

A LIVING HOPE

A Catholic Journey Through the Letters of Saint Peter

Session Six

Always Be Prepared

1 Peter 3:13-22

“Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence”

1 Peter 3:15 (RSV2CE)

Saint Joseph Parish, Springfield, Nebraska

Leader Preparation Guide

For the facilitator only. Not for distribution.

Session Overview

This is the summit session of 1 Peter, and three mountains stand on it. First, the apologetics charter (3:15): reverence Christ as Lord, and always be ready to give an *apologia* for your hope, with gentleness, reverence, and a clear conscience. Second, the descent to “the spirits in prison” (3:18-20), the scriptural root of the Creed’s “he descended into hell.” Third, the verse this study has been waiting for since Session One: “Baptism... now saves you... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (3:21), where Peter reuses the exact phrase of 1:3 and closes the born-anew thread himself. Participants should bring their Session One written guesses tonight.

The Discovery Aim. Participants should be able to say: defending the faith is every baptized person’s job, and its manner (gentleness, reverence, clear conscience) is part of its content; Christ’s victory reached even the realm of the dead; and Peter himself teaches that baptism saves, because it is the moment God applies the Resurrection to a person, which is when we are born anew.

The Catholic Touchstone. Apologetics as an act of hope and charity, never of contempt; the descent into hell as the Creed confesses it (CCC 632-637, citing this passage); and baptismal regeneration, taught

here in the New Testament's most explicit sentence and confirmed by Peter's own Pentecost preaching (Acts 2:38).

What You Need to Know

Blessed If You Suffer (3:13-14)

"But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed." Peter is quoting his Teacher: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Mt 5:10). The man who heard the Beatitudes on the hillside repeats them to the persecuted, and echoes Isaiah 8:12 in the Greek form he knew: "Have no fear of them, nor be troubled." (Your RSV2CE Old Testament will word Isaiah 8:12 a little differently; Peter follows the ancient Greek version.)

Reverence Christ as Lord (3:15a): A Hidden Divinity Claim

Peter's full sentence is "in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord," and it adapts Isaiah 8:13, which reads: "But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear." Peter takes a command about YHWH and fills the LORD-slot with Christ. This quiet substitution, made without argument as if obvious, is among the strongest evidences of the early Church's belief in Christ's divinity. Keep it for the Dig Deeper.

The Apologetics Charter (3:15b-16)

"Always be prepared to make a defense (*apologia*) to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you." Four notes. (1) The command is universal: not to bishops or scholars but to slandered laypeople in Asia Minor; readiness to explain the faith is standard baptismal equipment, the priestly "declaring" of 2:9 under cross-examination. (2) The occasion is hope: the question arrives because your life under pressure demands an explanation; conduct (Sessions Four and Five) generates the question that words then answer. Witness without words is a half; words without witness is a fraud; Peter requires both. (3) The manner is the message: "with gentleness and reverence," and a clear conscience, so that the manner of the defense never refutes its content. An argument won with contempt is a soul lost. (4) *Apologia* is courtroom vocabulary; some in the group may literally answer for their hope in hostile settings, and all will answer for it somewhere.

The Descent: Spirits in Prison (3:18-20; 4:6)

"Put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey... in the days of Noah." This dense text (with 4:6, "the gospel was preached even to the dead") is the scriptural root of "he descended into hell" in the Creed. The Church's teaching (CCC 632-637, citing this passage): between death and Resurrection, Christ in his soul went to the realm of the dead (Sheol/Hades, the "hell" of the Creed, not the hell of the damned) and opened heaven to the just who had died before him. The frightened fisherman's letter contains the Creed's boldest line: even death's waiting room heard the victory announced. Be honest with the group that the details (who exactly the "spirits" are) have been discussed since the Fathers; the core, that Christ's victory reached the dead, is the Church's confession. Handle with confidence on the core and hedged humility on the periphery.

Baptism Now Saves You (3:20-21): The Thread Resolves

Noah's household, "eight persons, were saved 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 clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Three anchors. (1) The word "corresponds" translates *antitypon*: the flood is the type, baptism the antitype, the fulfilled reality (CCC 1094 on typology; CCC 845 on the ark as figure of the Church). (2) The main clause is unavoidable: "baptism... now saves you." Peter's qualifier does not retract it; it defines it: not the physical washing as such ("removal of dirt") but the God-ward reality it effects. (3) The instrument is "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ", the very phrase of 1:3, "born anew... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Peter reuses his own words deliberately: the new birth of 1:3 happens where the Resurrection is applied to a person, and 3:21 names the where: baptism. The steelman chain (Q7-Q8) builds the symbolic reading fairly, then lets Peter answer it, with his own Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:38) as the closing witness.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Genesis 6-8: The Flood and the Ark

God's patience waited while the ark was built (3:20); eight souls passed through the waters that buried the old world and stepped into a cleansed one. The Fathers read the ark as the Church and the flood as baptism's type: the same water that ends one world begins another. This is tonight's discovery (Q6).

