

FIRST PETER 3:15b-18 “The Just for the Unjust”

1 Peter 3:15-20 ¹⁵ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; ¹⁶ and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. ¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, ²⁰ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.

Last week we spent some time dealing with the exhortation from Peter to, 'set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer (a defense) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.'

The defense Peter was talking about was the objective truth of God's solution to our sin problem as it's found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But one thing I didn't have time to touch on last week was the end of that verse which states, "do this with gentleness and respect,"

This might seem obvious, but I've seen otherwise calm discussions regarding God's word turn into verbal brawls and things turn ugly in a hurry. And I think Peter is simply reminding us that when we get the opportunity to give a defense or an answer concerning the hope we have in Christ we need to be sensitive to the person we're talking to and try to understand where they're coming from.

A person who wants to be confrontational with you may need a short sharp answer given with confidence and boldness, yet not in a retaliatory way, but in a way that lets them know that you really are concerned for their eternal welfare. A person who has doubts or just doesn't know can be dealt with in a gentler way.

Everyone is different and everyone should be approached in a way that is best for them. Paul understood this and he was a man who dealt with all types of people ranging from angry Jews to suspicious Gentiles.

But he said in COL 4:3-6 "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

And so basically he's saying just keep in mind who you're talking to and approach them with the truth in a way where Christ will be exalted in your words and in your actions. Also keep in mind that it is God who has given you the opportunity and it is God who is with you in that situation. And so in reverence to Him represent Him faithfully.

And as we are faithful to do that our behavior can't be questioned as something meant to belittle or hurt someone. This is partially why Peter continues with this thought in the next verse. 16 "keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

Now their shame may or may not occur in our lifetime. The shame may be associated at the time such a person stands before God, or it may happen in this life when they come to realize how they were actually coming against God and are now ashamed, and desire to humble themselves before the Lord and repent of their sin.

You never know how the Lord is going to touch a person's heart with the truth. A classic example is when one of the soldiers who was personally involved in Christ's crucifixion was ashamed of what he had done as he considered the blameless Lamb of God slain for others.

MAR 15:37-39 "With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

The reality of Christ's life in His death was used by the Holy Spirit to bring a softened heart to this man. And often times people will see the reality of Christ in our lives under difficult times and gaze upon the grace of God and turn their eyes heavenward as the Spirit opens their eyes.

Sometimes suffering may come at the hands of individuals who God is going to speak to through the way you react to them. And so Peter can say in 17 "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

It may be God's will for us to suffer. But it is not His will for us to suffer as a result of doing something evil. He says, 'if you're going to suffer, suffer for doing good where I can be glorified instead of suffering for something that would dishonor Me.'

And then Peter gives an example of suffering in Jesus. In giving this example Peter brings in some very interesting images that have been taken in different ways throughout the years.

18 "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 19 through which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,..."

There's a lot here in these verses which we need to take careful note of. First, Peter brings in the suffering of Jesus and makes it clear that His suffering for the Father was not in vain. It had a purpose.

Sometimes we lose sight of this in our lives. Trials and tribulations have a purpose and as we're willing to follow Christ He will use the circumstances in our lives to bring glory to His name.

In the case of Jesus, His suffering was designed to be for other people. And Peter tells us what kind of people these are; unrighteous people, which includes all mankind. We have no righteousness in ourselves to bring to God and lay at His feet to allow us entrance into His presence.

Only Christ's righteousness on our behalf will ever do. But it's precisely because of His righteousness that we have access to the Father. Notice that Peter says in verse 18 "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

That's the reason Christ came; to bring us to God as one's who are declared not guilty because of Christ's righteousness.

And yet, when we speak of Christ dying for sins once for all, this is not the equivalent of Him dying for all. In fact, Peter qualifies those for whom Christ died as he goes on to say, “to bring *us* to God.”

Peter is addressing the church, those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, His people. These are the one’s for whom Christ came to redeem; the same people of whom Joseph, the husband of Mary, was told by an angel, Jesus would come for.

Matthew 1:21 ²¹ "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Well, someone might argue that “His people” are the Jews being referred to in Mat.1:21. That, of course would be correct, but only to the degree that those Jews who believed would be part of that people. The unbelieving Jews certainly would not be.

So, who are “His people”? Everyone who is of the faith of Abraham.

Galatians 3:6-9 ⁶ Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. ⁷

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

There is only one people of God, and they are taken from both Jew and Gentile.

Ephesians 2:11-16 ¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision " by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹² *remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one

new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

^{NAU} **Galatians 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Those who come under the category of “His people” are those who have been chosen before the foundations of the world and have been given a free gift that they neither earned or deserved, since we all deserve death.

But God has chosen a people for Himself to glorify Himself. This is precisely what Peter says earlier in this letter.

1 Peter 2:9-10 ⁹ *But you are A CHOSEN RACE*, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

And so, when Peter speaks of Jesus dying once for all, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, he is speaking of the act of dying as an atoning sacrifice for His people which was only necessary one time.

This is the same language the writer of Hebrews employs.

