

1st Peter
Unashamed of
the Gospel in a
Morally
Shameless
Society

*If you suffer as a Christian, do not be
ashamed.*

1 Peter 4:16

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Introduction to Study

1st Peter was written to a widespread community of Christians who lived in a morally shameless culture. The description of the world around them was that of a moral cesspool of “sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.” (1 Pet. 4:3). The pressure put on Christians to conform to the amoral culture around them was great. “They are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.” (1 Pet. 4:4).

Intolerance for the high moral standards of Christians was growing. “They speak against you as evil doers,” (1 Pet. 2:12); “You do good and suffer for it.” (2:20); and, good behavior was slandered and reviled (3:16).

1 Peter warned Christians that things were going to get worse before they got better. “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you.” (4:12).

It is not unusual for Christians in 21st century America to feel that their belief in and committed practice of Judeo-Christian morality and ethics puts them in a cultural minority. Technically, Christians in America are not yet in the minority, but research indicates declining numbers in people of faith.

Not only that, but Christians often feel they are regarded as the “bad guys” for holding to biblical standards. If a Christian speaks out publically identifying scripturally condemned, but culturally ordained behaviors as “sin”, they are likely to be slandered and reviled.

Furthermore, Christians suspect that pushback is going to get worse before it get better. The fiery trial scenario looms.

Still, God’s call to his people is, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet. 1:16). “Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” (1 Pet. 4:16).

This is the message of 1st Peter.

Lesson Titles

Be Secure	1 Peter 1:1-2
Be Motivated	1 Peter 1:3-9
Be Great	1 Peter 1:10-12
Be Holy	1 Peter 1:13-21
Be Loving	1 Peter 1:22-2:1
Be Mature	1 Peter 2:2-12
Be Submissive	1 Peter 2:13-3:7
Be Righteous	1 Peter 3:8-17
Be Decisive	1 Peter 4:1-11
Be Unashamed	1 Peter 4:12-19
Be Humble	1 Peter 5:1-5
Be Unified	1 Peter 5:6-14

Lesson 1

Be Secure, 1 Pet. 1:1-2

To those who are elect

1 Peter 1:1-2 are the introductory verses of this letter. Peter, the apostle (and eyewitness, 5:1) of Jesus Christ is the author. He is likely writing from Rome in the early days of the administration of Nero as Caesar, perhaps A.D. 62-63. Nero would become a notorious persecutor of Christians across the Roman Empire.

This letter is addressed to Christians in specifically named regions of the empire grouped in the northern tier of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Christians in these areas were under varying degrees of local pressures to conform to the philosophies and practices of the empire. Allegiance to Jesus put them in an uncomfortable position socially and politically.

Description of the Recipients

Elect – The Bible traces a succession of God's elect people. God chose Abraham and Sara (Gen. 12:1-3). Through Isaac and then Jacob (Israel) with his sons, God chose the Israelite nation (Deut. 7:6-8). Finally, in Christ, all who are of faith are the chosen, the elect (Gal. 3:26-29).

Exiles – Abraham and Sarah were sojourners in a land not their own. Israel as a nation formed as slaves in Egypt. In the days of Daniel, Esther, and Ezekiel, the Jews suffered exile to Babylon. Likewise, Christians are pilgrims and sojourners in the world awaiting the place/age of God's preparation (Heb. 11:13-16).

Dispersed – The northern tribes of Israel, sometimes referred to as “the ten lost tribes”, dispersed across a wide geographical area after defeat at the hands of the Assyrians. Peter wrote to Christians scattered across wide areas of Asia Minor. Many had settled there after fleeing persecution in Jerusalem in the early days of the church. (Acts 8:4).

Exiles, refugees, sojourners, pilgrim, dispersion: these words communicate insecurity, not security. Yet, these words are often used to describe God's people. This world is not our home. We are in the world but not of the world. We are called to not conform to the world. Our lives run counter to culture. We follow a Lord who was despised and rejected, acquainted with grief and sorrow. So then, how can we be secure?

- Christians are God's elect according to his foreknowledge.

- We are secure in “whose” we are; note the strong Trinitarian formula of Father, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ.
- We have been made into a sanctified dwelling of the Spirit, forgiven and made holy by the precious blood of Jesus.
- We are a people of purpose, created to obey Jesus Christ
- God’s grace and peace are multiplied to us.

To the world we are oddities at best and rejects to be maligned, slandered, and abused at worst. To God we are his own people; planned for, accepted, embraced, forgiven, and sanctified. We belong to him. Be secure as you live for him, even when in a hostile culture.

