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**Quick Links to the Study**

I. [Context](#)

- a. [Historical](#)
- b. [Literary](#)

II. [Message](#)

- a. [Experiencing Suffering, vv. 13-16](#)
- b. [The Foundation for Suffering, vv. 17-22](#)

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1 Peter 3:13-22 presents contemporary Christians in the US with an anomaly. Peter talks about believers who faced physical violence against them simply because of their Christianity, but Christians in our country face nothing comparable. To be certain, many Christians elsewhere in the world know out of their daily experience exactly what Peter is talking about. Virtually no American Christian knows anything about this apart from having traveled to those places where Christians are being physically harmed. Violent religious based persecution is something one must experience in order to have a real grasp of its meaning. Thus, I confess at the outset that the interpretation of this passage is done theoretically, not experientially. I can confidently describe the meaning of the text, but I cannot describe the subject matter of the text out of personal experience. The closest that I have ever come to something remotely similar was living for a short period of time years ago in Europe as a target of Arab terrorists. But this had nothing to do with my religious commitment; it was solely based upon my citizenship as an American. This presents us with the challenge of building legitimate connecting bridges of meaning between the historical meaning of the text and contemporary applications of the text. Great caution must be exercised here, if the sacred scripture is to be treated appropriately.



**I. Context**

The relevant aspects from [the previous study on 1 Peter](#) will be summarized here. For the details, the reader is referred to that study at Cranfordville. New material will be added as it becomes relevant for this particular study.

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**a. Historical**

**External History.** Although differing perspectives can be found, my conviction is that Peter dictated this letter to his writing secretary, Silas,

sometime in the late 50s to middle 60s. This took place in Rome and the letter was addressed to Christian communities along the southern shore

of the Black Sea in ancient [Anatolia](#), or Asia. The letter was written in order to help Christians in this region face the persecution they were experiencing from the Roman provincial governing authorities increasingly using persecution of Christians for political brownie points with the leaders in Rome. Sometime during his later ministry -- although not verified anywhere inside the NT -- Peter most likely had traveled through this region either to strengthen these communities, or possibly to establish them, for the letter sends some signals of a personal relationship between Peter and his readers. Some aspects of this scenario are very hypothetical and represent a reasonable guess at implications of some of the ancient data.

**Internal History.** The time and place markers inside 3:13-22 are not specific. They do center around the clear assumption that his readers are experiencing violent physical persecution because of their Christian commitment. Their persecutors were using scare tactics to pressure these believers to abandon their Christian commitment (τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ ταραχθῆτε). But exactly what tactics were being used is not stated, nor is historical identification of the persecutors provided. The admonition to be prepared for a defense of their faith in the Roman court system (ἐτοιμοὶ αἰεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαὺν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος) provides some detail. But this, as well as the following admonition to a quiet non-radical lifestyle (ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε καταισχυθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφῇ)

## b. Literary

**Genre.** The broad literary form concern is that [this passage](#) surfaces in the body section of this ancient letter. The small genre concern relates to identifiable literary patterns inside the passage itself. 3:1-7 clearly follows the ancient Haustafeln, domestic code, discussions both inside and outside the New Testament 3:8 contains an example of an ancient virtue list.

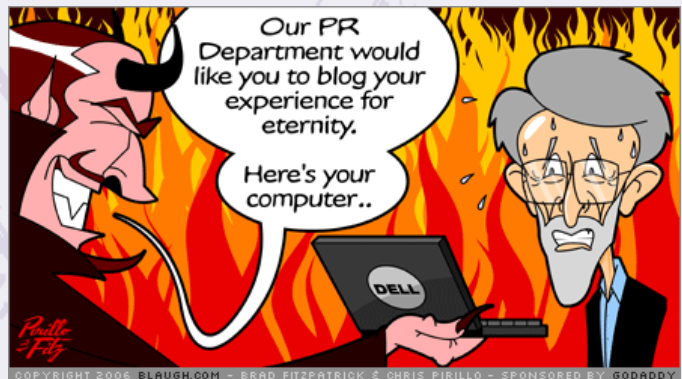
Inside this passage one can identify a beatitude in v. 14a. Though not in the complete expression form, the statement clearly is structured as a beatitude: “even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed” (εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι). This has echoes of Mt. 5:11, “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account “

Most debated is the illustration in vv. 18-22,

are fairly generalized and do not give the detailed historical reference that we would like to see.

The time and place allusions in the passage mainly build off the original readers’ experience of suffering in the mid-50s to mid-60s and that of Christ in his crucifixion in AD 30. Christ’s previous experience provides the model for these -- and all subsequent Christians -- to follow in facing hostility to their faith.

The one thorny time/place issue concerns the mysterious reference to Christ’s “descent into Hell” in vv. 19-20. This single vague reference in the entire New Testament has occasioned unreal volumes of interpretive controversy over the past two thousand years. Even questionable theological doctrines have been developed off this single reference. Where did Christ go? When did this happen? Exactly whom did he go to? These are the central questions of time and place regarding these two verses. We will attempt to address these in the exegesis part of this study. The one certain thing is that the matter is more serious than the cartoon below depicts.



especially vv. 19-20. But the discussion is more centered on the use of sources, and secondarily on literary form. The question of form grows out of the conclusion regarding source(s) used here. 1 Tim. 3:16 possibly reflects a somewhat similar pattern of using pre-formed Christian tradition:

Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.

This has particular tones to the declarations v. 18: Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.

He was put to death in the flesh,  
but made alive in the spirit,

Thus one can observe the use of a variety of forms by Peter. But a great deal of individual creativity exists which doesn't follow established patterns of religious affirmations elsewhere in the New Testament.

