**Week 7**

***Submission – Part 3***

***1 Peter 3:13-22***

**23-24 May 2022**

**Suffering for the Cause of Christ –** When you underlined forms of the word **“suffering”** throughout the book of 1 Peter this week, you saw just how prevalent this theme is. In this session we will particularly consider what it means to suffer for the cause of Christ. We will also see once again that **submission** is not a woman’s issue: it is a *believer’s* issue. And the main point that Peter makes at the end of chapter 3 is that **we should be willing to suffer unjustly because Christ was willing to suffer unjustly to bring us to God.**

**An Important Question –** Peter begins this portion of his letter with a question that sounds rhetorical: “If you are doing the right thing, who is going to pick on you?” We want to answer, “no one”—but that isn’t the answer that Peter gives. If you want to do the right thing, but everyone else around you does not, they won’t love you for what you are doing. They just want you to go away so you won’t make them look bad. They feel uncomfortable and even judged by your good deeds.

**Radical for the Cause of Christ –** When Peter framed his question, he used the phrase “*zealous* for good works”. This would have instantly made his readers think of a group called the Zealots who were radical for their cause. So another way of looking at this question is, “Who is there to harm you if you prove to be a *radical* for the cause of what is good?” That is, you are not practicing low level goodness, but being holy as God is holy. Peter tells his hearers that if they suffer for that reason, they will be blessed . . . perhaps not in this life, but certainly in the life to come. That is our “living hope”.

**Set Christ Apart as Lord –** Some versions of the Bible render verse 15 as “…set Christ apart as Lord”. Don’t let there be any room in your heart for someone or something else to take His place.

**Making a Defense Versus Being Defensive** – Peter also tells his hearers to always be ready to make a *defense* when questioned about their faith. Note that there is a difference between *making a defense* and *being defensive*. Making a defense involves giving a rational reason for what we are doing. But being defensive means that we have taken it personally when our behavior is questioned. And when we do that, we have stooped to the level of our opponent, and they will not listen to us. But as a follower of Christ, we don’t have to take it personally because the opposition is not directed at us individually. We are living stones, part of a house for the Lord, and we share fellowship with other people who are in this with us.

**Giving a Defense –** We have to be *prepared* to do this, and Peter has already told us how to do it. We need to become very familiar with the Word, to crave it like milk, so that it will be ready in our minds when opposition comes our way. Each one of us needs to build a “critical mass” of understanding about what the Bible says, lest we fall away during hard times. This is likely to become more and more of an issue in the next 10-20 years as opposition increases. Giving a defense starts with a proper understanding of scripture . . . and that’s why we are here today in this Bible study.

**Limitations of Social Media –** There is a difference between being on the offense and being on the defense. Offense is aggressive. Always remember that when you give a reason for your faith, it is most likely to be *heard*—even if not received—when given face to face and in person, i.e. not put out there on social media. Be aware of the limitations of a medium of communication; facial expressions and tone of voice convey a lot when you are speaking, and those are lost on social media.

**Gentleness and Respect –** When Peter gives his advice in verse 15, it sounds very similar to what he told women previously. Now he is saying that **ALL believers should display these qualities. He is showing what submission looks like in general.** Peter made a special point of saying that women should cultivate a gentle, quiet spirit because we tend to be quick to run to our words.

**Put to Shame –** When Peter says at the end of verse 16 that those who have reviled our character may “be put to shame”, he doesn’t mean “feel ashamed of themselves”. What is meant is that they will be *overthrown*, i.e. made to realize the invalid nature of their own position.

**A Good Conscience –** A “good” conscience does one of two things: it either convicts you of wrong or it confirms that you are on the right path. We need a conscience that is grounded in the scripture so that it speaks truth to us. A good conscience keeps us aware of our constant need for forgiveness. So having a good conscience doesn’t mean that we have finally ceased sinning, but that we constantly lay our sin before the Lord.