For enlightenment and discussion:

Find Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia on a Bible map.

Have you ever felt uncomfortable, nervous, or ashamed of your commitment to Jesus?

In times of difficulty, how has your commitment to Jesus made you feel comforted or secure?

What is your understanding of elect, exiles, God’s foreknowledge, sanctification?

In 1 Peter 1:1-2, which words most strongly communicate the feeling of security to you?

Lesson 2

Be Motivated, 1 Peter 1:3-9

You believe in him and rejoice!

If we are going to Be Secure (lesson 1) in a culture that has an ever-growing intolerance of our belief system, we need a pep talk-a motivational speech. 1 Peter 1:3-9 is one of the great Christian motivational speeches of all time.

Secular Motivational Speeches

- *Are emotion based
- *Exalt the power of self
- *Effectiveness is temporary

Spiritual Motivational Speeches

- *May appeal to the heart, but are rooted in substance and truth.
- *Exalt the power of the All-Mighty
- *Effectiveness is eternal

There is a great deal of difference between “I can do all things” and “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Php. 4:13

Peter’s motivational speech to the exiled dispersion of Christians living in difficult circumstances was grounded:

In the present: Ours is a *living* hope secured in God’s mercy (vs. 3), God’s power (vs. 5), our

genuine faith (vs, 7), and our love of Jesus (vs. 8).

In the past: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (vs. 3).

In the future: An inheritance (vs. 4) and the ultimate salvation of our souls (vs.5, 9).

This text is honest about the possibilities of the person of faith experiencing grief or the testing of that faith by fire. It is just as honest when it communicates hope, joy inexpressible, and future glory. Through persecution, grief, and temptation our salvation is secured by the resurrection of Jesus. Our eternal inheritance is guarded by God's power. Our motivation traces to something real and more powerful than ourselves. It is based on truths that are eternal.

Motivational speeches ask us to believe. Secular motivational speeches ask us to believe in ourselves. Spiritual motivational speeches ask us to believe in God. Though we do not now see him, this passage calls us to believe, love and find joy in Jesus

Motivational speeches have a familiar vocabulary. Words such as *great*, *power*, *faith*, *believe*, and *joy* are frequently used words in motivational speeches. Those words and concepts are found in 1 Pet. 1:3-9.

For enlightenment and discussion:

Have someone in class read the passage with the enthusiasm of a motivational speaker.

Who is your favorite motivational speaker?

To whom are these quotes attributed (you can google them)?

I think I can, I think I can, I think I can!

If it is going to be, it is up to me!

If you can dream it, you can do it!

How are those statements different from the motivational statements that are made in 1 Peter 1:3-9?

How did the fact of the resurrection, once realized, motivate the twelve apostles?

When you are tempted to feel ashamed of your faith, what word, phrase or sentence in this passage do you find most motivational and why?

Lesson 3

Be Great, 1 Peter 1:10-12

The prophets were serving not themselves, but you.

Have you ever received star treatment? Have you enjoyed an occasion at which you were made the center of attention and all your wishes were catered to? You felt that you were great because you were treated as though you were great.

Every phrase in 1 Peter 1:10-12 tells Christians, though we are exiles and strangers in the world, that we are at the center God's focus in history, in the work of the prophets, and in the ministry even of the angels.

Verses 10-11

God planned and then delivered "the grace that was to be yours." This gift is the salvation of our souls. So great was the gift that what God prepared was unseen, unheard, and unimagined by mankind! 1 Cor. 2:9

The prophets prophesied about it while not being blessed to experience it themselves. However, they were so curious about what God was doing that they searched and inquired about it. They longed to know *what* God was going to do and *when* he would do it. For example, look at the "what" and "how long" questions in Daniel's vision in 12:5-9.

Christ's suffering and how that suffering would lead to subsequent glories were a hidden form those who foretold it.. See Ephesians 3:4-7.

Verse 12

The prophets had to accept that in prophesying the great and wonderful things revealed to them, they were serving the heirs of the Christian age, not themselves.

The work of God the prophets prophesied was of hidden meaning until its truth was revealed by those who preached the good news of Jesus. This new message was a heavenly one delivered when the time was ready by the Holy Spirit. Until the time of its revelation, even the angels were held in curiosity about it. Even now, there are glories to come the angels do not yet fathom. Mt. 24:36.

