they are making a statement either verbally and/or by the act of baptism through immersion that they identify themselves with Christ, His death, and resurrection. They are testifying outwardly what Christ did inwardly in their lives. They are also declaring Him as Lord and Savior of their lives. We call this believer’s baptism. The Bible is clear that baptism does not save, that would be anti gospel, for the Bible states that salvation comes by the preaching and hearing of the Word when one confesses that Jesus died and rose again according to the Scriptures (Rom 10; 1 Cor. 15.1-3).

Second, what then is this passage saying and why does Peter include it? I believe it is important to point out that the Bible tells us about a few markers in Biblical history that are significant for the people of God. The Abrahamic covenant with God, the Exodus, Jesus’ death and resurrection and the Last Days. One of those moments in time that the Bible tells us about is Noah and the flood. It is my summation that Peter uses as an analogy the significance of Noah and flood to encourage his readers concerning Christ and their vindicated future. For during the time before the flood, we learn that mankind’s heart was constantly about evil (Gen. 6.5). Peter points out that just as Noah who set himself apart in being righteous for God’s sake, proclaimed through the spirit of Christ a message of righteousness (2 Peter 2.5). Noah was warned by God about an event not yet seen, prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, which condemned the world by the flood, yet became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith (Heb. 11.7). By using this event, which, his readers would have been familiar with, was to point in like manner what Christ came to do for those who are redeemed by His death and resurrection. Meaning, that by the act of baptism, because they had taken a stand for Jesus Christ, they could be sure that he would stand with them (cf. 2 Tim. 2.12).

A keyword in this analogy in verse 21 is “corresponding” (antitupos). This word means a representative like figure - a thing formed after a pattern. So, essentially, just as Noah endured persecution during his time in the construction of the ark, yet continued to set himself apart for God and preached the righteousness of God, he and his family by their statement of faith were carried safely by God during the flood in the ark. So too, Christians who trust in Christ and set themselves apart to live righteously for Christ sake in the midst of persecution. They will all be vindicated because Christ who now sits at the right hand of God is above all angels, authorities and powers (v.22).

Christians are to live for the will God, in the spirit with the promise in view (4.1-6)

Since Jesus Christ has gained the victory, Peter now urges his readers to rededicate themselves to God’s will as long as they might live. He wanted to strengthen their resolve and continue to persevere to the end. He resumes here his exhortation that he broke off in 3.17.

Focused on living for God's will, not man's (4.1-3) - Since Christ "suffered" to the extent of dying, Christians should be willing to suffer to the same extent. Here, Peter is urging his readers that by identifying themselves with Christ through baptism, they are to put sin behind them and live a clean life (cf. Rom. 16.1-11). They need to do as Paul wrote, "*consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed, which amounts to idolatry*" (Col. 3.5). These things, he states, are "*the wrath of God*" (Col. 3.6a). Instead, they are to live for "*the will of God*" (1 Pet. 4.2b). Their "time in the flesh" refers to one's mortal lifetime on earth, not to carnal living. The behavior of the Christian, then is to be Christ-centered, not man-centered. The time for being dominated by Gentiles is past, it's time to live for Christ according to God's will (v.3).

Focused on the pagan's response to godly living (4.4-6) - Some of the persecution Peter's readers experienced was due in part to their unwillingness to continue in their old lifestyle with their unsaved friends. The pagans, Peter mentions, are "surprised" that they (Christians) do not participate in their fleshly practices. Peter reminds his readers that their unsaved friends will answer to God in the end for their behavior. God is "ready" to judge "the living and the dead" (v. 5). Only those who have been preached to, and who have received the gospel, and now are dead physically, will live on in a new spiritual sphere of life since they became believers (cf. 3.18). Physical death is sin's last effect on believers during their earthly lives (v. 6).

Christians are to love and serve one another until Christ returns (4.7-11)

In preparing his readers to meet the Lord soon (v.7), Peter urged them to make the best use of their time now that they understand what he wrote about suffering (vv.8-10). First, Peter makes it clear that the "end of all things is near" (v.7a). Meaning, Christians and the world are living in the beginnings of the "last days." Jesus call this the "birth pains" of the end (Matt. 24.8).

Therefore, how should a Christian live out their days? Below is a list of things Peter exhorts concerning living for Christ until the end.