**Literary Context.** The larger issue of the literary design of 1 Peter was addressed in the 2:1-10 study and will be repeated here with appropriate revision for our passage.

At the broadest level 3:13-22 is a part of the body proper of the letter. The [basic sections](#) are Praescriptio, 1:1-2; Proem, 1:3-12; Body, 1:13-5:11; Conclusio, 5:12-14. Inside the body of the letter the following sections are lined out in the UBS Greek NT 3rd rev edition:

- A Call to Holy Living, 1:13-25
- The Living Stone and the Holy Nation, 2:1-10
- Live as Servants of God, 2:11-17
- The Example of Christ's Suffering, 2:18-25
- Wives and Husbands, 3:1-7
- Suffering for Righteousness Sake, 3:8-22*
- Good Stewards of God's Grace, 4:1-11
- Suffering as a Christian, 4:12-19
- Tending the Flock of God, 5:1-11

Our passage comes as a part of the sixth unit of material in the letter body. Verses 8-12 begin a summing up of previous units, especially the domestic code in 3:1-7. A series of virtues defining the ideals of Christian living are set forth in vv. 8-9

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love

for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called -- that you might inherit a blessing.

These principles are grounded in Psalm 32:12-16, which Peter cites in vv. 10-12 introducing them with the causal conjunction, γὰρ:

**For**

"Those who desire life  
and desire to see good days,  
let them keep their tongues from evil  
and their lips from speaking deceit;  
let them turn away from evil and do good;  
let them seek peace and pursue it.  
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their prayer.  
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

3:13-22 then serves mostly as an amplification and application of the Ps. 32 passage to Peter's initial readers. Also, it expands the list of admonitions in vv. 8-9. 4:1-11 continues some elements found in 13-22, namely Christ's sufferings and the expectation of Christian suffering. But these themes are given new directions and details, that supplement those in the preceding sections.

Thus, our passage contributes distinct ideas on the topic of Christian suffering. These ideas complement the theme developed by Peter up to this point in the letter body. They will also become something of a basis for the new thoughts contained in 4:1-11.

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## II. Message

**Literary Structure.** Some of the detailed issues of internal thought flow in vv. 13-22 are addressed in the [Block Diagram](#), [Semantic Diagram](#), and [Summary of Rhetorical Structure](#) that are contained in the larger internet version of this study.

The core thought structure flows around two foundational sections: (1) the experience of suffering, vv. 13-16; and (2) the basis for suffering (vv. 17-22). Inside each of these sections are well-defined expressions of ideas. Our study will be organized around this perception of text structure.

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### a. Experiencing Suffering, vv. 13-16

#### Greek NT

<sup>3:13</sup> Καὶ τίς ὁ κακῶσων  
ὑμᾶς ἐὰν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ  
ζηλωταὶ γένησθε; <sup>3:14</sup>  
ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ πάσχετε διὰ  
δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι.  
τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ  
φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ παραχθῆτε,  
<sup>3:15</sup> κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν  
ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις

#### NASB

13 Who is there to  
harm you if you prove  
zealous for what is  
good? 14 But even if  
you should suffer for the  
sake of righteousness,  
you are blessed. AND  
DO NOT FEAR THEIR  
INTIMIDATION, AND DO

#### NRSV

13 Now who will  
harm you if you are ea-  
ger to do what is good?  
14 But even if you do  
suffer for doing what is  
right, you are blessed.  
Do not fear what they  
fear, and do not be in-  
timidated, 15 but in your

#### NLT

13 Now, who will  
want to harm you if you  
are eager to do good?  
14 But even if you suffer  
for doing what is right,  
God will reward you for  
it. So don't be afraid and  
don't worry. 15 Instead,  
you must worship Christ

ὕμῶν, ἔτοιμοι ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογία πάντι τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, <sup>3:16</sup> ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραῦτητος καὶ φόβου, συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε καταισχυνθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφῇ.

NOT BE TROUBLED, 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.

hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; 16 yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. 16 But you must do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak evil against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.

### Notes:

In applying the previous citation of Psalm 34:12-16, Peter begins with a rhetorical question raising the issue of his readers suffering harm because of having become “zealots for good” (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ γένησθε): “who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?” This is an especially pertinent question in light of the last part of the Psalm: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” It has tones similar to Paul’s affirmation in Rom. 8: 31b, “If God is for us, who is against us?”

Peter wasn’t interested in his readers answering back to him, “Governor Pylamenes is the one doing us harm!” That wasn’t the point of his question. Rather, his concern was how could anyone do you harm if he had an awareness of God. Plus, the one who may be persecuting you is nothing up against the God you worship. Thus the only possible answer to this question? “No one, actually.”

The idea of “zealots for good” (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ) is defined repeatedly throughout this passage. First as “what is right” (δικαιοσύνην) in v. 14. Additionally, in v. 17 it is “doing good” (ἀγαθοποιῶντας). It leads to a “clear conscience” (συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, v.16). The opposite is specified as “doing evil” (κακοποιῶντας) v.17). It is closely linked to “your good behavior in Christ” (ὕμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφῇ, v. 16). The ideal that Peter pushes for is a faithful Christian discipleship that is contributing not only to the cause of Christ, but also that its inherent goodness and value is evident to non-Christians, even those hostile to Christianity, i.e., here the persecutors. This has connection to the requirement for spiritual leadership stated in 1 Tim. 3:7, “Moreover,

he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.” Peter calls for a life made up of genuine goodness that is reflected in the way the believer lives and serves Christ. This is the best possible antidote to persecution.