Hebrews 9:26-28 ²⁶ Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since ^athe foundation of the world; but now ^bonce at ^cthe consummation of the ages He has been ^dmanifested to put away sin ^{1e}by the sacrifice of Himself. ²⁷ And inasmuch as ^ait is ¹appointed for men to die once and after this ^bcomes judgment, ²⁸ so Christ also, having been ^aoffered once to ^bbear the sins of many, will appear ^ca second time for ^dsalvation ^ewithout *reference to sin*, to those who ^feagerly await Him.

Peter then explains that this process of taking our penalty for sin involved the sinless Christ dying for sinful man, but he then shows how this same Jesus was raised from the dead. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.

This doesn't mean He physically died but was raised only in the Spirit, as though He were some sort of phantom. His physical body was laid in the tomb and His physical body was raised from the tomb three days later.

In fact, we know that Jesus was raised with a body because on one occasion He had breakfast with His disciples. But this body was a body which was spiritual in nature, with none of the physical limitations our bodies have. And we know that one day we will receive a resurrected body like our Lord's.

1CO 15:42-44 "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

The point Peter is making in our text is that Christ was resurrected by the power of the Spirit and he is now contrasting Christ's physical life, before the resurrection, with His post-resurrection existence.

It was, in part, the agency of the Holy Spirit which brought about the resurrection. And it was in the power of the Spirit, as well as Christ's post-resurrection life, which enabled Jesus to go and make proclamation to the spirits in prison.

But the end of verse 19 has confused people over the years regarding our Lord's state between His death and resurrection and what He was doing during that time. Some have taken the position that what Jesus was doing was going down in the nether-world where the souls of men were located and that He preached the gospel to them and led them out as they accepted His payment for them.

Now whenever we come to a verse which seems a little confusing we must do a number of things. We must look at the context, we must look at other portions of Scripture which deal with similar teachings, and we must arrive at conclusions where the whole counsel of God's word is brought to bear on any particular area.

Now, in our text in 1Peter, the context has to do with suffering and living to God's glory because we've been given life in the Spirit through faith in Christ. This life in Christ was brought about as a result of Christ dying in our place and then being raised to life.

That's the context and so for Peter to abruptly change gears and introduce something which has no relation to the context is to misunderstand the point of the passage. The point of the passage is not to teach about the intermediate state of the dead, but to comfort believers who have life in the Spirit.

How was he going to comfort them by relating Christ's death and subsequent resurrection? By showing Christ's victory over death and how that proclamation would verify the very work He was sent into this world to accomplish.

With that said let's go back to our text and look at this portion and ask some questions. The first question we might ask is who are these spirits? Do they belong to human beings or to fallen angels?

What do we know about these spirits? Well, we know that they are in prison, but where is this prison? When did Christ preach to them and what was His message? These are all legitimate questions which need to be addressed before we decide what is being said.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, some believe that during those three days in the grave the Spirit of Jesus went and preached the gospel to these spirits. The problem with that is that the Greek language makes a connection between verse 18 and 19, which makes a contrast between being put to death in the flesh, and being made alive in the Spirit, in which He went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison.

"In the Spirit" does not necessarily refer to the time between His death and resurrection. Dr. Kistemaker in his commentary on Peter makes the point that "scholars are of the opinion that the word body signifies Jesus' earthly life so the word spirit refers to His resurrected life. The term spirit, then, relates to the spiritual sphere of Christ's post-resurrection existence."

Dr. Heibert in his commentary quotes Mounce who asserts, "The point that Peter makes is that by means of the resurrection, Christ passes into a new and fuller life. Previously He had experienced the limitation of physical existence. Now He enjoys the freedom of a spiritual mode of existence."

Heibert then says, "the contrast is between Christ's death as a real man here on earth and His risen life as the glorified Lord. Flesh and spirit thus denote two successive spheres of existence of the

incarnate Christ. Made alive in the spirit does not refer to Christ disembodied - the period between His death and resurrection."

And so to be made alive in the spirit, which is His resurrection, is the condition in which He went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison.

But again, who are these spirits? This is where a lot of people get themselves in trouble by reading something into the text that is more fanciful than exegetical.

It's not unlike how some have taken the passage found in Genesis 6:4 and equated demonic angels with the term, sons of God.

Genesis 6:4 ⁴ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore *children* to them. Those were the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown.

Now, without going in to a lot of detail on this passage, suffice it to say that there are some glaring problems with the idea that the sons of God are demons who had sexual intercourse with the daughters of men, producing offspring.

Number one, demons are nowhere in the Scriptures declared to be sons of God. They are enemies of God. Number two, if these sons of God are demons who produced children to the daughters of men, it begs the question, how is it possible for angels, who are of a different "kind" according to the beginning of Genesis, possibly intermingle with the human "kind"?

This would produce a hybrid angel/man being, of which there is no possibility, any more than we can produce a dog/cat animal. According to our Creator, "kinds" produce after their "kinds."

