

# 1<sup>st</sup> PETER BIBLE STUDY

1 Peter 3:13-22

Lesson #14

## Introduction

Last week we finished part 4 of our series that we had titled “A Christian’s Responsibilities.” While Peter’s epistle isn’t finished with these responsibilities, I’ve nevertheless ended that series, or at least interrupted it, so that we could put a new title on the these next group of verses. But first I’d like to lay some groundwork.

I myself was born in the last couple of years of world war two. I was a pre-baby boomer by a couple of years, and I have grown up my whole life in post war America. I’ve seen and experienced the very best years that this great country has known in its brief history. I’ve never had to fear to speak my mind or express my beliefs, because our constitution was designed to protect certain individual human rights that we have always felt were inalienable and God-given. If I had been born elsewhere on this earth, like China, or the old U.S.S.R. or the Middle East, or many other such places, the freedom and respect for my individual human rights that I’ve always known, and probably took for granted, would be an unknown concept to me. The government, and various elite groups, would have had all the rights and all the power, and all the authority, and I would have had to carefully adhere to the political correctness of that society, or been imprisoned or even perhaps put to death. I think cliches become so because they’re true, and the one that says “familiarity breeds contempt” might certainly apply to the situation in our great country.

We are moving rapidly away from our appreciation for individual human rights in favor of a more socialistic form of government, and political correctness is on the rise. Forces and authorities, and ever changing laws are being proposed and adopted, that when used by elite groups, will enable them to enforce their own form of political correctness, through the power of the government and legitimate law enforcement agencies, which were never before considered to be used in this fashion. Our freedom to speak our minds, and freely express those things that we hold dear to us, are systematically being turned into something called hate speech. If what you believe isn’t what’s politically correct, then it’s no longer your inalienable right of personal belief, it’s criminally hateful, and may get you arrested.

Freedom of speech has historically been accepted as an individual’s right to verbally, but peacefully, disagree with others, and your freedom to speak your mind means that I will have to accept your right to disagree with me, so that I have the right to disagree with you. But now we’ve somehow gotten the idea that we all have the right to never be offended by someone else’s contrary beliefs. If I want the right to speak freely, then I must accept that with that right is a responsibility to allow others to do the same, even when I disagree. But this mutual understanding has all but vanished in this “Me” generation, that’s grown up on self importance. My friends, this is only going in one direction, and when it gets there, even those who are in favor of it now, or just find it relatively innocuous, will look back and regret with bitter tears what has happened to this land of the free and home of the brave. Soon there may be no more freedom as that which we’ve grown up with, and being among the brave will probably end your freedom by getting you arrested.

Now I can almost hear the questions, what’s this got to do with this Bible study. Well, it has very much to do with this Bible study, because our next group of verses are concerning a situation that has been, up to now, completely foreign to all of us who have grown up in post WW2 America. But we are apparently bound and determined to bring them upon ourselves nonetheless. Whether by ignorance, or by sinister intent, or a little of both, I’m not entirely certain, but we’re moving rapidly away from our comprehension of the value of individual rights, and towards a government that tells us what we’re allowed to think, and what we must consider as valuable, and any ideas to the contrary will actually be criminal. We’ll all be free to do whatever we want, as long as it’s what the government says is right. Any ideas to the contrary will be made illegal and called hateful. That which we have traditionally called individual rights, has been re-labeled as bigotry.

As this situation escalates in our precious country, all those who hold the historic truths that are affirmed by the holy scriptures, those truths that this country was founded upon, will find themselves being on the wrong side of the political correctness issues, and it’s then and there that these next verses will start to become a stark reality in the here and now, rather than just words written in a book. So I’ve titled this lesson:

## A Christian's Expectations

### Verses 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 (NASB)

Peter starts this thought with a question that's perhaps a bit surprising, since he himself witnessed the persecutions and brutal murder of the Lord Jesus, who did no wrong in His entire life. But his point is, that generally speaking, doing what is good and right doesn't ordinarily bring harm upon those who do so. But it's his next statement that starts to get interesting. He says, but even if you should suffer persecutions for the sake of practicing righteousness then you are blessed. How does he figure that? How is suffering a blessing? Are we supposed to look forward to suffering, and long for it, because it's such a blessing and brings us such enjoyment? Of course not, and that's not at all what Peter's telling us. Was the Lord Jesus rejoicing as He prayed to the Father that night of His impending arrest and crucifixion? No He wasn't, but is there any doubt that as a result of that ordeal He was indeed blessed forevermore by His Father for His unwavering obedience. The writer of Hebrews wrote:

