

Study 4: 1st Peter Chapter 3

Introduction

The theme of submission follows through from the previous chapter. In the face of trials and persecution, if we live our lives as God would have us to do, then the world will have nothing to accuse us of. Of course, with that come the blessings from God. Peter then takes the brethren right back to the example of Christ.

Body of the Study

Wives – Submit to your Husbands!!!

Instructions for Husbands

Call to Righteous Living

Suffering Persecution

The Example of Christ's Suffering

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read chapter 4 in preparation for the next study

Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? What are some examples from scripture that support your answer?

Reflect on some things from your own life when you have been attacked / persecuted / faced trials for doing the right thing. As you look back on those events, how have they helped you grow both as a person, and as a christian?

Notes for study 4: 1st Peter Chapter 3

The theme of submission follows through from the previous chapter. In the face of trials and persecution, if we live our lives as God would have us to do, then the world will have nothing to accuse us of. Of course, with that come the blessings from God. Peter then takes the brethren right back to the example of Christ.

Wives – Submit to your Husbands!!!

Well – now that we’ve got your attention, let’s try and understand what the text is really about.

After giving instruction to christian slaves/servants (2:17-25) Peter addresses the responsibilities of christian wives “...*Likewise you wives, be submissive to your own husbands...*” (1:3:1 NKJV). Both this verse and 1:2:18 (servants being submissive to their masters) point back to 1:2:13 – christians submitting themselves to God. This is not an instruction to wives to behave as the slaves of their husbands (and even worse – for husbands to treat their wives as slaves). Schreiner¹ says:

Voluntary submission is in view here. Husbands do not have the responsibility to ensure that wives submit to them. The participle “submitting” (translating literally) functions as an imperative here...

Peter outlines the purpose behind the instruction “...*that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives...*” (1:3:1 NKJV). In many cases it was (and often still is) the women who are converted. The women are to show proper respect to their husbands – *their own husbands* – by submitting themselves voluntarily. Like submitting to the government and authorities (1:2:12-15), by doing such there will be no reason why the unbelieving husband can have anything bad to say about the christian wife. This may well result in the husband so admiring the conduct of his wife that he will turn to christianity himself “...*when they see the purity and reverence of your lives...*” (1:3:2 NIV).

Although at first glance it seems a little like a change in direction, Peter’s instruction is for women to adorn themselves inwardly, rather than outwardly. It is therefore a continuation of the same line of instruction “...*Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. ⁴ Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight...*” (1:3:3-4 NIV). These instructions are not a prohibition for wearing jewellery, but rather they are that we need to keep these things in perspective. God does not view the wearing of excessive and expensive jewellery as a sign of beauty.

The true sign of beauty is what things are like on the inside. “...*For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear...*” (1:3:5-6 NIV). The reference to Sarah suggests that the audience may have had some Jewish leanings. Whilst Abraham is consistently regarded in the scriptures as the father of faith, in this case Sarah is shown as the Matriarch because of her submission to her husband.

Instructions for Husbands

The idea of submission lies firstly with submission to God, and conforming ourselves to His will. It is in just such a way that a good woman will submit herself to her husband, and God (through Peter’s instruction) also requires the same kind of submission from husbands. “...*Likewise you husbands, dwell with them with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered...*” (1:3:7 NIV). Of course, Peter’s instruction is for *christian husbands*, as non-christian husbands would

¹ Schreiner, p.148

have no regard for the instruction! He reminds them that with their wives they are *heirs together* of eternal life. The greatest blessings that husbands and wives can give each other is to help each other grow in God's grace, and focus on the eternal life which lies ahead. It is easy to get distracted with the physical things of the world. But, as *sojourners and pilgrims*, we need to remember that "this world is not our home", and we are only here to prepare us for eternity. We can either help or hinder one another on that journey. If our behaviour towards one another is such that it does not help our spiritual journey, then it is obvious as to why God not grant our prayers (c/f Js 1:7-8).