It is a great privilege to live in the days of Jesus and his kingdom. To us God's great plan is revealed. We know of the great sacrifice of his son. The great prophets prophesied these great events. The angels ministered towards this great age. God has made us the great recipients of his great grace. God has pronounced us great. Be great!

For discussion and enlightenment:

Discuss by name some of the prophets and what they did in service to the Christian age.

How does the conversation between Jesus and Peter in Matthew 16:21-23 speak to the idea that God's plan to save us by Jesus' suffering was not comprehended until its announcement?

How should God's plans and efforts to save us make us feel about ourselves? How can this understanding aid us in times of trial and difficulty?

In your life, how would you understand and apply the phrase, "You are great, so be great!"

Does our greatness come from the power of self or from another source? If our greatness is rooted in the eternal work of God, how does that motivate our faith?

What are some remaining glories we are yet to see?

If you are counted among the elect, cleansed with blood of Jesus, sanctified by the Spirit, born again through the resurrection of Christ, and set for salvation at the revelation of Jesus Christ, you are great! Greatness is not your achievement. Greatness is God's achievement for you in Jesus Christ.

Lesson 4

1 Peter 1:13-21, Be Holy

Be holy, for I am holy.

The thematic verse for this section of 1 Peter is a quotation of Leviticus 11:44. “Be holy for I am holy.” (vs. 16). In conjunction with this call, God has made us a covenant with us, empowers us, supplies a model, and provides a safety net.

“Be holy” means “behave”.

The Covenant

We are obedient children (vs. 14) who call on God as Father (vs. 17). In a covenant, the powerful blesses, provides, and protects his people. The people respect, submit to, and serve the greater. The covenant stated is, “I will be their God and they shall be my people.” (Gen. 17:7; Ex. 6:7; Jer. 7:23; Heb. 8:10).

As he upholds covenant with us, God ransoms us from the futile ways of the world (vs. 18) and brings us grace (vs. 13). For our part, we conduct ourselves with fear and holiness during the time of our exile (vs. 17).

Empowerment

Holiness is lived out in our conduct, but it does not start there. We are made holy by the precious blood of Christ. We are made pure through a sacrifice that is without spot or blemish. (vs. 19). Our faith and hope are grounded in the resurrected and glorified Jesus. The empowerment for our holiness is not in ourselves but “in God.” (vs. 21).

The Model

The thematic verse for this section of 1 Peter is not just “Be holy.” It is be holy, *for I am holy.*” The Lord calls us to be holy (covenant), he makes us holy (empowers), but he also shows us (models) what it looks like to be holy. The holy nature of God is seen through every experience with the Father (creation, relationships, etc.). The holy mind of God is revealed through his Spirit and the written word. Now we have experienced Immanuel, God with us, as the Word became flesh in Jesus.

The Safety Net

What about when we fall short? There are times that we wholly fail at holiness. Thankfully, there is grace (vs. 13). God has paid a ransom for our sins (vs. 18). The precious blood of Jesus is not a one-time cleaning. It cleanses continually (cf. 1 John 1:7).

For discussion and enlightenment:

This passage begins with a call to action. (vs. 13). Twice in this passage “conduct” appears as either a verb or noun. Depending on your translation, “conduct” appears at least three more times in this letter. What does 1 Peter teach regarding our conduct?

“Hope” is mentioned in the opening and closing verses of this passage (vs. 13, 21). How are hope and holiness related?

What are some specific teachings about Jesus in this passage?

What are some of the phrases in this passage that describe life pre-Christ or outside of Christ?

What kind of uncleanness/unholiness is related in the context of Leviticus 11:44? How does that translate to holiness and clean living as we know and practice it in the days of Christ?

How would living this passage keep us from shame before God? How might it make us ashamed before the world?

Lesson 5

1 Peter 1:22-2:1, Be Loving

Love one another earnestly.

“Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth.” (1:22a), and “Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding world of God.” (1:23), a resulting command flows: “Love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” (1:22b).

Peter is writing to people who, because of their Christianity, feel isolated, estranged from the world, even looked down upon. Where can they find respite from the pressures of the culture around them? The answer is, in one another.

Have you received the gospel with faith? Me, too. Have you been washed in the blood? Me, too. Have you accepted the call to the mission of living a holy life? Me, too. Are you invested in the hope of eternal salvation? Me, too. Are you committed to love and obey Jesus? Me, too.

All of that makes us faith siblings – brothers and sisters. Our shared worldview, beliefs, and practices join us together in a family that knows the natural bond of brotherly love (*phileo*). Our next step is to “love (*agape*) one another fervently, intensely, unremittingly.”