*8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those **who obey Him** the source of eternal salvation,*

Heb 5:8-9 (NASB)

This is an aspect of salvation that's all but completely missing from contemporary Christianity. You have to look far and wide for any preachers who will teach you these things in spirit and in truth. Thank God there are still some who do, and do it well, but they are few among the many. Peter tells us, and the writer of Hebrews affirms, that a vital part of the Christian life is the potential for suffering, because it is that very thing which is often used by God for the perfecting of His saints, as it was for His beloved Son. And the final outcome is always a blessing of God. Peter tells us not to fear their intimidation when we're persecuted, or be troubled by their rejection of us and our Savior, but rather:

*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;*

When and if the persecution begins, we are advised to sanctify, that is to set our Lord Jesus Christ apart as Lord in our hearts, by setting our hopes and our desires upon His glorious return for us as our primary objective of life. We must not make our earthly possessions, or earthly relationships our treasure, or we will suffer much grief over our losses, but our eternal souls cannot ever be snatched out of the hand of our heavenly Father. (Jn 10:28-29)

Our verse goes on to tell us that we must always be ready to make a defense, (that is, give an explanation) to everyone who asks us to give an account (our reasons) for the hope that is in us. Every believer must have some logical reasons that they hold to this hope of salvation, and what they perceive that salvation actually means. It's not even possible to become a Christian unless one knows at least the basic rudiments of the faith, because belief in the truth is the very means of salvation. So every Christian needs to be able to articulate at least the bare essentials of the gospel, and the hope of forgiveness and eternal life that it holds to all those who believe it. We aren't all gifted orators, and we won't all use exactly the same words, but the truth of the gospel will always be the same. In other words, why do you call yourself a Christian, and what do you think that it means to be one? And your answer must be biblically based, upon sound doctrine, not simply emotionalism.

The next words of this sentence, "yet with gentleness and reverence" are very important. Although the Lord Jesus Christ did most certainly confront the hypocrites and religious elite who rejected him quite sternly, nevertheless to those who sought him He was compassionate and forgiving. As his royal priesthood, it is our biblical mandate to execute our office, and perform our duties according to the rules of this priesthood. And the rules are that we are to keep our behavior excellent among the Gentiles, to submit to government authorities, to maintain appropriate relationships to family and

community, and to give an account of our faith in Christ with gentleness and reverence. This is our sacred duty and our reasonable service of worship. We do not attempt to argue with anyone, or intimidate anyone, or threaten anyone with earthly and bodily harm, that's just not how we have been ordered to function. As His royal priesthood, we are ordered to demonstrate His virtues while maintaining an attitude of gentleness and reverence. So that we understand, this does not mean that we are not absolutely adamant in our belief, but rather, it means that we are not arrogant in our belief.

Also, It's not going to be possible to be bold in our proclamation of righteousness, if we ourselves are secretly indulging in sinful activity. The gospel is a call to repentance from sin, all sin, and intentionally indulging it will stifle our witness and destroy our confidence. It's impossible to completely eliminate sin, but it's altogether entirely possible, and required, that we put to death any and every on going, and habitual practice of sin in our lives. We are not allowed to hold on to a few favorites because we have a particular propensity for certain lusts. This will disqualify us from His priesthood.

When you have professing preachers of the gospel, who never speak of sin, and never call their congregations to repentance and holiness, you cannot help but wonder why this is, considering that the gospel itself is a call to repentance and holiness. So many times we have found that this was because these men were not maintaining a good conscience. They were often secretly practicing fornication, or adultery, or homosexuality, or drug abuse, so they simply couldn't speak openly on these things for fear of having their own little secret exposed. And so we must maintain a good conscience, which means abstaining from sin, all sin, so that we may speak the truth, the whole truth, and not be afraid that we ourselves are going to be exposed as hypocrites.

