

BE A BLESSING EVEN WHEN YOU SUFFER FOR IT 1 PETER 3:13-17	40
CHRIST'S SUFFERING & DEATH OVERCAME EVIL 1 PETER 3:18-22	41
LIKE JESUS, OVERCOME SIN IN YOUR LIFE 1 PETER 4:1-6	42
PERSONAL APPLICATION – 1 PETER 4:7-19	44

*They have been called to “be a blessing” to others. They should be “proactive” in overcoming evil with good. They should never let the evil behavior of others determine their own behavior. Their proper response to evil will be to bless those who abuse them, as Jesus did, with words of forgiveness.*



### THE GOAL OF OUR “MISSION”

In this section, Peter gives us some more information about our personal mission in a hostile world. He reminds us that God is expecting us to follow through, no matter what! He assures us that in the end we will be glad we did!

### BE A BLESSING TO FELLOW BELIEVERS

*1 PETER 3:8-12*

The word “finally,” at the beginning of this section indicates that what follows will apply to all of his readers. He goes on to list five special qualities, which they would need to cultivate.

The first of these is “unity of spirit.” The Greek term for this (omophornes) appears nowhere else in the New Testament. A literal translation would be: “of the same mind.” This does not mean that everyone has to think alike on every issue. It refers to our “mind set.” To serve and glorify the same Lord and Master is the “agenda” we can all bring to the fellowship. The second characteristic is “sympathy.” Literally this means “to feel with” another. The context suggests that this concept may be reflected in our modern term “sensitivity.” We will carefully regulate what we say and what we do, not so much in terms of how it makes us feel, but of the effect it will have on others. The third quality: “Love of the brethren.” Peter gave this high priority already in chapter 1:22. God wants us to live together as one big happy, loving family.

The fourth quality is the word translated “tenderhearted” (eusplagchnoi) is an Hebraism which literally means “having strong bowels.” The Hebrews thought of the bowels as the seat of human emotions. As brothers and sisters in the Lord, we should be quick to feel and to show affectionate concern especially for the needs and problems of fellow pilgrims. Incidentally, the verb form for this word is used only of Christ in the New Testament, suggesting that it is only as we have His Spirit that we can be truly tenderhearted. Last, but not least, the fifth characteristic is a “humble mind.” The Greek word for this (tapeinophrones) is quite descriptive. (Tapeinos – “low”; phrones – “mind”). Martin Luther’s translation “freundlich” captures the thought nicely. A humble person wants to be a friend to all, regardless of their station in life.

To encourage them to really work at this, even when it isn’t easy to do so, Peter reminds them that this actually isn’t easy to do, so, Peter reminds them that this actually is their “calling” (v.9). They have been called to “be a blessing” to others. They should be “proactive” in overcoming evil with good. They should never let the evil behavior of others determine their own behavior. Their proper response to evil will be to bless those who abuse them, as Jesus did, with words of forgiveness.

When they do this, their own lives would be blessed. They have God’s own Word for it, Peter reminds them, quoting Psalm 34:12-16. If they respond to evil by doing evil, they are included in the pronouncement at the end of verse 12. On the other hand, if they continue to do the right thing, “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayer.” Surely this is an important consideration.

## BE A BLESSING EVEN WHEN YOU SUFFER FOR IT

### 1 PETER 3:13-17

Here Peter, led by the Spirit, finds himself writing words to prepare his readers for the terrible persecution which would soon be unleashed against them simply because they were trying to live as God directed them.

At the moment of writing, Peter considered this a very remote possibility. The “but” which begins verse 14 introduces this subject. It is followed by the Greek word for “suffer,” which is in the optative form to suggest that the suffering was a very unlikely prospect for them. Nevertheless, Peter tells them how to meet it in the event that the unlikely does occur. Firstly, they should keep in mind that they “will be blessed.” That’s for sure. Secondly, they should “have no fear of them, nor be troubled.” When you read about the atrocities which befell the Christians in the first century, you wonder how they could possibly keep from being terrified out of their wits. Peter’s words in verse 15 are part of the answer. Instead of focusing upon the threats of imminent harm, Peter says they should focus upon Christ: “...in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord.” This is an adaptation of Isaiah 8:12-13, where the prophet says: “The Lord of hosts, let Him be your fear.” Reverencing means to honor and respect Him as the Lord of the Universe who can and will keep His Word to turn the worst of evils into everlasting good.

The other part of the answer is: “Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.” Here Peter may be remembering how totally unprepared he was for the confrontation he experienced that night in the courtyard of The High Priest’s palace. He focused on his fear of reprisal, instead of reverencing Christ as Lord.

He was not prepared “to give an answer” to the maiden and the others who questioned him. Peter adds, “yet do it with gentleness and reverence.” When Peter was challenged, his response was anything but “gentle and reverent.” History shows that many of the early Christians followed his advice. They were completely fearless even as their own flesh burned to illuminate Caesar’s games or as they felt the crunch of their bones as lions tore them limb from limb. They sang praises to God and gave powerful witness to Christ. Unbelievers couldn’t help but be impressed. Many of them became believers.

Whatever you do, Peter tells them, don’t allow the persecution to be the occasion for committing sin yourself. “Keep your conscience clear, so that when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame!” (v.16).

*For the faithful believers, it was a reminder that they weren’t going to be losers, but would share in Christ’s victory over sin, death and hell.*

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### CHRIST’S SUFFERING & DEATH OVERCAME EVIL

#### *1 PETER 3:18-22*

If they needed encouragement to accept the improbable idea that good can come out of suffering, Peter tells them (v.18) to consider the example of Jesus. Jesus’ suffering and death is the heart of the Gospel which they had come to believe. His death was the atoning sacrifice “for sins once for all.” It was vicarious — He was the Righteous One who suffered and died in place of the unrighteous. His purpose in going through all of this agony was “to bring us to God.” The outcome of His terrible suffering and death was the salvation they cherished. Incomparable good came from awful suffering.

As for Jesus, although He died physically, He was “made alive in the spirit.” This implies that what happened to Jesus is something they could count on to happen to them if ever they were called upon to lay down their life rather than deny their faith. Great encouragement!

When Jesus was made alive in the realm of the “spirit,” Peter tells us (v.19-20) that He “went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark.” Interpreters have differed about the interpretation of just about every word in this statement.

The word for “spirits” (pneumata), alone and without qualifications, is not used anywhere else in the Bible to describe human spirits. Nevertheless, the reference to the time of Noah and God’s patience during the 120 years that Noah was building the ark seems to indicate that it refers to people. Peter may have used their blatant disregard for God as symbolic of all people who turn their backs on God in any age. When unbelievers die, their disembodied spirits (souls) are taken to a “prison,” awaiting Judgment. Jesus, “made alive” in the realm of the spirit appeared before them and “preached” to them, Peter says. The word for “preach” is “ekeeruxen,” which means to “proclaim” — always with a suggestion of formality and authority. Jesus did not descend into hell to give sinners “a second chance” but to let them know in person that they had been terribly wrong to reject Him. Isn’t this possibly part of the torment they were to experience? For the faithful believers, it was a reminder that they weren’t going to be losers, but would share in Christ’s victory over sin, death and hell.

The story of how Noah and his family survived God’s Judgment by obeying God was likewise to be encouragement and comfort for them. The same water that flooded the earth and destroyed the wicked people served to lift the ark and provide a safe refuge for them. And if they found themselves wondering about the fact that as believers they were such a tiny minority, remember that out of all the people who lived at the time of the Flood only eight of them were saved.

The thought of how the water of the Flood actually provided salvation for the family

of Noah led Peter (v.21) to use it as a type of the salvation which was theirs by means of the water of Holy Baptism. J.B. Phillips’ translation sums up nicely what Peter is saying “And I cannot help pointing out what a perfect illustration this is of the way you have been admitted to the safety of the Christian “ark” by Baptism... It means the ability to face God with a clear conscience. For there is in every true Baptism the virtue of Christ’s rising from the dead.”

In verse 22, Peter pictures for his readers more of the victorious side of Christ’s suffering. He told them to consider where Jesus is now. Following His resurrection, he “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him.” It can’t get any better than this! When Handel was putting together his musical masterpiece on the life of the Messiah he saved the most triumphant chorus for what he regarded the climax of the life of Jesus. The majestic “Hallelujah Chorus” was originally a celebration of Our Lord’s Ascension!

### LIKE JESUS, OVERCOME SIN IN YOUR LIFE

#### *1 PETER 4:1-6*

In this passage, Peter once again becomes very practical. Jesus endured physical suffering because He knew that it would ultimately result in victory over sin, death and hell. His advice to his readers is “arm yourselves with the same thought.” This is clear enough. However, the last part of verse 1 is a bit obscure. At first reading, it seems to say that bodily suffering somehow helps a Christian to get rid of sin. This interpretation

flies in the face of the teaching that our salvation is complete and full because of what Jesus did. Peter had just stated (3:18) that Christ suffered and “died for sins once for all.” It may be that Peter wants us to take this statement in the same sense that his colleague Paul wrote Romans 6:5-7. By union with Christ, the Christian is to understand that his conversion is a death to sin.

