

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **Life in Exile: Hope Worth Defending (1 Peter 3:8-22)**

Welcome back to our verse-by-verse study through 1 Peter. Today we’re going to cover 1 Peter 3:8-22. In this section, Peter tells his readers to practice mutual love and peace with all and to follow Messiah’s example by doing good even in the midst of suffering. He also admonishes believers to be prepared to defend their faith.

But before we get started, here’s a quick summary of what we discussed last time:

1. Peter instructs his readers to live honorably among unbelievers so that they can refute slanderous accusations. They do this by following the standard household codes of the broader culture, existing in the tension between faithfully obeying God and being a good citizen in an ungodly society.
2. Living honorably among unbelievers involves submitting to human authority figures. We should do our best not to offend or stir up trouble unnecessarily. However, sometimes faithfulness to God *requires* us to be in conflict with society and endure persecution for our faith. Wisdom is learning how to navigate this path and knowing when to submit to secular authorities and when to resist.
3. Our calling as believers is to be a light wherever God has placed us. We don’t need to worry about the outcome—God will take care of the outcome. We just do what we’re supposed to do. We behave honorably in whatever situation we find ourselves in.

After giving his “household codes” for honorable behavior, Peter provides some general exhortations on how to relate to others. Let’s take a look:

#### **1 Peter 3:8-12**

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil

and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Peter admonishes his readers to have “[unity of mind](#)” and “[sympathy](#).” This doesn’t mean that they must all think alike, but rather that they should have mutual respect and be sensitive to each other’s needs and concerns, recognizing that they share the same goal. They must have “[brotherly love](#)” and “[a tender heart](#)”, as Peter says. That is, they must be committed to each other and even have an emotional affection and compassion toward each other. Finally, they must have “[a humble mind](#)”, as Peter says. That is, an attitude of submission and servanthood, looking out for the needs of others before their own needs (Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996], p. 223).

Next, Peter says, “[Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling](#).” Here, Peter reiterates Yeshua’s teaching of nonretaliation (Matthew 5:38-48). Peter says, “[but on the contrary, bless](#).” That is, believers are called not just to remain silent in the face of insulting and abusive words but, actually, to speak blessings over their enemies. How counterintuitive! But think about it. It’s extremely difficult to continue hating someone when they respond with nothing but kindness and blessing (1 Peter 3:13). However, regardless of how people respond, this is the type of kingdom ethic that Yeshua calls us to. It’s not how the world operates. But this way of living is how we obtain God’s blessing on our lives, as Peter says. And he backs up this point by quoting Psalm 34:12-16, which promises God’s blessing upon those who seek peace and abstain from speaking evil. The psalm also declares that “[the face of the Lord is against those who do evil](#).” We must not think that we can get away with doing evil because, as Peter says, “[the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous](#).” God is always watching.

Let’s continue:

### **1 Peter 3:13-17**

[Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.](#)

Peter suggests that believers are less likely to be harmed if they do good. He asks the rhetorical question, “[Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?](#)” Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that even people who are kind and seek peace still face persecution sometimes. In those times, believers need not fear; they are suffering for righteousness’ sake, and they are ultimately blessed by God, just like Yeshua taught in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:10). Suffering for doing good assures us that we are set apart from the world and united with Messiah who also suffered for doing good (John 15:19; 17:14). This assurance is a blessing! Thus, Peter admonishes his readers to “[have no fear of them, nor be troubled](#).” Since believers are blessed regardless of any suffering they might endure, they have no reason to fear their oppressors (Hebrews 13:6). Their hope is in a kingdom that transcends this world, an inheritance that they will receive at the end of the age (1 Peter 1:3-12).

Peter’s exhortation against fear draws upon Isaiah 8:12-13 and continues into the following verse which says: “[but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy](#).” The Isaiah passage says, “[do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But YHWH of hosts, him you shall honor as holy](#)” (Isaiah 8:12-13). Peter had already quoted Isaiah 8:14 in the previous chapter (1 Peter 2:8) to refer to the Messiah as the stumbling

stone. His point is that believers who face persecution should revere the rock (Isaiah 8:13-14; 1 Peter 2:8), that is, Messiah the Lord (1 Peter 3:15), instead of fearing their oppressors. While their oppressors can cause suffering in this life, it's only in *this* life. Once again, our hope is in God and his promises for us which reach beyond this life. Therefore, Peter admonishes us to “[honor Christ the Lord as holy](#)” in our hearts—we pledge our ultimate allegiance to him.

