

Session Four: When Standing Means Enduring Misunderstanding

1 Peter 3:8-22

God wants you to be a good Christian.

Did you know that? God wants you to be a good Christian.

For some of you, that sounds liberating and exciting. For others of you, that sounds depressing and burden-some — and difference between the two is how you define ‘good Christian’.

To live a good Christian life is to see that your Christian lifestyle is a byproduct of the gospel, not a means to the gospel.

In other words, a ‘good Christian’ understands that their position in God’s favour has been secured by Christ apart from their good works, and that they no longer need to strive to gain God’s approval by impressing him with their religious dedication.

This is not a message about cheap grace. Trust me, your good works matter to God. He’s not interested in saving you to a life of *disinterest* in holy living. God saved you **for** good works, not **by** good works.

Now, to help root today’s passage in its gospel context, I want you to go back to our second week in this series, our **Identity** week, and re-read some verses 1 Peter 2. The concepts Peter is dealing with in these verses help set the foundation out of which he could speak into *yielding* (which is what we spoke about last week), and *enduring misunderstanding* (which is what we’re speaking about today).

1 Peter 2:9–12 (CSB) — 9 But you are a **chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises** of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. 12 Conduct yourselves

honourably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

Even as we speak about living a life of good works today, I don't want you to lose sight of the fact that 'good works' are meant to be a *fountain* that springs from the deep well of the *gospel*. Clearly, these verses show us that one implication of our new gospel identity is that we live *set apart* lives in this world. It's *very* important that you note that I didn't just say, "that one implication of our new gospel identity is that we live set apart lives **from** this world". Peter says we "*abstain **from** sinful desires that wage war against the soul*", but that we "*conduct ourselves (live) honourably **among** the Gentiles*".

This principle is important for us to grasp, as it will impact our thinking about the passage we looking at today. Peter has already forecast where he's going with this. Look at his logic in 2:12, "*Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, **so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.***" See that? "Live well among the gentiles", leads to, "so that when they slander you". But let's let Peter unpack that for us in 3:8-22.

Read – 1 Peter 3:8-22

Like I did last week, I'm going to give you my summary of the main point of this passage, then I'll go back and point to it in the Bible so that your confidence will rest there (and not in me).

Live gospel fuelled lives of blessing toward others, because God is pleased with this type of righteous life. Yet, blessing should not be equated to comfort. For suffering for good, as Christ did, is better than suffering for evil.

Live gospel fuelled lives of blessing toward others, because God is pleased with this type of righteous life.

1 Peter 3:3-12

Peter has just used three different types of human relationships to illustrate what it looks like for someone to live out their new identity by living honourably among the gentiles. So now he says, "Finally, all of you..." — meaning, this doesn't just apply to some of you, women or men, slave or master, this applies to every single one of us. And now he's going to give us a list:

- **like-minded:** which means, seek to live in agreement with each other. Christ's followers shouldn't have the reputation of being argumentative and hostile toward each other, instead, we should have the reputation of how well we can live with each.
- **Sympathetic:** Our flesh is prone to defaulting to thinking the worst of a person, but even when we may disagree, how we disagree matters. Are we sympathetic toward others, seeking to understand them and their position? Or are we looking to dominate them, showing them and others how superior we are?
- **Love one another:** Does that need much more explanation? Maybe only this: that we define love the right way. Jesus said in *John 13:34*, "*I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another.*"
- **Be compassionate and humble:** Which means, we don't return 'in kind'. When treated with a motivation of evil, we don't return with a motivation of evil. When insulted, our response shouldn't be further insult. Compassion and humility results in not being provoked to engage at the same level as others evil or insults.

Why?

Peter gives us a solid reason why we should live out this gospel-fuelled life of blessing toward others. Simply put, God is pleased with this type of righteous life. So Peter says at the end of verse 9, "...since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing." In other words, you were called to live to **be** a blessing, and that you would **receive** a blessing."