Isaiah 8:12-13: Fear and the LORD

Spoken to Judah under invasion threat: do not fear what they fear; regard the LORD of hosts as holy. Peter echoes verse 12 at 3:14 and adapts verse 13 at 3:15, setting Christ in the place of the LORD.

Voices of the Church

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St. Justin Martyr (d. c. 165), First Apology 61

Explaining Christian initiation to the emperor, St. Justin writes that converts are brought where there is water and are regenerated, born again, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, citing Christ's word that unless you are born again you will not enter the kingdom. Within a century of this letter, the Church publicly described baptism exactly as Peter does: the washing that regenerates.

Voices of the Church

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), Catechetical Lectures 3

Preparing candidates for baptism, St. Cyril teaches that the water is no mere water: the Spirit descends upon it, and what is born of water and the Spirit enters the kingdom; the body is washed while the soul is sealed. He treats 1 Peter's ark typology as standard catechesis: as Noah was saved through water, so are you.

Voices of the Church

An Ancient Holy Saturday Homily (author unknown, Office of Readings for Holy Saturday)

"Something strange is happening: there is a great silence on earth today." The Church's liturgy for Holy Saturday reads an ancient homily in which the victorious Christ descends to the dead, takes Adam by the hand, and says: awake, sleeper, I did not create you to be held prisoner. It is 1 Peter 3:19 preached: the proclamation to the spirits in prison, prayed by the whole Church every Triduum.

Catechism Connection

CCC 632-637. The descent into hell: Christ, dead, in his soul united to his divine person, went down to the realm of the dead and opened heaven's gates for the just who had gone before him. The Catechism cites 1 Peter 3:18-19 and 4:6 directly.

CCC 845 and 1094. The ark of Noah prefigures salvation by the Church through baptism; flood and ark belong to the Church's basic typological grammar for reading the Old Testament.

CCC 1257. "Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament," while God himself is not bound by his sacraments. State both halves; Peter's "now saves you" and the Church's humility about God's freedom belong together.

Thread Watch

1. RESOLUTION: Born anew. 1:3 ("through the resurrection") + 1:23 ("through the word") meet at 3:21 ("baptism... through the resurrection"). Collect the group's Session One guesses before revealing; let Q8 land the echo.

2. Priesthood exercised. The declaring of 2:9 becomes the defending of 3:15. Same commission, cross-examined.

3. Suffering, blessed. 3:14's beatitude anticipates 4:14 ("if you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed"), next session's climax.

Session Goals for the Leader

1. Commission every participant as an apologist of hope: prepared, gentle, reverent, clear of conscience.
2. Teach the descent into hell with confidence on the core and honesty at the edges.
3. Let the group discover the flood-baptism typology in Genesis before naming it.
4. Land the thread resolution: Peter's own phrase-echo answers the Session One question.

Leader Note

Time frame: 75 to 90 minutes; this session runs full. If time runs short, Q2 and the Isaiah Dig Deeper are the cuts; never cut Q6 through Q9. Remind participants the week before to bring their written Session One guesses.

Discussion Guide

Session Six • Always Be Prepared • 1 Peter 3:13-22

Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer

Risen Lord, you went down to our lowest place and came back holding the keys. Help us to reverence you as Lord in our hearts tonight. Make us ready to account for our hope with gentleness, and show us what you gave us in the waters of our baptism. Amen.

Win: Gathering In

- ◆ Has anyone ever asked you, sincerely, why you believe, or why you're hopeful, or why you go to church? What did you say, and how did it feel?
- ◆ What question about your faith do you most dread being asked? (You don't have to answer the question, just name it.)

Build: Working the Text

Leader Note

One-minute recap: conduct generates curiosity (2:12, 3:1). Tonight Peter adds the second half: when curiosity asks its question, answer it. And he finally answers ours from Session One. Ask, wait, work, confirm.

