

# EPISTLE: 1 PETER

# 3



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### PRACTICE QUIZ

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After talking in chapter two about submitting to governmental authorities and to other masters, in chapter three the Holy Apostle Peter brings the concept of submission into a particularly important and immediate area of life: the family.

He begins by talking to wives – and particularly the wives of men who are not Christians – telling them to be submissive to their husbands and thereby win over the men through their attitude and conduct (3:1-2). Their attitude and conduct toward their husbands should be “the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” (3:4), which will adorn their character much like an attractive hairstyle or fine jewelry adorns a woman’s body (3:3). To give an example of such a wife, the apostle refers to St. Sarah, saying that contemporary women are the saint’s daughters if they do good and are not afraid that God will not bless them because they are married to unbelievers (3:6).

It might seem appalling to modern readers that St. Peter is telling wives to submit to their husbands, so Fr. Lawrence Farley explains, “Theirs is not a

cringing servile submission, nor is the submission absolute. Rather this submission has as its source the wife’s fear of Christ...the submission of the Christian wife is the submission of one who belongs first and fundamentally to God.” Also, notice what the apostle says in the next verses: the husband is to give honor to his wife, and both are “heirs together of the grace of life” (3:7).

This loving submission of one person to another is not limited to the nuclear family, but extends to the church family: we are called to bless each other and be loving and courteous, and to refrain from vindictive thoughts and actions in retaliation when we’ve been hurt by others (3:8-9). St. Peter reinforces this point by quoting Psalm 34:12-16.

The apostle then moves on to talk about open persecution, and the way in which Christians should suffer for righteousness. While persecution can be frightening, Christians should always remember our hope of everlasting life in Christ, and we should be able to tell others – and particularly those persecuting us – about this hope and the reasons for which we hold it (3:13-16) because, St. Didymus the Blind tells us, “We must be so well instructed in the knowledge of our faith that whenever anyone asks us about it we may be able to give them a proper answer and to do so with meekness and in the fear of God.”

We need to remember that we are not the only ones to suffer unjustly.

Christ too suffered unjust torment and death (3:18). Christ’s suffering was not pointless, however – even though put to death in the flesh He was made alive by the Holy Spirit, and therefore able to preach “to the spirits in prison,” and ultimately to ascend in glory to the right Hand of God to rule over “angels and authorities and powers” (3:19, 22). There are two general interpretations regarding these spirits in prison: some, such as Fr. Lawrence Farley, believe it refers to Christ proclaiming His triumph over death to the angels who fell before the Great Flood; others hold to a position similar to that voiced by St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “In other words, He preached to those who were in hell also, so that He might save all those who would believe in Him. For both those who were alive on earth during the time of His incarnation and those who were in hell had a chance to acknowledge Him.”

We can look in this way at Righteous Noah: just as he led eight members of his family to salvation through the flood, so Christ leads us to salvation through Holy Baptism (3:20-21). As the monk Andreas explains, “The water of the flood is a type of baptism because it both punished evil people and saved the good, just as baptism expels evil spirits and saves those who turn to Christ.”

### LIFE TIP

St. John Climacus writes, “You will know that you have completely freed yourself of this rot (of remembering wrongs), not when you pray for he person who has offended you, not when you exchange presents with him...but only when, on hearing that he has fallen into bodily or spiritual misfortune, you suffer and weep for him as for yourself.”

