

Exegesis of 1 Peter 3:13-22

By, Donald Swartz

[Central Conference Western Wisconsin District Pastoral Conference, October 8, 1990]

Introduction

The Apostle Peter is writing to the Christians in Asia Minor to encourage them to remain faithful to the true God in the trials and tribulations ahead. Peter is expecting these Christian brothers to be facing opposition, persecution, even perhaps martyrdom. To prepare them for these sufferings he encourages them in this first letter to “Be holy” (I Peter 1:16). Their lives are to be living testimony to their faith in Jesus Christ, their Savior, and just as He was victorious in His suffering for the sins of the world, so they too may share in His victory by remaining faithful to Him, even in the presence of unjust suffering. Peter encourages them: “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (I Peter 2:12). Peter himself states his purpose in writing: “I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (I Peter 5:12).

After the opening greeting, Peter begins his letter with the basis of our salvation found in faith in Jesus Christ (1:3-12). In view of our salvation, a practical exhortation to live in personal holiness in our relationship with God (1:13-1:21) and our fellow man (1:22-2:3) follows. He then proceeds to remind the chosen people how they are to live as “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (I Peter 2:9) while in this world (2:4-10). This is reinforced with specific encouragements: in our personal lives (2:11-12), in submission to the government (2:13-17), to others in authority over us (2:18-25), in marital relationships (3:1-7), and finally in our relationships with our fellow Christians (3:8-12).

Peter continues his encouragement to all Christians now turning his attention to the persecution he is expecting his readers to face simply because they are Christians (3:13-5:11). He relates the experience of suffering for righteousness (3:13-17) and how Christ provides our motivation to remain true to our Christian faith in times of persecution (3:18-22). In order to endure this suffering for righteousness the Christian is to be armed with the proper attitude and motivation (4:1-11). Peter then encourages steadfastness in suffering as Christians (4:12-19) with specific appeals to the elders (5:1-4) and all members (5:5-11) to place themselves in God’s care.

The exegesis before us is concerned with the Christian’s suffering for righteousness and Christ’s victory as our motivation to remain firm in our faith in times of persecution (3:13-22). Prior to this section, suffering because one is a Christian has been alluded to in 1:6 (“you may have suffered grief in all kinds of trials”), 2:12 (the pagans ...though they accuse you of doing wrong”), 2:15 (“silence the ignorant talk of foolish men”), 2:19-21 (“unjust suffering”), and 3:9 (“Do not repay evil with evil”). But now and throughout the rest of the letter the theme of suffering for the Christian faith is expounded upon. This is the central theme of Peter’s First Letter. As Lenski states: “The real purpose of Peter has now been reached, namely to enlighten, comfort, and strengthen the readers in suffering and trial” (Lenski, page 146).

We will be looking at this section of the letter in two parts. First, the Christian suffering because he is a Christian (I Peter 3:13-17) and, secondly, Christ’s victory as our motivation for remaining firm in our faith during times of persecution (I Peter 3:18-22). Edward G. Selwyn describes the section that we are going to be looking at thusly: “The blessedness and fruitfulness of Christian patience based upon the redemptive work of Christ, whose death and resurrection were of cosmic range and significance, signaling the overthrow of the powers of evil, delivering the baptized (typified in the deliverance of Noah), and issuing in Christ’s sovereignty over the whole spiritual order” (Selwyn, pages 5-6).

Part I: The Christian Suffering Because He is a Christian

There is a very definite flow of thought from the preceding verses, 8-12, to the verses before us. Peter has encouraged all of his readers to live as Christians, being righteous before God, doing good, and not to repay

evil for evil. Peter continues to encourage his readers to do good, but now he encourages them to do good in the face of suffering they may have to endure because they believe in Jesus. There is such a smooth transition from verses 8-12 to verses 13-17, that these verses are often lumped together. In fact the Historic Pericope series uses I Peter 3:8-15 as the Epistle Lesson for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, while our 3-year Lectionary uses I Peter 3:15-22 as the Epistle Lesson for the Sixth Sunday of Easter. Yet in spite of the flow of thought from the preceding verses to verse 13, a new theme is introduced by the opening clause of verse 13. The possibility that someone may wish to harm Peter's readers is introduced. This brings us to our theme: The Christian suffering because he is a Christian. "To encourage his readers to stand firm, the writer develops a number of interwoven strands of thought: the idea that the innocent man can face suffering with confidence; the basis of this confidence is Christ's victory and the privilege of sharing His passion" (Kelly, page 139).

