

1 Peter 3:13-22, 4:12-19

So how should Christians relate to the world? That has been Peter's overarching theme in this letter since the beginning.

Remember in 1:1 Peter, describes Christians as scattered exiles. By that he doesn't mean to imply that they are totally at odds with the world. Indeed an exile might have an honoured place in first century society – the point was that that wasn't their home culture. They might find themselves at the same time honoured, and also treated with some suspicion.

At the beginning of our passage he captures something of the ambiguity of Christians' relationship with the world in two juxtaposed sentences.

V13-14a

Why does that matter? It matters because it helps us know what to expect in the mother and toddler groups we run. Overwhelmingly people love them. Just occasionally someone takes offense at a book on the book rack, a notice on the wall, a statement on our church website. Have we done something wrong? That is always possible. But this mixture of respect and hostility is just what the New Testament tells us to expect.

It matters for us as we go to work. Hopefully people respect us for our values and integrity. Just occasionally someone may take offense at our faith. Have we done something wrong? Again it is always possible. But a Christian who goes through their life only being respected has definitely done something wrong.

Woe to you when all men think well of you

Said Jesus.

Peter has been trying to help us to find our place in this world as Christians. He has called us a holy nation and royal priesthood living such good lives amongst the pagans that

though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

There is the tension again – hostility and respect.

Last time we were here we saw him instructing us how to conduct ourselves in the workplace, how to conduct ourselves at home, how to conduct ourselves as a church. But today he is going to be talking about fundamental attitudes.

The first thing he says is “don't be afraid.”

➤ ***Don't be afraid***

Don't be afraid to do right.

14

How much of our life is dominated by fear? Most of us at times keep it quiet that we are Christians out of fear. The workplace is increasingly dominated by the threat of disciplinary action if we talk about our faith. There is certainly no call in scripture to completely disregard the sensitivities of employers – on the contrary we must respect them. But we mustn't fear them. If ultimately there was a conflict between our faith and our job we must not be driven by fear. The health worker who won't be involved with

abortions. The employee who won't fiddle the books for the their boss. The student who won't disguised their Christian convictions in an essay must all be brave.

Do not fear their threats do not be frightened
You are blessed

And don't be afraid to speak.

15-16

Notice the careful way that Peter sets this out. Some are called to be proclamatory evangelists, but not everyone is. For most speaking is much more about response.

Always be prepared to give an answer.

Notice though somehow this person has noticed that we have a Christian hope. If your friends, your colleagues at work, don't know you are a Christian then something is wrong.

And notice we are to respond with

The reason for the hope that we have

Most people think the Christian faith is not based on reason at all. To have faith is just to have some blind hope without evidence, or sometimes against the evidence. But the New Testament always insists that there is a reason for our hope. I believe that Jesus lived in Palestine, died for my sins, and was resurrected from the dead as the solid assurance of my future hope. And I believe it because it is perhaps the best attested set of historical facts in the ancient world. There is a reason for my hope.

But before we go to battle armed to the teeth with apologetic arguments Peter checks us.

But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience

Gentleness not belligerence. Respect not dismissing others as ignoramuses. Keeping a clear conscience not being manipulative, or deceitful, or presenting yourself as more certain than you. Just honestly, openly, sharing your faith.

So a couple of things to consider, then, as we prepare to speak about our faith. The first is that our daily relationship with Christ and personal godliness will massively affect our fruitfulness. It wasn't an accident that Peter prefaced this with

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord

If Christ is at the centre of our hearts we will be gentle, respectful, honest. And people will ask us about our faith.

The second thing to consider is do you have reasoned responses ready for when people ask questions? If not you should. Read some apologetics books. There are plenty out there. The John Dickson books which all begin with "If I were God...." Are good. Or the classic book by Josh MacDowell – Evidence that demands a verdict.

Don't be afraid, then. As you go to work. As you meet friends. As you serve God in the world. There will be opposition as well as respect. But if Christ is at the centre of your heart then your life will count for him.

➤ *Do follow Christ*

Peter repeatedly comes back to the example of Jesus as he urges us to live for him in the world.

 **V18**

Here is a succinct statement of Christ's death. His suffering was substitutionary

The righteous for the unrighteous

That is he the righteous one took our sins on himself so that we the unrighteous ones didn't need to pay for them ourselves – he was our substitute.

