

Lesson 21 – 1 Peter:

II. Believers' conduct in everyday circumstances	2:11 – 5:11
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1) Suffering for Righteousness' sake	3:13–17
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2) Christ's Suffering and Its Triumphant Consequences: 3:18-22:

“Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.

So, he went and preached to the spirits in prison – those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing the dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers accept his authority.”

As in chapter 2:21-25, Peter again appeals to Christ, who was righteous and yet suffered, as the supreme example for believers facing persecution (3:13-17). The unique work of Christ on our behalf reminds suffering Christians that they have a secure foundation for hope and confidence.

The suffering that Peter writes about in these verses is uniquely Christian. Peter just explained the two characteristics in verse 17: “Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!”

Two characteristics:

1. The Christian's suffering should be undeserved, 1 Peter 2:19-20.

“For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.”

2. The Christian's suffering, if it occurs, should be the will of the Father.

The first reason for this Christian suffering's distinction is that it is supremely illustrated in the suffering of Jesus Christ, Himself and, second, because this becomes a pattern of experience in which His people are destined to share. This is His example and we should follow in His footsteps, see 2:21. 2:21 – **“For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.”**

As the Old Testament prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit to foresee, this suffering was foreordained for the righteous in Christ, and it was also His predestined road to glory. Since suffering came upon Christ, so also came the corresponding glories following. His human and once-for-all earthly sufferings were supremely worthwhile and were divinely and eternally rewarded. And it is this theme that Peter returns to in these verses in this chapter and again in chapter 4:12-19, in order to declare that this kind of suffering started with Him and will be in the life of His followers.

Let's look a little deeper at the sufferings of Christ. His sufferings are also unique in character and in consequence. He being righteous, having never sinned, He suffered for what He did not deserve. He bore the penalty that is rightfully ours. He bore the suffering and punishment due for our unrighteousness and the proper consequence for our sins. Yet, He bore them so as to provide reconciliation with God. He suffered with this result in view to bring sinners under judgment back to God.

His suffering was not ineffective or inadequate or useless or purposeless. Though He suffered the extreme penalty of sin for the unrighteous, and was put to death in the flesh, He was quickened in the Spirit. Therefore, He was at once able Himself to go and proclaim His triumph to the disobedient generation of Noah hades awaiting final judgment.

This passage vv. 18-20, have long been difficult for Bible interpreters. There two views of who these “spirits” are:

1. One view is that Christ, after His death and resurrection (v. 18), went to imprisoned angels (evil spirits) who had sinned in Noah's day, (v. 20) and proclaimed to them His victory over death and Satan (v. 22).
2. The other view is that Christ, by the Holy Spirit proclaimed through the mouth of Noah (see 2 Peter 2:5), a message of warning to his disobedient generation who are in hades awaiting final judgment. This interpretation fits

best with the context of this passage, which speaks of the disobedient and unsaved people of Noah's day. It would be in harmony with Peter's statement that the Spirit of Christ spoke in times past through the prophets, see 2 Peter 1:20-21.

2 Peter 2:5 – “And God did not spare the ancient world – except for Noah and the seven others in his family. Noah warned the world of God's righteous judgment. So God protected Noah when He destroyed the world of ungodly people with a vast flood.”

2 Peter 1:20-21 – “Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.”

Let's dive a little deeper into the verses:

v. 18 - “Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.” Jesus suffered physical death – literally means ‘death in the flesh,’ but he was raised to life in the Spirit literally means ‘in spirit’: Flesh and spirit are often contrasted: see Romans 7:5-6 and 8:2-11.

Romans 7:5-6 – “When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced a harvest of sinful deeds, resulting in death. But now we have been released from the law, for we died to it and are no longer captive to its power. Now we can serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit.”

Romans 8:2-11 - “and because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So, God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So, letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit

control your mind leads to life and peace. For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful natures can never please God.

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not belong to him at all.) And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God. The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you."