Next, Peter invokes a divine blessing on those believers who may possibly be undergoing suffering: “But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed” (ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ πάσχετε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι). The ancient Jewish - Christian beatitude form was an important way for one to prayerfully request God’s blessings on individual(s) meeting certain requirements. The second person form of the beatitude -- used here -- specified the prerequisite condition in a dependent clause of some type. Here a 3rd class concessive protasis clause is used. This adaptation of the beatitude form reflects Peter’s style and compares to a very similar pattern in 4:14, “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you” (εἰ καὶ πάσχετε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι). The use of a concessive clause with an optative mood Greek verb is rare. Peter sets up a somewhat similar structure in verse 17 with a conditional clause using an optative mood verb: “it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil” (κρεῖττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιῶντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιῶντας). In the context of Peter’s repeated probing of his readers’ assumed experience of suffering, these two “if” clauses cannot be taken to suggest that his readers may only experience suffering as a remote possibility, as some try to suggest.

J. Ramsey Michaels (*Word Biblical Commentary*, Logos Systems) proposes:

The use of the rare optative mood here (πάσχοιτε) and in v 17 (θέλοι) is often urged as evidence that Peter has in view only a remote contingency (perhaps in contrast to the stark present reality implied by the indicative in 4:14). Yet he examines this contingency with some thoroughness; it occupies his attention at least through v 17. Even the reassurance that no one is going to harm those who pursue the good (v 13) suggests that “harm” was exactly what his readers feared. Why then the optative? In each instance, the optative serves to strengthen the rhetorical device by which Peter encourages his readers: the beatitude of v 14 and the *Tobspruch* of v 17. Those who do good are “blessed” even in suffering; their lot is “better” than that of evildoers even when the will of God permits those evildoers to oppress them (cf. Zerwick, 111). That such things are more than remote possibilities can be seen in this epistle as clearly in what has preceded (1:6–7; 2:18–20) as in what follows (4:12–19; 5:8–10; cf. F. W. Danker, ZNW 58 [1967] 100–101).

Thus when suffering does occur to believers, they indeed are far better off spiritually than their persecutors: divine blessing is upon them even in such a horrible experience as suffering.

In light of these two spiritual principles -- no one can really harm believers; God blesses even in suffering -- Peter moves on to three admonitions in vv. 14b-15. The first two are negative and the third one positive:

- (1-) **Do not fear what they fear,**  
τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε
- (2-) **and do not be intimidated,**  
μηδὲ παραχθῆτε,
- (3+) **but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.**  
κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν

The first one (1) can be understood two ways: (1) do not be afraid of their fear; (2) do not be afraid of them. The shift is determined by whether αὐτῶν is taken as a subjective (1) or an objective (2) genitive case function. The latter is more likely because of Peter’s use of Isa. 8:12 for this expression. In the three translations used in our study the NRSV takes it as subjective genitive, while the NASB and NLT consider it an objective genitive. Michaels (*WBC*, Logos



Systems) provides helpful comment:

τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε, “so have no fear of them and don’t be troubled.” The only significant change from the LXX of Isa 8:12 is Peter’s substitution of αὐτῶν for αὐτοῦ. The meaning of the Hebrew text was “do not fear what they [i.e., the people] fear” (lit. “do not fear the fear of them”). The effect of the singular αὐτοῦ of the LXX had been to focus the fear on the king of Assyria as its *object*: “do not be afraid of him” (lit., “do not fear the fear of him”). Formally, Peter’s modification of the LXX represents a move back in the direction of the Hebrew, yet Peter’s context shows that he follows the LXX in assuming the pronoun to be an objective genitive: “do not be afraid of them.” The αὐτῶν of 1 Peter (like the αὐτοῦ of the LXX) thus refers to the enemy, anticipating the implicit reference to accusers (καταλαλεῖσθε) and the explicit mention of despisers (οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες) in v 16. Selwyn notes correctly that “had St. Peter not been quoting, he could have written τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτοῦς” (p. 192). If he had done so, the similarity of his thought to that of certain synoptic passages (e.g., Matt 10:26–33) might have been more obvious. But as it is, his use of the cognate accusative (“to fear a fear”) indicates that the Isaiah text is indeed his primary point of departure.

The second negative admonition (2) essentially repeats the first one: “do not be intimidated” (μηδὲ παραχθῆτε). The sense of the Greek verb is “do not allow yourselves to be upset.” When people aggressively oppose you, human instinct is to feel fear and inward disturbance. Peter admonishes his readers to reject such instinctive reactions.

But how? The solution comes in the positive admonition (3): “in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord” (κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν). The literal meaning of the command is to make Christ holy in the decision making part of your life. In other words, our choosing of responses to persecution is to be guided by Christ and his example. The older RSV renders this well as “in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord.” With Christ guiding the response to hostility, the human instincts of fear and intimidation can be avoided.



But the expansion elements extending the

command to make Christ Lord, vv. 15b-16, elaborate more implications of making Christ Lord. For a detailed presentation of the text structure see the [Block Diagram](#) in the larger internet study of this lesson.

The first thing implied is that we should be prepared to present a defense of our Christian commitment: **“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you”** (ἔτοιμοι ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογία πάντι τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος). This is not a separate command from the previous; instead, it is an extension of that one. Growing out of making Christ Lord is a readiness to present the details of our Christian hope. The language used by Peter points to responding to a hostile demand, probably from persecutors. And perhaps in a court room setting. At least, this is the way that Paul uses the term ἀπολογία in his letters. The response is oral: τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον ; **“the one asking you to give a word...”**

Interestingly, one’s religious commitment to Christ is here defined as **“the hope that is in you.”** Peter uses the term three times in this letter: a) the hope of life eternal, 1:3; b) hope focused on God, 1:21; and c) the hope dwelling in you, 3:15. Sometimes the combination of defense and hope in this verse is read to signify that every Christian should be able to articulate a detailed doctrinal stance on every fine point of Christian belief. But such is not Peter’s point. In the context of his readers, the confidence that Christians possessed in facing the future, particularly, death and beyond, was a major distinguishing trait that set them apart from others. Peter here stresses that making Christ Lord suggests being able to explain -- mostly experientially -- how Christ as Lord prepares one for eternity and gives courage to face death fearlessly.