1. *Be serious and watchful in prayer (v.7b)*. The words, "sound judgment" and "sober spirit" indicate one who is clear headed and self-controlled for the purpose of prayer. Prayer is the most notable and necessary ministry that God entrusts to his children, but it is also the most neglected ministry (cf. 1 Tim. 2.1; 1 Thess. 5.17; Heb. 4.15-16). Jesus praying in the garden might have impressed this upon Peter's life (cf. Matt. 26.40-41). Jesus prayed when the end of His life was near. The word "prayer" used by Peter indicates all kinds of prayers.
2. *Keep fervent in your love for one another (v.8)* - In relation to their fellow Christians, Peter considered most important the practice of unconditional love for one another (1.22; Rom. 13.8-10; 1 Thess. 5.8, 15; 1 John 4.7-11). The person who possesses this kind of love is willing to forgive, because this love "covers a multitude of sins" committed against them. The proper way to deal with sin among Christians is to confess and forgive (1 John 1.9).

3. *Offer and show hospitality without complaining (v.9)* - This is one of the ways to demonstrate love for the brethren (cf. Matt. 25.35). In Peter's day, a host might experience persecution by giving hospitality to a known Christian.
4. *Use your spiritual gift (vv.10-11)* - God has given every believer at least one "gift" (ability) that he or she can and should share with other believers (employ/use), and in doing so serve them. We do this to be good stewards with God's "manifold grace." Meaning, God has given believers many-faceted or variegated gifts. He bestows them on different people in different ways. These gifts are aspects of God's grace. No Christian can claim that he or she has nothing offer the church (v.10). All believers have something to offer in their service to God, His church, and brethren. Believers can do this in two basic ways...by their speech and/or by their service (v.11). Those who "speak" do so by presenting God's Word, not just their opinion. By "service," one provides some kind of help or assistance to others in the body. Acknowledging one's words and works as from God means that God gets the credit. This is only fitting, since He deserves all the "*glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen*" (v.11b)

LIVE IT:

Vindication is something most desire because of the injustices committed towards us in this life. Most of these injustices are just that, they are not necessarily connected with our service with Christ unless you are married to a spouse who slanders and makes fun of you because of your faith in Christ. The employer or employee who unjustly ridicules you because of your Christian ethics. The neighbor or friends who poke fun of you because you come across holier than thou. When you, as a Christian, stand for Christ and choose not to participate in fleshly activity in the world, either you will be respected, ridiculed, and/or rejected because of Christ. If you are suffering for the sake of Christ and His righteousness, then consider it pure joy because you know you are being obedient to Christ and the will of God. The Lord will take note and will vindicate you when you enter His presence in glory by saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Die to self and live for Christ now so you may live and give Him the glory, both now and evermore! Amen!

Letters of Peter: Lesson 5
The Christian's Universal Responsibility
1 Peter 4.12-5.14

LOOK IT UP:

■ **REVIEW:** What is the motivation for Christians to abstain from worldly living? (1 Peter 4.2)

■ **REFLECT:**

1. What should be the reaction from Christians concerning suffering? (1 Peter 4.12-13)

2. To Whom should we entrust our souls to when faced with trials? (1 Peter 4.19)

3. What is the primary role of elders in the church? (1 Peter 5.1-4)

4. What is the primary responsibility of everyone in the church? (1 Peter 5.5-6)

5. List Peter's instructions on how to defend yourself against Satan. (1 Peter 5.7-9)

■ **REVEAL:** What is the revealing future of those who are believers and those who are ungodly? What does this say about the suffering you experience now and your future in Christ? (1 Peter 5.10-11)

THE LESSON

LEARN IT:

OVERVIEW: Peter begins this section by instructing his readers on how to suffer well in the sufferings of Christ (4.12-19). Peter exhorts specific groups in the church how to serve when faced with suffering (5.1-11). Peter closes his letter stating the letter's purpose and personal greetings (5.12-14).

PURPOSE: Those who suffer according to the will of God should continue to trust in Him by doing what is right for His glory.