Peter reminds his readers again of Christ's suffering and how He endure it patiently, as the supreme example of the kind of suffering for doing good. The word 'suffered' here means He died. He died for 'our sins' meaning He died as a sin offering. Since Christ Himself was sinless, this wording in verse 18, indicates that His suffering was atoning or propitiatory. See 1 John 2:2 – **"He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins – and not only our sins but the sins of all the world."** His suffering was also vicarious or substitutionary – the just for the unjust. He bore the suffering (penalty) due for our sins. Jesus is our 'once for all' sacrifice. It does not have to be repeated like the ineffective animal sacrifices of the Levitical system. His suffering and death are the one event that achieves a complete and final settlement of the issue raised by our sins.

Christ's suffering decisively removed the barrier and secured open access not only for Christ to come to God, but also for Him to bring us to God. He secured reconciliation to God for sinners and the full, free, permanent enjoyment by them of unhindered access to God's presence.

The phrase **"He suffered physical death"** suggests the violence of His execution and the deliberate and painful end of His earthly life. Yet, the phrase **"yet He was raised to Life in the Spirit"** indicates that both flesh and spirit are part of the Lord's human nature. Here, Peter tells us of His earthly life was abruptly ended by execution, as if He were a sinner. Then, as an unexpected "anti-climax", Peter tells us that His human spirit was quickened – meaning it entered into fuller life.

His death was not a death in sin but rather a death to sin once and for all.

Jesus was not a victim but the Victor, the Lord over death and all who because of sin are already victims of death. His earthly life was ended but this phrase suggests the positive benefits of His accomplished sacrifice. His resurrection from the tomb is one of those benefits and He was already able to move freely in the spiritual world as the victorious Man.

v. 19 & 20 – “So he went and preached to the spirits in prison – those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood.”

Bible Scholars have found this passage of Scripture difficult to interpret and there are four main theories which have been offered to explain who these spirits in prison are and what did Christ preach to them.

1. The first theory says these spirits are the souls of the people to whom Christ preached by the Holy Spirit through Noah during the 120 years the ark was being built. Many scholars hold this view, but it has problems. However, applying the term ‘spirits’ to people is questionable. The Bible sometimes speaks of human beings as ‘souls,’ and mentions the spirits of just men made perfect – Hebrews 12:2,3, but the Word of God never calls human beings ‘spirits.’ This term seems to be reserved for supernatural and nonhuman beings.
2. The second theory says the ‘spirits in prison’ were the mongrel offspring of a union between fallen angels (the sons of God’ of Genesis 6:1, 2) and women. Those who hold this position contend that when Jesus died, He descended immediately into hades and announced to these imprisoned spirits that He had paid the price for sin. There are some objections to this view. First, the purpose for this declaration is not given, and one must also except the theory that fallen angels were actually able to live in the marriage relationship with human women and produce offspring.
3. The third theory says these spirits were wicked angels of Noah’s day who engaged in some kind of monstrous evil, but who probably did not actually marry women. The people who hold this view consider the ‘sons of God’ of Genesis 6 to be fallen angels who entered into or possessed the bodies of violent men. These men in turn fathered children with even more lawless traits. The term “Nephilim,” translated ‘giants’ in Genesis 6:4, thus would denote men who ‘fall upon’ or attack others rather than ‘fallen ones’ or ‘giants.’ Scholars who give this explanation of the ‘spirits in prison’ see the sinning angels of Genesis as the same ones to whom Peter referred as “delivered ... into chains of darkness” (2 Peter 2:4). They say the purpose of Christ’s entrance into hades was to tell this special group of wicked angels that their doom was certain. He had paid the price for sin and would soon demonstrate that He was indeed their Master by rising from the dead. This interpretation is possible only for those who feel that the “sons of God” of Genesis 6 were fallen angels, and that they possessed men’s bodies and personalities for the purpose of leading the human race away from God.