Peter goes on to admonish his readers to be prepared to “[make a defense to anyone who asks \[them\] for a reason for the hope that is in \[them\]](#).” So, instead of fearing those who are hostile toward them, believers are to stand firm on the hope they have in Messiah and defend their faith. The Greek word for “defense” is *apologia*, from which we get the English word “apologetics.” Peter says that all believers must be prepared to offer an apologetic, a defense, for their hope in the Messiah. This means that believers must know what they believe and be able to explain and even answer criticisms. Peter says to expect that unbelievers will ask for a “reason” for our hope. In Greek, “reason” is *logos*, which in this context means “an account”—that is, the reasoning or logic for our commitment to Messiah the Lord. We must be prepared to account for the hope we have. In Peter’s letter, our hope refers to God’s promise of salvation in the Messiah (1 Peter 1:3; 20-21). So, we must be ready and able to explain why we know that the gospel is true and we must be able to answer all types of questions and challenges from unbelievers.

However, Peter also indicates that true “apologetics,” if you will, is not just an intellectual matter but also a matter of character. Peter says one’s intellectual defense of the faith must be accompanied by “[gentleness and respect](#).” In other words, Peter admonishes believers not to bulldoze their critics with aggressiveness and hostility but instead respectfully convey the facts to gently persuade those who challenge their beliefs. This approach will put to shame those who slander them. Moreover, it might be “[God’s will](#)”, as Peter says, that a believer suffers for doing good. Standing firm on the faith and continuing to do good in the midst of slander and persecution is also a type of apologetic. It demonstrates to a watching world that the gospel is worth suffering for, which testifies to its truth. Nobody willingly endures suffering for what they believe to be a lie.

Let’s continue:

### **1 Peter 3:18-22**

[For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ \[Yeshua Messiah\], who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.](#)

Peter says, “[for Christ also suffered](#),” pointing to Yeshua as the ultimate example of someone who suffered for doing good (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-25). But much more than being an example for believers, Yeshua’s suffering, including his death on the cross, was “[for sins](#).” In this verse, Peter speaks to the nature of Yeshua’s sacrificial death and what it accomplished. Yeshua suffered and died to make atonement for humanity’s sin. Like the Levitical animal sacrifices, which were offered to enable the worshiper to draw near to God at the tabernacle and temple, Yeshua’s sacrificial death “[bring\[s\] us to God](#).” But unlike the animal sacrifices, which had to be given daily, Yeshua’s sacrificial death is offered only “[once](#)” (cf. Hebrews 7:27; 9:12, 26-28), as Peter says. He was righteous and yet suffered and died

“for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” Yeshua’s sacrificial death pays the penalty for sin—that is, death—so that humanity could be reconciled to God. For more on this, by the way, see our teaching, [Animal Sacrifices in Light of the Messiah](#).

Peter clearly affirms the biblical concept of substitutionary atonement, the righteous Messiah dying as a substitute for the unrighteous, paying for our sin so that we could stand before the Father as righteous. Peter here might be alluding to the suffering servant poem of Isaiah 53, which he quoted in the previous chapter (1 Peter 2:24-25). Isaiah describes a servant—clearly, a Messianic figure who the New Testament identifies as Yeshua—he bears the punishment that the people deserved for *their* sins in the passage. The servant of Isaiah is described as innocent—he’s righteous—and yet he suffers for the unrighteous so that forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation with God could be granted to them.

Peter goes on to say that Yeshua was “put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.” There is some confusion about this and the next verse which we’ll read, but it could have some strange implications here if Peter’s words are misunderstood. For instance, some have suggested that Yeshua being “made alive in the spirit” means that, while he was physically dead, his “spirit”—that is, himself in spirit form—was made alive after his crucifixion and prior to his resurrection. Yeshua’s spirit then descended into Hades—the abode of the dead—and proclaimed the gospel to the conscious human spirits residing there. This is how some have interpreted the next verse, which goes on to talk about Yeshua preaching to the spirits in prison. This concept also appears in some later Christian creeds, such as the Apostles Creed.