Our connection to one another is rooted in the word of God. We have been “obedient to the truth’ (1:22). We have been born again through “the living and abiding word of God.’ (1:23). We believe “the word of the Lord remains forever” (vs. 24). We cling to “this word...the good news that was preached.” (vs. 25).

A secular culture scoffs at our commitments to purity, obedience, and truth. They do not understand why Christians do not value the temporary glories that so important to them. They do not buy into our overriding preference for all things eternal.

Christian share these two things: 1) a common belief system and, 2) the hostility of the world around us. If we are to survive, we must “love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” To the degree that we are disconnected from one another, we are that much more susceptible to the temptation to backslide into worldliness.

Therefore, we cannot afford to treat one another with actions and attitudes that are at the opposite end of love. Malice holds grudges; love forgives. Deceit tells lies; love speaks the truth. Hypocrisy drains relationships; love blesses relationships. Envy resents a friend’s blessing; love rejoices at a friend’s blessing. Slander tears people down; love builds people up.

Your soul has been purified. You have been born again. You have tasted that the Lord is good. Having experienced the love of God, be loving!

For discussion and enlightenment:

Comment on these recurring words and phrases in 1 Peter 1:

Obedience, vs. 2, 14, 22

Perishable/imperishable, vs. 4, 7, 18, 23

Good news, vs. 12, 25

Born again, vs. 3, 23

What is the difference in the two loves mentioned in verse 22?

How is brotherly affection and shared godly love effective in helping us not to give in to the temptation of becoming ashamed our Christian beliefs and behaviors?

Lesson 6

1 Peter 2:2-12, Be Mature

Grow up into salvation

This passage begins with the picture of a baby and a bottle of milk, but its message is to grow up into spiritual maturity and completeness.

A second picture in this passage is a construction project. We do not want to be a building half-built. We are to become everything God has called us to be – complete and mature.

We are emphasizing the theme of shame/unashamed in our study of 1 Peter. This epistle addresses Christians who were experiencing the shame of social rejection because of their faith. That social rejection would eventually increase to a fiery trial of physical persecution. (4:12). A strong, mature, complete faith would be necessary to the spiritual survival of those exiled from the secular community as a result of spiritual commitments.

To help them remain unashamed of their faith in the face of cultural rejection, Peter reminds Christians that Christ himself was rejected. (vs. 7). Yet, as Jesus was the chosen one of God (a meaning of the title “Christ”), so were Christians to find their consolation from being rejected by men in their being chosen by God (vs. 4). This recalls the irony of the description of the addressees of this letter in 1:1, “elect exiles.”

Once saved, Christians are to “grow up into salvation.” (vs. 2). Once chosen as a living stone in the building or temple of God they are to be “built up” (vs. 5) as a spiritual house.

Peter’s Marks of Maturity

- As a brick fills its spot in a structure, a mature Christian finds and fulfills his or her kingdom niche, vs. 4-6.
- A mature Christian walks with honor and purpose through life, not stumbling around in unbelief, vs. 7-8.
- Mature Christians know to whom they belong and are confident in their relationship with God, vs. 9.
- Mature Christians stay aware of their challenges and temptations, vs. 11.
- Mature Christians execute their purpose of bringing glory to God through honorable conduct. vs. 12.

The sojourners and exiles (vs. 11) who were living among the Gentiles (vs. 12) were to neither be ashamed of their commitment to Jesus, nor bring shame to the cause of Jesus. Instead, they were to pursue maturity with continued spiritual growth. The covenant promise to them was, “whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (vs. 6).

For enlightenment and discussion:

1 Peter 2:2-12 is rich in Old Testament background and language. The quotations from Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, and Isaiah 8:14 are directly quoted in 1 Peter 1:6-9. Also compare 1 Peter 2:3 with Psalm 34:8; 1 Peter 1:9 with Exodus 19:5-6; and, 1 Peter 1:10 with Hosea 1:23.

In your life how have you “tasted that the Lord is good”? 2:3

Why are these phrases good descriptions of Christians:

living stone

spiritual house

holy priesthood

chosen race

royal priesthood

holy nation

people for his own possession?

Why and how does an unbelieving culture speak against Christians as evildoers? vs. 12.

We probably understand what it means to not bring shame on the Lord or his kingdom. What does it mean that “whoever believes in him will not be put to shame”? vs. 6.