4. The fourth theory says the ‘spirits in prison’ are wicked beings and Old Testament believers. Those who hold this view say that Christ descended into hades between His death and resurrection to make an announcement to all wicked spirits, and to release the Old Testament saints being kept there in a special compartment or space. Paul declares that Jesus “descended first into the lower parts of the earth” and “led captivity captive” (Ephesians 4:8-10). Some Bible scholars see a dual purpose for our Lord’s descent into hades. They say He first announced to fallen angels that He had conquered sin and paid its penalty. Then, contending that the believers of the ages before Calvary were not fully forgiven until Christ had presented His sacrifice, they maintain that He went to them immediately after his death to take them to heaven. This view can be held only if one is convicted that the ‘compartment’ theory of hades is biblical, and that Old Testament saints were not permitted to enter heaven until Jesus had died on the cross.

The Bible scholars and commentators that I have followed in this study, lean toward the thought that these ‘spirits in prison’ are fallen angels. Christ was able at once to exercise in His quickened human spirit, before His body was raised from the tomb, to go to where evil spirits are in prison, awaiting the judgment of the great day (2 Peter 2:4-5; Jude 6), and to announce to them His victory over death, and over the consequences to men of their evil-doing. He made them aware that their own judgment was finally sealed – Colossians 2:14-15.

The verb ‘kerussein’ means ‘to herald’ or ‘proclaim’ here translated ‘preached’ is to be distinguished from the Greek word ‘evangelizein’ – to proclaim good tidings. Peter is not saying that Christ preached the Gospel. Rather, He announced His triumph over evil which was bad news for the evil spirits. Many scholars have wished to interpret the phrase ‘the spirits in prison’ as a reference to departed human spirits; but it fits in with the linguistic usage of Scripture and with the reference to the days of Noah, to understand it is a reference to fallen angels.

The phrase ‘**God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat**’ speaks of the longsuffering of God. He waited to give sinners time to repent. Yet only eight people were saved – ‘diasozein’ – means to bring safely through. So, the sense is that Noah and his family were brought safely through the water. The flood was the means of their salvation. Yet, paradoxically, the flood brought judgment of death to others, while Noah and his family were delivered into a new world.

This corresponds to the paradoxical truth of the gospel that by Christ's death sinners are not only saved from death but are brought into the enjoyment of new life.

v. 21 – “And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing the dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Bible scholars call this use of ‘baptism’ an antitype or a corresponding figure, or representation, model, pattern, of the way to salvation. Just as the flood spoke of a judgment, which those in the ark were both saved from and saved by, in order to enjoy a new world, so the water of Christian baptism speaks of the death which fell upon Jesus, a death due to sinners, which believers into Christ are both saved from and saved by, and through which they enter into a new life before God. It is the resurrection of Christ that enables believers to share in this new life.

Peter deliberately adds two statements in this verse to unmistakably make clear that it is not by mere participation in the outward form of baptism that saves us. It is only Christ who can save us through His death and resurrection, not the baptismal water and its outward act. In order to share this in salvation, must enter into Christ crucified and risen! The outward baptism is the testimony of a personal self-commitment of faith in Christ and by genuine and open confession of our need for forgiveness and faith in and to God.

Another Bible scholar said it this way: “Peter might mean that, as the “water” floated the boat in which Noah and his family were saved, so “baptism” saves believers. Or he could mean that, as Noah and his family passed through the “water” to safety, so Christians pass through the waters of baptism to salvation. Finally, he might mean that, as the waters judged sin in Noah’s day, so the water of baptism washes away the sins of Christians. Peter does not mean that water baptism “saves” a person regardless of that person’s heart. He adds that baptism “saves” only “as a response to God” from (or as an appeal to God for) a “clean conscience”, thus making clear that only people exercising faith toward God will benefit from baptism.” – Richard DeHaan in his book “Good News for Bad Times.”

v. 22 – “Now, Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers accept his authority.”

In the ancient world, spiritual beings were widely believed to directly affect the course of affairs on earth. Christians needed to be reminded that Christ has already won his victory over these spiritual powers. It means that we don't need to fear the spiritual realm – see 3:14 – “But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats.”