

THE READY WITNESS OF THE BELIEVER

Summary and Historical Background

This chapter carries forward the dual themes of submission and suffering. Husbands and wives are to be submissive to each other; Christians are to submit to one another for unity in compassion and love; and finally, the wonderful example of Jesus Christ, Who was victorious in the discipline of suffering, is pressed upon us.

The advice to wives is six times as long as advice to husbands; a saved wife had a unique problem since under both Roman and Greek law, she had little or no rights, no mind of her own, or no independent existence. She passed from her father's absolute power into a husband's absolute power. For almost no reason could she lawfully leave him, whereas he could at any time dismiss her, with or without cause. Peter exhorts her to win her husband by being submissive, pure and reverent — in short, by being a good and godly wife (3:1-6).

Husbands are charged, on the other hand, with the responsibility and obligation of a master: there is no privilege without a corresponding obligation. The husband must remember to be considerate, chivalrous, and mindful that the wife is an equally spiritual heir of grace (3:7).

The duty of Christians to one another is fulfilled in unity, sympathy, compassion, brotherly love and humility (3:8-12).

Submission lays the foundation for the main lesson of the rest of the chapter, which exhorts believers to be a ready witness for the Lord (3:15). They are to witness with a clear conscience toward man (3:16) and God (3:21). Christ suffered wrongfully as a faithful witness for God, but was glorified by Him (3:22). So we ought to suffer for righteousness' sake in our witness for God (3:14, 17). When we are glorified with Christ, we will receive a full reward (Rom 8:17; cf 2 Cor 5:10).

I. Duty of Submission — 3:1-12

A. Christian Wife — 3:1-6

3:1 — Her **attitude** is submission to her husband.

"Be in subjection" — Literally, it means "to be under authority" (cf. 2:13, 18). She is not commanded to be in subjection to all men - only to her "own" husband. She is not inferior to him, but for the sake of order in the home, God has chosen the husband to be in charge.

"If any obey not the word" — That is, if any husband refuses to receive the word of the Gospel; i.e., he is unconverted.

"Be won" — The husband may be converted to Christ without a word from his wife. This is the only place in the Bible where a silent witness is commanded.

"Conversation of the wives" — This is an old English expression for the "behavior of the wives." The unsaved husband will be more impressed to receive Christ as his Savior by seeing the behavior of Christian wives and especially his wife's behavior than by hearing her words exhorting him to be converted to Christ.

3:2 — Her **activity** is holy living.

"Chaste conversation" — This again is an old English phrase for pure behavior; morally pure in every area of life.

"Fear" — Reverence for God - cf. 1 Peter 2:17. A high and holy reverence for God will cause her to be holy in her life. Some commentators apply this "fear" to the husbands, but if it is, it

is second to that of God. Furthermore, it is not a paralyzing type of fear (cf. 3:6), but rather a loving, respectful fear.

3:3 — Her **appearance** is not her chief concern.

"Adorning" — The Greek word is *cosmos* from which the word for "cosmetics" is derived. It has reference to something well ordered and beautiful. However, it is an outward beauty and appeals only to the eye. The godly woman does not give primary concern to her outward appearance; but on the other hand this does not mean she should neglect it altogether. There is nothing appealing about a disheveled woman.

"Plaiting the hair" — Braiding the hair. The worldly woman gives attention to her hair, her jewelry and her clothes, but having done only this, all she gets is worldly attention.

3:4 — Her **attractiveness** is a beautiful spirit.

"Hidden man of the heart" — Her inner spirit is the attractiveness of her character.

"Not corruptible" — This is in contrast to the outward ornaments of gold and apparel which are perishable.

"Meek and quiet spirit" — This is a submissive, humble spirit that does not murmur, backbite, threaten or speak sensually (cf. Prov 7:5, 11; 1 Tim 2:9-11).

"Great price" — A meek and quiet spirit is highly valued by God and should be given the same value by men.

3:5-6 — Her **aspiration** is to be like the holy women of old.

"Holy women" — They were set apart for God to please Him and do His will. Therefore, they adorned themselves by having a proper spirit. This spirit was shown by submission to their husbands.

"Sara obeyed Abraham" — The general classification of "holy women" is here made specific by calling attention to Sarah's obedience to Abraham.

"Lord" — Sarah called Abraham, "lord" or "master."

"Not afraid" — Wives should not be afraid of their husbands. That kind of fear will bring a snare to their lives (Prov 29:25).

B. Christian Husband — 3.7

3:7 — "Likewise" - The husband is responsible for the spiritual development of the home by the way he loves his wife, just as she is responsible by the way she submits to her husband (cf. 3:1).

"Dwell with them" — This means more than living in the same home together. It refers to the most endearing relationships between a husband and his wife. He is to love her dearly.

"According to knowledge" — He is to have an intelligent, spiritual knowledge of his wife's needs.

"Honor" — He is to give honor to her because she is the weaker vessel (probably in the sense of physical power). Therefore, he should be courteous to her, hold her in high regard, provide for her needs, and protect her from harm (cf. Eph 5:28, 29).