In a moment, we’ll address why we think it unlikely that Yeshua was preaching to conscious human spirits while he was in the grave. But first, the phrase “put to death in the flesh” could actually be understood as “put to death *by* the flesh”, that is, put to death by humanity. Humans put Yeshua to death, in other words. Similarly, the next part of the verse could be understood as “made alive *by* the spirit.” That is, the Holy Spirit raised Yeshua from the dead (cf. Romans 8:11). So, what Peter is probably saying is that Yeshua was put to death by humans but made alive by the Spirit. Taken this way, Peter does not suggest that Yeshua became a disembodied spirit who preached to the dead in Hades prior to his resurrection; no, Yeshua’s being made alive by the Spirit is a reference to his own bodily resurrection! There are some technical reasons why this interpretation we propose makes the most sense, and as Paul Achtemeier explains, he puts it well here. He says this:

A most natural construal of ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι [but made alive in the spirit] would be to take it as a dative of instrument: Christ was raised “by the (divine) Spirit,” that is, by God, a central affirmation of the New Testament ... It is hard to see how Christ could die “by means of the flesh” so long as “flesh” is understood either as Christ’s own flesh or as a description of his human life. Yet the passive form of θανατώθεις [put to death] indicates something done to Christ by others, and if one understands σάρξ [flesh] to stand here for humanity as it does in 1:24, then it names the agency of Christ’s death. In that case, it means that Christ was put to death by humans but raised by (God’s) Spirit ... Such a construal has the advantage of allowing us to understand Christ’s resurrection in the second member of the parallel phrase in its normal form, as a bodily resurrection, since the resurrection is being described in terms of the one who brought it about (Spirit), not in terms of the sphere within which it occurred (spirit). Such a construal would therefore allow the interpretation of the phrase to remain within the normal boundaries of NT tradition. One need no longer posit here some unique affirmation about Christ’s resurrection that is at odds with the remainder of such tradition.

-Paul Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 250

Now let's unpack this next verse a little bit more. Peter says Yeshua was made alive in or by the Spirit, "in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison." That is, in *the spirit*, Yeshua went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison. What is Peter saying here?

Well, as we mentioned earlier, some believe that this verse says that Yeshua became a disembodied spirit and descended to Hades to preach to other conscious disembodied spirits after his crucifixion and before his resurrection. Who are the spirits in prison? Well some suggest that they are the souls of humans who have died and now reside in Hades, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Sheol, or the abode of the dead. What does Yeshua preach to these human souls? Well, some suggest that Yeshua offers them a second chance to be saved and liberated from their prison of death, if you will.

There are some problems with this view. First, Peter refers to these "spirits" as those who "formerly did not obey...in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:20). Why would Yeshua visit *only* this generation of disobedient souls and offer a second chance of salvation *only to them*? Why not others? Also, the idea that there could be a second chance given to people who have already died is problematic on its face. Scripture teaches the opposite. Hebrews 9:27, for example, says, "...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." There is nothing for the unrighteous after death except for the judgment that occurs at their resurrection at the end of the age.

Now, there are a couple of other interpretations of this verse that we might consider to be better alternatives.

One suggestion is that the spirits to whom Yeshua preaches are actually the "sons of God" of Genesis 6, who many take to be fallen angels that married human women and who are now held captive in a type of spiritual "prison." On this view, during his ascension, the Holy Spirit brought Yeshua to where these fallen angels were imprisoned, and he proclaimed his victory over them and their coming judgment. Their fate is sealed, if you will, because of Yeshua's work on the cross.

The view that these spirits refer to fallen angels of Genesis 6 has much more going for it than the previous view we covered. Once again, Peter identifies these spirits as those who did not obey "in the days of Noah." The narrative of the sons of God and daughters of men in Genesis 6 is in the context of the Noah story. Also, the concept of rebellious angels being imprisoned appears again in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Second Temple Jewish literature, such as the book of Enoch, also speaks of angels being imprisoned—and directly identifies these angels as the sons of God in Genesis 6! 1 Enoch describes these angels as being condemned to a prison for their sin of marrying human women and creating the Nephilim (1 Enoch 10:4-6, 12-14; 21:7-10). Remarkably, Enoch is then described as visiting these angels to proclaim judgment upon them as he ascends to heaven (1 Enoch 12-16), a potential parallel to our verse in 1 Peter, except that it is the Messiah Yeshua who proclaims their judgment.