Verse 13: And who will harm you, if you are enthusiasts for good?

Peter begins this section with the rhetorical question. The interrogative who (τίς) with the verb will harm (κακώσων -- future active participle of κακώω - to oppress, afflict, harm, maltreat - taken with εἰάν and γένησθε the aorist subjunctive of γίνομαι.) indicates a future more vivid clause or as Robinson refers to it as a condition of the third class. Here the expected answer is no one. You do not expect to be harmed if you are an enthusiast for good (objective genitive). I have chosen to translate hew ζήλωταί enthusiasts as opposed to one burning with zeal, because a zealot "is associated with a tendency to annoy and irritate others rather than with the gentleness and reverence desired in verse 15" (Best, page 132). It should also be noted here that "the KJV reading, 'followers' (minmetai), literally, 'imitators,' follows the variant reading of the Textus Receptus. That reading is not as well supported" (Hiebert, page 209).

And who will harm you, if you are enthusiasts for good? The question automatically brings our sense of justice to demand a strong negative answer. Certainly, no one should want to harm anyone who is eagerly striving to do good. Peter is certainly expecting that those who have been called to faith in Christ are going to strive to do good. Therefore, they should have no enemies. Lenski here states: "What Peter says is that zealotness for the good robs opponents of any real reason for mean treatment of the readers" (Lenski, page 147). But Peter is expecting mean treatment to come to his readers. That is why he is writing to his readers, to warn and prepare them for it. Therefore, this cannot be all that he is saying.

Here Lenski misses the continuity from verse 12, where Peter had reminded his readers that they were under the watchful hand of God. Although he is introducing a new theme of suffering because of one's faith, the smooth transition still makes us aware of the fact that God is in control. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). If we are zealous for what God wants, living as His children in faith, whatever happens in our lives causes no lasting harm for us. Kretzmann sums up the thought nicely when he says: "If the Christians at all times are zealous for that which is right and good, if they have a veritable passion for that which has the approval of the Lord, then nothing can really work lasting harm in their case, for they are under God's care and protection. The only things which really will hurt us, in time and in eternity, are disobedience, deviation from God's Word. But no enemy can take away from us the true, eternal blessings: God's grace and mercy, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, peace with God, joy in the Holy Ghost" (Kretzmann, page 532).

Verse 14: But if indeed you should suffer on account of righteousness, be happy. Do not fear their fear, nor be troubled.

This line of reasoning, "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28), is continued in verse 14. But if indeed you should suffer on account of righteousness, be happy. Note that we have εἰ καί here with the optative (πάσχοιτε optative of πάσχω to be affected either in a good sense of a bad sense, here bad because of κακώσων in verse 13 - in a potential optative with ἂν and the verb of the main clause missing or as Robinson calls it a condition of the fourth class). If we would have καί εἰ (even if) there would be

a hint of improbability, but having *εἰ καί* (If indeed or if also) treats the suffering as a matter of indifference—so what. So what if you might have to suffer account of righteousness (accusative of causation). It almost becomes a matter of indifference to the writer. If you might have suffering because of your upright behavior, be happy. I have translated *μακαριοί* be happy. Literally, it means blessed and the verb is missing. But to say you are blessed does not quite convey difference in the meaning of *μακαριοί* used here and *εὐλογοῦντες* used in 3:9 or *εὐλογητός* from 1:3. There *εὐλογοῦντες* or *εὐλογητός* focus the attention on the divine source of the blessing while *μακαριοί* concentrates on the result to the one blessed. Hence, you are happy. This, of course, corresponds to the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed (*μακαριοί*) are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).

Peter here continues his thought from verse 13, that no harm will befall God’s people, but now clarifying it so that his readers realize that being God’s children does not mean that persecution will not come. If it does, so what, you still have the one thing needful, faith in the Savior. “To consider oneself blessed when suffering persecution is not natural, and so Peter offered practical guidance. The Christian response has its demands, both negatively and positively. Negatively, Christians should not yield to the natural reactions of fear and agitation (v. 14b). Positively, they should keep Christ central in their lives and make appropriate responses to their adversaries (vv. 15-16)” (Hiebert, pages 210-211).

