

The Peter Principles

Week 10

1 Peter 3:18-22

Participant's Guide

In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter writes, *“Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. **His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction**”.*

What Peter says about Paul in verses above is very true of him in the verses we are about to study. These verses plus a couple of more in Peter’s writings have been the subject of a controversy.

Therefore I would like to encourage you to begin with a time of prayer specifically asking the the Holy Spirit reveal to you the truth and application of these verses.

Read 1 Peter 3:18-22

These verses pose 2 of the most difficult issues in the Scriptures for the purpose of interpretation. One has to do with Christ’s descent into hell. And the other is to do with the role of water baptism in our salvation.

Before we deal with those issues, we need to be reminded of what we learned in the introduction to the book of 1 Peter. We learned that this book was originally written as a letter. We also learned that there were no chapter and verse division in the original letter. These were inserted centuries later for the purpose of studying these documents. This understanding of the Bible plays an important role especially in dealing with verses like what we are about to study.

1 Peter 3:18-22 belongs to a bigger context. The paragraph for this section starts in 1 Peter 3:13 but it does not end in 3:22. In reality, the paragraph really ends at 4:6. In other words the context for our text is 1 Peter 3:13 to 4:6.

Now why do you think it is important to know the context of our text?

What is the main idea of this context (1 Peter 3:13- 4:6)? And What is the central focus of this context? (1 peter 3:18)

The phrase “the righteous for the unrighteous” (Put in a different way in 2 Corinthians 5:21) has been referred to by many theologians as the Great Exchange.

Who is the righteous and who are the unrighteous in verse 18? (Look up Romans 3:10)

This is important because it will aid us in dealing with the latter verses.

Back to verse 18, this is one of the New Testament's most concise and yet profound descriptions of Christ's atoning work. Christ died once and finished the work as He cried out on the cross. Nothing can be added to and nothing can be deducted from His finished work.

One may ask, that is what Jesus did then but what is He doing now and where is He?

How did the example of Jesus suffering for doing right in verse 18, helped Peter's audience in the midst of their suffering?

How does the example of Jesus suffering for doing right in Verse 18, helps you in the midst of your suffering? How does it answer your complaint that life is not fair?

Remembering that there is a link between understanding the reason for our hope (3:15) and living for Jesus, why do some people 'give up' the Christian faith when suffering comes their way?

Let's read 1 Peter 3:19-22 again and also read Genesis 6:1-13.

Before we get to the story of Noah, let's deal with our first difficult question that comes out of verse 19. We read in Apostles Creed: " I believe in Jesus Christ ... suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell".

It is the phrase "descended into hell" that has been the subject of controversy among theologians and believers for many centuries.

Did Jesus really go to hell?

I do not want to spend too much time on it. There are tons of material on the internet that you can study for yourself. Here are some of the answers in a brief form.

While there are many views on this verse, the three main ones are (1) that between his death and resurrection, Jesus preached to the unrighteous dead in Hades, perhaps specifically to those who lived before the flood of Noah; 2) that in line with Peter's description of Noah as a "preacher of righteousness" in 2 Pet 2:5, Christ preached through Noah to disobedient people in Noah's day; 3) that before or after his resurrection, Jesus proclaimed triumph over the fallen angels referred to in 2 Peter 2:4-5 where Peter equates them with "the sons of God" from Genesis 6:1-2.

Please study this subject for yourself and decide on which view comes close to what the Bible teaches, but **let's not lose sight of the forest for the trees.**

Back to our passage,

Why do you think Peter bring up the historical account of Noah in verses 19-20?

How does this event fit into his discussion in this passage?

How is Noah's experience like the experience of Peter's readers?

What relationship did Peter see between the readers of his letter and the ministry of Noah? (See 2 Peter 2:5–9.)

What circumstances might his readers have been experiencing that were similar to Noah's?

How is this true for us as Christians today?

What was the outcome of Noah's obedience to God's instruction then?

What would be the outcome of our obedience to God's instructions now?

Verse 21 poses the second difficult theological question that has been the subject of controversy. Based on this verse some have concluded that water baptism brings salvation.

What do you think Peter meant in verse 21 by "corresponding to that, baptism now saves you?"

What type of baptism is he referring to and in what sense does it "save" us?

What does Peter say baptism corresponds to? (3:21)

What is your experience with baptism? What role does it play in your faith story?

In what ways is it an important symbol to you?

8. What is baptism a picture of? Look up the following verses to help with your answer: Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12

A final word: Let's not lose sight of the forest for the trees. Peter has been trying to make a very important point. He has been trying to encourage his readers to live righteously among an unrighteous group of people and respond in a God honouring way to unjust and undeserved suffering because that is how the prophet of old like Noah did and because that is how the Apostles of new like Peter himself and others have been doing and because the Lord Jesus Christ taught and lived. But here is the climax of the teaching. Why should we live like that and to what end?

Here is where the story of Noah plays a big role. A judgement is coming and is imminent just as in the days of Noah and it will put an end to this world as we know it. At Noah's time it was with water but in the Day of Son of God it will be with fire. So we need to keep living righteously as Noah did and inviting people to enter into the ark as Noah did (into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ). Christ undeserved suffering on the cross made it possible for the unrighteous to be made righteous (3:18). The least we can do is to sometimes and when it is God's will to suffer even unjustly and undeservedly in order that perhaps we can make a way for another person to enter the ark and be saved.

Before we spend some time in prayer, let's ask ourselves this question:

What has impacted you the most in your study of First Peter in the last few weeks? What is Jesus asking of you personally?