He suffered in that way


To bring us to God

Christ's great purpose on the cross was reconciliation – reuniting us to God since we are no longer separated from him by our sin.

And his death wasn't the end. He was afterwards

Made alive

Then we get a weird bit.

 **19-20**

Ever since the early church this passage has been disputed. The so called Apostles' Creed which was written in the early centuries of the church says that after Jesus died "he descended into hell" before rising again on the third day. That statement seems to be an inference of this passage in which Jesus

made proclamation to the spirits in prison

However there is nowhere else in the Bible that suggests that Jesus was in hell between his death and resurrection. And as the NIV has captured the sentence seems to imply actually that the proclamation happened after his resurrection.

It seems much more likely that Peter is speaking about Jesus' exaltation to the right of God the Father at which point the whole spiritual realm, including the spirits of those long dead, could see that Jesus is Lord.

Peter seems to use the example of Noah for a specific reason. Noah remember built his ark because God had warned that he would judge the world by flooding it. Noah too lived in a day in which people were hostile to him and to God. He is saying "those long dead people now see how wrong they were and how right Noah was. Just as people today will one day.

He points out that God in Noah's day was patient too – just as God is today. The fact that opposition to the gospel seems to go unchecked in our world doesn't mean to say that God has forgotten us. He is simply patient.

And he points out that Noah was saved through accepting God's rescue plan.

 **20b-21**

The flood, says Peter, was a kind of symbolic anticipation of baptism. In both cases the waters represent being swallowed up in death. In both cases there is a path through the waters so that we come out the other side into a new life.

Perhaps more controversially Peter says that baptism

Now saves you

Roman Catholic teachings use this verse to justify baptism as a specifically saving act. The very act of being baptised saves us – as they put it ex opera operato.

But notice Peter immediately qualifies his statement.

 **V21ab**

It is “the pledge of a good conscience.” That is our heart is fundamental.

In the New Testament the fundamental marks of a believer is that they “repent” – that is they turn away from evil and towards God in their hearts. And also they “believe” or “have faith” – that is they come to trust Christ and particularly his death on the cross as sufficient from them to be forgiven. Both of those things happen in the heart of the believer and it is them – repentance and faith – which are the essential marks of believer.

However those heart attitudes will always issue in actions. True repentance results in a changed life.

And one of the first actions of all believers is to be baptised. Baptism is intimately linked to salvation in the New Testament. It is not ultimately necessary for our salvation. Remember one of the thieves crucified with Jesus was promised “today you will be with me in paradise.” He of course could not physically be baptised. Everywhere else in the New Testament baptism is one of the first responses to coming to faith in Christ. It is

The pledge of a good conscience.

There is no instance in the NT of someone voluntarily deciding not to get baptised and yet being called a believer.

a. Some here baptised as infants

- We respect that as a church – can be a church member.
- But we teach that baptism should follow a credible profession of faith
- If you believe that and have not been baptised as a believer – you should be.

b. Some here not baptised in any way but are believers

- As far as I can see unless your hands are nailed to a cross the NT doesn’t give you any option but to follow Christ’s instruction – be baptised.
- Baptismal service on 9th December – you should be baptised.

But now after unpicking all that we must return to Peter’s main point. He has been describing how Jesus endured opposition, even to death but was vindicated.

 **V22**

Noah too endured opposition but was obedient and was saved.

We will endure opposition but as we are obedient we too will be saved. Peter’s point is that this what we are called to. Most of us live with a rather starry eyed vision of the past in which Christians were universally respected and protected. It was never thus. Even if it is getting worse at the moment that is simply a pattern we should expect.

 **1 Peter 4:12-14**

A very early Christian letter to a man called Diognetus describes our role in the world in this way.

5 For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. ²They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life....⁵They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land....⁹They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. ¹⁰They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. ¹¹They love all men, and by all men are persecuted. ¹²They are unknown, and still they are condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. ¹³They are poor, and yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. ¹⁴They are dishonoured, and in their very dishonour are glorified; they are defamed, and are vindicated. ¹⁵They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect. ¹⁶When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life. ¹⁷They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity.

We are opposed by many in the world but we don't go into battle against them. We serve, we love, we are gentle and kind, but we will not capitulate to the world's requirements. And we learn to live like that by feeding deeply on the examples, and the blessings that come from Christ.