Circumstances vary, and we will be confronted by many different kinds of people and situations. When the gospel is attacked, and the name of Christ is maligned, we are free to defend the gospel, and the good name of Jesus Christ our Lord. We are not only allowed, but we are instructed, to call sinful behaviors sinful, and to warn humanity of the consequences. But our words will carry little weight if we ourselves are practicing these behaviors also. And hence, our mandate to keep all our behaviors excellent, and to keep a good conscience in the practice of our priestly duties. Even unto death, if God should will it so. (v.17) Yes, that's what it says! We are commanded to be faithful even unto death if God should will it so, just as He did for His beloved son. Which brings us to verse 18:

**Verse 18:**

*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* 1 Peter 3:18 (NASB)

So here we have in one sentence the explanation of atonement. For our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died a horrific death for sins He himself did not commit. He himself died once, for all. Who are the "all" that are being described here? There's much debate on this issue. The question isn't how much is "all" because that's obvious, the question is, what is the group or category to which this "all" is referring? And the Scriptures tell us plainly that is to all of those who believe in Him, all of those who receive Him through repentance and faith. Christ Jesus died once, Himself, for all of these whom his Father has given him. The death of a just and righteous man on behalf of the unjust, so that He might bring us to God.

It was the fact that He was just, which means righteous in every way and totally without sin that makes His substitutionary death efficacious on our behalf. We could have, and certainly would have died ourselves for our sins, but this would not bring us to God, this would bring us to destruction in the lake of fire. So why does Christ's death bring us to God, when our own deaths would have doomed us to hell?

Unless we understand that God the Father is the very essence of righteousness and holiness, and that sin and unrighteousness are not tolerated in His presence, then we won't be able to capture the essence of this verse. There is but one acceptable atonement for sin, and that is a perfect sacrifice. There are two possible end results for sinful mankind. One is to die as an imperfect and sinful being, and suffer the eternal condemnation for such. And the other is to be forgiven for our sins by the righteous sacrifice of another, so that we might escape the condemnation of hell and enter a perfect and sinless Kingdom of God.

And this is why the verse says “that He might bring us to God.” There is absolutely no other means by which humanity may be brought to God. Jesus said straightforward that He was the way, and the truth, and the life, and that no one could come to the Father except through Him. (Jn 14:6) The apostle John stated that he who has the Son has the life and he who does not have the Son does not have the life. And again, Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; [but] the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1Jn 2:23) Contrary to popular thinking, there are not multiple roads to heaven. The Lord Jesus was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit so that He, and no one else, might bring us to God the Father. Apart from Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, none will ever come to God. (Repeat)

As objectionable as this statement is to those who reject the Lord Jesus, nevertheless it is a mandatory truth that must be understood by all those who are chosen to be the children of God. There will be absolutely none in heaven, not a single one, that have not come through the substitutionary death, and imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Jesus doesn't bring you to God, then you will never be with God, and if you find this to be too exclusive, or too narrow, then just tell God that you demand more options, because you don't like the one that He's provided. Tell Him that you're a good person, and you feel like you have a right to more choices than what He's providing.

I assume you understand that I'm being facetious, but I'm doing so to make a point. Consider, if you will, the extraordinary measures that the Father has implemented to provide a means of atonement for sinful mankind. Consider, for a moment, the extraordinary love, and mercy, and compassion that the Lord Jesus displayed in suffering so brutally and shamefully on our behalf, and then tell the Lord that all this just wasn't enough, it's much too narrow and exclusive, and you think we need more options and other methods, so that we can each pick the one that we feel is best of us.

Now you see the point I'm making? Do you see how arrogant, how unappreciative, and how selfish and self centered such thinking is? Listen to me now, if you're a Christian, do not ever, for one second, think that you need to be apologetic for the exclusivity of the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather rejoice that He was willing, of His own accord, to suffer and die Himself for the likes of us, so that He might bring us to God. To Him be the glory forever and ever, amen.