"Heirs together" — He is to recognize his wife as a joint heir with him. They are equals by the grace of God. They share the same spiritual blessings in Christ as well as the same material blessings on earth.

"Prayers be not hindered" — The relationship that a man has with his wife will affect his relationship with God. A man who mistreats his wife will pray to the Lord in vain. A man cannot love God and hate his wife (cf. 1 John 4:20).

C. Christian Community — 3:8-12

3:8-9 — This is Peter's **exhortation**. This is a summary of all that he has been saying about submission (2:11ff).

"Finally" — A concluding word about submission.

"Of one mind" — Live in harmony (Phil 1:27; 2:2; 4:2). Harmony comes from humility (Phil 2:3), from helpfulness (Phil 2:4), and from having the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5).

"Having compassion one of another" — This phrase is one word in the Greek - *sympatheis* (sympathy). Christians need to sympathize with others by rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep (Rom 12:15).

"Love as brethren" — cf. 1 John 3:11-4:21.

"Be pitiful" — Be compassionate or tender hearted: i.e., Jesus' compassion (Matt 9:36); the good Samaritan's (Lk 10:33); and that of the father of the prodigal son (Lk 15:20).

"Be courteous" — There is a different word in some texts which means "humble minded." Both courtesy and humility need to be practiced in a Christian's life (1 Cor 13:5; Phil 2:5ff).

"Rendering" — A Christian is not to "repay" evil for evil, or railing for railing. Instead he is to bless those who curse him, and he is to do good things to those who hate him, and he is to pray for those who persecute him (Mt 5:44).

"Railing" — Reviling (Jn 9:28; 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Pet 2:23).

"Bless" — To speak well of someone.

"You are thereunto called" — Christians are called to be gracious to others, even to their enemies.

3:10-12 — This is Peter's **explanation**. It is a quotation from Psalm 34:12-16.

"For" — This connecting word joins Peter's quotation from the Psalm with his position of non-retaliation and peace (vv. 8-9). This psalm supports his position and explains it more fully. The person who wants to have a full and fruitful life must follow the guidelines set forth in it.

"Tongue . . . lips" — First, a person must keep his mouth from speaking evil words which will hurt people; and he must not use guile, which will deceive people.

"Eschew evil" — Second, this person must turn away from wrong and do good things to others. This will take careful purpose and planning in his life. Conscious choices will have to be made so that good is accomplished.

"Seek peace, and ensue it" — Third, the godly person will have to pursue peace with diligence. When he is attacked, he must not retaliate, but bless his enemy. This will be difficult, but it will produce a full and fruitful life.

"Eyes of the Lord" — This speaks of the Lord's care of the godly person. The Lord sees everything that is happening to His child and will bless him for his godly response to persecution and suffering.

"His ears are open unto their prayers" — Contrast God's response to the godly person's prayers with those of the unloving husband in v. 7.

"The face of the Lord" — God's "face" speaks of His attitude and His actions toward a person. He is "against" those who do evil.

II. Suffering — 3:13-22

A. Christian's Attitude toward Suffering — 3:13-17

3:13 — "Harm" - Peter does not deny that a Christian may suffer harm, and even die for doing what is good, but such suffering is unusual. Furthermore, it can be said with assurance that such suffering will not harm his testimony or the effect of the Gospel on others. In fact, the persecution of believers promotes the Gospel.

3:14 — "But" - This is a strong word for "but" in the Greek to show that immunity from suffering is not guaranteed for the godly, but not likely.

"If you suffer" — A fourth class condition which indicates a highly improbable situation, but not one that is impossible.

"For righteousness' sake" — True righteousness is living according to God's standards.

"Happy are you" — This believer is "blessed" by God; he is highly privileged (cf. Phil 3:10). So his suffering may be used to convict some sinner of his need for Christ.

"Be not afraid of their terror" — This is the beginning of a quote from Isaiah 8:12, 13 where Samaria and Syria had joined together in a confederacy against Jerusalem, which put fear in the hearts of many in Judah. Isaiah counsels the godly not to fear the impending invasion of this confederacy as the unbelievers in Judah were reacting. Peter takes these words of Isaiah and applies them to the godly in his day. They were not to be afraid of their enemies either.

3:15 — "Sanctify the Lord God" - This is a continuation of Isaiah's counsel. Peter also applies it to his readers. The Lord was to be given a separate and special place in the hearts of these believers. This would be necessary to give them boldness to witness in the day of trouble.

"Be ready always" — The Christian must always be ready to witness for the Lord about the great salvation he has received from the Lord (cf. Eph. 5:15, 16; 6:19, 20; 2 Tim 4:2).

"To give an answer" — To give a reason or a defense before those who were asking about the believers' hope and their assurance of salvation.

"With meekness and fear" — Their answer, or defense, was to be done with humility and gentleness, and with a fear of God, not men (Matt. 10:28). This fear was a deep respect for God.

3:16 — "A good conscience" - The Christian who lives a godly life and answers his enemies "with meekness and fear," will have a good conscience that is clear of nagging accusations and doubts.

"They may be ashamed" — The enemies of God will be ashamed of their false accusations against a righteous believer. God will use his righteous life to convict the ungodly persons of their sins.