Lesson 7

1 Peter 2:13-3:7, Be Submissive

Be subject for the Lord's sake.

Remember the general thesis of our study of 1 Peter. The exiled, dispersed Christians lived in a place and age of varying degrees of intolerance regarding their faith. It was not just that Christians were looked upon as odd, or that they were ignored. 1 Peter 2:12 (the verse that precedes the text of this particular lesson) notes that the secular world would “speak against you as evildoers.” Christians were viewed as detriments to and in opposition of the society in which they lived. They were greatly misunderstood and mischaracterized.

1 Peter 2:13-3:7 addresses the subjects of politics, of a master/slave economy, and of the submissiveness of wives to the authority of their husbands. This section of scripture and others like it are often met with disdain by 21st century American culture. Given poor interpretation and application, today's Christians may have their own issues of embarrassment surrounding biblical instruction on these issues.

There are four areas of subjection, submission, and service addressed in this text:

- 2:13 Be subject to governmental authority.
- 2:18 Servants be subject to masters.

3:1 Wives be subject to your husbands.
3:7 Likewise, husbands honor your wives.

2:13-17

First century Christians, in their commitment to monotheism, were at odds with the religious structure of their communities. If crops in the area failed, the community might place blame on Christians who did not sacrifice to the agriculture god. As the supposed deification of the empire's Caesars increased, Christians suffered persecution, being perceived as subversive to governmental authorities.

Peter reminded Christians that they were to be good citizens. Christians benefit social structures. "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." These admonitions, if followed, resulted in Christians being good neighbors and good citizens. These admonitions also called Christians to not be ashamed of God or the church.

2:18-25

Christians are also called to be good workers within the economic structure. Peter acknowledges that some authorities and even an entire social construct may be unjust. The epistle reminds Christians that our Lord suffered unjust treatment at the hand of authorities and

powers. His response was “he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten.” A good work ethic is never bad..

3:1-6

Wives are included in the call to the practice of submission. Sara is noted as an example of a wife who followed the lead of her husband. Part of the equation in this text is the recognition that some Christian women may find themselves wed to men who were not of faith. The advice on winning their husbands to salvation was to be a good wife.

3:7

Just as each section above began with the instruction to “be subject” or “be in submission”, so this verse addressed to husbands begins with a “likewise.” Husbands are to honor their wives.

Although all of these relationships – citizen to government, servant to master, wives to husbands, and husbands to wives – have many complicated layers, the focus of the teaching in this apostolic letter to Christians who live in unchristian circumstances is that disrespect will not earn respect.

There is one more consideration for practicing submission, stated in two different ways as this passage begins: “Be subject *for the Lord’s sake*

to every human institution” (2:13). and “For this is the *will of God* that by doing good, you should silence the ignorance of foolish people.” (2:15).

For enlightenment and discussion:

Are you ever in situations in which you know being identified as a Christian or a Bible-believer will cause you social embarrassment?

How has Jesus prepared his followers to suffer?

Is quiet submission to unjust treatment always the best answer?

In our current society and culture, is Christianity perceived as subversive, uncooperative, or even evil?

What opportunities to glorify God are afforded us as national citizens, employees, and spouses?

A recurring word in 1 Peter is the word “precious.” What are Peter’s precious things? 1:7, 19; 2:4, 6; 3:4.

Lesson 8

Be Righteous, 1 Peter 3:8-17

If you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed.

Here are four questions to help us work through this text that calls us to be righteous. “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous...if you suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed.”

How is “be righteous” different from “be holy”?

A previous passage called Christians to holiness. (1:13-21). This text emphasizes righteousness. Those two words overlap in meaning and practice. There is a difference in nuance. Holiness is to be set aside, or dedicated, to God’s purposes. Righteousness is to conform to God’s standards. Technically, holiness is a character that results in righteous behavior while righteousness is specific to behavior itself. So, Peter gets down to specifics.

The righteous practice unity, sympathy, brotherly love, and humility (vs. 8). The righteous response to reviling is to bless. (vs. 9). The righteous choose good over evil in word and deed, and pursue peace rather than enmity. (10-12). They speak up for Jesus and maintain a good conscience. (vs. 15-16).

When is a Christian excused from righteous behavior?

If doing the right thing causes embarrassment, costs us our job, results in being ridiculed or bullied, or brings actual suffering and harm (vs. 14), “it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” (vs. 17). Righteousness honors Christ, while fearing no evil. Even in the face of mistreatment, it acts with gentleness and respect. (vs. 15).