Movement One: The Charter (3:13-17)

Read: 1 Peter 3:13-17 (from participants' own Bibles)

Q1. Verse 14: “Even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.” Where have you heard almost this exact sentence before, from another hillside? What does it mean that Peter, of all people, is the one repeating it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake” (Mt 5:10). Peter sat on the grass and heard it preached; thirty years later he hands it to persecuted converts as tested equipment. The letter keeps doing this: Jesus' teaching arriving through the memory of a man who watched it proven, including against his own failure.

Q2. Verse 15 begins: “in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord.” Why must that come before “always be prepared to make a defense”? What goes wrong with apologetics when the order is reversed, when defending comes before revering?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Reversed, apologetics becomes ego: winning arguments to defend myself, my tribe, my need to be right. When Christ is revered as Lord in the heart first, the defense serves him, not me; losing face stops mattering and the person in front of me starts mattering. Interior reverence is also the fuel: you cannot commend a hope you do not actually live from. Adoration is the first apologetic.

Dig Deeper

Peter's sentence adapts Isaiah 8:13, where Judah is told: “the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy.” Peter takes the command about YHWH and, without a word of argument, sets Christ in the LORD-slot. The earliest Christians did this constantly (compare Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13), and it is among the strongest evidences that Christ's divinity is not a later invention: it is the reflex of the first generation's worship, written by a monotheist fisherman who had eaten breakfast with him.

Q3. Now the charter itself, 3:15: “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.” Who is this addressed to, what exactly must be defended, and what generates the question in the first place?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Addressed to ordinary, slandered laypeople, every baptized person, not a class of experts; readiness is standard baptismal equipment, the priestly declaring of 2:9 under cross-examination. What is defended is your hope, the living hope of 1:3, which means the question usually arrives because your life under pressure demands an explanation. Conduct (Sessions Four and Five) generates the question; words answer it. Witness without words is a half; words without witness is a fraud. Peter requires both, in that order.

Q4. Peter immediately regulates the manner: “yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear” (3:15-16). Why is the how part of the what? What happens to the content of the gospel when it is defended with contempt, and what does a clear conscience contribute to an argument?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The gospel is the news that God is humble, patient love; defend it arrogantly and your manner refutes your message in real time. An argument won with contempt is a soul lost. Gentleness is not weakness; it is strength that has nothing to prove. And the clear conscience is the argument no one can rebut: when they revile you, your life gives them nothing to work with (3:16), so the slander shames the slanderer. Manner and conduct are load-bearing parts of the apologia.

Movement Two: He Descended (3:18-20a)

Read: 1 Peter 3:18-20 *(from participants' own Bibles)*

Q5. Verse 18 is a complete gospel in one sentence: “Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” Then comes the strangest journey in the creed: “he went and preached to the spirits in prison.” Every Sunday we say “he descended into hell.” What is that line claiming, and what is the good news in it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Between his death and Resurrection, Christ's soul went to the realm of the dead, the “hell” of the Creed means Sheol or Hades, the abode of the dead, not the hell of the damned, and there proclaimed his victory, opening heaven to the just who had died before him (CCC 632-637, which cites this very passage). The good news: there is no place Christ's victory did not reach; even death's waiting room heard the announcement. The Church has discussed the details (exactly who the “spirits” are) since the Fathers, and honesty allows that; the core is the Creed's confession: the dead were not forgotten. Every Holy Saturday the Church reads an ancient homily of Christ taking Adam by the hand: awake, sleeper.

Movement Three: Through the Water (3:20b-22)

Q6. Verse 20 recalls Noah: “eight persons, were saved through water.” Skim Genesis 7:17-23 and 8:15-19.

Work the paradox: what did the same water do to the old world, and what did it do for the eight in the ark? What kind of thing is that water, destroyer or deliverer?

Leader Note

Discovery moment. If they stall: what is drowning while the ark floats, and what kind of world do the eight step out into?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Both at once: the water that buried a corrupt world carried the ark and delivered its passengers into a

cleansed one. They were saved not from the water but through it. Hold that picture; Peter is about to tell us what it was a picture of. The Fathers add: the ark itself is a figure of the Church, the one vessel riding the flood (CCC 845).