To prove this, Peter reaches back and recalls a well-known Psalm to mind, by quoting a portion of Psalm 34, which has three clear parts to it:

1. **Desire:** "*For the one who wants to love life and to see good days*" — This is what the psalmist, and Peter, is saying is a genuine desire. It's fairly relatable isn't it? Don't you want to 'love life' and 'see good days'? Everybody does. But wanting doesn't make it so. What should I do with this desire?
2. **Action:** "*let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it*" — As I said earlier, just because under Christ we are under grace and not the law, doesn't mean we are free from living holy lives. The Psalmist is basically saying, 'if you want to love life and see good days, then live good lives and live good days'. How we live day-by-day matters. Your actions are not divorced from consequences. The Bible is clear, "You reap what you sow." Yet, even deeper than this principle, is a more fundamental motivation.
3. **Motivation:** "*because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.*" — God is pleased with

the type of life that seeks to be a blessing to others. In fact, one of the greatest implications of the gospel, is that in Christ, we have already received every spiritual blessing. *Ephesians 1:3 Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ.* You already have God's blessing, yet even though that remains true, God desires for you to live honourably among the gentiles, to **be** a blessing and **experience** the blessing of God.

Sounds simple, doesn't it?

Peter could have ended this section there, I mean, it all sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? It's clear cut, and simple enough to understand: **Live gospel fuelled lives of blessing toward others, because God is pleased with this type of righteous life.** It even sounds like Peter is starting to wind things up here when he asks the question (that has it's own implied answer) in verse 13, "*Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good?*" The implied answer is, "*No-one!*" I mean, really, who's going to get upset with you if you devote your life to being a blessing to everyone you meet?

But you and I know, and in fact, Peter knows, that life isn't that straight-forward. Life is far more complicated. In this life, there are very few straight lines between actions and consequences. So Peter wants to give us a strategy to deal with being misunderstood.

Dealing With Misunderstanding

Illustration: Pack for the destination — "A few years ago, in the middle of an Australian summer, I went on a trip to America and attended a conference which was located just below the Canadian boarder. I went from +40 degrees, to -40 degrees in the space of 24 hours. I had to pack for the destination. It would have been crazy to look at the weather outside my window and use that information to determine what I put in my bag. I had to know where I was headed, and armed with that knowledge, decide what to put in my bag.

I think it's a similar concept that Peter is trying to get across here when he acknowledges that life is often filled with living in the midst of misunderstanding.

1 Peter 3:14 (CSB) — *14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed.*

That's a massive statement! Really, Peter? I'm blessed if I suffer for doing good? I'm blessed, when I'm doing the right thing and being misunderstood? So let's see how Peter backs up his statement.

Don't get side-tracked by the 'Jesus preaching to spirits in prison' bit, we'll come back to that at the end and I'll try and shed some light on that. But you don't need to understand that to understand what Peter is trying to help us understand about being blessed even when we're misunderstood. So let me remind you again of my overall summary of this passage, and then we'll step through Peter's defence of his claim.

Live gospel fuelled lives of blessing toward others, because God is pleased with this type of righteous life. Yet, blessing should not be equated to comfort. For suffering for good, as Christ did, is better than suffering for evil.

We've dealt with the first bit, so let's try and unpack the second bit. To do that, I'm going to use the same categories we used earlier for Psalm 34. Desire, Action, Motivation.

1. **Desire:** What do you desire in this situation? What outcome do you want? Is the goal to justify yourself, to reassert your own credibility, or identity? Or is it something greater? **1 Peter 3:14b (CSB)** — *“Do not fear what they fear or be intimidated”* I think that the ESV deals better with this statement than the CSB, when it says, “Do not fear them nor be troubled”, but either way, the idea is that we need to resist the temptation to respond out of fear when we are misunderstood or mistreated for acting with righteous motivation. Often, when motivated by fear, our response is either ‘fight or flight’, right? We're doing the right thing for the right reason, when suddenly we're attacked because people misunderstand our motivation or actions, so what do we do? Well, motivated by fear, we either give as good as we get (we fight), or, we pull our head in and head for the hills (flight). But Peter gives us another way.
2. **Action: First,** Peter asks us to reorient our heart away from our own sense of self-justification and self-identity, to bow once again to the Lordship of Christ. *1 Peter 3:15 (CSB)* — *15 but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, This is what it means to submit day by day to the gospel. The good news of Jesus isn't just something for your salvation (a point in time in the past), but for your sanctification (your ongoing growth as a Christian as you conform to the image of Christ). We need to bow to Jesus every day, not because we need to be 're-saved' every day, but because we need to 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling' every day. Secondly, 1 Peter 3:15–16 (CSB)* — *15 but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. 16 Yet do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. Peter asks us to prepare ourselves to give a defence (v15). But*

notice that he doesn't ask us to defend ourselves. The defence Peter has in mind is to give a reason for the hope that in you. This links back into our first week, that we live out a higher calling on our lives enthralled by the living hope we have in a victorious saviour who conquered sin and death. Yet even in this defence, Peter says, do it with gentleness and respect.