How is right living connected to enjoying life?

The righteous are sometimes persecuted, but that is not the usual circumstance. In most contexts, right living results in a long life of good days (vs. 16). Peter quotes Psalm 34:12-16 which describes the blessed life of a righteous person. God created the world and us, then gave us standards as to how to live our best life in the world. When we live according to righteous standards, a blessed life results.

Yes, in a fallen world, there is suffering. As Peter reasons, if then you suffer, let it be for doing good, not for being evil.

What will happen when we practice
righteousness?

“For to this (righteousness) you were called, that you might obtain a blessing (vs. 9)...But even if you suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed.” (vs. 14).

If you practice righteousness, you will tend to live a long life of good days (vs. 10), though it is possible to experience seasons of rejection and persecution.

If you practice righteousness, you may draw someone to Christ and have the opportunity to share your reason for hope. (vs. 15).

If you practice righteousness, you definitely will receive a blessing (vs. 14).

For enlightenment and discussion:

How does making choices for good rather than evil actually add years to our life?

What does it mean to “see good days”?

Is it your expectation to be appreciated or to be persecuted for your good behavior?

How does our good behavior result in shame on those who slander our choices?

How can we be prepared to offer a defense to people to ask about our reason for hope?

Lesson 8

Be Baptized, 1 Peter 3:18-22

Baptism...now saves you

The gospel is defined and summarized as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Given that, 1 Peter 3:18-22 is a “gospel” text:

Christ was “put to death.” vs. 18
 While his body was entombed (burial) his spirit
 “proclaimed to the spirits in prison.” vs. 19
 This was followed by “the resurrection of Jesus
 Christ.” vs. 21.

1 Peter encourages believers who suffered persecution, a persecution that was only going to increase in intensity, to not grow ashamed of their faith and relationship with the Lord. In the verses immediately preceding this text, Peter had acknowledged that the righteous may suffer for their good deeds. This section of the letter comforts their suffering by reflecting on the suffering of righteous Jesus himself. This paragraph begins “For Christ also suffered.” (3:18). The next paragraph begins “Since therefore Christ suffered.” (4:1). The words in between tell the story of Christ’s suffering and ultimate victory. Point being: his story can be our story – death, burial, resurrection to victory.

This passage is famously known as one of the most difficult and mysterious in scripture. It is

easy to get lost in discussions about the spirits in prison, what Jesus proclaimed among them, and the relation of Christian baptism to the story of Noah, and the matter of our conscience. Therefore, it is worthwhile to point to the primary function of this scripture in context: We may suffer for choosing righteousness, but none are more righteous than Jesus, and none suffered more than Jesus, so take heart!

Genesis 6:9 reads, “Noah was a righteous man” who lived in a time of great wickedness. 1 Peter 3:18 identifies Jesus as righteous, but suffering at the hands of the wicked. Peter’s original audience received the call to be righteous, but lived in a culture of wickedness. Likewise, any generation, including ours, should not be surprised when our righteousness is unappreciated – persecuted, even.

Yet, we can take consolation in that, as flood waters lifted Noah and his family to salvation from wickedness and receded to place him on a cleansed earth, so the waters of baptism, in a retelling of the faith story of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, saves and cleanses. The purpose of our baptismal bath was not to remove dirt from our bodies, but sin from our consciences. The efficacy of baptism is in the power of the resurrection of Jesus. As a righteous sufferer, he ascended to heaven as

victor. Our hope is to join him in the same manner.

For enlightenment and discussion:

What were the reasons for Jesus' suffering?

What is the "prison" mentioned in verse 19?

Besides Noah, what are some other stories about the loneliness of the righteous?

How does it help for those who suffer for righteousness sake to know that others have suffered before them?

How was this passage helpful to Peter's audience as they suffered through persecution from Roman state and local governments, idol promoters, and militant Jews?

How do the stories of Noah and Jesus help all believers overcome the shame of rejection and persecution?

Lesson 9

Be Decisive, 1 Peter 4:1-11

Live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions, but in the will of God.

Decide to pay the cost of discipleship

Jesus warned his disciples about the response of the world to their decision to follow him: “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” (John 15:20). Sometimes the cost of discipleship is being maligned; sometimes it is being martyred. Since Christ suffered, Christians must be resolved to suffer whenever and however necessary.

Decide to be done with sin

When we were baptized, we were cleansed from sin and left it behind. Sin was a part of our former life, but we do not have time for it any more. Our purpose in our new life in Christ is to do the will of God.