**Suffering Is Assumed –** As you read the passage for this week, it is evident that Peter assumes that believers will suffer. Yet many people today want to deny this. They want to sell us the notion that because Jesus suffered, we won’t. And if suffering *does* come into our lives, it is because of some secret sin that we haven’t addressed. But that’s not what Jesus Himself said. There are three reasons why we can suffer:

1. Suffer for doing wrong
2. Suffer for doing right
3. Just suffer—it is part of the fallen human condition (remember Job)

**Not Comfortable, Yet Reassuring –** Peter is not issuing a call for withdrawal to some “safe” place. He is not telling us to just avoid everyone around us so we don’t make waves. Instead he is letting his hearers know that they *will* be living among people who oppose them, and the *way* that they live will shout the gospel. **We are called to live openly holy lives, ready both to offer an explanation and to endure difficulty because of it.** It isn’t comfortable or pleasant to feel out of step with everyone else. No one likes that feeling of being different. But it is important to realize that that feeling is actually an assurance to us that we are following Christ and that we have a living hope that those around us do not have, a hope that is kept imperishable for us.

**Suffering Like Christ? –** In verse 18 Peter brings the example of Jesus Christ, who suffered ONCE for all on the cross in order to bring us (i.e. *present* us) to God. That raises the question: when we suffer, are we suffering like Jesus did? He suffered as the righteous for the unrighteous, while we still carry a load of unrighteousness even as we suffer. We are *positionally* righteous, since the righteousness of Christ has been credited to us, but we still do unrighteous things and so contribute to the fallen world system we live in.

**A Confusing Issue –** Verses 19 and 20 bring up an issue that has been interpreted in several ways down through the ages, regarding the identity of the “spirits in prison”. Because of this, Jen would encourage us to do more research on our own so we can reach an informed opinion. One reason for the confusion is that Apostle’s Creed says that “He (Christ) descended into Hell…” There has been much discussion about whether Jesus descended into Hell between His crucifixion and His resurrection.

**Jen Wilkin’s Conclusion –** The word that is translated “spirits” in verse 19 is the word *pneuma*, which is never used in scripture to refer to *human* spirits. So Jen would describe verse 19 as, “Christ’s victory proclamation following His resurrection as He ascended to take His place at the right hand of God the Father.” There were demonic spirits in Noah’s day who stirred up wickedness on the earth. Scripture tells us that these spirits are imprisoned, being held for a coming day of judgment. When Christ triumphed over death, that fact was announced to these spirits. The resurrected Christ basically says to these bound spirits, “I win! My death looked like a defeat, but it was actually a victory. You stirred up wickedness on the earth, but I brought those eight people to safety then and many more now.”

**Baptism –** Believer’s baptism corresponds to the eight people on the ark being brought through the flood waters to safety. They were “reborn” as it were, passing through the flood. Baptism pictures that for us. Peter is not saying that baptism saves us in the sense of giving us salvation, but it acts as a picture of this same act of salvation. The “ark” of Jesus’ body carries many sons and presents them to the Father. What He accomplished on the cross was a *massive* deliverance!

**A Continuation of Submission –** Chapter three of 1 Peter ends up with “angels, authorities and powers” being brought into submission to Jesus Christ. ALL of them submit to Christ. This is another way that Peter seeks to encourage those enduring hardship for their faith. He wants his hearers to know:

1. Their suffering is certainly not beyond the sight of God. The God who sat enthroned above the waters of the flood also sees their circumstances.
2. Nothing that comes against them is beyond the control of God. All of their suffering will have purpose.

**How Should We Live in Light of All This? –** If we focus on who we are *under* instead of who we are *over*, it will go well for us. If we are more concerned with how we can “go low” than with how we can elevate ourselves, then submission is going to work for us the way that it should. Christ Himself was willing to go to the lowest place, knowing that at the proper time He would be exalted to the highest place…with all things in glad submission to Him. Are you ready to *give* a defense of your lifestyle and are you ready to *live* that defense? Are you ready to let your actions speak that defense whether anyone ever asks you or not?