

Surveying the Text: 2 Peter

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INTRODUCTION:

There are three great themes in the epistle of 1 Peter. Those three themes are not unrelated—they tie together harmoniously. As you read through the epistle, meditate on these three things. The three things I have in mind are *holy living*, *suffering*, and *the meaning of Christian baptism*.

Keep in mind that this letter is also from Silas, a long-time companion of Paul. This helps account for stylistic differences between 1 and 2 Peter, as well as for how “Pauline” the epistle feels.

THE TEXT:

“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified” (1 Pet. 4:14).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

When we are baptized, this identifies us with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the holy one, and that means that baptism identifies us with His holiness. Jesus is the one who suffered for us, and so baptism identifies us with His suffering. Jesus Christ identifies with His people, and so when we are united with Him, we are identified with all His people as well. When we are slandered for His sake, the spirit of glory rests upon us.

One of the common taunts in our day is that we in the West don’t know anything about persecution—one writer said that we tend to complain about “paper cut persecution.” While it is true that we have not yet resisted to the shedding of blood (Heb. 12:4), and we want to do nothing but honor those saints elsewhere in the world who suffer imprisonment or death for the gospel, we still need to let the *Bible* define persecution for us. Slander and false report is certainly part of it (Matt. 5:11), and so Jesus says that being reviled for His sake clearly qualifies. And one more observation should be made about this—those who minimize the insults borne by “well-placed” first world Christians will be the first to topple over when actual hot persecution starts in here. The cool kids never do well in this sort of thing.

HOLY LIVING:

Holiness is not a matter of gritting your teeth and following the Rules. Rather, holiness is a matter of understanding *who you are with*. Who do you belong to? This letter is crammed with ethical exhortations, but it is crucial to note how and when these exhortations are delivered.

Humble yourselves (1 Pet. 5:6). Gladly bear reproach for the sake of Christ's name (1 Pet. 4:14). Be sober and pray watchfully (1 Pet. 4:7). Seek peace and pursue it (1 Pet. 3:11). Love each other (1 Pet. 3:8). Be courteous (1 Pet. 3:8). Husbands, honor your wives (1 Pet. 3:7). Abstain from fleshly lusts (1 Pet. 2:11). Now picture a group of Christians saying these sorts of things to each other before they are all ushered at sword point out into the arena to face the lions. Legalism is not the word that comes to mind.

SUFFERING:

Christians walk with God in holiness, and it is that holiness that provokes the reaction from the unholy. The unholy do not like what holiness reminds them of. When the light reveals filth, there are really only two possible reactions. One is to repent, and the other is to somehow extinguish the light. The impulse to extinguish the light is where persecution comes from. This is how it arises.

It is quite striking that Peter refers to the crucifixion a number of times, but he does not talk about it by saying *Christ died*. Rather, he refers to this event in terms of the Lord's *suffering*. Suffering to the point of death is assumed, but the emphasis is on His suffering (1 Pet. 2:21, 23; 3:18; 4:1).

Part of the reason for this emphasis is because those who were called to follow in His steps were called to follow in *these* steps. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered For us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

BAPTISM AND BELONGING:

So all of this is what flows from the fact that we were baptized. Baptism now saves us, not by the physical washing, but rather the appeal of a good conscience toward God, and it accomplishes this great thing by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 3:19-22). Peter compares this baptism that we have received with the eight souls that were saved at the time of Noah's flood.

Those eight souls were saved because they were *in* the ark. They were not saved because they had seen it, or had rapped on the side of it. That ark created a *separation* between those who were inside the ark and those who were outside it. Those inside belonged to salvation, and those outside belonged to destruction. There were two communities then, one of life and the other of death.

It is the same in our time, as it was in Peter's. You belong to one community or to the other. You are either inside the ark, *which is Christ*, or you are outside the ark, *which is Christ*. So Christ establishes the definition of both communities, *and this applies to every man*. So do not approach your baptism the way one of Noah's hecklers may have done. You saw it? The water of baptism touched your skin? That is what the water of Noah's

flood did to everyone outside the ark, immersing them all.

Peter says that through the power of the resurrection, the saved and baptized one is able to reply to God with *a good conscience*. The nature of that good conscience is described just a few verses above, being the result of sanctifying the Lord God in your hearts (1 Pet. 3:15). It is the kind of thing that makes unbelievers ask about it. You do so with meekness and fear, such that you have a *good conscience* when they slander you.

Once we were not a people, and yet now we are a people. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

THE SUM OF ALL:

We could hardly do better than to conclude the way Peter concludes. “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet. 5:10).



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