

## I Peter 3

### 3:18-22. Christ Also Suffered For Righteousness' Sake

The thought of the believers' suffering unjustly brings Peter back to the sufferings of Christ which brought about eternal redemption for those who will receive Christ as Savior.

**(18) For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit:**

**(19) By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;**

**(20) Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.**

**(21) The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:**

**(22) Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.**

#### 3:18

**For** is the word ordinarily translated *because*. Its use here indicates that the Lord Jesus Christ is being cited as an example of someone Who was in the center of God's will and Who suffered for doing good. Since Jesus suffered for righteousness' sake, the believer should not be surprised if he is also called upon to suffer for righteousness' sake. Christ's suffering is thus given as the reason for what Peter has written in verses 13-17. He had suffered for righteousness' sake. He did not fear their terror and was not troubled. He sanctified the Lord as God in His heart. He was always ready to give an answer for the hope that should be in men. When He spoke, it was with meekness and respect. He had a good conscience and a good manner of life. In fact, He was sinless and perfect in every way. Yet, He was crucified upon the cross at Calvary; but it was all done according to God's will. **Christ** is our Lord and Savior. Believers are here reminded of what He did for them and of the pattern

He established for suffering. **Also** suggests that what He did was similar to what believers may be called upon to do: He suffered unjustly, and they may also be called upon to suffer unjustly. Believers are not the only ones who have suffered unjustly: so they should never begin to feel sorry for themselves or to feel that they are all alone in their sufferings.

**Hath once suffered for sins** indicates that His suffering was completed at the cross. **Once** is *once for all (time)*. It was a never-to-be-repeated experience. He does not suffer over and over again. He suffered for sins on only one occasion. The same word was used in Hebrews 6:4,

(4) For *it is* impossible for those who were **once** enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost.

It was also used in Hebrews 9:28,

(28) So Christ was **once** offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

It was again used in Hebrews 10:2,

(2) For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers **once** purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

It also reminds us of Hebrews 10:10-14 where a strengthened form of the same word is used:

(10) By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**.

(11) And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away

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sins:

(12) But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God;

(13) From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

(14) For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

**Hath suffered** is the same word Peter has used before. It was the slaves who had done well and suffered in 2:20. It was used of Christ in 2:23, of suffering for righteousness' sake in 1:14, and of suffering for well-doing rather than for evil-doing in 3:17. It will be used again in 4:1 of Christ and also in 4:19 of suffering according to the will of God. It means *experience* or *be treated* and is used of every kind of experience or treatment, whether of good or ill. It came to be used less and less frequently in a good sense; and in almost all places it came to mean treatment in an unfavorable sense, i.e. to *suffer* or *endure*. **For sins** gives the reason Christ suffered. **For** is used in the sense of *on behalf of* and, when used with sins, suggests to *take away* or *atone for* sins. His suffering was on behalf of sins to take them away. He had no sins of His own for which He had to die. He gave His life as an offering for sin. Likewise, Paul wrote in Romans 8:3, . . . *God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*. John also wrote in I John 2:2, *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world*.

**The just for the unjust** tells us that Christ died as a substitute for the sins of all others. It is another way of saying what Peter has just said in the previous phrase. He died in the place of others who deserved to die for their own sins. **The just** is a direct reference to Christ. *Just* means *just one*, *upright one*, or *righteous one*. *The* does not appear in the Greek text before *just* indicating that Christ's quality as just or righteous is being emphasized. The verbal idea of *hath suffered* must be supplied from the previous phrase to complete the thought. **For the unjust** tells us for whom Christ suffered. It is the *unrighteous ones* or the *unjust ones*. As with *the just*, *the* does not appear in the Greek text before *unjust ones* which tells us that their quality as unjust

or unrighteous ones is being emphasized. Now it is not limited in any way by the context. It is for the entire class or group of *unjust ones*. Since *all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23), and since *there is none righteous, no, not one* (Romans 3:10), Christ suffered in His death on the cross at Calvary for every human being who ever lived. His blood was shed for all of the *unjust* or *unrighteous* ones and becomes effective for each individual unrighteous person at the instant he places his trust in Christ as his own personal Savior. It is thereby limited only in its effect and not in any way in its intent. It is applied to everyone who believes. **For** is *on behalf of* or *instead of* and clearly indicates substitution. He took the place of all unrighteous ones. They deserved to be there dying on that cross paying for their own sins, but He died there in their place paying for their sins so that they would not have to pay for them themselves.