The negative reaction is presented with two prohibitions. Do not fear (*φοβηθήτε* aorist middle subjunctive *φοβέω*) their fear, nor be troubled (*ταραχθήτε* aorist passive subjunctive of *ταράσσω* agitate, trouble). “The force of the genitive *αὐτῶν* (“the fear of them”) can be differently understood. It may be taken in a possessive, subjective sense, ‘their fear,’ the fear that your opponents themselves feel. That is the meaning of the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 8:12, the fear that gripped the people.... If that is correct then Peter urged his Christian readers not to fear the things that their non-Christian opponents themselves dreaded. That is the interpretation of the NIV, ‘Do not fear what they fear.’ But the context does not call for that meaning. It is more natural to understand the expression to mean the fear that their enemies sought to instill in them. That is the view of the NASB: ‘And do not fear their intimidation.’ Or the genitive may be viewed as having an objective relation to fear, a fear of the people who opposed them. That is the view of the RSV, ‘Have no fear of them.’ If that is correct then the meaning is, ‘do not fear your threatening opponents.’ That is the view of Best, Kelly, Selwyn, and others” (Hiebert, page 211).

Obviously, there is a difference of opinion between scholars as to what is meant by “their fear.” Lenski seemed to confuse the issue even more for me. He states: “Peter is not quoting, but only alluding to Isaiah and thus says ‘their fear,’ the fear they would inspire in you (the subjective genitive is to be understood in this sense). The sense is: ‘Do not let them scare you!’” (Lenski, Page 149). I agree with the thought that the sense of the passage is that Peter’s readers are not to be afraid of their enemies or intimidated by what their enemies may do to them. But to me that is an objective genitive (the fear felt of someone - do not be afraid of them) as opposed to the subjective genitive (the fear felt by someone - do not be afraid of what they are afraid of). Therefore when Lenski calls *αὐτῶν* subjective genitive and explains it as I understand an objective genitive, I thought it was worth bringing to your attention.

Isaiah 8:12-13 reads: “Do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.” “What they fear” is a subjective genitive. But here in Peter, I feel that we have an objective genitive. Luther indicates this, “Have no fear of them” (Luther, page 103). This would also be in line with Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:28, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” This is echoed by Luther: “Here we have great protection and support. On this we can depend. Therefore no one can harm us. Let the world frighten, challenge, and threaten as long as it wants to - this must come to an end. But our comfort and joy will not come to an end. Therefore we should not be afraid of

the world. No, we should be courageous, before God, however, we should humble ourselves and fear” (Luther, page 103).

Verse 15: But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, ready always for defense to every one asking you a word concerning the hope in you.

Our hearts and minds will be at rest in Christ Jesus if we do as Peter says. This is the positive side of Peter’s practical guidance for what to do when the persecution comes. Instead of being afraid, sanctify (ἀγιάσατε - aorist active imperative of ἀγιάζω - sanctify, consecrate, treat as holy, reverence) or treat as holy Christ as Lord. The direct object of ἀγιάσατε is τὸν Χριστόν because it has the definite article with κύριον as a predicate accusative - Christ as Lord. Lenski disagrees with my analysis because of the allusion to Isaiah 8:13, “The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy.” He states: “Κύριον is a proper name and thus has no article. Because it is a name for God in Isaiah 8: 13, Peter must add τὸν Χριστόν since he refers “the Lord” to Christ. The article must be used to indicate that Χριστόν is a second name and thus an apposition, for Κύριον Χριστόν would be a unit designation; “Lord Christ.” Because Peter has only an allusion, the Christological import of his use of Κύριον to designate Christ is so strong. As the word refers to God’s deity in Isa. 8:13, it here refers to the deity of Christ. We are to sanctify Christ in our hearts as the prophet demands this same sanctifying of the Lord of hosts by Israel in their hearts” (Lenski, page 149). The word κύριον, Lord, is the usual Septuagint translation of the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH, Yahweh, and the Greek words can be translated as Lenski suggests. But as Selwyn and others point out “the predicative use of κύριον, i.e. ‘as Lord,’ surely gives a better sense, and does more justice to the order of the words” (Selwyn, page 192).