Another trait to the lordship of Christ in the context of defending one’s religious hope is how we present that hope: **“yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience...”** (ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν). The NASB is closer than the NRSV, but still misses an important grammatical point. Literally, the text reads **“being prepared to defend...but while possessing**

**a clear conscience with humility and reverence.”** The humility and reverence characterizing the defense are inseparably linked to a clear conscience. What’s on the inside becomes the basis for the posture used in making one’s defense. The humility (πραΰτητος) and reverence (φόβου) here are focused on God. It is this focus on the divine that provides appropriate demeanor in the context of making one’s defense.

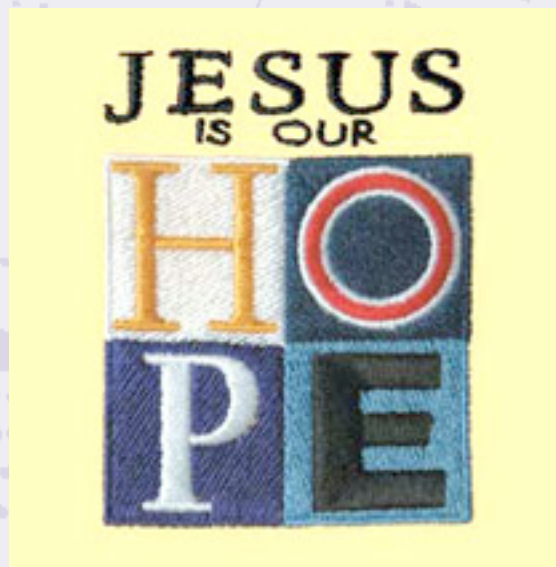
What is the objective of making one’s defense this way? **“Then if people speak evil against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.”** (ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε κατασχυνθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφὴν) The NLT has captured the essence of the Greek text. Two

hostile actions against the believers are referenced here: a) **“speak evil against you”** (καταλαλεῖσθε); b) **“the threatening ones”** (ἐπηρεάζοντες). The first implies intentional misrepresentation, while the second carries with it verbal threats and abuse. In spite of such hostility, the objective of believers is to produce shame in the hearts of these people when they can find nothing to legitimately criticize. Instead, any criticism must

be born of lies and misrepresentation. This shame comes of the manner of defense of Christian hope, but more importantly it comes out of observation of **“your good conduct in Christ”** (ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφὴν). The focus is on an inherently good manner of living in the context of commitment to Christ.

**Summary: Who were the persecutors?** A profile from within this passage paints them with these strokes. They were physically harming the readers (ὁ κακῶσων ὑμᾶς). They were seeking to instill fear (τὸν φόβον αὐτῶν) and intimidation (ταραχθῆτε) in the readers. They were pressing the believers about their religious hope (πάντι τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος). They were speaking evil against the believers in slanderous misrepresentation of these Christians (καταλαλεῖσθε). They were mistreating the believers with threats and verbal abuse (οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες).

What does this have to do with us today?





As mentioned in the beginning of this study, the distance between what these early believers were experiencing and what we as American Christians experience is rather substantial. We just don't have to face such physical hostility and danger because of our religious convictions. For that I'm profoundly grateful to God. But that's not the case elsewhere in our world. The above map (in the red, or darker countries) charts out where persecution of Christians is taking place today. The darker the red, the more severe the persecution. To believers in those countries Peter's words have particular relevance.

Now do we American Christians face occasional opposition because of our Christian faith? Yes, mostly on an individual basis in the work place or some other aspect of society. Do the principles of Peter's words to his initial readers apply to us? They



most certainly do. We needn't be intimidated by anyone hostile to Christianity. If Christ is truly Lord in our life, we have a basis for hope and out of our experience we can share that hope. A genuinely good way of living is still the best witness and defense of the Christian religion. That inherent goodness should be so readily apparent that even Christianity's critics would have nothing to criticize us about. Remember the funeral of Ruth Graham recently? She comes about as close to exemplifying what Peter is getting at as any Christian in our country today. May we all be challenged by her example!

**b. The Foundation for Suffering, vv. 17-22**

**Greek NT**

<sup>3:17</sup> κρείττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιῶντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιῶντας. <sup>3:18</sup> ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι. <sup>3:19</sup> ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, <sup>3:20</sup> ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης

**NASB**

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

**NRSV**

17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20 who in former times did not obey, when

**NLT**

17 Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! 18 Christ also suffered when he died for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. 19 So he went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20

κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτὼ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος. <sup>3:21</sup> ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σῶζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδησεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, <sup>3:22</sup> ὅτι ἔστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ [τοῦ] θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.



#### Notes:

This second part is likewise composed of two core affirmations. Both are causal and provide a basis for Peter's beginning admonitions. The first (v. 17) is pragmatic: it's simply better to suffer unjustly as a righteous person than justly as a law breaker. The second (vv. 18-22) asserts the sacrificial death of Christ as the foundation for suffering. Because Christ suffered, his followers can expect to suffer.