However, sinners love company. Those still practicing the impulses of the flesh entice us to join with them, do not understand when we decline, and malign us for our stand.

Decide to live

People who live sin and heap abuse on those who do not join them, will be held accountable

in judgment. The wages of sin is death. Yet, in every age (“even to those who are dead” 4:6), God has offered the prospect of life. If we live for God now, we will live with God later. It is appointed for all to die and after that comes judgment. (Heb. 9:27). Though we all die a physical death, we can still “live in the spirit the way God does.” (1 Peter 4:6).

Decide to love

Remember that 1 Peter 4:1 called disciples to cease or be done with sin. In 4:8, Peter writes that disciples “above all” are to “keep on loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins.” A close knit Christian community may suffer abuse for outsiders (Gentiles, 4:3), but a fervent love within community leaves no room for sin, and quickly forgives sin should it occur. It binds the community together.

Decide to glorify God with your gifts

Bless one another with hospitality. Serve one another as we are able. Speak the truths of God to one another. Our abilities come from God, to serve all the people of God, bringing glory to God.

For enlightenment and discussion:

What does ceasing or being done with sin look like in our lives?

Who was Peter calling “Gentiles” in 4:3

How descriptive of our present culture is the sin list in 4:3?

Why do people practicing sin urge others to join them, act surprised when others do not participate, and then slander them for not joining in? Have you seen that in your experience?

Peter writes about a day of judgment and end of all things. Is that a good or bad thing? Is it really “at hand”?

How does hospitality build community? In the context of 1 Peter, why is a close, loving community important for Christians?

Lesson 11

Be Unashamed, 1 Peter 4:12-19

If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God

Suffer, But Don't be Surprised, 4:12

Jesus was always honest with his disciples that suffering would be part of the package of being a Christian. "Take up your cross and follow me." The path of Jesus is one of suffering, for himself and his followers. (Matt. 16:24). Suffering includes everything from an insult (1 Peter 4:14) to losing one's life (Matt. 16:25).

In the present context for those studying this booklet, our suffering is mostly along the line of inconveniences at best and insults at worst. However, we should remember that *Christianity Today* magazine issues a World Watch List each year. That is a listing of the 50 countries where it is most dangerous to follow Jesus. North Korea is the highest rated. It categorizes persecution into two categories; violence and pressure. In the 2019 reporting period, in the top 50 countries rated highest for persecution against Christians, 4,136 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons. 2,625 were detained, arrested, sentenced, and imprisoned. 1,266 churches or Christian buildings were attacked.

For the original audience of 1 Peter, it seems the level of persecution they had experienced was

pressure categorized as rather than violence. Social ostracism, threats, and business boycotts may have been common. Yet, Peter warned that persecution could ramp up. His readers should not be surprised if unpleasant pressure turned into a fiery trial. If, as is likely, this letter was written just prior to Nero's persecution of Christians across the Roman empire, this warning was not just in the realm of possibility, but was prophetic.

Suffer...and Rejoice in Response, 4:13-14

Rejoicing in suffering is a frequent admonition in scripture. See Matt. 5:11-12; Rom. 5:3-5; Jms. 1:2-4. Suffering joins us as a sharer in the experience of Christ, which ends in glory. Suffering refines and builds faith and perseverance. Peter says that when we suffer persecution for the cause of Christ, the Spirit of glory and of God rests on the sufferer.

Suffer...But Do Not Be Ashamed, 4:15-16

Suffering can occur because of legitimate and just reasons. Law breakers, such as murderers and thieves suffer stern penalties when caught and convicted. General evildoing to destructive consequences. There may be health related or social prices to pay. Peter also notes that suffering may come to the "meddler." Some biblical scholars suggest that Peter was addressing a situation in which Christians were

too stridently trying to enforce their morality on unbelievers, resulting in insults and reviling from the community. All of those situation may bring shame, and rightfully so because of the harm done. Yet, it can occur that in societies that have an anti-Christian bias, Christians may unjustly suffer, even just for wearing the name "Christian." In that case, there is no shame. Whether insulted, imprisoned, or killed, the believer brings glory to God in a show of perseverance and faith.

Suffer...But Trust and Do Good, 4:17-19

Judgment is coming. Those who are saved will have been saved through the crucible of suffering. This is the meaning of "scarcely saved." If the saved have come to salvation with experience in suffering, then what will the experience of suffering amount to for those who have rejected God? The saved experience suffering, but continue in doing good in confidence of receiving God's promises.

