

Second Reading: I Peter 3:13-22

The Problem of Unjust Persecution

¹³Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

¹⁴But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed.

Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone

who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned,

those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good,

if suffering should be God's will,

than to suffer for doing evil.

The Example of Christ

¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once for all,

the righteous for the unrighteous,

in order to bring you to God.

He was put to death in the flesh,

but made alive in the spirit,

¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,

²⁰who in former times did not obey,

when God waited patiently in the days of Noah,

during the building of the ark,

in which a few, that is, eight persons,

were saved through water.

The Significance of Baptism

²¹And baptism,

which this prefigured, now saves you

—not as a removal of dirt from the body,

but as an appeal to God for a good conscience,

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God,

with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Starting Over

¹³Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

PK: This verse indicates that the folks to whom Peter is writing are concerned about persecution and false accusations. (Understanding honor and shame as social currency and social debt.)

Is this a concern for Christians today?

Is this a concern for you specifically in your current life?

¹⁴But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed.

We sometimes tell people, "You did the right thing."

What is the acceptable "suffer"/"blessing" ratio for you?

Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

¹⁵but in your hearts sanctify (make holy) Christ as Lord.

What is the role of fear in our time and culture?

What do you fear that "they" also fear?

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone

who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;

¹⁶yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

So, what defense of our words and behaviors should we make ready regarding the hope within us? Does our defense meet the "Gentle and Reverent" standard?

Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned,

those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ

may be put to shame. (Shame and Honor reference.)

¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good,

if suffering should be God's will,

than to suffer for doing evil.

Look ahead to vs. 21 and its reference to baptism as an appeal to God for a good conscience.

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I Peter: an introduction per New Revised Standard Version

1. Christians as pilgrims ("aliens and exiles") and Christianity as a living hope are dominant themes in this letter. The letter is quite general and may originally have been a catechism for pre-baptism instruction or a sermon for confirmands at their baptism.
2. Silvanus, as 5:12 indicates, is responsible for the excellent Greek style of the original text.
3. "Babylon" (5:13) was a Christian code name for Rome.
4. If Peter authored the letter, it would date from around A.D. 64, the time of emperor Nero's persecution of Christians.
5. By welcoming sinners into its ranks, the church's public image had suffered. Suspicions that Christians were some kind of revolutionaries seem to have been aroused.
6. The writer of I Peter urges his readers to bear witness to the gospel by the quality of their lives. They are called to show themselves obedient, loving followers of Christ, even under severe provocation or undeserved persecution.
7. The creative suffering that the writer of this epistle describes is not easy to do. Unjust punishment must be patiently endured. Curses are to be answered with "bless you!" False accusers are to be silenced by good conduct. Remember, says the writer, all this is only doing what Christ did first.
8. Other notes: "but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison." We say in the Creed, "He descended into hell." This speaks to a number of questions. A. This is an example of the universal availability of Jesus as Spirit, post-death. B. In proclaiming "to the spirits in prison," is Jesus also freeing them from 'prison'? Is this a second chance? C. Does this apply to all who are "in prison" or just those prior to Noah. Regarding this passage, I think Peter is writing using a "notion" or "common thinking" in his

time about the disposition of what, in our common notion, we would call heaven and hell. The greater meaning of verses 18-20 are seen in the number 8, that is 8 were saved. The Beatles made it popular, but 8 refers to the day of new beginning, new life. It is the day of Resurrection, the first day of Eternity. In their song, "Eight days a week," we do not think of the Beatles being confused about the number of days in a week, but we do understand them as saying, "I need your love more than all the time!" An equivalent biblical statement would be "You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." Psalm 23:5

My Teaching Based on this Scripture

I think the American problem is the problem of EGO! Our egos are threatened quite easily, leaving us defending ourselves, surrendering our sense of well-being and personal peace or, sense of security. Here Peter teaches us to "sanctify Christ as Lord" "in our hearts."

To do this we need to understand that those who seemingly accuse us wrongly do so out of un-sanctified hearts. The heart which sanctifies Christ as Lord remains assured and responds with gentleness and reverence.

I would suggest that any time we, as Christians, are responding with anything other than gentleness and reverence, we should consider the heart. What is in your heart regarding the matter at hand? And, is your heart, in this matter, one in which Christ is sanctified and Lord?

The EGO can also lead to a bondage to the sin, binding us up in guilt over those times when we said or did the unkind thing. "I wish I had kept my mouth shut!" "I wish I had just walked away." "I don't know how things got so far out of hand." "I wish I could take back what I said!" "I'm afraid I'll have to take that to the grave." "I don't think they'll ever forgive me." Regret is guilt's eternal power.

Water, which destroyed the earth's population (in the story of Noah), except for the eight requires an understanding. In baptism, water is they destroyer that brings death to EGO (for purposes of this example), such that the one baptized can (call upon it, that is water/baptism, as an) appeal to God for a good conscience. So, before God we can say, "I too have died in the waters of baptism." And then we sing, "Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me." In more contemporary words we could say, "Just as I knowingly am, but for the sanctified Christ within me. Raise me also to new life." Luther taught that each day we should remember our baptism, making the sign of the cross over us.