Do not be sad or embarrassed for the divinely decreed fate of the multitudes who reject the Lord Jesus. Oh yes, be very sad indeed that they do reject the Lord, but you never have to be sad that God the Father called upon His beloved Son to die for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us, those who receive Him, and believe Him, and appreciate Him, to God the Father. To reject so great a gift is the ultimate act of disrespect and irreverence, and those who do so will be justly and rightly compensated accordingly.

This is the truth that must be told unashamedly, both for the sake of the Lord who died, and for the sake of those for whom He died. A very unfair trade, probably the most unfair trade in the history of the universe, the death of the perfect and righteous Son of God, in exchange for the life of the sinful and lost dregs of humanity, but nevertheless a trade ordained and approved by Almighty God from before the foundation of the world. And what shall be our reaction; to demand more choices, or apologize for the exclusivity? No I don't think so, I think praise, and worship, and rejoicing are more in order, how about you?

Our verse goes on to say *“having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit”* This is another point where the gospel is often attacked. We've all heard those who contend that Jesus didn't really die on the cross, that He just sort of passed out, or swooned as some put it. This is their way of dealing with His resurrection without confronting His divinity. You see, if He really did die, then He really was resurrected from the dead, as the scriptures proclaim, and allowing this as fact is implicitly accepting His divinity, so His literal death is challenged so that His resurrection can be explained in a non-miraculous fashion. Challenge His death and you challenge His resurrection, challenge His resurrection and you challenge His divinity, you see how it all fits together. It all stands together, or it all falls together.

But in this verse, as well as countless others, we have the reaffirmation that the Lord Jesus was in fact put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. We all understand that the substitutionary atonement provided by Christ was absolutely contingent upon His being literally put to death, because that is the price that must be paid for sin. (Eze 18:4; Rom 6:23; Heb 9:22) Unless there was a death, the price has not been paid.

But we also know that this is only half of the story, unless there was a literal resurrection from the dead, as Jesus said He would do, then our own assurance of a resurrection from the dead ourselves, and a life eternal with Jesus would be unsubstantiated. His literal death assures us of our atonement, and His bodily resurrection assures us of our resurrection and eternal life with Him in the eternal kingdom of God.

Now we get to the last half of the sentence which says “but made alive in the spirit.” Which sets the tone and context for the next sentence which says:

**Verses 19-20:**

*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 3:19-20 (NASB)

To understand this verse it is imperative that we keep it in its context. This verse begins with the words “in which” that refer back to His condition of being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. It is in this condition, dead in the flesh but alive in spirit, in which the Lord Jesus went and made a proclamation of something to some spirits that are in prison. These spirits are specifically identified as the ones that were disobedient during the days when Noah was building the ark. (Gen 6) Peter apparently doesn't feel the need to tell us what it was that Jesus proclaimed to those spirits. Either he doesn't feel like it matters, which begs the question, why would he mention it then, or else he assumes that we already know what He proclaimed, which seems a more reasonable conclusion.

Peter is using this reference strictly as an example. He's using a situation that was apparently commonly known and understood by his contemporaries at that time. He wasn't trying to teach something about this, but rather using this as an example to teach something else. I know that there's a good deal of controversy about this verse, and I was going to discuss it at greater length, but it became apparent that it would take much more time than I initially thought, and it would take us completely off the entire point that Peter's trying to make by using this example. At which point it would run the risk of becoming a distraction instead of a clarification, as Peter had meant it be. Therefore let me just sum the whole thing up with just a short explanation.

Acknowledging that there are varying points of view, nevertheless I hold to the point of view that understands these verses to be referring to fallen angelic spirit beings who were cohabitating with humans and instigating every kind of evil and disobedience to God, to the point that God locked them up in an abyss awaiting the final white throne judgment.

Therefore, based on this assumption, the proclamation that Jesus would have made after having been put to death in the flesh and thereby making atonement for the sins of all of His elect, is that He had set the captives free, that the Gates of Hell would not prevail against His church, and that He himself was alive for evermore. That Satan's stranglehold on humanity through his devious interjection of sin was broken, and that God's eternal and sovereign plan for Christ and His elect was omnipotent and immutable. Satan was defeated, Christ was anointed king of all, and the sovereignty of God was demonstrated. Such would be the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had been put to death in the flesh but made alive forevermore in the spirit. Hallelujah.