For enlightenment and discussion:

How does suffering for Christ change from place to place and age to age in the world?

Can you point to any personal experience of suffering for being a Christian?

If a trial of suffering intensified in our day, age, and place, what would the refining result look like?

How is “fiery trial” an apt description of Christian suffering?

Lesson 12

Be Humble, 1 Peter 5:1-5

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility.

Christians were under social pressures and physical persecution was at hand. The wolves (or the lion as 5:8 will address) were attacking the flock, causing it to scatter. Therefore, the shepherds were exhorted to diligently tend the flock.

*Three interchangeable words describe the church leader in scripture. The descriptive terms also became designations for the office known as elder/pastor/bishop. Peter addresses the “elders” (presbyters, vs. 1), who are to shepherd, that is, pastor (vs. 2) the flock, as they fulfill the work of “oversight”, or bishop (vs. 2). The book of Acts does the same thing with the same three words in Acts 20. Paul “called the *elders* of the church” (Acts 20:17). They had been made *overseers* (bishops). They were instructed to “care for (*shepherd*, pastor) the church of God,” the flock. (Acts 20:28).

Humility Among the Shepherds, 5:1-4

Jesus taught (Matt. 20:26-28) and modeled (John 13:13-15) a serving, humble style of spiritual leadership. In this passage, Peter tasked the elders in the churches across Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia

with seeing the flock through sufferings and persecution.

Peter gave the church leaders some do's and some don't's in their role as elders, shepherds, and overseers.

Do not see the call to leadership as a
compulsion

Do not use the position for shameful gain

Do not domineer those in your charge

Do lead willingly

Do lead eagerly

Do lead by example

Their reward is to share in the glory of Christ who underwent suffering prior to glory as they and their churches were called to do. The partaking in glory (5:1) is restated as "the unfading crown of glory" (5:4) which they would receive from the chief shepherd, Jesus.

Humility Among the Sheep, 5:5

The call to subjection, which had been a prevalent topic in chapters two and three, comes up again as younger Christians are instructed to "be subject to the elders." Spiritual clothing was enjoined, beginning with humility. Proverbs 3:34 is quoted: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

For enlightenment and discussion:

Trace the thread of humility from chief shepherd, to church shepherds, to sheep. How is humility a common denominator?

How do the traits of leadership Peter prefers in this passage translate from the spiritual to the secular arena?

How is Peter's note that he was "a witness of the sufferings of Christ" helpful to his audience?

How can you improve in your leadership tasks?
How can you improve in fields where you are a follower?

Lesson 13

Be Unified, 1 Peter 5:6-14

The same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

As we reach this last lesson in 1 Peter, it is hoped that the theme which connects Peter's original audience with a 21st century American audience has not been lost along the way. Christianity at one time thrived with minimal opposition in the geographical areas where this letter went. As the letter went out, cultural, social, and political winds were blowing that had already had an impact on the comfort levels of Christians. Furthermore, a more severe situation, a fiery trial, was appearing on the horizon. That situation is similar to feelings Christians are familiar with in our own age, making 1 Peter a book relevant for today.

In the concluding words of 1 Peter, Christians are urged to find safety and solidarity in numbers, "knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." (1 Peter 5:9).

When Christians get pushback from the world over faith issues, Peter lists 10 ways we can respond.

Humble yourselves (a carry over from the last lesson)

Be assured of God's promise of exaltation.

Cast cares and fears on a caring, mighty God.

Be aware, watchful, and alert to the devil.

Stand firm in the faith.

Remember that many faithful friends are enduring in the faith.

Be settled that sufferings are only for a little while.

Be motivated by God's grace and of sharing in Christ's eternal glory.

Allow Christ to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Recognize that Christ has ultimate dominion forever.

Peter has his own friends with whom to stand in faithful unity: Silvanus who carries this letter, the church at "Babylon." (likely, a reference to Rome, with historic echoes of persecution and dispersion), and John Mark.

Two concluding statements offer a unifying exercise and a salutation of unity:

Greet one another with the kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

For enlightenment and discussion:

How many phrases can you find in this passage describing God in ways that lend encouragement to a persecuted or suffering person?

What do these words reveal about the devil: adversary, prowls, lion, seeking, devour?

Given the occasion for this letter – an encouragement for Christians to keep the faith in the face of present and building persecution – in what way is the letter’s doxology appropriate? “To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”