**That he might bring us to God** indicates the purpose of the Just One's suffering on behalf of the unjust ones. It was in order that He might bring us to God the Father. **That** is used to introduce this purpose clause and is to be understood in the sense of *in order that* or *for the purpose that*. **He** is Christ, the Just One. **Might bring us to** implies *might bring us forward to* where *us* refers to believers, those unjust ones who have received Christ as Savior by faith. **God** is God the Father. We have access to God because of Christ's work on the cross. Christ has opened the way of access to God the Father for all believers, thereby reconciling them to Him. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:18, *For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father*. He also wrote in Ephesians 3:12, *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him*. Since we have access to God the Father, the writer of the book of Hebrews could write in Hebrews 4:16, *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*. Some day Christ will return for believers and take them to heaven where God the Father dwells and where He will then present them to God the Father.

**Being put to death in the flesh** indicates the manner in which Christ suffered. He suffered by being put to death physically. It was when, as the sacrificial Lamb of God, He shed His precious

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blood on the cross at Calvary in order to atone for the sins of all mankind. One remembers, of course, that it was not just death of any kind, as if death by strangulation, by heart attack, by stroke, by accident, by disease, or by some other means might suffice to bring us to God. It was death by crucifixion and not the sort of crucifixion whereby He might have been tied to a cross and left there to die, perhaps by strangulation, exposure, exhaustion, or some other means, but by the shedding of His blood. In fact, after shedding His blood, but before He died by dismissing His spirit, He triumphantly shouted, *It is finished*, referring to His blood atonement satisfying the righteous demands of the Law (John 19:30). After He completed the atonement, He then immediately gave up the ghost. It was no swoon or fainting spell. It was death. He *did* die. **In the flesh** indicates that He died physically, and Peter emphasizes the fact that it was *in flesh* or physical. *The* does not appear before *flesh* in the Greek text thereby indicating that its quality as flesh is being stressed. He was no phantom as the gnostics claimed; He died physically.

**But quickened by the spirit** indicates that it was the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. **But** indicates a contrast between His death and His resurrection. **Quickened** is *made alive*, or *given life to*; and He is alive forevermore (Revelation 1:18). He will never again die. Also for Him to be made alive it is presupposed that He was in fact dead. He had to be dead before He could be made alive. **By the spirit** indicates that it was the Holy Spirit who gave life to Christ and raised Him from the dead. **By** is to be understood as *by means of*. As far as the Greek text is concerned *spirit* may be used of the Holy Spirit or of Christ's human spirit. Although understanding it as Christ's human spirit provides a parallel with Christ's flesh, the issue will be ultimately decided on the basis of how one understands the next verse. This writer understands it as a reference to the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, rather than to Christ's spirit.

### 3:19

Verse 19 indicates that Christ preached by the Holy Spirit to the spirits in prison. **By which** refers

to the Holy Spirit. It was by means of the Holy Spirit that Christ preached. This implies that Christ was not necessarily doing the preaching directly. His preaching was done indirectly. He preached through someone else who actually served as the human mouthpiece. If, on the other hand, **spirit** is a reference to Christ's human spirit, then *by which* should be understood as *in which*, meaning in Christ's human spirit. **Also** indicates that Christ's preaching as mentioned here was in addition to His suffering. Although this preaching was done indirectly, His suffering was done directly. **He** is Christ. **Went** indicates that Christ proceeded to wherever the spirits were at the time of the preaching, **and He preached** unto them there. *Preached* is *announced*, *proclaimed*, or *made known*. What He preached is not specified in verse 19. **Unto the spirits** indicates the group to whom Christ preached. Who these spirits were is not specified in verse 19. **In prison** is a prepositional phrase used as an adjective modifying *the spirits*. It is literally *the in-prison spirits*. Since it does not modify *preached* thereby indicating the location of the preaching, it does not necessarily tell where these spirits were when He went to them and preached. Thus, *in prison* is to be understood as the place where these spirits were confined or guarded at the time Peter wrote his epistle, but they were not necessarily *in prison* at the time Christ preached to them by means of the Holy Spirit. What prison this was or where it was located, Peter does not specify.