Now, this view makes good sense of the data and is more consistent with other scriptural concepts than the idea that Yeshua was preaching in Hades. However, it assumes a particular interpretation of Genesis 6 that might be in conflict with other biblical teachings. For instance, in Matthew 22:30, Yeshua seems to indicate that angels do not marry, which goes against the idea that the sons of God in Genesis 6 are angels. A full treatment of Genesis 6 is, of course, beyond the scope of this teaching, but that's just one point to consider.

A second alternative for how we might interpret this verse is that Yeshua's proclaiming "in the spirit" wasn't during the time between his death and resurrection, nor was it during the time of his ascension. Instead, it was during the days of Noah. As Guy Waters argues:

What, then, is Peter saying? He's saying that Noah, in the course of building the ark, bore testimony to the coming judgment of God. He was the "herald of righteousness," as Peter says in his second letter (2 Pet. 2:5). Noah preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit whom Peter has earlier called "the Spirit of Christ" (1 Peter 1:10).

-Guy Waters, "Does 1 Peter 3:19 Teach That Jesus Preached in Hell?" *The Gospel Coalition*.  
www.thegospelcoalition.org

In other words, those who lived in the days of Noah received the messianic gospel *through* preachers like Noah, warning Noah's generation of the coming judgment. However, because of their disobedience and rejection of the message proclaimed through Noah, God's patience ran out and these people were swept away in the flood. Their spirits are now in "prison"—that is, the captivity of the grave, awaiting the final judgment at the end of the age.

We might note that the NASB (1995) includes the word "now" in its rendering of this verse so that it says "the spirits *now* in prison." According to Tim Hegg:

The word "now" is not actually in the Greek text but is strongly suggested by the construction of the sentence.

-Tim Hegg, "Interpreting 1 Peter 3:19-20," *TorahResource*. www.torahresource.com

This view coheres quite well with the context of Peter's message. Peter had just admonished his readers always to be prepared to defend their faith in the face of slander and persecution (1 Peter 3:15-16). This message follows that train of thought. Like Noah, we are empowered by the Spirit of Christ to testify of our hope in the midst of a hostile world. And like Noah and his family, we too will be saved when God judges the disobedient. Furthermore, Peter said earlier that the "Spirit of Christ" in the prophets inspired what they preached (1 Peter 1:11-12), which fits the concept of the Spirit of Christ preaching through Noah. The New Testament uses "Holy Spirit," "Spirit of Christ/Yeshua," and "Spirit of God" interchangeably (Acts 16:6-7; Romans 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11-12).

So, if this view is correct, an extended paraphrase of these verses could go something like this:

"Christ was put to death by humanity but resurrected by the Spirit—the very Spirit by which the gospel was proclaimed through Noah to the people in Noah's day whose spirits now reside in the prison of the grave because they disobeyed."

Let's continue. Peter goes on from here to apply the imagery of the flood to baptism. He says this:

### **1 Peter 3:20-21**

...the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ [Yeshua Messiah]...

So, according to Peter, the water of the flood corresponds to baptism. In other words, something about what the water accomplished for Noah teaches us something about what baptism accomplishes for us.

According to Peter, baptism “saves” us, perhaps like the flood waters saved Noah and his family from the hostile world they lived in.

To be clear, Peter isn’t saying that baptism saves us as though the baptism ritual is a prerequisite to eternal salvation. Instead, the water baptism ritual is symbolic of our salvation already accomplished “[through the resurrection of Yeshua Messiah](#),” as Peter says. Believers publicly confessed their faith in Yeshua’s resurrection when being baptized. It isn’t the “[removal of dirt from the body](#)” that is significant in Peter’s mind. It’s the repentance and commitment to follow Yeshua that is significant—a commitment that is symbolized and publicly declared by the baptism ritual. As Achtemeier writes:

Thus baptism, as the antitype of Noah’s deliverance through water from his evil contemporary world, similarly delivers the Christians from their evil contemporary world by allowing them, through their participation in the power of the risen Christ and his defeat of the powers of evil, now to live a life pleasing to God and appropriate to their redemption through Christ. To accept baptism is thus to accept the responsibility, through the baptismal pledge, to maintain such a life in the midst of a hostile world, a major point of the letter as a whole.

-Paul Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 272

For more on this, check out our teaching, [What is Baptism?](#)

Peter concludes this chapter by declaring that the Messiah “[has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him](#).”