This means that as long as God allows them to live on this earth (“in the flesh” 4:2), they should always seek to obey the will of God and not be ruled by “human passions,” as they once were. Some see a bit of irony in verse 3, as though Peter, “with tongue in cheek” reminds them that they have had more than enough opportunity “in time past” (before their conversion) to do the evil things which the non-believers are doing.

I’m sure they knew what Peter was referring to, but for some reason, Peter is led by the Holy Spirit to list (v.3) the most prominent evil activities of their unregenerate neighbors. Perhaps Peter did this for our benefit. When we study his catalogue of evil ways we can readily see that this is pretty much the way worldly people live today.

The fact that they no longer participated in these sinful activities with their former friends would very likely be a problem for some of them, says Peter. The unbelievers are going to be surprised. That surprise, Peter implies, will likely lead them to open hostility. When they refuse to join their former cronies in “passions of the flesh,” as they once did, their former friends will take it as a personal insult. Subconsciously, they will feel a sense

of judgment upon them and their way of life. They will strike out against the Christians in whatever evil way the devil prompts them: Boycotting their businesses, telling lies and doing whatever they can to make life miserable for them.

If this happens, don’t let it discourage you, Peter reminds them. The Day of Judgment will come and they will have to explain their behavior. They will be judged not only for their disobedience to the Gospel, but also for whatever abuse and misery they heaped upon the Christians.

Finally, Peter has a word of assurance regarding loved ones who had already died. They had responded to the Gospel which had been preached to them. Even though they experienced the common judgment of death to their bodies, they “might live in the spirit like God.”

Have you found some more ideas to add to your Personal Mission Statement? Share these with fellow students.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

1 PETER 4:7-19

*Lord God in heaven, keep me ever aware of the fact that it won't always be easy to follow the path You have set for me. Help me to do the things that will keep me strong in my faith and in my dedication to the purposes for which You have called me into the fellowship of Your people. In Jesus' precious Name. Amen.*

1 Peter 4:7

1. What special reason does Peter give his readers for keeping close to God in prayer?

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Look at 2 Peter 3:10. According to Jesus (Luke 21:28), what should be the response of believers to this event?

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1 Peter 4:8-11

2. Besides "sane and sober" prayer (v.7), what else should they make a priority in their daily lives?

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What could you say to a person who says he can be a good Christian without being part of a church fellowship?

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What incentive does Peter give that will enable us to be loving, especially to fellow-believers?

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In the light of what Peter wrote earlier (3:18), what do you think he meant?

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3. To what specific opportunity to show love to fellow Christians does Peter point (v.9)?

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Why do you think this was important at that time?

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How might this apply today?

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4. What does Peter say (v.10) is the real purpose for which God gives a variety of personal "gifts" to the people of faith?
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How are we to think of ourselves with regard to the gifts God has given us?

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What “gift(s)” has God given you (don’t be bashful)? Pick three people in your study group and tell what gifts each have and uses for the good of the fellowship of believers.

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5. Can you think of occasions where you can use the “gift” of speaking (v.11) in a spiritually productive way? What does “as oracles of God” teach us about the manner in which we might use words for the benefit of others?

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In addition to helping others, what is the ultimate goal of good stewardship?

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1 Peter 4:12-14

6. Peter has “good news” and “bad news” for the recent converts to Christianity in Asia Minor. What is the “bad news”? (v.12)

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Why do you think Peter felt constrained to bring up this bleak picture of what might be in store for them?

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What is the “good news” which is implied in the term “fiery ordeal”? (see 1 Peter 1:7)

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7. What does Peter say (v.13) which makes it clear that he isn’t recommending that they face their trials with a stoical acceptance of the inevitable?

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What could help them to be sincerely happy even in the midst of suffering?

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What additional incentive is given in verse 14?

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1 Peter 4:15

8. How does Peter point out (v.15) that suffering “per se” does not automatically produce blessing?

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What are the sins mentioned in Peter’s list?

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What point is Peter making?

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1 Peter 4:16-19

9. Which kind of suffering carries with it the promise of blessing?

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What great good does it accomplish?

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In verse 17, how does Peter refer to the sufferings that loyal Christians are called upon to endure?

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10. In verse 18, using the word of Proverbs 11:31, Peter poses a question. What is your answer?

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In the light of all this, what does verse 19 tell us to do?

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