A number of views of this difficult text have been suggested. For example some have held that Christ following His crucifixion went to Hades and preached to the spirits of the unsaved dead, giving them a second chance to be saved. Such contradicts Scripture which knows nothing of a second chance; and, therefore, this writer rejects this view without hesitation. In fact, Hebrews 9:27-28 says, *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many. . . .* This clearly teaches that one had better take care of the matter of his salvation before he dies because he will not have another opportunity after death. Jesus' words in John 5:28-29 indicate the same thing.

(28) Marvel not at this: for the hour is

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coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

(29) And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

No hint is given of any second chance. In fact, the opposite is the case. Whatever one did that was good or evil was obviously done before he died. In the account of the rich man in Hades in Luke 16:25-28 Luke wrote,

(25) But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

(26) And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence.

(27) Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

(28) For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

It has also been suggested that Christ went to the demons confined in Tartarus where He proclaimed what He had done and where He proclaimed victory over Satan without giving these demons a chance to be delivered. This supposedly occurred between the crucifixion and the resurrection. This view requires that *spirit* in verse 18 be Christ's human spirit rather than the Holy Spirit. This view believes that Genesis 6:1-4 speaks of angels cohabiting with men, with the result that these angels were cast into Tartarus and with the result that men became increasingly ungodly and God brought the flood upon them. If one believes that the *sons of God* in Genesis 6:1-4 are angels, he will probably accept this view here in I Peter. If, however, one believes as this writer does that the *sons of God* are not angels but either the godly line of Seth or, perhaps better, all the godly, he can be expected to reject

this view here. The expositor will have difficulties in Genesis 6 no matter which view he accepts. All views of that passage have some inherent difficulties. While this view that the sons of God are fallen angels has much to commend it and is held by men who believe the Bible, and while it may indeed be so, this writer believes that there is a better explanation though it also has some difficulties.

This third view is that Christ preached by the Holy Spirit through Noah while Noah was still alive and was in process of building the ark. Christ was the preacher; Noah was the mouthpiece. Noah was *a preacher of righteousness* (II Peter 2:5). This means that he was telling his contemporaries how to attain the righteousness that they needed. These persons rejected the message and subsequently died. At the time of their death their spirits were imprisoned in hades awaiting the resurrection to the Great White Throne Judgment at which time they will be cast into the lake of fire, also known as Gehenna or hell. The preaching took place in Noah's day *while the ark was a preparing*, and their spirits were imprisoned in hades at the times of their deaths and remained in hades in Peter's day when Peter wrote his epistle. This view would require *spirit* in verse 18 to be the Holy Spirit. One of the main difficulties is that the term *spirits* in verse 19 is not used elsewhere in the New Testament to designate human beings. However, this writer believes that the liabilities inherent in this view are more acceptable than the liabilities in the view which regards these *spirits* as the fallen angels in Tartarus.

### 3:20

**Which . . . were disobedient** describes *the . . . spirits*. It means that they were disobedient in the sense that they did not obey the message. It is to be understood in the sense *who were disbelieving* or *who were unbelievers*. They were disobedient to the message of salvation which Noah, a preacher of righteousness, proclaimed. Inasmuch as Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their three daughters-in-law were the only ones saved on the ark, this entire group who lived until the time of the flood remained unbelievers until the day in which they died. Any

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who responded favorably to Noah's preaching must have died before the flood. **Sometime** is *at some time or other (of the past), once, or formerly*. At one time in the past they were disobedient or unbelieving. Now they were in prison.

**When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah** gives the time that the preaching took place. **Once** is *once for all (time)*. It was used also in verse 18 where Christ **once** suffered for sins, the just for the unjust. **Longsuffering** means *patience or forbearance (toward others)*. **Of God** indicates that it was God's longsuffering that waited. Now this was not just any God; it was God the Father, the God of the Bible. It might also include God the Son as well as God the Holy Spirit. In which case it would be a reference to the Triune God. **Waited** is to be understood in the sense of *expected*, and its tense denotes continuous action in past time. It is used in the sense of *was looking for, was expecting, was waiting for, or was awaiting*. **In the days of Noah** is literally *in Noah's days*. It indicates the time in which God's patience was waiting. *In Noah's days* is when Christ preached to the spirits who are now in prison. **While the ark was a preparing** further limits the time Christ preached to these spirits. It was not throughout the lifetime of Noah but only during the 120 years during which the ark was being built. **The ark**, of course, is the one Noah built. **Was a preparing** is *was being made ready, was being built, or was being constructed*.

**Wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water** indicates that eight people were saved from death in the flood by being on the ark. **Wherein** is *in which or upon which* and refers to the ark. **Few** is used in contrast to the many who died in the flood and is later limited to **eight**. **Souls** is used in the sense of *lives*. These eight souls were Noah; his wife; their three sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth; and the three wives of Ham, Shem, and Japheth. **Were saved** is physical deliverance from the destruction of the flood. It is used in the sense of *were brought safely through, were rescued, or were delivered*. **By water** is *by means of water*. It was the same waters which drowned those who rejected the preaching of Noah that buoyed up the ark resulting in the preservation of Noah and his

family. In reality, the water did not save Noah. If he had not been on the ark, the water would have drowned him along with the rest.

### 3:21

**The like figure** is literally *corresponding to*. It is a fulfillment of the type. The type was the saving of Noah and his family, and the antitype, i.e. the fulfillment of this type, is baptism. **Whereunto** is *to which or by which*. **Baptism** is believer's baptism. It was first practiced by John the Baptist, and Jesus Himself was baptized by John. It was made part of the Great Commission by Christ and was practiced by the local churches. In the New Testament only those who had already been saved were baptized, and baptism was always and only by immersion. **Also** suggests that, in addition to water saving the eight souls in verse 20, baptism **doth now save us**. Throughout the New Testament, however, baptism was only and always practiced on those who had been previously saved. Baptism did not then, and does not now, actually save them from their sins any more than the water itself saved the lives of Noah and his family. Had it not been for the ark, Noah and his family would have drowned along with the rest of the people. Instead, baptism pictures the union of the believer with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The one being baptized is publicly proclaiming that Christ is his Savior. He is confessing his trust in Christ's death for sin upon the cross, in Christ's burial, and in Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead. He believes that Christ died for sin and rose again from the dead, and he is saved because he does. By his immersion the one being baptized is publicly testifying that he is dead and buried to the old way of life just as Christ died and was buried. By his coming out of the water, just as Christ was raised from the dead, the believer is testifying publicly that he intends to live the rest of his life for the Lord. (Compare Romans 6:4-12). **Us** is limited to believers.

**Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God** limits the way by which baptism saves us. Negatively, it is not putting away the filth of the

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flesh; but, positively, it is the answer of a good conscience toward God. **Putting away** is *removal* or *getting rid of*. **Filth** is literally *dirt*. Figuratively it is *uncleanness*. *Filth* describes it well. **Flesh** is not physical flesh as if Peter were saying that baptism is more than just a bath. *Flesh* refers instead to the old sin nature. Baptism does not save from sin as if it removed our old sin nature, and Peter made that clear to his readers. Instead, baptism is *the answer of a good conscience toward God*. **Answer** is *request* or *appeal*. **Conscience** is *moral consciousness*, and it is **good** in the sense that it is clear. **Toward God** indicates the direction or focal point of his good conscience: it is good toward God. He has not seared his conscience by disobedience. He has been saved by the grace of God through faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows that his sins have been forgiven, and he has taken the first step of obedience in the Christian life, that of baptism, thus getting his Christian life off to a good start and in the right direction.

**By the resurrection of Jesus Christ** indicates the means through which we were saved. Apart from the resurrection of Jesus Christ there would be no salvation. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:12-20:

- (12). Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?
- (13) But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:
- (14) And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.
- (15) Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: Whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.
- (16) For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:
- (17) And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.
- (18) Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.
- (19) If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.
- (20) But now is Christ risen from the dead,

and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

If it were not for the fact that Christ rose from the dead, the believer would not now have a good conscience. Similarly, Peter wrote in I Peter 1:3 that God the Father has begotten us unto a living hope *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*.

### 3:22

**Who is gone into heaven** indicates where Christ is now. **Who** refers to Christ. Following His resurrection Christ ascended into heaven where He is on the right hand of God. That Christ **is on the right hand of God** indicates that He is co-reigning with God the Father over the entire creation. **Angels and authorities and powers** are three designations of spirit beings. Peter is referring to the entire class or group of angels, and the entire class of authorities, and the entire class of powers under consideration. None are omitted from consideration. *Authorities* is translated *powers* in Ephesians 6:12. *Powers* is used also in Romans 8:38-39:

- (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
- (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Authority* and *power* are both used in I Corinthians 15:24:

- (24) Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and authority and power.

**Being made subject to him** is descriptive of the angels, authorities, and powers. It means that they were subjected to or subordinated to Christ. He is sovereign over them. They obey Him.