With either translation Peter is definitely letting his readers know that the Christ is true God. The Textus Receptus here reads τὸν θεόν instead of τὸν Χριστόν, and thus the KJV has “But sanctify the Lord God.” “Textual and transcriptional evidence supports the reading Christon” (Hiebert, page 213). “This is the correct text, not ton theon of the Textus Receptus” (Robinson, page 114). That we sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, makes sense “because the heart is the seat of the deeper emotions, the place where fear would reside, but where faith and reverence should have their home” (Kelly, page 142). The sense in the passage before us is, “In your hearts, or in the affections of the soul, regard the Lord God as holy, and act towards him with that confidence which a proper respect for one so great and holy demands. In the midst of dangers, be not intimidated; dread not what man can do, but evince proper reliance on a holy God, and flee, to him with the confidence which is due to one so glorious” (Barnes, page 1420). This is the same thought that we have in the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Hallowed be Thy name.” Just as we pray that God would help us to keep His name holy among us in our hearts, words, and deeds, so we say: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.”

In so doing this in our hearts, we ought then to be ready always for defense to every one asking you a word concerning the hope in you. Remember Peter is here writing not just to clergymen, but to all Christians in Asia Minor. This then is the duty and responsibility of each Christian to be capable of defending (ἀπολογία - apology or defense) what he believes if he is asked (αἰτοῦντι - present, active, participle αἰτέω followed by ὑμᾶς; an accusative of person, and λόγον, an accusative of thing) to give an account of the hope that is in him (what he believes). A few commentators, like Best and Selwyn, think that the ἐν ὑμῖν should be taken collectively as a reference to the whole Christian Church. If this were the case, you would expect Peter to have used faith instead of hope as the thing being inquired about. I prefer to agree with most commentators who believe that the ἐν ὑμῖν refers to each individual with his own personal conviction concerning his hope in the Savior. Peter basically says that as part of treating Christ as holy we are to be prepared to speak about our hope that is founded in Jesus Christ. Luther is certainly in agreement with this. “Here we shall have to admit that St. Peter is addressing these words to all Christians, to priests, laymen, men and women, young and old, and in whatever station they are.

Therefore it follows from this that every Christian should account for his faith and be able to give a reason and an answer when necessary. Now up to this time the laity has been forbidden to read Scripture. For here the devil came up with a pretty trick for the purpose of tearing the people away from Scripture. He thought: 'If I can keep the laity from reading Scripture, then I shall bring the priests from the Bible into Aristotle.' Then the priests can babble what they please, and the laity has to listen to what they preach to them. Otherwise, if the laity were to read Scripture, the priests would also have to study, lest they be rebuked and overridden. But note that St. Peter tells every one of-as to be prepared to make a defense of our faith" (Luther, page 105).

Verse 16: But with gentleness and respect having a good conscience in order that when you are spoken against, the ones reviling your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

Peter continues with the thought that our defense is to be made with gentleness (*πραΰτητος* humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness) and respect (*φόβον* - fear, awe). Gentleness is not to be confused with weakness, but rather to be considered with humility. A Christian having full confidence in his own faith should express that confidence while avoiding any sign of arrogance. It is by God's grace that we are Christians and that alone should keep us humble. This gentle spirit of humbleness in expressing our faith should be accompanied with respect, that is the respect of fear or awe. The fear is certainly not in the sense of being afraid of something, but rather the respect of reverence and caution, reverence for the seriousness of the subject we are speaking about and caution, for when we talk to others about our faith, it may be the difference for them of coming to faith or remaining in unbelief. As Luther states: "When you are challenged and are questioned with regard to your faith, you should not answer with proud words and act defiantly and violently, as though you wanted to uproot trees. No, you should conduct yourself reverently and humbly, as though you were standing before God's tribunal and had to give an answer there" (Luther, page 108).