And now we're getting to the point of these particular verses. Peter uses this example of Christ's vicarious death being the very vehicle of salvation for all of His chosen, and likens it to those who were on the ark in the days of Noah, when God flooded the whole earth and judged mankind by flood water. Just as the ark brought a very small remnant of mankind, only eight people, through the fierce judgment of God, in like manner, the death of Jesus Christ in the flesh, but His being alive in the spirit, brings a small remnant of mankind through the final judgment of God upon an evil and disobedient mankind, in the last days. Symbolically, metaphorically, Christ Jesus is the ark that carries a small remnant of humanity to safety through the judgment period of God. A better example is nowhere to be found, so Peter makes reference to this event in his explanation of Christ's death and resurrection. And then he goes on to say:

### **Verses 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 (NASB)

Now Peter says “corresponding to that” which is referring to the example of Noah and the ark providing safety from judgment on a remnant of humanity, Peter says that Christ’s death and resurrection provides a vehicle of safety from the final and eternal judgment of God on a violent and disobedient mankind. Peter uses the word “baptism” here to symbolically represent a genuine saving faith in Christ. He’s not suggesting that the act of baptism itself is what saves, and he makes that clear by saying “not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Peter is saying that baptism represents a soul that is born again, regenerated, and transformed to Christlikeness, and is thus maintaining a good conscience because of their obedience to Jesus Christ.

It is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ that the new covenant promise is realized. It is the bestowing of the Holy Spirit that regenerates mankind. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, who has been authorized by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to quicken the spirits of man through taking up residence within our spirit and bestowing upon us a new heart that loves God and earnestly desires righteousness. This new resident Spirit assures regenerate mankind that he has been forgiven of his sins, and affords him a good conscience through a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. (Ch1, v.2)

Verse 22 is a continuation of the same sentence concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ and says “who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.” Whether this has something to do with the proclamation which He made in verse 19 isn’t stated, but there certainly seems reasonable cause to make a connection. After having been put to death in the flesh, Christ is now ascended into heaven, and occupies His position at the right hand of God, who has put all things, angels and authorities and powers, in subjection to His beloved Son.

### **Conclusion: (Brief overall summary)**

In verses 13-17 we are instructed that we may be called upon by God to suffer persecution, or even death, for the sake of righteousness. We’re told to always be ready to give an explanation of our faith to anyone who ask us why we believe what we do. And to do so with gentleness and reverence.

These verses go on to warn us that our godly behaviors will likely cause us to be slandered (v.16) And such is the case now, when the news media intentionally and repeatedly tries to link the behaviors of radical bigots to the beliefs and teachings of authentic Christianity. They know full well what they’re doing, and so does everyone else, but they still do it every time they get a chance. So we’re told to keep a good conscience, so that when they accuse us, the true Christians, they themselves are made manifest as the real bigots by their shameful twisting and manipulation of information to falsely accuse the innocent.

Their hatred of all that is Godly is evident by their attitudes and actions, so to mask their own hatred of all things Godly, they accuse the innocent of hate. But all of this has been ordained by God as part of His creation plan, and our suffering on behalf of His righteousness is eventually a great blessing, when all has been completed and the final accounting is done. All is proceeding exactly as planned, and scripture will have its fulfillment.

In verses 18-22 Peter speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the means by which mankind may be brought to God. He uses the example of Noah and the ark, and symbolically applies that to Jesus Christ as the unique vehicle of transport that brings a sinful humanity safely through the judgement of God. We discussed the absolute exclusivity of Christ as the only means, and addressed the utter lack of any validity to the claims of those who argue that God’s way of salvation is just too narrow and exclusive.

And then we finished with the declaration of verse 22 that He (Christ Jesus) has ascended into heaven and has taken His rightful place at the right hand of God, with angels, and authorities, and powers having been put in subjection to Him. The next time the world sees Him it will be in His full manifest glory and power, leading His army of saints and angels back to earth to take His place as Lord and King. His faithful saints will rule and reign with Him, and share His power and His glory for their faithful endurance of sufferings for righteousness to the end. And for this we ever cry - Come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen.

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