3. **Motivation:** *1 Peter 3:17–18 (CSB) — “17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit”* — So how can Peter say in verse 14 that ‘even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, that you are blessed’? Well, here’s his reason. Firstly he restates his position, that it is better to suffer for doing good, than for doing evil. But he then roots that statement in our gospel identity. He says, it’s true for us, because it was true for Jesus. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit. In Peter’s mind, we endure misunderstanding by remembering Jesus endured misunderstanding for us. Or in other words, one of your most effective weapons in the face of misunderstanding is worship.

So decide what you need to pack in your suitcase now, not on the basis of your current climate, but on your destination. What you reach for from the backpack you carry through life will fail you if you packed for the circumstances facing you now. But if you packed on the basis of your living hope, of the final destination, on the basis of your true identity in Christ, then you don’t reach for weapons of fear to help with your strategy of ‘fight or flight’, but instead, you grasp realities to help you demonstrate the hope you have with all gentleness and respect.

Blessing is not the same as comfort. For suffering for good, as Christ did, is better than suffering for evil.

Tricky passages

I know that, if you’ve been reading ahead, you’ve probably been waiting to hear about some really intriguing verses in this passage. So let’s look at them briefly:

1 Peter 3:18–22 (CSB) — *18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 in which he also went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison 20 who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not as the removal of dirt from the body, but the pledge of a*

good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

These verses have been a point of contention among scholars for almost as many years as they've been written. So i'm not going to pretend to have the final authoritative say on what they mean, but I will give you a summary of the different views and tell you which one I think is probably right. I've just got this information from a couple of decent Bible commentators and am just repeating them to you.

1. The first interpretation understands "spirits" as referring to the unsaved (human spirits) of Noah's day. Christ, "in the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18), proclaimed the gospel "in the days of Noah" (v. 20) through Noah. The unbelievers who heard Christ's preaching "did not obey ... in the days of Noah" (v. 20) and are now suffering judgment (they are "spirits in prison," v. 19). Several reasons support this view: (a) Peter calls Noah a "herald of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5), where "herald" represents Greek, "preacher," which corresponds to the noun, "proclaim," in 1 Pet. 3:19. (b) Peter says the "Spirit of Christ" was speaking through the OT prophets (1:11); thus Christ could have been speaking through Noah as an OT prophet. (c) The context indicates that Christ was preaching through Noah, who was in a persecuted minority, and God saved Noah, which is similar to the situation in Peter's time: Christ is now preaching the gospel through Peter and his readers (v. 15) to a persecuted minority, and God will save them.
2. In the second interpretation, the spirits are the fallen angels who were cast into hell to await the final judgment. Reasons supporting this view include: (a) Some interpreters say that the "sons of God" in Gen. 6:2-4 are angels (see note on Gen. 6:1-2) who sinned by cohabiting with human women "when God's patience waited in the days of Noah" (1 Pet. 3:20). (b) Almost without exception in the NT, "spirits" (plural) refers to supernatural beings rather than people (e.g., Matt. 8:16; 10:1; Mark 1:27; 5:13; 6:7; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 7:21; 8:2; 10:20; 11:26; Acts 5:16; 8:7; 19:12, 13; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 16:13-14; cf. Heb. 1:7). (c) The word "prison" is not used elsewhere in Scripture as a place of punishment after death for human beings, while it is used for Satan (Rev. 20:7) and other fallen angels (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). In this case the message that Christ proclaimed is almost certainly one of triumph, after having been "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18).
3. In a third view, some have advocated the idea that Christ offered a second chance of salvation to those in hell. This interpretation, however, is in direct contradiction with other Scripture (cf. Luke 16:26; Heb. 9:27) and with the rest of 1 Peter and therefore must be rejected on biblical and theological grounds, leaving either of the first two views as the most likely interpretation.

I personally lean toward the first interpretation, where Noah was a 'type' of Christ and through him the Spirit of Christ was preaching the gospel to actual people of Noah's day.

But don't let what is **unclear** about the Bible distort what **is clear** about the Bible.

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