INTRODUCTION: As Peter nears closer to the end of his letter, he, bearing the responsibility as a shepherd of the flock of Christ, gives loving and fatherly advice to his readers. The loving nature of Peter's words are witnessed by how he addresses them, "beloved" (agapetos). How would we use this word today? We would write, "My dear beloved wife/husband." The root word for "beloved" is "agape." It describes unconditional love that is sacrificial and true. It is a love that designates someone or something as being their favorite. Therefore, the following words of instruction does not come from a distant authoritative figure who has no affection for those to whom he is communicating. He knows them perhaps, because he had visited them. He honors them because they are mutual partners together for the same cause, the gospel and glory of Christ. The instructions below are then from a loving shepherd and caretaker of the flock who is concern for the well-fare of his Master's sheep.

Suffer Well (4.12-19):

Be not surprised by suffering, instead, glorify God (vv. 12-14) - Some Christians, especially those in America are "surprised" when other people misunderstand, dislike, insult, and treat them harshly as they seek to carry out God's will. Peter reminds his readers that it is not a strange or surprising thing to experience negative reactions from others who are not Christians. Peter had earlier reminded them that their "fiery ordeals" were in a sense God's refining process (cf. 2.11). It was for their "testing" (proving), to manifest their faith, that God allowed their sufferings (cf. James 1.2-4).

Peter is reminded of what Jesus had told the disciples, "*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves...beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; you will even be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles...you will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved*" (Matt. 10.16-22).

The point is this, Christians should expect persecution for being identified with Christ and not be considered a friend to this world. Again, this always amazes me when many churches today seek to be a friend of the world, especially when they compromise their worship, walk, witness by accommodating the world culture in the church, when we should be setting ourselves apart to demonstrate the holiness and glory of God by proclaiming "*the excellencies of Him who has*

called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2.9). Thus, when we suffer for Christ sake, we glorify Him (v.14).

Be not ashamed for suffering, instead, glorify God (vv. 15-19) - Peter re-emphasizes here that when we suffer it should be for the good we do in Christ, not because of sin (v. 15). Also, when we do suffer for Christ sake, Peter encourages his readers not to be “ashamed” but “glorify God (v.16). Peter certainly can attest to this (being ashamed) when he denied Christ three times in the high priest’s courtyard (Lk. 22.54-62). He learned his lesson, stopped feeling ashamed, and urged his readers the same. We glorify God when we stand up as disciples of Christ, both visually, as others view our lives, and verbally, as we proclaim and explain our commitment to others.

The most encouraging message here about suffering by Peter is when he states, *“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (V.17).* O.K., how do I find this to be encouraging? It is because our suffering for Christ now is lesser than what the ungodly will experience at judgment as they stand before God. A more severe judgment will fall upon the ungodly. So, by comparison, the suffering we experience now for Christ, can by no means be compared to the wrath God that will pour out on those who are ungodly. Therefore, as Peter quoted Proverbs 11.31 in verse 18, he shows that even the Old Testament also taught that both the righteous and the wicked will receive from the Lord. God will reward both. If God disciplines His own children, how much more severely will He deal with those who are not His children? Thus, our suffering is light compared with the ungodly. Peter urges his readers to “suffer according to the will of God” and “entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (v.19). This verse reminds us as always that God is in control. He created us, loves us, and He is faithful to do the right thing.

I pray that your perspective on suffering takes on a new meaning in light of what Peter wrote in this section. Not to trivialize persecution, but our suffering is nothing compared to the horrifying wrath of God that will come on those who do not believe. Pray for and proclaim to those who do not believe that God will save them. Follow Jesus’ command by “loving your enemy and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5.44). Suffer well for Christ sake, but also, serve well.

Serve Well (5.1-8):

Next, Peter concludes the body of his epistle, and this section on encouragement in suffering, with specific commands so his readers would understand how to live while suffering for Christ. Since suffering is a given, how then should the church function. Well, the same as if they were not suffering, if not, excelling more as Paul would say. To this Peter addresses the leaders and congregation.

As leaders who shepherd (vv. 1-4) - The first group in the church that Peter instructs are the leaders. By leaders, Peter points out the “elders” (5.1). “Elders” in the church are men who are spiritually qualified to oversee the congregation (see 1 Tim. 3.1-7; Tit. 1.6-8 for Elder qualifications). Peter is not only speaking as an apostle, but also as a fellow elder. He is speaking

from experience, not only in the office as an elder, but also by experiencing suffering. His exhortation to his fellow elders was to “shepherd the flock of God among you” (v.2). Peter’s command is similar to Christ’s command to Peter, that is, to take care of those under their charge in the same way a shepherd cares for his sheep (cf. Jn. 21.16; Acts 20.28; Ezek. 34.1-16).