Pragmatic reason, v. 17: **"it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil"** (κρεῖττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιοῦντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιοῦντας). "If suffering comes," Peter says, "make sure it comes unjustly." Suffering (πάσχειν) for believers is measured by the experience of Christ (v. 18). The irony here of unjust suffering is that sinful humans inflict the suffering on righteous believers. The assumption is that suffering is coming to disciples just as it did to Christ. AND that this suffering should have the same moral tone -- unjust -- as Christ's sufferings did. For a believer to suffer at the hands of authorities as a consequence of having broken legal bounds has no spiritual value or merit. But unjust suffer-



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. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you -- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience -- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. 21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. 21 And this is a picture of baptism, which now saves you by the power of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Baptism is not a removal of dirt from your body; it is an appeal to God from a clean conscience. 22 Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers are bowing before him.



ing does have God's blessing. This is part of the implication of the "if" clause (εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ) literally translated as **"if the will of God might desire."** This is a theme that will be repeated in 4:12-19 with the climatic declaration in v. 19: **"Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good."** Sometimes statements such as this disturbs us. Can it ever be that God's will involves suffering for His children? The health and wealth gospel preachers answer with an absolute no. But such answers ignore passages like these in 1 Peter



and similar ones elsewhere in the NT. Suffering has many contexts in the Bible -- living in a sinful world, punishment of sinful actions, as a corporate member of God's people etc. as Barry Smith notes in his discussion, "Suffering," [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#). In our passage the primary context is persecution. Does God desire us to suffer persecution? The answer is 'yes' when it means faithfulness to Christian conviction over against compromising that conviction.

The second foundation for Peter's admonitions at the beginning of the passage is set forth in the core statement in verse 18: "Christ also suffered for sins once for all" (καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν). The suffering and death of Christ is held up both as the ultimate example, and also as the substitutionary atonement bedrock spiritual principle, for Christian experience.

His suffering was unjust but redemptive: "the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God" (δικαίος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ). Thus the twofold value of what Christ experienced is crucial to Christian experience. Unjust suffering is not unexpected, as Peter will later say (4:12), "Beloved,

do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." The inspiration of our Lord's example should move us to be willing to face anything in order to be true to him. But just as importantly is the spiritual transformation of our life brought about through this suffering death of Christ. Through it our sins have been forgiven; our lives have been forever changed. Out of the spiritual relationship forged in the redemptive death of Christ we gain the spiritual resources to remain faithful. As Peter already declared it is the good manner of living "in Christ" that forms the core of our testimony to our accusers.

The spiritual power here? Peter defines it in the antithetical parallelism in verse 18:

put to death in the flesh,  
but made alive in the spirit,  
θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ  
ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι·

Physically Christ died, but spiritually he was resurrected back to life. Here Peter reflects a core Christian proclamation, along the same lines of Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3-5, "For I handed on to you as of first importance



what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to..." The death and resurrection of Christ stand as the centerpiece of Christian witness and conviction. For Peter in our passage it is this experience of Christ that stands as a major basis for the kind of living and witness that answers the persecutors of believers. Without this believers have an insufficient resource to withstand the persecution of the enemies of Christ.

This much of Peter's statements is easy to understand. But the last part of his statements in vv. 19-22 have puzzled Christian interpreters for many, many centuries. Here we encounter a mixture of Christ preaching to imprisoned spirits, the eight persons saved in Noah's ark, and the flood waters being a type of Christian baptism, and Christ's exaltation in Heaven.

How does all this hang together? And just as importantly, how does it contribute to Peter's points generally in this passage? The answers to these two questions vary as much as commentators on the passage! Again, J. Ramsey Michaels (*WBC*, Logos Systems) provides a helpful introduction:

On the long history of the interpretation of these verses [18-22], see Selwyn, 314-62; Reicke, *Spirits*, 7-51; Dalton, *Proclamation*, 15-41. Many of the issues raised over the centuries have resulted from a widespread tendency to read certain NT passages simultaneously instead of one at a time. In particular, vv 18-22 are frequently read in the light of 4:6, so that the "spirits" to whom Jesus made a proclamation are understood as the spirits of the dead — usually as the spirits of the evil generation that perished in the flood. At the same time, these verses are read in the light of Eph 4:8-10 so that Jesus' proclamation is set in the context of a descent to "the lower parts of the earth," thus a "descent into hell" (a phrase that found its way into certain forms of the creed). Because it was inconceivable that Jesus would have descended into hell after ascending to heaven (v 22), the descent into hell to preach to the dead — either to assure the salvation of OT believers or to give the wicked a second chance for salvation — was assigned to the three days Christ is said to have spent in the tomb between his death and resurrection. When vv 18-22 are read by themselves, however, they speak neither of a "descent" nor of "hell." Their relationship to 4:6 can be assessed only after interpreting that verse in its proper sequence, and their relationship to other NT passages can be assessed only in connection with particular words and phrases.

The unpacking of the language of Peter here

begins with the antecedent of the relative pronoun ἐν ᾧ in v. 19. It could mean “during which time,” that is the time between being put to death and being made alive. Or, it can also mean “by which,” that is, by the Spirit, or in His spirit. The NRSV takes it as the latter: “in which also he went...” The NASB agrees, while the NLT ducks the issue altogether with its “So he went...”

Next, who are the “spirits in prison” (τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν)? Are they supernatural beings in Hell? Or, were they the souls of the eight people in Noah’s day awaiting a gospel message? If Peter is influenced by 1 Enoch, as many are convinced, then these ‘spirits’ may be either demons or the evil offspring, the giants, from the cohabitation of the “sons of God” and women in Gen. 6:1-4. But Gen. 6:4 describes these as “the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.” The Greek text in 1 Peter clearly identifies these spirits as “disobedient ones” (ἀπειθήσασιν) “who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark...”