But, to even infer that angels could have produced offspring of any type assumes angels have the ability to produce at all. We know they don't produce after their own kind since two things are true: 1) all angels are of the male type, and 2) therefore, there is no marriage in the angelic world according to Jesus Christ Himself.

When explaining the relationship of men and women after the resurrection, Jesus makes the connection to that future relationship as He compares it to the present condition of angels who do not marry.

Matthew 22:30 ³⁰ "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

In what way are resurrected human beings like angels in heaven? There is no marriage, which is to say there is no godly relationship that would produce offspring on the new earth.

So, to make the leap that the sons of God are demons who have sexual relations with the daughters of men in Genesis 6:4 is simply to read something into the text that other portions of God's word clearly do not teach.

So, who are the sons of God who came into the daughters of men that are identified with the Nephilim? That's for another study. But I can assure you they are not demons.

But as we come back to our text in 1Peter we run into a similar problem if we dismiss the obvious of what Peter has already said in the context, and where other portions of God's word must be brought to bear on this text. Let's look at it.

1 Peter 3:18-19 ¹⁸ For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; ¹⁹ in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison,

The first thing we notice is that the subject has to do with salvation, wherein the means for this salvation is Christ dying for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust, with the express purpose of bringing us to God.

Therefore, the one's being addressed as those who would be on the receiving end of this salvation are the unjust who are justified by Christ's death, who would naturally be human beings, who are either presently alive, or those who died in faith in the past, like Abraham and Moses who would be the recipients of this salvation and have in fact been brought to God.

But then Peter goes on to describe how this was accomplished. He says, that Christ was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit. As I've already mentioned this simply means that the physical body of Jesus Christ was placed on the cross and He died.

Therefore, through no natural physical means, but rather through the agency of the Spirit, Jesus was raised bodily from the dead. We are told that it is in this new spiritual condition, which is through

the agency of the Spirit, that He went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison.

And it is at this point that we must address this last aspect of the atoning work of Jesus Christ risen from the dead. In what way did He make proclamation to the spirits in prison?

Some have suggested that this was a trip that our Lord made between His death and resurrection where He either went to hell to declare His victory to those who rejected the Messiah in this life, or to some other place, like Abraham's bosom, where He declared His finished work to those saints of old who were held captive in a temporary place until Christ's death and resurrection where He would then lead them to heaven.

The problem with the first scenario is that those who are in hell have no need to have the gospel preached to them since they are sealed in their rebellion with no second chance after death for salvation.

Hebrews 9:27 ²⁷ And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,

The problem with the second scenario, where Jesus goes to lead those out of the temporary holding place containing the saints of old, is that Abraham's bosom is not a place, but a status of residence.

In other words, to be where Abraham is, is to be with Abraham where he is. And where was Abraham prior to Christ's resurrection? In heaven, with the Lord, as were all of the O.T. saints.

^{NAU} **Genesis 5:24** Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

Well, where did God take him? The writer of Hebrews gives us some insight.

^{NAU} **Hebrews 11:5** By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.

The implication is clear that he was taken up to God. Well, where is God?

1 Kings 8:30 ³⁰ "Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; hear and forgive.

Exodus 20:22 ²² Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven.

We see a similar situation with Elijah who we are told specifically was taken up to heaven to be with the Lord.

2 Kings 2:1 ^{NAU} And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

2 Kings 2:11 ¹¹ As they were going along and talking, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.

Even the thief on the cross with Jesus was told that he would be with our Lord that particular day in Paradise.

Luke 23:43 ⁴³ And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

This is pre-resurrection, which is presumably before heaven was opened up, according to some, until which time Jesus rose in victory from the grave.

Well, where and what was the Paradise Jesus referred to? Well, we know it was where Jesus was, since He said to the thief, you shall be with *Me* in Paradise.

Of course, we know that this would have been heaven, since the spirit of Jesus and the spirit of the thief would be in the same place that day of death for the both of them, as their bodies would lay in the tomb; for Jesus three days, for the thief, still there until his and our resurrection.

The point is that there has only been two places of residence for dead human beings since the first person died, being Abel, after sin entered into the world; either heaven or hell.

So, for Jesus to preach to the spirits in prison these spirits, presumably, must be either in heaven or hell. Since there was no

need to preach to those in hell and since those in heaven were already in heaven the idea of preaching to either group is not necessary, which leads to a third position.

And this is where I want to go next time as we go into some depth regarding the importance of Christ preaching to the spirits in prison, both in the past, the present and the future.

Because as we'll see next time the past included the days of Noah, which is why some believe that Jesus went to those people who were disobedient during the days of Noah, who were obviously dead during the time of Christ, and their spirits now had the gospel preached to them by our Lord.

We've already dealt with this fallacy, but the next time we get together we will discover what it means to preach to the spirits in prison in a way that is much more natural to the text that includes people being preached to by Christ in all generations.

For we who have received the message of the risen Christ; we who were prisoners in bondage to our sin without hope, but now have life in our Lord, may we rejoice in this gift and acknowledge the One who has fulfilled the Scriptures for our benefit and His glory.

Luke 4:18-19 ¹⁸ "aTHE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹ aTO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."