

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter

Lesson 6: Suffering for Righteousness; Baptism Saves -- 1 Peter 3:8–22

Imagine being insulted and answering with a blessing. Someone wrongs you, mocks you, repays your kindness with contempt, and instead of firing back you actually wish them well, and mean it. Everything in us recoils from that. The instinct to return blow for blow runs deep. Yet Peter tells a roomful of mistreated believers to do exactly this: “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless.” He is asking them to break the chain that runs from hurt to revenge, and he tells them this is precisely what they were called to do, because it is what their Lord did first.

From there Peter moves to a question many of his readers were living every day: what do you do when you suffer for doing what is right? Not when you suffer because you deserve it, but when you do good and get punished for it anyway. Peter’s answer is bracing. Do not be afraid. Honor Christ as Lord in your heart. Keep your conscience clear, and always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you, with gentleness and respect. A clear conscience and a settled hope can carry a person through suffering that would crush someone with neither.

Then Peter does something unexpected. To encourage suffering Christians, he points them to Jesus and to a flood that happened thousands of years before they were born. He tells them that Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. He speaks of Christ proclaiming victory over imprisoned spirits, of Noah’s family brought safely through the water, and then he says something that has steadied and puzzled readers ever since: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you.” These are deep waters, and we will wade in carefully, but the destination is solid ground.

So this passage holds together the everyday and the eternal. It asks us how we will answer the next insult, and it shows us a Savior who suffered for sins to bring us home. It speaks of a clear conscience under pressure, and it tells us how that conscience was washed. Read it slowly. Peter wants suffering believers, then and now, to know that the same Christ who went through death and out the other side, now exalted with angels and authorities subject to Him, is the One who saves us and walks with us through every hard thing.

Group Discussion: Peter tells believers, “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless” (v. 9). Why is the instinct to retaliate so strong in us, and what makes blessing those who wrong us feel almost impossible? Where have you seen someone break the cycle of evil by responding with good, and what effect did it have?

Personal Reflection: Peter says to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (v. 15). How ready are you to explain your hope to someone who asks? What makes you hesitant, and what is one thing you could do to be more prepared and more gentle?

Study Questions

1. Peter calls believers to “unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind,” and to bless rather than repay evil for evil (vv. 8–9). What does this teach about how Christians are to treat one another and their enemies, and why does Peter say we were “called” to this so that we “may obtain a blessing”?
2. Of the qualities Peter lists in verse 8, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, a humble mind, which is hardest for you to show consistently, and toward whom? What would growth in that area look like this week?
3. Quoting Psalm 34, Peter says the one who would “love life and see good days” must “keep his tongue from evil,” “turn away from evil and do good,” and “seek peace and pursue it” (vv. 10–11). What does this teach about the connection between the way we speak and act and the life God blesses?
4. Peter says we should keep our conscience clear and our conduct good so that those who revile us will be “put to shame” (v. 16). Is there an area where your conduct could be honestly criticized right now? What would it take to keep a truly clear conscience before God and others?
5. Peter says, “Even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed,” and “it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil” (vv. 14, 17). What does this teach about suffering that comes from doing right, and how should a Christian face it differently from suffering that comes from doing wrong?
6. Peter says, “Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy” (vv. 14–15). When you face opposition or the possibility of suffering for your faith, what are you most tempted to fear, and how does honoring Christ as Lord in your heart drive out that fear?
7. Peter says to be ready to give “a reason for the hope that is in you,” yet always “with gentleness and respect” (vv. 15–16). Why does Peter insist that the manner of our witness, gentle and respectful, matters as much as the content, and how can a harsh defense of the truth actually undermine the gospel?
8. Peter assumes Christians have a “hope” so real and visible that outsiders will ask about it (v. 15). Is your hope in Christ visible enough that anyone would think to ask? What in your life either displays that hope or hides it?
9. Peter says, “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God,” and then that “baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you... as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (vv. 18, 21). What is Peter teaching here about the suffering of Christ for our salvation and about the meaning and necessity of baptism, and how should we understand the difficult mention of the “spirits in prison” (vv. 19–20) without drawing wrong conclusions from it?
10. Look back across the whole passage. Peter moves from how we treat others, to suffering for righteousness, to the hope we are ready to share, to Christ’s suffering and our baptism, to

His exaltation over all powers. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through these verses. What single truth from 1 Peter 3:8–22 do you most need to carry into this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 34:12–16, the words Peter quotes about loving life and seeking peace; Romans 6:3–5, baptized into Christ's death and raised to new life; Acts 2:38, baptism for the forgiveness of sins; Acts 22:16, rise and be baptized and wash away your sins; Genesis 6–8, Noah and his family brought safely through the floodwaters