As you give your account of faith having (*ἔχοντες* - present participle) a good conscience. We have a good conscience by being right with God in thought, word, and deed. This is important in order that (purpose clause) when (*ἐν ᾧ* - literally "in which" referring to the preceding thought, with gentleness and respect having a good conscience) you are spoken against (*καταλαλεῖσθε* - present indicative passive of *καταλαλέω* slander or speak evil of), the ones reviling (*ἐπηρέαζοντες* - present participle of *ἐπηρέάζω* - threaten, mistreat, abuse) your good conduct (*ἀναστροφῆν* - way of life, behavior) in Christ may be put to shame (*καταισχυνθῶσιν* aorist passive subjunctive *καταισχύνω* - dishonor, disgrace, in passive - be put to shame, be humiliated). Your good conduct in Christ is the ability to lead a good life. This is a special blessing Christians have been given. Since we have been brought to faith in Christ by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, who was sent by Christ for that purpose (John 16:5-15) we have the forgiveness of sins with its blessings and also the power, according to the new man, to serve God. Only Christians can do good works (John 15:5). Without Christ's saving work and His sending the Holy Spirit we would have neither the forgiveness of sins or the power to serve God. Therefore, our good conduct as Christians is in Christ. When this good conduct in Christ is being slandered, our conscience is clear by being right with God.

Verse 17: For if the will of God wills, it is better to suffer doing good than doing evil.

Peter now sums up the whole situation for the Christian. Robinson calls this a condition of the fourth class (*θέλωι* - present optative of *θέλω* with *ει*). The improbability of this happening under normal conditions is shown by the optative. But these are not 'normal conditions. Peter is expecting suffering to come to his readers and is preparing them for it. Now when the suffering comes, make sure you don't deserve it Peter says here. This is somewhat of an echo of I Peter 2:20, "But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God." As Barnes states: "If we are to suffer, let it be by the direct hand of God, and not by any fault of our own. If we suffer then, we shall have the testimony of our own conscience in our favour, and the feeling that we may go to

God for support. If we suffer for our faults, in addition to outward pain of body, we shall endure the severest pangs which man can suffer - those which the guilty mind inflicts in itself” (Barnes, page 1422).

Of course, in an even more serious sense, we can say that it is better to suffer now for doing what is right as a child of God, than to suffer later in the judgment for doing wrong (not being a Christian). This thought would not only sum up verses 13-17, but would carry us into verses 18-22 as we see the exaltation of Christ Jesus presented. We are to cheerfully submit to God’s will and what follows in verses 18-22 is ample motivation for cheerfully obeying our Lord.

Part II: Christ’s Victory as Our Motivation for Remaining Firm in Our Faith in Times of Persecution

Verse 18: Because indeed Christ died for sins once, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous in order that he might bring you to God, being quickened in the spirit.

The *ὅτι καί* (because indeed) refers back to the whole section, verses 13-17, concerning suffering on behalf of your faith in the Savior. The fact that the section is summed up in verse 17 makes the flow of thought into verses 18-22 a very smooth transition. Although the beginning of verse 18 is similar to I Peter 2:21, “Because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example.” The suffering of Christ is here not going to be brought out as an example. Here we shall see the Savior, his suffering over, exalted over the disobedient spirits in hell and now ruling at God’s right hand in heaven. In Christ’s victory we find the Christian’s reason for becoming a Christian and remaining a Christian even in spite of persecution. That theme of the undeserved suffering of Christ for righteousness is to encourage Peter’s readers to stand fast in their faith in their own suffering with the assurance of their coming triumph in the risen and exalted Savior.

Because indeed Christ died for sins once, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous in order that he might bring you to God. There are some textual variants here. The Nestle text has *ἀπέθανεν* (aorist indicative of *ἀποθνήσκω*- to die) while the Textus Receptus (KJV) has *ἔπαθεν* (aorist indicative of *πάσχω* - to suffer). According to Arndt and Gingrich *πάσχω* also carries the idea of suffering unto death. That Christ suffered unto death is made clear in this passage by *θανατωθείς* (aorist passive participle of *θανατώω* - being put to death). Therefore neither reading would change the thought produced here. To show how evenly scholars are divided on which is the correct reading here, you need only look at Nestle-Aland (26th ed.) and United Bible Societies (3rd ed.) to find suffered while United Bible Societies (1st ed.) and Nestle-Aland (24th ed.) have died (from Hiebert, page 221). “The manuscript evidence for died is stronger” (Hiebert, page 221). “The textual evidence favors it” (died - Arichea and Nida, page 111). “A number of manuscripts also have the words ‘for us’ or ‘for you,’ but they seem to be scribal glosses to make the statement more personal” (Hiebert, page 221).