In other words, “elders” (vocational pastor or lay elders) are responsible for the shepherding work of the local church. The verb “to shepherd” (poimaino) literally means, “to tend.” Pastoring duties include feeding (the word of God), leading, guiding (by example), guarding (defending the Word and flock from spiritual wolves), and providing for the needs of those in the church. Just like a shepherd does for his sheep (cf. Ps. 23; Jn. 21.16). This, a shepherd should do “voluntarily” as opposed doing it “under compulsion,” meaning not “grudgingly” (v.2b). There should be a desire by the local pastor to willingly and lovingly serve the body of Christ.

The shepherd/pastor should not be in it for “sordid gain” (v.2c). Which in many cases, one does not go into ministry for the money. But, there are some who do it for some kind of “gain” because of human pride, be it monetarily or fame. Shepherds, instead, are to be according to God’s will, be “eager” and “prove themselves to be examples to the flock” (v.3). Wiersbe points out that pastors/elders/ministers are not to be little popes or petty tyrants (Matt. 20.25; 2 Cor. 1.24). An effective pastor knows his flock. He knows their needs and problems; and he needs to be ‘over’ his people so he can lead them and help them solve their problems. He needs to be as a preacher, able to apply the Word of God faithfully, to the needs of the people. He is not to be a weekly lecturer passing on information about the Bible, but a shepherd who knows his people and seeks to help them, counseling them through the Word.”

If there is a high view of the elder’s role and function in the church, they are actually under-shepherds who serve under the “Chief Shepherd” Jesus Christ (Jn. 21.15-17). This is not our church. The church does not belong to the pastor, nor to the people. The church, the congregation, the flock who make up the people of God, belong to the Great Shepherd, Christ Jesus our Lord. As it is, elders (under-shepherds) will give an account of their stewardship at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. Heb.13.17) where they will receive “an unfading crown of glory” (v. 4).

As sheep who follow (vv.5-9) - Next, Peter turns to those in the church who are to submit themselves to the “elders” (v.5). He identifies them as “younger men.” Peter is instructing the “younger” people in the church to take a position under the authority of the leaders (in most cases were older men in the congregation). Peter’s reason? The older have more experience and wisdom in living (cf. Job 32.4). Christians, young and old are to put on “humility” as a garment (v.5b). The word “clothe” is rarely used in scripture. It comes from a word referring to the apron that slaves put on over their regular clothes. This garment prepared them for service (cf. Jn. 13.4-15). We should be ready and eager to serve one another, rather than expecting others to serve us (Mk. 10.45).

Humility is an important instruction from God's word. Peter, re-emphasizes this in verse 6. He urges them to submit to God's working in their lives so that they may be "exalted" by God at "the proper time." Peter assures his readers that as they allow God to work in their lives, the Lord will raise them up to a higher position, eventually a better position for their suffering (cf. Lk. 14.11; Jms. 1.2-4). This again, Peter learned. To submit to God's hand on his own life, though at times he had not been as submissive as he should have been.

How does one "submit" (vv.7-8)? Peter explains by first, "casting" (or entrusting) oneself and troubles to God (Ps. 55.22; Matt. 6.25-34; Phil. 4.6). We can do this because of the confidence we have that God's cares for our welfare. Second, Peter urges his readers to "be of sober spirit and alert" (v.8). Why must we have this disposition? Peter explain, because Satan is on the prowl (cf. Job. 1.7; Matt; 26.41; 1 Cor. 16.13). What should sober and alert the Christians is that they are in danger from the devil when giving into temptation by doubting God's goodness and by regarding their sufferings as an indication of God's disinterest or ill will towards them. Satan certainly caused Eve in the garden to question God's interest and welfare for her and Adam (Gen. 3; 2 Cor. 11.3). If we look at our circumstances like raging waters rising up around us like Peter did when walking out to Jesus, we will ourselves sink in life because of pride in not only trusting in the Lord. We will be devoured by the evil one who causes us to drown in despair.

