

Good morning. The Lord bless you and give you peace. We are continuing our study in **1 Peter 3**, as you have ascertained from our reading, but we have come to a portion of scripture that is, arguably, one of the hardest sections of scripture to understand. The Greek grammar that is used is difficult. For example, some portions of the Greek are only found in **2 Peter (1:14)**, so we can't compare it's use in other biblical passages to get a broader sense of use. Further complicating this is that there are really trustworthy people throughout history that have differing opinions on the proper way to exegete this passage. From current faithful commentators to the early church fathers, this passage has raised differing understandings as to some of the things that Peter raises.

Martin Luther is said to have said this concerning our text. **"This is a strange text and certainly a more obscure passage than any other passage in the New Testament. I still do not know for sure what the apostle meant."** (cited from Pelikan, 1967, by Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 236)

Well, that makes me feel a lot better as I scratch my head with this passage as well. We have, however, the task to be faithful to the text, as well as to our commitment here at Westwood that if it is in the text, we will talk about it. First, we must determine this in our minds, that to say something is hard does not mean we cannot learn something from this section. Nor does it mean that we cannot come up with some definitive conclusions on the text. Nor does it mean that what is found here is inapplicable to our lives. There are some things here that have clear and immediate application.

Considering all of this, I want to spend some time not only teaching you the content of the letter in a way that will also encourage and challenge us, but I think it will be helpful to show you the **exegetical tools** that I am using so that you may continue your study here and improve your study in other texts. Our homiletical road map will be simple. We are going to identify tools to study our text, the details that distinguish our text, and ultimately, the conclusions we can make of our text. I think within that framework we can be exposed to the main ideas of interpretation of this text, while at the same time seeing how we came to the principal conclusions that we can make of this text.

Let's begin with tools to study our text. There are several tools that we can use on the onset. I've talked about historical data on this text. Those come from commentaries. A commentary is basically a book that explains the content of the text, and they are typically concerned with all the surrounding information that needs to be dealt with correspondent to the text and the conversations about the text. Commentaries are a good tool of you get the right one, but they can also rob you of the blessing of wrestling with a text and seeing its connections in other passages of scripture.

Theologies, both systematic and biblical theologies are helpful. Ostensibly, systematic theologies and biblical theologies are encyclopedias for the content that is presented in scripture. Biblical theology corresponds to any given topic, like Christ's atoning work for example, but it looks at it in its given context. So, if you notice, Peter presents the vicarious, that is substitutionary, work of Christ in **3:18**. He also deals with the sufficiency and singularity of that event. Those are all big themes in scripture which basically mean that Jesus died in our place, and not only do we not need anything else for salvation, but Christ's sacrifice happened one time. He will never, in any form, suffer again.

Systematic theology organizes all the content of biblical theology into a context in which all the parts that talk about a given subject can be studied together. Once that takes place one can begin to make logical determinations on a topic. The biggest point in systematic theology that we all agree with is this, that God is one in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The reason that we say that is that all members of the Godhead are recognized in scripture as God and sharing the same nature. In our case in **1 Peter 3:18** we can determine this, that if Jesus Christ suffered once for sins and is now, **verse 22**, is at the right hand of God, then it is a false doctrine to say that Jesus Christ is somehow sacrificed again every time there is a mass. We are all systematic theologians my friends, because we all look at scripture and make conclusions about how we will live our lives based upon what we believe about God.

If you are studying scripture in depth, at some point you will need to employ these tools to help you glean from those who have been given the tools to go more deeply than you. Here is an example, St. Augustine has been one of the most influential contributors to Christianity that we have ever known. However, as one commentator pointed out with this, his exegetical work on 1 Peter isn't as helpful as others because Augustine didn't know Greek well enough to interact with it in the depth this passage demanded. Augustine employed a different tactic. He used the theology that he knew to be true definitively to be the guiding principle of what he would say. That is not a bad thing, but it is limited in what it can really show us about a specific text. Faithful students of the scripture use all the tools that they can to help them understand a passage.

But I realize that not everyone has access to commentaries, although with your smartphones and computers this content is more accessible to us than any other time in the history of the world – no excuses, but there are tools that we can use to study the scripture on our own and get to the place that we understand better what the commentator is saying.

The most important tool at our disposal is to remember the context of the text. I remember when I was in high school being introduced to the narcissism of how we read literature. The professor was a big Shakespeare fan and would often ask us, what does that line mean to you? In other words, we get to determine meaning based upon our feelings, not what that author intended. It made papers easy, just bake up some phony baloney about how this spoke to you and voila, you passed your assignment. Ladies, if you are saying something and your husband or significant other is presuming his own interpretation on what you say, what's the normal response? It's not going to be a fun day for mister presumption.

The context tells us that Peter wants to encourage and strengthen the Church in the midst of trial. The context tells us that whatever happens, God has accomplished a salvation that has present and future realities and promises that will be realized in our lives. Anything that can be said about the passage must fit into that ultimate goal. If my conclusions on a hard text leave me in a different place than the revealed intent of the author two things are true, I misunderstood what the text actually said, or I am in sin and understanding the text brings me conviction, so I reject its content.

