

PETER'S EPISTLES: PREPARING FOR ETERNITY

XV. Christ's Example Of Responding To Persecution

(1 Peter 3:18-22)

I. Introduction

- A. Before the Apostle Peter began to minister for the Lord in the Church, his outlook was impacted by Christ's prophecy in John 21:18-19 that he would be crucified for Christ. Eternity was thus often on Peter's mind.
- B. Peter's epistles highlight preparing for eternity, and 1 Peter 3:18-22 gives us Christ's example of responding to religious persecution. We view this passage for our insight, application and edification:

II. Christ's Example Of Responding To Persecution, 1 Peter 3:18-22.

- A. In 1 Peter 3:17, the Apostle Peter had stated that God willed that if we believers suffer persecution, we should suffer for doing what was good rather than suffer for doing what was evil.
- B. Peter then mentioned Christ's great example of facing unjust suffering on the cross, 1 Peter 3:18. Jesus "once for all" (*hapax*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 798) died "for sins" (*peri hamartion*, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 851), a phrase "used in the Septuagint in regard to the sin offering for atonement" (*Ibid.*), the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but being made alive in the spirit. He faced unjust suffering, but in facing it in God's will, Jesus produced our salvation from sin. Every believer is thus encouraged to follow Jesus' example in facing unjust persecution by doing so righteously and in grace.
- C. The statement of 1 Peter 3:19, "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" has been "subject to many interpretations." We thus note and address two of the major ones (as follows):
 1. Some believe Peter "referred to the descent of Christ's spirit into hades between His death and resurrection to offer people who lived before the Flood a second chance for salvation." (*Ibid.*) However, this view conflicts with Hebrews 9:27 that claims that it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment where man has no second chance after this earthly life to believe unto salvation!
 2. "Others have said this passage refers to Christ's descent into hell after His crucifixion to proclaim His victory to the imprisoned fallen angels referred to in 2 Peter 2:4-5, equating them with 'the sons of God' Moses wrote about (Gen. 6:1-2)." (*Ibid.*) However, though the expression "sons of God" is used of angels or demons in Job 2:1 and 38:7, the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-2 cohabited with women to produce offspring, what angels cannot do according to Mark 12:25. Rather, the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1-2 were demon-possessed men who errantly claimed to be of divine origin in accord with similar claims about men in ancient pagan literature. (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 36) Besides, the context at 1 Peter 3:20 clarifies that the spirits in prison in 1 Peter 3:18 had rebelled against Christ's ministry through Noah when he was building the ark before the flood. Those people had died in the flood and their spirits were in prison in Hades in Peter's day for having rejected the ministry of Christ through Noah, 1 Peter 3:20; *Ibid.*
- D. Thus, just as Christ's spirit through Noah preached to the wicked generation of Noah's day with only a few souls, Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives being physically saved by the ark (1 Peter 3:20), so Peter's readers were physically saved by believer's baptism, 1 Peter 3:21. Peter explained that he did not refer to the cleansing of the flesh by water baptism, but of the answer of a good conscience toward God due to the evidence of Christianity's validity by Christ's resurrection. Peter thus taught that just as the ark physically saved Noah's family, submitting to believer's baptism physically saved his readers as it led to their being persecuted and fleeing from Israel before God's judgment fell on Jerusalem as predicted in Luke 19:41-44.
- E. Mention of Christ's resurrection led Peter to return to the theme of Christ's example: Jesus had gone into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God with angels, authorities and powers being made subject to Him in reward for His facing the unjust suffering of the cross, 1 Peter 3:22.

Lesson: Christ exemplified for us believers our need to face unjust persecution by doing what was good with God's reward, for Christ faced unjust persecution on the cross to bring us to God, becoming a sin offering as our Substitutionary Atonement only to be rewarded by being seated at the Father's right hand over the universe.

Application: (1) May we follow the example of Noah who was used of Christ to minister to his sinful generation by similarly facing unjust persecution, and may we follow Christ's own personal example of facing unjust persecution by doing good to produce our salvation. (2) May we yield to the will of God the Father if we are led to face unjust persecution, for the spiritual rewards that await us are great as is evidenced by Noah's being rewarded by God to continue to live on the earth after the Flood and Christ's being reward by His being highly exalted in heaven!