The significance of the word, whether you choose *ἀπέθανεν* or *ἔπαθεν*, lies in the aorist tense. This was an act done once (*ἅπαξ*) for all time. The force of the aorist indicates the action is finished. When Christ died His work of atonement was done. “For sins (literally ‘concerning sin’ or ‘on behalf of sin’) is a common phrase used for the sin-offering in the Old Testament (Lev.5.7; 6.30; Ezek 43.21; compare Psa 39.8). But whereas the sin offering has to be offered repeatedly, Christ’s death is once and for all” (Arichea and Nida, page 111). The reason for the suffering of the Savior was *περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν* - because of sins. What this means is certainly clarified by *δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων* the Righteous (singular) for the unrighteous (Plural). The Righteous Jesus died because of the sins of the unrighteous ones: The preposition *ὑπὲρ* is here used with the genitive of person. The contrast here points out the innocence of the righteous Jesus (He is, specifically called the Righteous in I John 2:1): Who could not justly be accused of any sin (John 8:46), offering Himself for the sins of men (Hebrews 9:28, Romans 4:25).

His reason for offering Himself is described in the *ἵνα* (purpose) clause, in order that he might bring (*προσαγάγῃ* aorist subjunctive of *προσάγω* a to bring) you to God. The thrust of the verb implies an actual

beginning of an intimate personal relationship. There is a variant reading here for ὑμᾶς (you). The reading is ἡμᾶς (us). “The textual editors and the English versions differ on the reading accepted as original. The confusion, present elsewhere, reflects the similarity of pronunciation of the two forms in New Testament times. The first person seems more natural as denoting all believers; but it may be argued that copyists would be more likely to change the second person, which applies the teaching to the readers, to the first person. The meaning is clear with either reading” (Hiebert, page 223).

Peter here summarizes Jesus atoning work. This is what He accomplished through His work. This summary closes the references to His humiliation. What follows is not part of the atonement but proof of its success. Peter moves on giving what follows in point of time. Death is mentioned in sharp contrast to life. Being put to death (θανατωθεῖς aorist passive participle of θανατώω) in the flesh but quickened (ζωοποιηθεῖς aorist passive participle of ζωοποιέω to make alive) in the spirit. The KJV and the NIV both translate πνεύματι (spirit) with a capital S - by the Spirit. This translation indicates their thinking of πνεύματι as a dative of agent. But they translate σαρκί (flesh) as 6 dative of reference - in the flesh (KJV), in the body (NIV). This cannot be right because the grammatical structure would be thrown out of balance by using different types of datives here. They must both be datives of agent or datives of reference. They both cannot be datives of agent (or instrument) because put to death by means of the flesh does not make sense. Therefore they should be understood as datives of reference - in the flesh and in the spirit.

Now what does in the flesh and in the spirit mean? Luther says: “The little word ‘flesh’ occurs frequently in Scripture. So does the little word ‘spirit.’ And the apostles commonly contrast the two with each other. This is now the meaning: Through His suffering Christ was taken from the life which is flesh and blood just like a human being on earth, who lives in flesh and blood, walks and stands; eats, drinks, sleeps, is awake, sees, hears, touches and feels, and, in short, does what the body does. This is transitory. To it Christ died. St. Paul calls it the corpus animate, the ‘physical body’ (I Cor. 15:44), that is, life like that of an animal. In the flesh, not according to the flesh, that is, in the natural functions of the body. To this life he has died, so that this life has ceased with Him, and He has now been transferred into another life, has been made alive according to the spirit, and has entered into a spiritual and supernatural life which embraces the whole life that Christ now has in body and soul. Consequently, He no longer has a physical body but has a body that is spiritual. This is the way Paul expresses it” (Luther, page 111). Σαρκί and πνεύματι cannot mean merely flesh (body) and spirit (soul), because then we would have the problem of how Jesus’ soul can be said to be made alive. In order to make the soul alive we would have to assume that the soul died with the body. Nor can they refer to the two natures of Christ, human and divine, because we would then be splitting the two natures apart. Therefore what most be meant here is what Luther says. They, σαρκί and πνεύματι must denote two modes or spheres of existence. His physical mode of existence in a natural body σαρκί, and His spiritual mode of existence in a glorified body. My understanding therefore is that Christ descended into hell, not only according to His divine nature, but whole and entire, the quickened and glorified Savior, true God and true man in one Person. The union of the two natures make it impossible for a fragmented Christ to have descended into hell. “This quickening was made in the spirit, or with respect to the Spirit, that is, in the new glorified state, in which Christ, in His transformed and glorified body, lived, acted, and moved about, came and went as a spirit. In this spirit, in this new spirit-life, glorified and exalted, Christ, the God-man, according to His soul and body, retaining His flesh and blood in a glorified form, went forth, as our triumphant Champion, into the abode of the damned and of the devils, and there proclaimed His victory to the spirits in prison, that is, in hell, specifically to those who are further described” (Kretzmann, pages 533-534).