In our text, the immediate context tells us that Peter needs us to understand that it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. He then gives us the greatest example of that in Jesus Christ. **Verse 18**, Jesus suffered once for our sins to bring us to God. This connects with the greater scope of teaching that Peter has already brought us. If you remember he begins his epistle by focusing upon the God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to bring us to salvation. God has been talking about and preparing for the coming of Christ for a long time, **1 peter 1:10-12**. The consequence of this act is that the triune God determined in His being as God that the second person of God would experience for us the necessary punishment of our sin. Context makes it clear that this was the plan of God. Context makes it clear that Jesus Christ the righteous one suffered for the unrighteous that Jesus might make them righteous. He didn't sin but paid for our sin by the will of God. Since we are His people now, we surrender, as Jesus did, to whatever God's will might be knowing that the consequence will be life giving even if it is hard. To further buttress the importance of context, we are reminded by one commentator that there are three Christological passages in **1 Peter, 1:18-21, 2:22-25**. All three of these passages are squarely focused upon the distinguished, unrepeatable, and sufficient suffering and death of Jesus Christ for our sins. (Jobes of Goppel, pg 236) **This leads us to understand the starting point for filtering all content in its context is to use the context to find out what it is saying about God. Then I can move to try and understand what it is saying about man.**

Now I don't just consider the context of the passage in the epistle or book in which it is written, I must consider the context of the scripture. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God does not lie. That being said, the internal testimony of scripture is that God was the ultimate author working through those who penned the words we read. Again **1 Peter 1:10-12** mentions that the Spirit of God in these prophets was the one speaking and guiding their writing. **2 Timothy 3:16** tells us that all scripture is breathed out by God. In other words, that He filled with His

words the minds and hearts of those who wrote. **2 Peter 1:21** “No prophecy of scripture was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” **Jeremiah 1:9** “The Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.” In another section, Jesus challenges the religious leaders about their lack of understanding the word of God and in that challenge underscores the real and active work of the Holy Spirit in leading those who wrote the scriptures. **Matthew 23:43**, “How is it that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying...” I’ve taken some pains to highlight the inspiration of scripture for this very simple point, God is not going to say something through one person and the opposite through another. (see **Deuteronomy 13:1-5**). Scripture interprets scripture. In fact, if you think about what Jesus often uses scripture to interpret scripture. It’s what made the religious leaders crazy because the scriptures they said they believed were being used to disembowel their godless conclusions. So, I use scripture to interpret scripture. I look at the context of the scripture in general in its clear themes and teaching, and especially in those areas that touch upon the kind of content that is in the specific text which we study. In this case we will have to deal with texts dealing with Christ’s vicarious suffering, Christ’s resurrection, Christ’s preaching, and the recipients of His preaching, the purpose of His preaching, the biblical perspectives if baptism, the illustrative nature of O.T. history, sanctification, glorification, consummation, and eschatological teaching. All of those major themes are found un these **5 verses**. It is not a task for lazy exegesis.

Let’s take a moment and use this tool of context on our text just a little, so you might see how it works. I liken this to taking music lessons and learning how to play your first song, Chopsticks. Our passage has told us that Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, **verse 18**. We’ve learned from **chapter 1:1-2** that salvation is God’s action upon us, not our action towards God. **Chapter 1:3** emphasizes this with the phrase that God caused us to be born again to a living hope. **Chapter 1:18** tells us that our ways were futile and that our salvation took nothing less than the blood of Christ. Further, **1:23** tells us that our birth came through the word of God. **2:9-10** tell us that we were in darkness and we were people who needed mercy. **Chapter 2:24** tells us that Jesus bore our sins and that our healing from sin came from Christ’s sacrifice. Have you noticed a pattern? Peter is supremely concerned that we understand that our salvation, and the gratitude for our salvation, and the impetus for right living, is all a consequence of what **CHRIST DID**, not us. Why is this important? Well, what does it say about **what we cannot say regarding 3:21**? “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.” Also, important to consider is that Peter talks about the removal of dirt from the body, which is what water does, and we cannot disconnect that Jesus washed dirt off Peter’s feet, he baptized Peter’s feet so to speak, to show how we are to serve one another, but Christ says **before they were washed that they are clean** and needed not to be washed all over. Judas, of course, being the exception as he would betray Christ. Whatever we say Peter means, it cannot mean that we are saved because we have been baptized with water. Further, Peter connects his meaning with a direct reference to the work of Christ, not ours. Salvation is not a work we do, even if that work has some Christian nuance like baptism. Further still, if you trace how baptism is used in reference to the Spirit of Christ working in us for salvation, and we remember that the principal tributary of this passage it to honor Christ who has done this great work, we begin to understand that Peter is making a analogous point regarding water baptism in relationship to the work of the Spirit of God in applying the salvific work of salvation to us.

Let’s dig a little deeper. The context tool makes me ask this, are there other passages of scripture that support my conclusion that works are in no way a part of my salvation? Certainly, there are. For example, **Ephesians 2:8-9** “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Peter speaks to this in **Acts 15:9-11** when he rebuked the Christians who were teaching that the Mosaic law had to be followed along with believing in Jesus if someone was to be saved, and they specifically focused upon circumcision. Peter responds this way to them in the first Church counsel ever to be called. “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they

will.” We certainly would have to do some more exegesis, but context has given us a standard for understanding that whatever Peter means in this section, **it does not deny the absolute free and grace sustained salvation that comes by believing alone.**

Now remember the point of Peter’s writing is to encourage the saints in the midst of trial. Whatever suffering you have to go through as a Christian can never go to the depths of having to try to do the impossible – pay for your sins. Christ has done that for us. Further, whatever trials we have to go through they can never take our Christianity away, Christ guards that for us. Finally, whatever trials we have to go through will always bring glory to God, Christ will honor that for us. Take heart, loved ones. Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God the Father. All has been subjected to Him. Our submission brought through faith in Him for our salvation is to a loving and merciful Savior. We need not fear. And the submission of those unbelieving that have caused us pain is a submission to Christ as victorious conqueror and perfect judge. No pain is ignored by Him or lost to Him.

Remember, if it’s in the text, we will talk about it. But remember further, Christ saved you, guards you, and will not just sustain you in trial, but honor you for it. Stay faithful, loved ones. Amen.