When Christ went to these spirits what did he “preach” (ἐκήρυξεν) to them? Was it a message of hope or of damnation? Although throughout the NT this Greek verb describes preaching the message of redemption, that idea in 1 Peter is carried by another verb, εὐαγγελίζω. This single use of κηρύσσω in the letter may signal a different kind of message being preached. Michaels (*WBC*, Logos Systems) proposes a somewhat different understanding:

If “the spirits” are the “evil” or “unclean spirits” against which Jesus directed the power of the Kingdom of God to set free those who were demon-possessed, the connection is not at all difficult to see. On one occasion, when he drove out these “spirits,” they asked for a haven (Mark 5:10, 12) and he granted their request (Mark 5:13). They feared that he had come to torment them “before the time” (Matt 8:29). There is no direct evidence that he did, although without question he set limits to their power, and rescued many of their victims. Their kingdom was shaken by Jesus’ ministry (cf. Mark 3:23//Matt 12:25//Luke 11:17–22), but not yet overthrown. If “the spirits in refuge” in our text are seen against this background, then Christ’s proclamation to them after his death and resurrection may simply have been that their “prison,” or “refuge,” was no longer inviolate. They too, like all other powers in the universe, must now submit to his sovereignty (cf. v 22, “angels and authorities and powers”). The usual alternatives—i.e., a proclamation of forgiveness or salvation vs. a proclamation of judgment—may not be applicable in such a context. Perhaps the proclamation is more accurately described as one of “domestication,” or “taming,” by which those for-

merly “protected” from the presence of God are now invaded by it and made (however unwillingly) subjects of Christ the Lord (cf. Phil 2:10, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth”).

Where were these spirits that Christ preached to? Again Michaels’ proposal (*WBC*, Logos Systems) has a certain appeal over the alternatives:

If “the spirits in refuge” are demons, it is probably futile to locate their safe havens either above the earth (with Dalton) or under the earth (with most other commentators). The point is simply that Christ went and announced his sovereignty to these spirits wherever they might be, in every place where they thought they were secure against their ancient divine Enemy. The location of their strongholds, and hence the geography of Christ’s mission to them, is not Peter’s main concern.

The major problem with his view is that it disconnects “spirits” with the time of Noah -- something that the text clearly links.

The easiest solution to this virtually impossible text is to adopt a translation pattern that overlooks most of the troubling details. The NRSV certainly adopts this approach with its rendering: “in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark,...” The problem here is that we read these words and scratch our heads saying, “What is that talking about?” Clearer in meaning but not necessarily more accurate to the biblical text is the Good News Bible: “and in his spiritual existence he went and preached to the imprisoned spirits. These were the spirits of those who had not obeyed God when he waited patiently during the days that Noah was building his boat. The few people in the boat -- eight in all -- were saved by the water,...” Even clearer but much less faithful to the biblical text is Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*: “He went and proclaimed God’s salvation to earlier generations who ended up in the prison of judgment because they wouldn’t listen. You know, even though God waited patiently all the days that Noah built his ship, only a few were saved then, eight to be exact - saved from the water by the water.” Several interpretative assumptions underneath this translation are virtually impossible to defend.

The one interpretative tradition based in large part on this text that has absolutely no validity is the “descent into limbo” idea where the souls of men descend into a “waiting pen” for Christ to come with a message of salvation that gives them a “second chance” at salvation before eternal damnation. In Christian art, this is the frequently adopted meaning of this passage in visual portrayal, as the painting

“Mantegna’s Descent into Limbo” here suggests.

Whatever Peter’s intended precise meaning, it does attempt to contribute to the overall point of the power of Christ over death and his newly gained sovereignty over all creation.

The mentioning of Noah and the flood waters evokes a comparison of them to Christian baptism: “during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, “ (ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἦν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ὀκτὼ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι’ ὕδατος. ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,). Peter quickly moves away from the physical water of baptism having some kind of magical saving power. Baptism that reflects a sincere commitment to Christ signals the spiritual deliverance comparable to the deliverance that the flood waters brought to those in the ark in Noah’s day. Those waters represented destruction to all others, but deliverance to those in the ark.

The structure of the Greek text clearly attributes the saving power associated with baptism to the resurrection of Jesus Christ; cf. the [Block Diagram](#) of the visual details of this text structure: ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, ...δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Christian baptism reflects the resurrection power of Jesus brought into the life of the one who responds genuinely in faith to Christ (συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν).

This Jesus Christ now has ascended to the position of power at the right side of the Heaven Father: “who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him” (ὃς ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ [τοῦ] θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων). This final, climactic declaration of Peter is most supportive of Christ’s suffering and death as the foundation for his admonitions to believers to respond to persecution in a “Christian” manner. These persecutors of the believers had assumed the power of life and death over these believers in ancient Anatolia, and were treating them as scum and worthless. The “right hand” or “right side” image is



one of power and authority. This exaltation of Jesus came when he “went into Heaven” (πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανόν) and is linked to Jesus’ ascension, viewed from a different angle. Most importantly, the ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων are submissive to him. They unquestionably acknowledge his superior power over them. D. C. Arichea and E.A. Nida (Translator’s Handbook,

Logos Systems) summarize it well:

*Angels and heavenly authorities and powers taken together include all spiritual or superhuman beings which in Judaism were believed to be able to influence and affect human life. The fact that they are now subject to Christ emphasizes his absolute power over all spiritual forces, both on earth and in heaven. Such a message would have had tremendous meaning for that handful of Christians who, because of the difficulties they were encountering, could have easily doubted or forgotten that Christ has indeed been and continues to be victorious over all evil powers.*

Thus these earthly persecutors were nothing in comparison to Christ. They really had no real power over these believers, even though they thought they did!

