

FPFWC Christian Development



Faithful vs. Faithless

March 2024

Spring Quarter

March 16, 2024

Lesson #3 – Defending Our Faith

SCRIPTURE TEXT –1 Peter 3:8-17

ICE BREAKERS-

1. What does it mean to explain our hope in Christ? How do we do this?
2. What can we do to be better prepared for discussions about Christ with non-Christian friends?

Key Verse: “For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.”—1 Peter 3:17

LESSON BACKGROUND –

Peter was one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples (also known as “apostles”; Luke 6:13). Peter (also called Simon or Cephas; John 1:42) was known for being impulsive (examples: Matthew 14:22–28; 16:22; 26:35; Mark 9:5–6; John 18:10). In spite of that fact—or perhaps because of it—he seems to have held a special place among the Twelve. He is named first in all four listings of those Twelve (Matthew 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13). Jesus conferred on him “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19). After Jesus’ ascension, Peter was a leader of the first-century church (see Acts 1:15–17; 2:14–40; 15:6–29). His ministry focused mainly on Jews (see Galatians 2:8). In that position, he experienced persecution (example: Acts 12:1–4), which informed his outlook regarding suffering and trials.

C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

First Peter 5:13 reveals the likely location of where the letter was written: the city of Rome. That verse says “Babylon,” not “Rome,” but there is widespread agreement that *Babylon* is a code word for *Rome*. Historic, literal Babylon had been the great oppressor of the Jews in the sixth century BC (2 Kings 24–25). This served as Peter’s analogy to Rome of the first century AD (compare Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; etc.), particularly under the evil Emperor Nero (reigned AD 54–68).

The letter’s positive attitude toward government (1 Peter 2:13–17) may indicate that Nero’s state-sponsored persecution had not yet reached full intensity (but see 4:12). In any case, Peter was not shy about confronting ruling authorities when necessary (Acts 4:19; 5:29). As one writer notes, 1 Peter is “one of the earliest Christian documents reflecting on the problem of the relation of the Christian to the state.”

The letter of 1 Peter is one of two existing letters by that apostle (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1). The recipients of both letters were the various churches found in an area of northeastern Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 3:1). The first letter was likely intended to be circulated among the regions, perhaps by way of Silvanus,

an assistant to Peter (1 Peter 5:12). Were the intended recipients primarily of Jewish background, primarily of Gentile background, or a roughly even split? The letter's dozen or so quotations from the Old Testament could indicate that the intended audience was primarily of Jewish background. A stronger case can be made, however, for seeing the audience as primarily Gentile in background as Peter addressed their former lives of "ignorance" (1 Peter 1:14; compare Paul's use of this same word in Ephesians 4:17–19 to refer to Gentiles).

The occasion for Peter's letter was primarily a response to the suffering of believers, particularly since more was yet to come (see 1 Peter 1:6–7; etc.). Peter could address whatever suffering his audience had or would experience because he had been "a witness of sufferings of Christ" (5:1); Peter himself had suffered for that name (Acts 12).

LESSON COMMENTARY

3:8–12. Peter continues with general exhortations, loosely based on the theme of submission in 2:13–3:7. Believers should be sympathetic toward fellow believers (v. 8). Sympathy and selfishness cannot coexist. Love that exists among family members should be the practice of the church. Being tenderhearted and humble in spirit keeps relationships strong, leaving no place for evil or insult (v. 9). Blessings should be paramount. To emphasize these qualities, Peter quotes Ps 34:12–16 (vv. 10–12), describing a person who wishes to live a life he can love and find worthwhile. This person must guard his speech, turn from evil, and do what is good by zealously seeking peace. The Lord delights in such a person, but He also sees and judges those who are evil.

3:13–17. Believers will not be free from opposition and hardship. If one suffers **for the sake of righteousness, [he is] blessed** (vv. 13–14). This paradoxical statement reflects the words of Jesus (cf. Mt 5:10–12). **Blessed** does not mean one "feels delighted." It means "to be highly privileged," because one is the object of divine favor (see the comments on Mt 5:1–6). What man can truly harm the believer? Instead of being afraid, the believer should **sanctify Christ as Lord in [his] heart** (v. 15). To "sanctify" (*hagiazō*) means "to consecrate" or "set something apart," but here has the sense "to revere something or someone as holy." When the believer experiences suffering, he must continue to speak boldly on behalf of Christ, out of reverence for Him, rather than be intimidated or **TROUBLED** by those who persecute believers. He must be more concerned about pleasing Christ than about what men might do. Although this acknowledgement is in the heart, the believer must be ready to speak a word of **defense** (the word *apologia*, a "formal defense," from which is derived the English word "apologetics"). However, the words **always** and **to everyone who asks** make the reference general and comprehensive. It should be remembered that there are direct as well as implied questions. Peter failed when asked for a testimony (cf. Jn 18:17, 25–27). Testimonies must always be given **with gentleness** ("a mildness of attitude and action," its opposite being "harshness") **and reverence** (*phobos*, here meaning "deep respect"). The spirit of a defense may be more important than the words spoken. If the Christian's conduct is consistently good, accusers will often be silenced. But sometimes it is God's will for suffering to occur when one is acting properly (vv. 16–17).

LESSON NUGGET – Anybody can suffer for doing wrong, but Christians must learn to suffer for doing what is right. Of course, Jesus is the example for us to follow. (1 Peter 3:18). We witness not by making noise and fighting back, but by showing meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15). A gentle witness can make a big difference in a violent world.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word for Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary