

OUR DEFENSE

1 Peter 3:13-22

Does the world really care what you THINK? Probably not! Does anyone care what you DO? Probably so! Most of us think that same-gender marriage, pornography, and abortion are wrong and no one really cares that we think that. We sometimes hear about some groups who think that abortion is wrong and, consequently, will stage a protest march at an abortion clinic. Based on the press coverage, it seemed that many people cared what they did. Some of those who participated in such action have been arrested. I have not heard of anyone getting into problems on the job for believing that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died to save us from our sins, and that He is Lord of our lives; however, I do know of some who have had problems because they discussed this belief with fellow workers. The parents who deplore the obscene language in “required reading” for their teenaged children get along very well with the school authorities until they take action to get the required reading material changed. If we, as Christians, are not doing anything to change the world around us, then no one cares what you believe. If, on the other hand, we are changing the society for the sake of the Kingdom of God, then those who are not in that Kingdom will care and will oppose what is done.

Suffering for the cause of Christ is a reality in many parts of the world and is becoming more real in our society. We see what the news media do to people who oppose abortion, same gender marriage and pornography. They are painted as some wild-eyed fanatic rather than concerned persons who are trying to preserve that which is of value.

Be Ready – 3:13-17

¹³ Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, ¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ¹⁶ and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. 1 Peter 3:13-17 (NASB95)

How do we resolve the seeming inconsistency of the statement in verse 13 with the first part of verse 14? The implication of verse 13 is there is no one who can harm you and the implication of verse 14 is that you might suffer. How can both ideas be correct? It is likely that Peter is writing about damage (harm) to the soul and spirit from an eternal perspective in verse 13 and the concern in verse 14 is more about suffering in the body and emotions while we are on this earth. When we use the word “saved” to describe a person who has embraced God’s provision in Christ Jesus, the meaning is to be “preserved and protected” which will find its ultimate expression in the spiritual realm.

In general, and in a world that is reasonably ordered, taking positive action to show Christian love for those in need will not bring bodily or emotional suffering to us. However, when the social order becomes so perverted that “good is bad and bad is good,” then we have a real possibility of suffering for righteousness’ sake. We can see a growing tendency of opposition to Christianity in our society and there are cases where the so-called “freedom of choice” and “freedom of expression” issues carry more weight than do the “right to life” for the unborn and the “right to decency.” If we get involved by taking action for what is right, then we have a real possibility of suffering for righteousness’ sake. Peter’s advice was to count it a blessing and not be afraid. He was speaking from his own experience. He and John had been arrested for healing a lame man. He had been thrown in jail at other times, and he would

eventually be killed for his belief in Christ.

We can see evidence that such things as immorality, drugs, perverted life styles, foul language, and a host of like things are glorified in our literature and the entertainment media. We have become as the frog that sits in water that is gradually heated until the water becomes so hot that the frog dies. We have been lulled into complacency so that we fail to see the wrongness of the way of the world. It is almost as if our society has been given over to a reprobate mind.

What's a Christian to do? The answer to this question starts with a quote that Peter lifted from Isaiah chapter eight when Judah was being threatened by the forces of Syria that were allied with the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The first thing to be done is to make sure that their threats and attacks do not cause the church (in general) and Christians (in particular) to be fearful of what these godless people might do. In today's environment, we sometimes find the church afraid of losing its "tax exempt" status if we speak out against evil practices that have been declared to be "political issues." In a broader sense, we have real terrorism going on in the world and there are continuing threats from those who already have and would harm Christians.

The confidence and courage to not be overcome with fear results from knowing Who is in control when we have Jesus on the throne of our lives. The wording that Peter used was "sanctify the Lord Jesus in your hearts." The wording that Isaiah used was "sanctify Jehovah of heaven's army and if you have any fear or respect let it be reserved for Him only." When Peter substituted "the Lord Jesus" for "the Lord of hosts" he was acknowledging and agreeing with what Jesus had told His disciples "I and My Father are One."

The "how to" of sanctifying Jesus starts with seeing that the word used in the text is the same word that Jesus used in the Model Prayer in the phrase "hallowed be Thy Name." The way this can be done is to make sure that we recognize Jesus as holy and is to occupy a special and prominent place in the very center of our lives. It is likely that Isaiah was thinking about sanctifying Jehovah in the Temple. In Peter's letter he specifically mentioned that the place of hallowing or sanctification was to be in your heart which is the temple of God in the new covenant.

Since that is the case, then every thought of our hearts should be under the control of the One Who is on the throne in the temple that is located there. In addition to that, there has to be reverential fear and awe because of the very presence of the Lord. The implications of this are too many to explore now. At the very least there should not be anything that would dishonor the Lord in our hearts.

Peter's advice was to make sure that our own motives and actions are what they are supposed to be. Some might express this as keeping a clear conscience. The only way we can really trust our consciences is to make sure that our innermost being is aligned with and responsive to the Holy Spirit. If we set Him apart as the Number 1 priority in our lives – that is, He is Lord, then this will make a difference in the way we interact with the world and others will see that there is a difference in the expression of our lives as compared to the way that people typically behave. If we are approachable, then those who see the difference will be more likely to ask what is the reason for the difference they see.