Why do we need to be faithful? Because of our Christ. And we need to maintain integrity in our commitment to him. Only then will we be able to give a good witness to our Lord!



**Greek NT**

<sup>3:13</sup> Καὶ τίς ὁ κακῶσων ὑμᾶς ἐάν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ γένησθε; <sup>3:14</sup> ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι. τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ παραχθῆτε, <sup>3:15</sup> κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἔτοιμοι ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαὶν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, <sup>3:16</sup> ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε καταισχυνθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφῇν.

<sup>3:17</sup> κρεῖττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιοῦντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιοῦντας. <sup>3:18</sup> ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι. <sup>3:19</sup> ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, <sup>3:20</sup> ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὅκτῶ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος. <sup>3:21</sup> ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδησεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, <sup>3:22</sup> ὅς ἐστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ [τοῦ] θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ

**NASB**

13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, 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. 21 Corresponding to that, baptism now saves

**NRSV**

13 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 14 But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, 15 but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; 16 yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. 21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body,

**NLT**

13 Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't be afraid and don't worry. 15 Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. 16 But you must do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak evil against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.

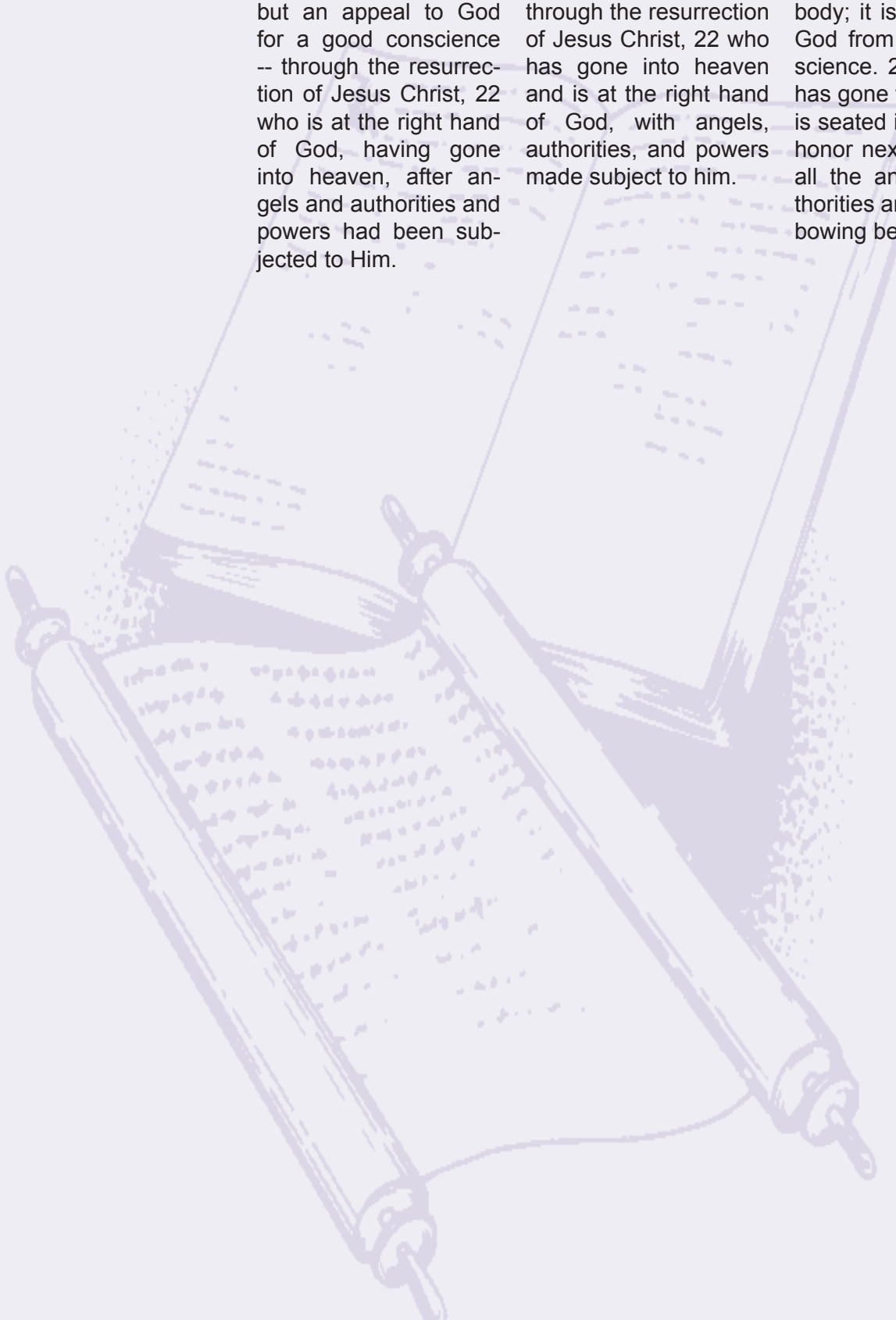
17 Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! 18 Christ also suffered when he died for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. 19 So he went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. 21 And this is a picture of baptism, which now saves you by the power of Jesus Christ's resur-

ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν  
καὶ δυνάμεων.

you -- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience -- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

rection. Baptism is not a removal of dirt from your body; it is an appeal to God from a clean conscience. 22 Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers are bowing before him.