Call to Righteous Living

Peter closes the section dealing with the manner of life for the three specific groups (servants, wives, and husbands) with a general call to all christians. "...*Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous...*" (1:3:8 NKJV). We must remember that these brethren were about to (or were already) face great trials and probably persecution. They needed to help and support each other through their struggles. Bearing in mind the things that were already going on between them, and needed to be stopped (1:2:1-2), it was important that they showed proper respect for each other.

Here he gives several imperatives for Christians' getting along together. The five virtues in v. 8 have many illustrations in the life of Jesus and parallels in the other letters. They are normative qualities every person united to Christ should manifest. On "harmony," see Ro 12:16; Php 1:27; 2:2; on "be sympathetic," see Ro 12:15; 1Co 12:26; on "love as brothers," see 1Th 4:9-10; for "be compassionate," see Christ's example in Mt 11:29; and concerning "humble," see Christ's example as set forth in Php 2:5-11. (NIVBC)

The sentence continues with specific instructions aimed at correcting their present situation and dysfunctional practices "...*not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing...*" (1:3:9 NKJV). Whilst the normal human response to aggression is to retaliate, and do the same thing back, that is not how christians should behave. We need to remember that we have offended God by our sins, but in response He forgave us and showed His grace. We ought to do the same thing to others – forgive our enemies and show grace towards those who are offending us.

In support of the statements that he has made, Peter quotes from Ps 34:12-16 "...*Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*"..." (1:3:10-12 NIV). There are two aspects to the life that Peter is discussing – our physical lives on this earth which will be prolonged if we live a calm and happy life without upsetting people. On the contrary, if we do go around upsetting people, it not only makes our lives more stressful, but it may also cause them to make our lives harder and more difficult. They may take away our jobs, or our food, or on the worst cases, even our lives. The second aspect of life is our spiritual life, which can be quenched out by the conflicts of the physical life. So, the imperative is that we live our lives God's way, and live a long and happy life on earth which will prepare us for eternal life with Him.

Suffering Persecution

God will bring retribution to those who afflict His people, to which Peter adds a statement that we are less likely to have troubles and to be persecuted if we live righteous lives "...*And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good...*" (1:3:13 NKJV). Suffering and persecution is the key theme through the letter. The suffering of Christ is held up as the example of how christians should react to the persecution when it comes.

However, suffering is not inevitable. By acting in the way instructed, the christians would have done all they could to either avoid the suffering, or at least, to minimise it. But that doesn't mean

that it *won't* happen. So Peter adds "...*But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."*..." (1:3:14 NKJV). The blessedness (happiness) comes from suffering for what is right, knowing that we are the recipients of God's promises.

Verses 14b- 15 are built on Isa 8:12b- 13, where the prophet admonishes the godly in Israel not to fear the impending invasion as do the unbelievers. Instead, godly reverence is to be their concern (cf. Mt 10:28). Thus Peter admonishes his readers not to be afraid of other people but acknowledge "Christ as Lord." This passage is important for Peter's Christology, for here again he ascribes to Christ the OT name for the Lord (see comment on 2:3). Peter's readers are to acknowledge in their "hearts" (see comment on 3:3-4) Christ as the Holy One. When the centre of a person's life is rightly related to God, he or she is able to respond properly to the vicissitudes of life. (NIVBC)

Verse 15 is very well known. In the context of the letter, the Christians needed to be prepared to stand firm in the face of opposition, and not to turn against those who were doing evil towards them. The natural question then is *why are they like this? There is something different about them – what is it?* As Christians we ought to be prepared for these questions "...*and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is within you, with meekness and fear...*" (1:3:15 NKJV). But notice that Peter says that by doing this we "...*sanctify the Lord God in your hearts...*" (1:3:15 NKJV). Sanctify means to "set apart" – so we show that we are *set apart* – that God is the person who is set apart in our hearts, when we are able to provide the answers that defend the gospel.

The manner in which we respond to others is important. We are not to do it with a high-and-mighty attitude, but rather with humility "...*But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander...*" (1:3:15-16 NIV).

If we do evil and suffer for it, we deserve what we get. But it is a different thing if we suffer because we have done good. Peter has been driving at this theme right through the epistle. "...*It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil...*" (1:3:17 NIV).