3:17 — Here is a summary statement of this section (3:13-17): it is better to suffer for doing God's will than to suffer for doing one's sinful will. It also summarizes 2:15, 19, 20.

B. Christ's Example for Encouragement — 3:18-22

3:18 — Christ's example in suffering is an encouragement to Christians because it was by His suffering that salvation for sinners was made possible.

"Has once suffered for sins" — His suffering was completed. He suffers no more. It was done "once." This is an encouragement to Christians. There is an end to suffering in God's plan for the godly. This is not so for the ungodly, however.

"The just for the unjust" — Christ's suffering was vicarious. Christ's suffering was in the place of the sinner (2 Cor 5:21). If it were not for Christ's death on his behalf, he would have no salvation. Christ's suffering should be a great encouragement to the believer who is suffering.

"That he might bring us to God" — Christ's suffering was purposeful. God used it to bring sinners to Himself and it is still bringing believing sinners to Himself. Likewise, God also has a purpose for the suffering of His servants, using it to bring sinners to Himself.

"Quickened by the Spirit" — Christ's suffering preceded His victory. He had to pay for men's sins before He could have victory over His enemies. Without His death, He could have no victory.

3:19-20 — This passage of Scripture is one of the most difficult in the Bible. There are many interpretations of this passage. We will briefly deal with three groups of interpretations, which have variations within them. The first group says that Christ went to Hades, the place of the dead, not necessarily in Hell, to preach to the people who lived during Noah's time. He did this between His crucifixion and His resurrection. The reason for His preaching varies. (1) He offered salvation to those who had died in the flood. This interpretation led to a second chance for salvation, i.e., universal salvation or purgatory. (2) He announced glad tidings of His victory on the cross to the saved. The verse says Christ preached to the "spirits in prison," not saved persons. OT believers were comforted in Abraham's bosom (Lk 16:20-26), not in prison.

The second group says that Christ in the Spirit descended to Hell between His death and resurrection to announce the final judgment to the "sons of God" (fallen angels), who had sinned in the days of Noah. They believe these angels committed fornication with women in the days of Noah and produced a race of "giants," part man and part angel, who opposed God (Gen 6:1ff). God destroyed these "giants" with the other sinners in the worldwide flood and incarcerated these evil angels ("spirits in prison") to wait for their final judgment.

The third group says Christ was preaching by the Spirit through Noah to the sinners of his day before the flood (cf 2 Pet 2:5). God withheld His judgment for 120 years while Noah built the ark and preached to the people that God was going to destroy them with a flood for their sins, but the ark he was building would save them from His wrath. The people did not believe Noah and perished in the flood, but Noah and his family were saved from God's judgment by being in the ark. Christ is our "ark" to save us from God's judgment in Hell.

"By whom" — This refers to the Holy Spirit (cf. the previous verse).

"He went and preached" — It is Christ who preached by the Spirit through Noah (cf. 1:11 regarding the Spirit of Christ in the prophets).

"To the spirits in prison" — "Spirits" can refer to people as well as angels (Heb 12:23). We believe it is people that are the spirits in prison, not angels. These people heard Noah's preaching, rejected it and died in the flood that God brought on that wicked generation. When they died, they were imprisoned (in Hades) until the final judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

"Who . . . were disobedient" — They were in prison because they disobeyed the message of the Spirit of Christ that Noah preached to them.

"When . . . the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah" — God held back His judgment for 120 years while Noah built the ark and preached a righteous message to his

people (Gen 6:3; 2 Pet 2:5). Noah preached that God was angry with their wickedness and was going to destroy them with a worldwide flood, but the ark he was building was God's place of salvation for those who believed his message. Notice, God's longsuffering for 120 years was to people, not to fallen angels. There is no place of repentance for angels.

"Eight souls were saved by water" — The eight souls were Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives. They were saved from the hostility of the godless people that rejected Noah's message when the flood waters of God's judgment destroyed their bodies on earth and confined their spirits in prison.

3:21 — "Baptism" - At first glance the mention of baptism seems to be unrelated to the message of this passage, but a careful study shows its vital relationship. As stated above, the ark physically saved the eight believers from God's wrath because they were in it. Christ is like the ark. He spiritually saves all sinners from God's wrath that receive Him (Jn 1:12; 3:36). By receiving Christ, they died with Christ, were buried with Christ and were resurrected with Christ. Baptism symbolizes the believer's union with Christ, but it does not save anyone. In the New Testament, it always followed salvation. It is an outward sign of one's inward faith in Jesus Christ to save them from their sins. However, baptism saves the conscience of believers when they take a public stand with Jesus Christ, acknowledging that His death and resurrection is their only hope for salvation. It is the right thing to do, even though it may be a dangerous thing to do (see 3:16). Noah stood firm in preaching God's message to his wicked generation for 120 years while he built the ark. Obeying God saved his conscience. So believers must stand firm with God and obey Him to save their consciences.

3:22 — This verse goes on to declare the ascension of Jesus Christ where angels and all authorities are under His jurisdiction. His victory is an example of what suffering for obedience to God can accomplish in the hands of God. What an encouragement this should be to Christians who are suffering for righteousness' sake.