- Q7.** Verse 21 says the astonishing thing: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you.” Many sincere Christians read baptism as a symbol only: an outward sign of a salvation already complete the moment a person believes. Build that case as strongly as you can from this verse itself. What in 3:21 supports it?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A real case exists: Peter himself says “not as a removal of dirt from the body,” denying that the physical washing as such saves; he locates the action in an “appeal to God for a clear conscience,” which sounds interior, a matter of faith; the underlying word, *eperotema*, can even be rendered “pledge,” as some translations do, making baptism sound like the believer’s promise rather than God’s act; and Scripture everywhere requires personal faith, which mere water cannot replace. Stated at full strength: Peter qualifies his own sentence toward the inward and God-ward. Steel, not straw; now let Peter answer.

- Q8.** Now press it, in three steps from the text. First: what is the plain main clause of 3:21, before and after the qualifier? Second: Noah’s family was saved through water; does a symbol save anyone from a flood? Third, the step we have waited five weeks for: through what does 3:21 say baptism saves, and where in this letter have you read that exact phrase before? Take out your Session One guesses.

Leader Note

The thread resolution. Have someone read 1:3 aloud, then 3:21 aloud, back to back. Let the echo do the teaching before you confirm.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First: the main clause stands: “Baptism... now saves you.” The qualifier does not retract it; it defines it: not the bath as bath, but the God-ward covenant act it effects. Second: take the covenant-sign reading at full strength; it grants that Noah’s water was real and calls baptism a real and meaningful sign. But notice what Peter predicates of the antitype: Noah’s family “were saved through water,” and baptism, “which corresponds to this, now saves you.” The correspondence lies precisely in the saving, not merely in the picturing. Whether *eperotema* is rendered “appeal” or “pledge,” that word describes what baptism is; the main verb still declares what baptism does: it now saves you, through the resurrection. Third, the echo: 1:3, “born anew... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”; 3:21, “Baptism... now saves you... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Peter reuses his own phrase deliberately. The new birth happens where the Resurrection is applied to a person, and Peter names the where: baptism. Word and sacrament are not rivals; 1:23 stands too, for we are born anew through the living and abiding word of God, and in the Church’s lived order it is that preached and believed word which leads a person to the font. But the letter’s own answer to “when are we born anew?” is the answer the Church has always given (CCC 1257, 1265). And it is Peter’s consistent voice: his first sermon ended, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38).

- Q9.** Verse 22 finishes the sentence in the throne room: Jesus “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.” Why does Peter end a paragraph about your baptism there? What does the ascended Christ's position have to do with the water poured on you?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Because baptism joins you to that Christ: the one now enthroned above every power. Your baptism is not a private religious moment; it is incorporation into the cosmic victor. For exiles being slandered by neighbors and squeezed by an empire, the sequence is everything: the powers that intimidate you are already “subject to him,” and you are his. The paragraph that began with suffering for righteousness ends with the throne, which is the trajectory of the whole letter.

Send: Carrying It Out

- ◆ What is your honest answer, in two or three sentences, to “why are you hopeful?” Practice it on the group right now; gentleness and reverence included.
- ◆ Most of us were baptized long ago and rarely think of it. Knowing now what Peter says happened there, what would it mean to live this week from your baptism instead of merely after it?

Live It This Week

This week: (1) Memorize 1 Peter 3:15. (2) Find your baptism date if you do not know it (ask family or the parish office) and mark it in your calendar as an anniversary to keep. (3) Write out your two-sentence account of your hope and pray for one chance to give it gently. (4) On entering church, sign yourself with holy water deliberately, as a renewal of what 3:21 says.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, enthroned above every power, you saved us through the waters and sealed us in your Resurrection. Keep our consciences clear, our answers gentle, and our hope so visible that someone asks us to account for it. Awaken in us everything you gave us at the font. Amen.

Scripture Memory

“Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15, RSV2CE)

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used or referenced in this session

Primary text

1 Peter 3:13-22 (movements: 13-17, 18-20a, 20b-22)

Discovery passages (read in session)

Genesis 7:17-23; 8:15-19 (through the water); 1 Peter 1:3 re-read against 3:21

Leader background and Dig Deeper

Isaiah 8:12-13 (echoed and adapted at 3:14-15); Matthew 5:10 (the beatitude)

Acts 2:38 (Peter's Pentecost sermon); John 3:5; Romans 10:13 (LORD-texts applied to Christ)

1 Peter 4:6 (gospel preached to the dead, next session's edge)

Threads

RESOLVED: born anew (1:3, 1:23) answered at 3:21. Priesthood (2:9) exercised at 3:15

Beatitude of suffering (3:14) anticipates 4:14 (Session Seven)

Catechism

CCC 632-637; 845; 1094; 1257; 1265