Stand Firm (5.9-14):

Resist the devil" (v. 9) - So, what is the strategy against Satan? Peter urges his readers to "resist him" (v.9). As we forsake the world and deny the lust of the flesh, we should most of all "resist" the devil (cf. Eph. 6.11-13; Jms. 4.7). Satan wants you to doubt, deny, disregard, and disobey what God has said (Gen. 3.1-5; Matt. 4.1-11). To "resist" means to defend oneself against, as oppose to attacking the enemy. Paul's instruction about putting on the armor of God (Eph. 6.11-20) is all about standing firm in the faith, being strong in God's strength, and protected by all that God gives you to defend yourself from the devil's schemes. The armor is not for advancing the enemy, but for standing firm in Christ. To hold your ground. The only offensive weapon that God gives is the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6.17). This is to be used as Jesus did in the wilderness.

Christians need to be reminded that we have three enemies: The world; the flesh, and the devil. The defense against these enemies is to flee, deny, and resist. Therefore, respect your enemy by being "sober in spirit" (v.8a). Recognize your enemy by being "on the alert" (v.8b). If Peter had been sober and alert, perhaps he would not have denied Jesus three times.

Trust in God's grace (vv. 10-11) - Jesus stated in the gospels and revelation that He is able because He has overcome the world. He is the "God of all grace" Who gives sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12.9). Our God, the Creator of all things, has "called" Christians "to His eternal glory in Christ" (v.10). Though it may not seem like it now, but God in Christ will "perfect" us and make us "complete" in Him. He will "establish" us, "strengthen" us for His service, and "confirm" us, giving us peace in His will. There is no better place in this life to be positioned than in God's

peace through Christ (Rom. 5.1). God has enough power and ability to help us endure whatever suffering He allows us to experience, “to Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen” (v.11).

Final greetings and purpose (vv. 12-14) - Peter concludes this epistle with a final exhortation and greetings from those with him in Rome. He begins with greetings from “Silvanus” whom he cites as being a “faithful brother” in Christ. It was probably Silvanus who penned what Peter dictated to him. Peter also sends greetings from “she who is in Babylon,” “She” probably means the church in the town where Peter was when he wrote this letter. “Babylon” might have referred to the “Babylon” on the Euphrates river. But, this seems unlikely and was probably a metaphorical reference to Rome where Peter spent the last years of his life. Christians during Peter’s day came to think of Rome as a type of Babylon during their day. Even the Jews spoke of Rome as being Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which may support the view that Peter wrote this epistle after that date.

Peter also sends greetings from “Mark” who was Peter’s protege. Many commentary writers believe this to be John Mark who was with Paul and Barnabus on Paul’s first missionary journey and who quickly abandoned them (Acts 15.38). This was also the same Mark that wrote his Gospel in Rome, influenced by Peter concerning the life and ministry of Christ.

In the midst of these greetings, Peter states the purpose of his epistle: That he wanted to exhort the readers to “stand firm” in the faith, since suffering for the Savior is part of being a recipient of God’s grace (5.9).

In conclusion, Peter signs off praying for God’s peace in Christ for all his readers who are suffering for His sake. “Peace” expresses the common Jewish blessing “Shalom.” Peter opens with peace and closes with peace. What a wonderful way to walk through fiery trials, with the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

LIVE IT:

What can we take away from Peter’s letter? I believe the most important lessons learned are these:

1. Because Christians are called out by and are identified with Christ, some form of persecution by the world for His sake is certain.
2. If Christians are to suffer, let be because of the good we do in Christ’s name, not because of sin.
3. When suffering for the sake of Christ, our suffering, our lives should point everyone to Christ so that He receives the glory.
4. All Christians are called by God to live holy lives that reflect His holiness.
5. All Christians are called to live lives of submission to one another and of service to Christ.
6. Christ, Who committed no sin, is our example of suffering.
7. Though Christians suffer now at the hands of ungodly people, their suffering profoundly less than the ungodly who face God on judgment day.

8. All Christians are to be sober, alert, and resist the devils schemes that might cause them not to trust God's motives upon their lives.
9. All Christians are to stand firm in the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
10. All Christians who are faithful in Christ will be raised up and exalted to serve Christ for eternity.

This is certainly not an exhausted list, but just some of the lessons learned from this short letter. As stated before, I pray that this letter and study helps you with a clearer perspective how to face suffering. Just because you are a Christian and you experience some sort of fiery ordeal, be it from natural causes or spiritual causes, it does not mean that God is displeased with you. It could simply mean that you have become a dangerous enemy to Satan and he is seeking to "devour" you. Suffer well, Serve well and Stand well in the grace and peace of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!

Grace and Peace!

Glenn Tatum, 2018