According to Peter, Yeshua is at the right hand of God. In Semitic cultures, a ruler’s “right hand” was a position of great honor and authority. Therefore, being seated at God’s right hand was to be enthroned as ruler of the cosmos (Craig Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014], p. 544). Yeshua was given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Even “[angels, authorities, and powers](#)”—that is, spiritual powers behind the rulers that persecuted God’s people—are under subjection to the Messiah (cf. Colossians 2:15), according to Peter.

Even though times were hard, and the future seemed bleak, Peter reminded his readers of who is really in control. What a great comfort that must have been for them! May we who read this letter today also be comforted as we face persecution in our own times.

## Hope worth defending

Let’s talk more about Peter’s command to defend the faith. He says this:

### 1 Peter 3:15

[But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.](#)

As we’ve mentioned, the word “defense” in this verse is translated from the Greek word *apologia*. It’s from this Greek term that we get our English word *apologetics*, a branch of theology devoted to the study and defense of Christianity’s truth claims. Peter calls believers to be prepared to give a “reason”—that is, the logic, the rationale—for the hope we have in Messiah. We must substantiate the truth claims

we affirm by using reasoned arguments and evidence. We must know what we believe, why we believe, and we must be able to defend those beliefs intellectually.

Many believers today, however, do not acknowledge the importance of apologetics. Some go so far as to criticize the discipline, labeling it a mere intellectual brain candy. They see apologetics as unprofitable for Christians or even a distraction from loving God and our neighbor. And thus, many modern congregations fail to emphasize or even consider apologetics as a part of discipleship. As a result, Messiah's body suffers and is less effective in fulfilling our calling to make disciples of all nations.

Now, to be clear, it's certainly possible to focus too much on the intellectual side of faith at the expense of the practical side of it. This is why it is important to engage in apologetics with gentleness, respect, and a good conscience, as Peter says—so that it will be profitable. When apologetics is done right, it's not a distraction from loving God and our neighbor at all. On the contrary: apologetics is one of the ways *we walk out* our love for God and neighbor!

Yeshua said the greatest commandment includes loving God not only with all our heart and soul but also with all our mind (Matthew 22:37). We should not unhitch our emotions from our intellect. Loving God includes studying his Word and growing in knowledge of him and his will. God created us with a rational mind so that we may discover the truth. Scripture instructs us to think about “whatever is true” and weigh the data and evidence in order to discern the will of God (Philippians 4:8; Romans 12:2). Moreover, we are commanded to believe, proclaim, and defend the truth and refute falsehoods (Jude 1:3). So, living as a Christian involves the mind. The intellectual side of faith keeps our faith from becoming superficial and empty.

What role does apologetics play in loving our neighbor? Well, here are two examples:

First, apologetics serves an essential role in evangelism. It helps resolve objections that hinder people from seriously considering Christianity.

For example, Christian author C.S. Lewis went from being an atheist to a believer in God first through intellectual argument. As the obstacles to his faith were gradually removed through reasoned arguments and evidence, he was eventually able to see the truth of the gospel and receive the Messiah by faith. Countless people have similar testimonies. When sharing the gospel, we often hear how important it is to relate to people and speak to them on their level. Well, this is also true with intellectuals. Unless we can engage with people thoughtfully and offer rational grounds for considering Christianity, we will be doing a disservice to the very people we are called to serve and be a light to.

Second, apologetics benefits believers! In Acts 18:24-28, for example, we read about Apollos, a Jewish believer in Yeshua. He was, as the passage says, “an eloquent man, competent in the Scripture.” The passage goes on to say that he “powerfully refuted” his opponents in public and demonstrated by the Scriptures that Yeshua is the Messiah. This greatly encouraged the other Jewish believers in Yeshua (Acts 18:26). So, believers need to know that what we believe is rational and factual. It's not enough to say, “Just have faith!” Apologetics gives us an intellectual basis for our belief in God's existence and the reliability of the Bible, which is a great encouragement to believers. Moreover, the apostle Jude instructs us to “have mercy on those who doubt” (Jude 22). We are called to minister to the doubtful in our communities; to give them room to honestly wrestle with difficult questions and work with them to find answers. Apologetics helps us love those who struggle with doubt and gives us the tools to minister to them effectively.



So, may we take seriously Peter's instruction to be prepared to defend our faith. May we know what we believe, why we believe, and may we become equipped to answer objections from those who challenge those beliefs.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!*

*For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

**EMAIL:** [Info@119ministries.com](mailto:Info@119ministries.com)

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