The Example of Christ's Suffering

Throughout the letter, Peter returns to the theme of Christ's suffering as an example for us. The things that the brethren were facing were the very things that happened to Christ.

Peter turns to a very strong exegesis (explanation) of the nature and pattern of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Unfortunately it is a passage that can be somewhat difficult to understand, although the point that Peter makes (Christ's suffering as an example and pattern for us) is clear. There are three main views as to how this passage is interpreted.

These may be easily differentiated if the following questions are kept in one's mind: (1) Who are the "spirits" to whom Christ made a proclamation? (2) When did Christ make this proclamation? (3) What was its content?

The first group sees Christ going down to the realm of the dead and preaching to Noah's contemporaries during the interval between his crucifixion and resurrection. His message is interpreted as an offer of salvation to the spirits, as the announcement of condemnation, or as the announcement of good tidings to those already saved.

The second group views the pre-existent Christ as preaching in the time of Noah to Noah's sinful generation.

The third group sees Christ as proclaiming to the fallen angels his victory on the cross. This victorious proclamation took place perhaps during the three days in a literal descent into hell, but more likely it occurred during his exaltation. (NIVBC)

One of these views is given by Jackson²:

Did Jesus, during that three days when His body was in the grave, go into Hades and preach the gospel to those “spirits” that were therein imprisoned? Some so believe, and they employ 1 Peter 3:19 as proof-text for that idea. “...he [Christ] went and preached unto the spirits in prison...” But does the text actually teach that? No.

The apostle had just said that Christ was put to death in the flesh, but He was made alive in the spirit. The meaning of this latter phrase may be that by means of the spirit’s re-entry into His body, Christ was made alive; this would be an allusion to His resurrection. At any rate, the apostle continues: “...in which [i.e., in the spirit] also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison ...” The issue is not *what* He did, but *when* He did it. The answer is supplied in chapter 1 of this same book where it is affirmed that the Spirit of Christ resided in the prophets of the Old Testament (1:11). Consequently, it was *through Noah* that Christ proclaimed a message of hope to the ante-diluvian world. Those ancient people were, *at the time of Peter’s writing*, in the prison of the Hadean realm. But they were very much alive and on earth when Christ (through Noah) preached to them. This is a common figure of speech in the Bible known as *prolepsis*, whereby something is spoken out of its normal timeframe. Thus, underline “spirits in prison,” and note: *In hadean prison now, but when originally preached to by Christ through Noah; see 1:11.*

However to counter this position, we only need to remember what Peter said on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:31). Jesus’ soul went to Hades, but was not left there. So, what did He do whilst He was there? It was quite possible that He preached to them. Of course, our knowledge of Hades is limited, as is our understanding of why Jesus would preach to them, when they are unable to change their state (Lk 16:20-31).

The New International Bible Commentary adds:

To sum up, the thought of vv. 18-19 may be paraphrased as follows: "He was put to death in the human sphere of existence but was made alive in the resurrection sphere of existence, in which state of existence he made a proclamation of his victory to the fallen angels." As for the pastoral significance of these verses, it is one of comfort because through suffering Christians go on to victory. Those who oppose Christians will be defeated (Col 2:15; 2Th 1:6-8). (NIVBC)

“...For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,¹⁹ through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison²⁰ who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah...” (1:3:18-20 NIV).

Peter is very strong in his statement of fact concerning Noah. He is specific concerning the number that was saved (8 souls), and reminds us all that of the millions who were alive in the world at that time, “a few” was only eight! “...*In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water...*” (1:3:20 NIV). Baptism is an element in our conversion, and symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:1-11) “...*and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...*” (1:3:21 NIV).

In the end, just as Christ overcame even death with power, might and authority, so we as christians are assured of our salvation because of Christ our example “...*who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him...*” (1:3:22 NIV).

² Jackson, Wayne: “Notes from the Margin of My Bible” Courier Publications, PO Box 55265 Stockton, CA 95205 p.154