The next step is to make sure that we are prepared to share the truth of the gospel message when the opportunity arises. It is important that we tell others in such a way that it draws them to Jesus rather than drives them away. We are to tell them in gentleness and in reverence. Gentleness or mild disposition (contrasted with harshness) will reflect the attitude we should have toward others and reverence is the attitude we should have toward God.

Our lifestyle should be one that is true to God regardless of what the world does. We

know in our own hearts whether what we do is right or not. If we are doing what is right and suffer persecution for that, then we can take comfort in knowing that Christ also suffered for being and doing right. Just as God used His suffering for great good, so also He can use our suffering for good.

Be Assured – 3:18-20

¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, ²⁰ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. 1 Peter 3:18-20 (NASB95)

Spiritual life is the essence and absolute necessity of Christianity. We cannot have a “relationship” with God if we have no spiritual life. Jesus talked about the importance of our spiritual life. In His discussion with Nicodemus, He said that unless a person has been born of the Spirit they cannot see, nor enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus told the woman at the well that God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Both Peter and Paul wrote much about the spiritual life within us.

Notice that Peter said that Christ died in the flesh and was made alive in the spirit. This is also a description of the work of the cross in the life of the believer. As we identify with Christ in His death on the cross, we are putting the old carnal life to death so that we can have spiritual life that results from being born of the Spirit of God. This is also pictured in baptism in which we show as a testimony that we have died to self, we are buried with Christ and raised to new life that is of the Spirit.

Having been born of the Spirit of God, we have within us the uncreated life of God. This life can never die – that is, it is eternal. A consequence of this reality for those who are born of the spirit is that we can no longer say that we are “only human.” We are no longer just body and soul, but we are now body, soul and spirit. It is by our newly born spirits that we are able to commune with God on a spirit-to-Spirit basis. It is also by our spirits that we can “know” by means of revelation from God.

Verse 19 says that “in the spirit” Christ made proclamation to the spirits in prison who were once disobedient. Next (in verse 20) we see a statement that seems to connect “these” to something that happened in the time of Noah. I cannot remember ever having heard a sermon on this passage. Most people readily admit that they don’t have a clue as to what Peter was writing about. I’m not sure what we would do with the information if we knew what it meant, but we can briefly check out what some commentators have written on these verses.

You have probably heard speculation that this is a description of what happened during the time between Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection. Some claim that He descended into Hell and delivered the gospel message to the Old Testament saints who were looking forward to the coming of the Savior but who died before that happened. Others claim that He went into the place they call Purgatory and gave those who were there a chance to be saved if they would believe. To say the least, this is reading a lot into the text that is not there and both options create a lot of “conflicts” with what is generally believed about Scriptural teaching on death and judgment. These speculations are somewhat influenced by erroneous doctrines held by the Roman Catholics for centuries.

Some of the comments in John Gill’s commentary point out that the text does support the idea that in His Spirit, Christ was working in and through the person of Noah during the time he was building the ark to proclaim God’s call to the people to trust and obey. Those who were

disobedient to the message proclaimed through Noah perished in the flood and these are still (even now) “spirits in prison.” Those (few) who did believe the message were saved from the flood in the ark. How do we know that they believed? They got on-board the ark before the door was closed.

In the midst of these various speculations about what this means, there is an interpretation that aligns with what we know happened in the first century church as the gospel was taken to the Gentiles or those who had a heathen or pagan background. The same Spirit Who raised Christ from death was working in and through the early believers as they took the gospel message to people who were ignorant of God. It can be argued that these people were imprisoned in their paganism and ignorance. Of course, they could be classified as “sometime disobedient” in their past lives. In fact, Paul used this exact terminology in his letter to Titus. (For we ourselves were sometimes disobedient. Titus 3:3.) Just as God was patient with the people in Noah’s time while the Ark was being constructed, God showed similar patience and withheld judgment on these unbelievers while the fullness of His plan of salvation was being revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Show Others – 3:21-22

²¹ Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him. 1 Peter 3:21-22 (NASB95)

In verse 21 we find what some would claim to be a “proof text” that you must be baptized to be saved. However, this verse is literally telling us that baptism is an image or a picture of the means of our salvation. It pictures the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and in our “good conscious” acceptance and identification with Him in what is represented by this imagery we find our salvation.

Following Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, He now sits at the right hand of the Father and reigns in heaven. In like manner, we have this as our hope that in Christ we too enter into heaven (the spiritual realm) and are seated with Christ and reign with Him. This is the ultimate expression of victory that is ours in Christ.

Summary: We will likely have times of difficulty in our lives, but we cannot let the possibility of problems prohibit us for doing what we should be doing out of fear that we may be hurt. There are some things we can keep in mind that will overcome the fear and these are to keep our focus on the promises of God and the assurance that we are ultimately safe in Christ. Living in such a way that we have a clear conscious keeps us from suffering because of wrong choices we make and, finally, we need to realize that the ultimate victory has already been won by Christ and we share in that victory.