

1 Peter 3:13-22

Be Ready To Give Account

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS

In these verses there is a connection with, but not a repetition of the verses preceding this part, particularly with chapter 2:18-25. There Peter addresses the domestic slaves in the congregation; here Peter directs himself to the congregation as a whole. Whereas in 2:18ff. he dealt with the calling to endure unjust treatment at the hands of their "masters" in the Christian manner, in these verses he speaks about the suffering for righteousness' sake which everyone must endure in the face of great temptation. Everyone must be prepared to give account. In such suffering lies a great reward. However, they are to do this only by living in the source of power, Christ, who endured opposition from sinners, who despised the cross and the shame, and who fixed his eyes on the glory which was promised to him. It can be seen by his example that the way to glory is through suffering.

MAIN THOUGHT

This section contains two parts. In 3:13-17 Peter directs his readers' attention to their duty to bear the suffering which will come upon them for the sake of the name of Christ after whom they are called. They must be ready to give an account at all times in an appropriate way of the hope that is in them. In verses 18-22 he directs the believers to look at Christ and to live in him, noting where he in his work as Mediator and in his course of life was sanctified through suffering, thus acquiring the triumph of glory. They must also note the way in which he became the salvation for his people, including this part of their salvation, that they are being trained "to suffer for doing good" (v. 17) for his Name's sake.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Verses 13, 14

The question in verse 13 includes an absolute negation. "To harm" must be understood here in the sense of "to cause actual destruction" - [see question 1](#).

By "to do good" or "right" [RSV], Peter means "because you, fearing God, keep his commandments". The translation, "do not fear what they fear" is to be preferred above "have no fear of them" [RSV] for it says, "Do not be terrified with their terror", or with that which instills fear. "Frightened" means to be "confused by fright". Peter alludes here to Isaiah 8:12, 13.

Verses 15, 16

Some manuscripts read "God" instead of "Christ"; the latter is better. Peter encourages the believers to live in the faith which knows, even in the heaviest trials, that Jesus has power over all things; no enemy of faith can so much as move without his will.

The Greek word for "asks" indicates an asking to which an answer is expected.

"Hope" was a concept unknown to the heathen world. The heathen were always amazed when Christians testified of the glorious future that awaited them. "Gentleness" is contrasted to the hard, unrighteous manner of demanding payment of account. They are not allowed to testify in a superficial, banal way, but with "respect" or "reverence" [NASB]; their testimony must be filled

with trembling for the glorious things of which they give account. They must keep a "clear conscience"; the believers lead blameless lives, and so do not incur guilt or give reason for offence.

Verse 17

"Better" means "more useful", "more fruitful".

Verse 18

The contents of verse 17 are elucidated here with the example of the Saviour: he suffered while "doing good" in the absolute sense of the word. What is shown here in a beautiful way is the guarantee of Christ's work as Mediator. We do not have to ask the question, "Do people die more than once?" "Once", here, indicates the nature of Christ's self-sacrifice unto atonement – [see question 2](#).

"In the body" has also been translated as "in the spirit", or "in the Spirit". The latter is better. One is immediately inclined to think of "flesh" [NASB] and "spirit" as meaning "body" and "soul", but that is not acceptable since the Saviour died and rose again in his whole human nature. Along with Professor Greijdanus we ought to see that in this verse the same contrast is made as in Romans 1:3-4. We must think here of "Spirit", therefore, not as the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, but as Christ's divine nature.

Verse 19

This is one of the most difficult verses of this epistle. From verse 22 it appears that Christ's ascension is meant by "went". The Greek idiom indicates this "going" is closely connected with "made proclamation" [NASB], or "preached" [NIV]. The ascension is that proclamation.

The "spirits in prison" ([see question 3](#)) are the spirits of Noah's unrepentant contemporaries who are presently in the realm of the dead, and not in hell, the "lake of fire", the place for the condemned after the last day — [see question 4](#). Take note of the fact that Peter uses a different word here (in Greek) from that which he uses elsewhere in this letter (1:12-25; 4:6), a word which means "to appear as herald" — [see question 5](#). [Questions 6, 7, and 8](#) also pertain to this verse.

Verse 20

In this context "disobeyed" refers to that hardening of heart and impenitence by which they rejected the Word preached to them (by Noah, both in word and deed) — [see question 9](#).

For the phrase "waited patiently", the Greek language employs a very strong, active expression. God's long-suffering did not wait passively, but looked anxiously to see if, perhaps, the people would yet repent (120 years!).

When we read "through water", we must note that in the next verse the Flood "symbolizes" baptism. The Flood served two purposes. For the wicked and unrepentant world it meant burial, but for the Church it meant salvation. The same water, therefore, served both as an instrument of judgment and as a means of preserving life.

Verse 21

"Symbolizes" means "antitype". Note the image used here. Baptism is antitype, the Flood is type. Baptism is not a shadow of the Flood, but the Flood is a shadow of baptism (cf. the prayer before baptism). Baptism, then, is the real thing, the greater thing. (It may be compared to a photograph which a young man has in his wallet of his girlfriend. The photograph is type; the girlfriend is

antitype.) The phrase "baptism that now saves you" is sacramental language. Peter means of course, that Christ's saving blood, which is pictured in the water of baptism, saves. Baptism is richer than the Flood. The latter is either burial or preservation; the former is both burial and preservation. That the water of baptism itself does not save is indicated by the addition of the words "not the removal of dirt from the body". This is "an appeal to God for a good conscience" [NASB], for, only he who uses his baptism in faith benefits by it (cf. Romans 2:29). This appeal, which arises from inner renewal, is worked by Christ's resurrection (cf. 1 Peter 1:3; Romans 6:4).

Verse 22

This verse shows Christ's triumph over those who once had opposed and reviled him. For that reason believers can truly be comforted in all their suffering by the glory which Christ has obtained for his people. This is the explanation of the word "better", "more fruitful", found in verse 17.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can verse 13 be said to mean that malicious behaviour (harming someone who does good) rarely occurs?
2. What is the nature of Christ's sacrifice as it is expressed by the word "once" in verse 18 (cf. Romans 6:10; Hebrews 9:26)?
3. Can you prove that the spirits of verse 19 refer to Noah's contemporaries? (See v. 20.)
4. Is it correct to say that the spirits of verse 19 are not actually in hell (cf. Revelation 20:11-15)? Will hell be closed until the Day of Judgment?
5. What is the particular meaning of "proclaiming", or "preaching" as it is used in verse 19?
6. Why does Peter refer to the contemporaries of Noah?
7. What does Rome teach concerning verse 19? What is the Lutheran teaching? And what do the later modernist exegetes believe? (See footnote in NIV study Bible for help.)
8. What is the significance of the proclamation inherent in Christ's ascension? What is the believers' comfort?
9. Can you prove that Noah preached both in word and in deed (cf. Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5)?

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Jan Smelik

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¹ Ed. Note: a question was removed, as it was no longer relevant.