Verse 19: In which also going to the spirits in prison he preached,

Now let us turn our attention to the descent into hell. Luther begins his comments on verses 19-22 by saying: “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 means” (Luther, page 113). With this encouragement, let us proceed into verse 19. In which (ἐν ᾧ) refers to πνεύματι, that is His glorified state. The πορευθείς is an aorist participle denoting a single act of going to a place. The place here is φυλακῆ (prison). The only interpretation for this can be hell. There He preached (ἐκήρυξεν aorist active indicative of κηρύσσω - announce, or make known). Paul indicates what Jesus preached to the spirits in hell in Colossians 2:15: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” This was then an announcement of His victory.

Verse 20: To disobedient ones such as once when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. In which a few, that is 8 persons, were saved through water.

Christ’s victory was announced to the disobedient ones such as once when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared. The ἀπειθήσασιν (aorist participle of ἀπειθέω to be disobedient) refers to the spirits to whom Jesus preached, but because of the lack of definite article does not limit itself to the example coming up as being the only spirits preached to. Therefore πότε ὅτε (once when) does not limit τοῖς πνεύμασιν, but rather gives an example of such spirits, and the example used is of Noah’s day when the patience of God waited (ἀπεξεδέχετο - imperfect of ἀπεκδέχομαι) while the ark was being built (κατασκευαζομένης - present passive participle κατασκευάζω prepare, make, here used in a genitive absolute). Although God waited patiently for their repentance, the repentance did not come. God’s continuous waiting during the 120 years of grace is shown by the use of the imperfect. During this time the building of the ark stood as a continual call for repentance.

At the time of the flood, Whitcomb and Morris estimate that there were 1,030 million people alive on the earth. They assumed that each family had at least 6 children and that each new generation required 90 years on the average. Considering the long life span, 6 children would allow for other children who died prematurely or did not marry. With 18 generations from Adam to the flood, there would be 258 million people alive in the 17th generation and 774 million people alive in the 18th generation. Assuming both generations were alive at the time of the flood, there would be 1,030 million people. Out of these people only 8 souls were saved (διεώθησαν - aorist passive of διασώζω - rescue, bring safely through) by means of water. Note Peter here writes ψυχαί (souls, persons) as opposed to πνεύματα (the disembodied spirits whose bodies were still on earth. Those 8 persons were saved by water raising up the ark and floating it, while that same water caused the destruction of all other people.

Verse 21: Which by way of a type baptism also now saves us, not putting away of the filth of the flesh but an answer of a good conscience, toward God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

“Which’ (ho), a nominative neuter relative pronoun, is strongly attested as the original reading, but it is difficult to construe. That difficulty is attested by the variations in the manuscripts. Erasmus adopted the dative on the basis of some cursive manuscripts, thus forming the basis for the reading in the Textus Receptus. On the basis of textual evidence, Westcott and Hort retained the nominative, though Hort regarded it as ‘a primitive error.’ A few modern scholars favor the dative, but the neuter nominative is commonly accepted as original. The antecedent to that relative cannot be the ark since it is a feminine noun. The antecedent is either water or, more simply, the intended antecedent may be the entire preceding picture of Noah and his family in the ark being saved through water” (Hiebert, page 232-233). Lenski states: “The subject is ὅ, its antecedent is ‘water.’ The preliminary apposition to ὅ is ἀντίτυπον: water ‘as a type’ saves you now, namely as a type of the water ‘by means of which’ Noah and his family were brought safely through the food judgment. The final apposition

βάπτισμα states which water has this saving effect; ‘baptism,’ the suffix –μα denoting a result, the accomplished baptism. Two further appositions follow, but these define what the inner effect of baptism is, i.e., show how it indeed ‘saves’” (Lenski, page 170).

Ἀντίτυπος is used to express a copy of an original. It is only used elsewhere in Hebrew 9:24; “For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself.” The copy is inferior to the original. This is certainly the case in the fact that the water of baptism saves man in a far higher and more important way than the water of the flood saved Noah. Peter clarifies how the water of baptism saves. Not as a putting away of the filth of the flesh. Baptism is more than removing dirt from the body. Baptism saves because it is the answer of a good conscience toward God. Remembering that the term, good conscience, was used back in verse 16 in the sense of being right with God in thought, word, and deed, the answer of a good conscience is one made to God by us. God puts the question to us, do we want a good conscience, one that is right with Him. We ask God for a good conscience (to be right with Him) in the act of baptism, by obeying the command to be baptized. We receive a good conscience through this act of obedience as the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts. In baptism God bestows something on us that becomes ours, here called a good conscience toward God. Baptism saves us because through baptism we are able to approach God with a good conscience because our sins are forgiven.

Of course, the forgiveness is dependent upon Christ’s atoning work on Calvary, which was made clear to us by His resurrection. Without his death resurrection there is no baptism, no salvation, no conscience cleansing to offer us comfort when we are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Baptism does not save because of its washing effect or because of the loyalty either of the one being baptized or the one baptizing. It saves because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For His resurrection assures us that the sacrifice that He made to God the Father was accepted as full payment for the sins of the world. His resurrection and what follows in verse 22, assures us of His full exaltation. And it is that assurance of Christ’s present exaltation, after suffering and dying here on earth, that is to sustain us in the true faith in spite of persecution that results because of our faith.

Verse 22: Who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being subjected to Him.

The demonstrative relative ὅς is a nominative “he who.” The picture for us is clear. Jesus triumphant and, exalted is in the position of honor and authority. There He reigns with unrestrained use of His divine power and majesty. “Immediately after the words ‘on the right hand of God,’ the Vulgate has a remarkable gloss: ‘swallowing down death, the we might be made heirs of life everlasting.’ The clause was in the pre-Vulgate text of Augustine, apparently the translation of a Greek gloss. Though not authentic, it is instructive since it reveals how in the mind of the student who wrote it the thought of the quickened Christ as the Life-giver ran through the paragraph concerning His suffering” (Hiebert, page 237). The word for having gone, πορευθείς, (aorist participle of πορεύομαι) is the same word used for the descent into hell in verse 19. Now He is in heaven with all angels, authorities, and powers (apparently 3 ranks of spiritual beings) being subjected (ὑποταγέτων - aorist passive participle of ὑποτάσσω used in a genitive absolute) to Him. Every thing in heaven and on earth are subjected to His authority. Is it any wonder that we may place our assurance and trust in time of persecution in our Savior’s outstretched arms? He, who rules in all eternity as the Almighty God with all things put under His feet will certainly guard and protect the members of His church on earth in the midst of all tribulations and persecution. Here is the assurance that nothing can harm us if we stand firm in what is right with the Lord.

Bibliography

- Arichea, Daniel C. and Nida, Eugene A. *A Translator's Handbook on The First Letter from Peter*. New York, New York: United Bible Societies, 1980.
- Barnes, Albert. *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregge Publications, 1975.
- Bauer, Walter, Arndt, William, & Gingrich, F. Wilbur. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Best, Ernest. *New Century Bible I Peter*. Greenwood, S.C.: The Attic Press, Inc., 1977.
- Crosby, Henry Lamar, and Schaeffer, John Nevin. *An Introduction to Greek*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966.
- Lenski, R.C.H. *The Interpretation of I and II Epistle of Peter, the three Epistle of John, and the Epistle of Jude*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966.
- Hiebert, D. Edmond, *First Peter An Expository Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1984.
- Kelly, J.N.D. *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969.
- Kretzmann, Paul E. *Popular Commentary of the Bible, New Testament Vol. II*. St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1923.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works Vol. 30 The Catholic Epistles*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967.
- Robertson, A.T. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1934.
- Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament Vol. VI The General Epistles and the Revelation of John*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1933.
- Selwyn, E.G. *The First Epistle of St. Peter*. London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1977.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974.
- Whitcomb, John C. and Morris, Henry M. *The Genesis Flood*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1968.