## Greek NT Diagram

- 3.13 Καὶ  
1 τίς (ἐστὶν) ὁ κακῶσων ὑμᾶς  
ἐὰν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ γένησθε;
- 3.14 ἀλλ' ἔτι  
2 εἰ καὶ πάσχετε  
διὰ δικαιοσύνην,  
μακάριοι (εἰσὶν).
- 3 δὲ  
3 τὸν φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε  
μηδὲ  
4 παραχθῆτε,  
3.15 δὲ  
5 κύριον  
τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε  
ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν,  
(ὄντες) ἔτοιμοι  
ἀεὶ  
πρὸς ἀπολογία  
παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον  
περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος,
- 3.16 ἀλλὰ  
μετὰ πραύτητος  
καὶ  
φόβου,  
συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν,  
|-----|-----|  
| ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε  
ἵνα...καταισχυθῶσιν  
↑  
ὑμῶν  
ἀγαθὴν  
ἐν Χριστῷ  
οἱ ἐπηρεύοντες...τὴν...ἀναστροφὴν.
- 3.17 γὰρ  
6 κρεῖττον (ἐστὶν)...πάσχειν  
ἀγαθοποιῶντας,  
εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ,  
ἢ  
7 (κρεῖττον ἐστὶν...πάσχειν)  
κακοποιῶντας.
- 3.18 ὅτι  
8 καὶ  
ἅπαξ  
περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν  
Χριστὸς...ἔπαθεν,

9 δίκαιος (ἔπαθεν)

ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων,  
ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγη τῷ θεῷ

θανατωθεῖς μὲν σαρκὶ  
ζωοποιηθεῖς δὲ πνεύματι·

3.19 ἐν φυλακῇ πορευθεῖς  
ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς...πνεύμασιν...ἐκήρυξεν,

3.20 /-----|  
ἀπειθήσασιν  
ποτε  
ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία  
ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε  
κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ

3.21 /-----|  
εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι...δισώθησαν,  
τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτὼ ψυχαί,  
δι' ὕδατος.

καὶ  
νῦν  
ὁ...ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον...σώζει βάπτισμα,  
|-----|  
οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ρύπου  
| ἀλλὰ  
συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα  
εἰς θεόν,  
/-----|  
δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

3.22 |-----|  
ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ  
ὅς ἐστιν  
πορευθεῖς  
εἰς οὐρανόν  
ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων  
καὶ  
ἐξουσιῶν  
καὶ  
δυνάμεων.

### Semantic Diagram

|     |         |                             |  |
|-----|---------|-----------------------------|--|
|     |         | Καὶ                         |  |
|     | 1-----1 | (Pres --- Ind? 3 S) Τίς     |  |
| A-- |         | ἀλλ’                        |  |
|     | 2-----2 | (Pres --- Ind 2 P ὑμεῖς)    |  |
|     |         | δὲ                          |  |
| I-- | a-----3 | 1 Aor Pass Imp- 2 P (ὑμεῖς) |  |
|     | 1--     | μηδὲ                        |  |
| B-- | b-----4 | 1 Aor Pass Imp- 2 P (ὑμεῖς) |  |
|     |         | δὲ                          |  |
|     | 2-----5 | 1 Aor Act Imp+ 2 P (ὑμεῖς)  |  |
|     |         | γάρ                         |  |
|     | 1-----6 | (Pres --- Ind 3 S) πάσχειν  |  |
| A-- |         | ἢ                           |  |
|     | 2-----7 | (Pres --- Ind 3 S πάσχειν)  |  |
| II- |         | ὅτι                         |  |
|     | 1-----8 | 1 Aor Act Ind 3 S Χριστὸς   |  |
| B-- |         | ---                         |  |
|     | 2-----9 | (1 AorAct Ind 3 S Χριστὸς)  |  |

### Summary of Rhetorical Structure

The core structure of thought flow in the passage is relatively simple. The first two introductory statements ask a rhetorical question probing Peter’s readers experience of suffering evil. Particularly if they are “zealots for good.” The contrastive statement (#2) pronounces a beatitudinal blessing on those who may be suffering because of their righteous way of living. Thus τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ (statement #1) is equated with δικαιοσύνην (statement #2). This beginning pair of declarations positions Peter in regard to facing persecution.

The second set (statements #3-5) contain a series of admonitions. The first two (#s 3-4) are negative, i.e., prohibitive. Both are couched in the Aorist imperative thus adding emphasis or intensity to them. The third one (#5), also an Aorist verb, flips over to the positive perspective. The interplay off the direct objects is insightful. Peter tells his readers to not all their persecutors to shake or upset them. But they are to dedicate themselves in conscious decision to Christ. This entails preparation to defend themselves to their persecutors who will demand to know why the people are following Christ. This defense must be done with integrity. Its objective is to embarrass their persecutors by revealing such a noble way of living that any objection to these believers clearly has not legitimacy.

The second major section (statements #6-9) provide two sets of justifying foundations for the first two sets of demands that Peter has made on his readers. The first pair (#s 6-7, again working off the positive / negative thought structure) affirms this for suffering because of doing good. This is better than to suffer for doing evil.

The final set (#s 8-9) focus attention on Christ and his suffering. He suffered for sins (#8). And most detailedly he suffered as the just one in behalf of the unjust ones.

The very puzzling part of this long statement 9 is the reference to Noah. Interpreters have scratched their heads over these verses, vv. 19-22, since the second century. Noah’s deliverance through the ark from drowning becomes the launch pad into the application of the flood water becoming a representation of Christian baptism. The statement ends in v. 22 with the affirmation that Christ has gone into Heaven where angels, authorities, and powers have been brought into subjection to Him.



## Greek NT Text Analyzed

3:13

Καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two sentences - and

τίς : Interrogative Pronoun - Nom (Subj) - M - S - τίς, τί - who

ὁ κακῶσων : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Subst) - Nom (Pred) - M - S - κακῶω - the one harming, hurting

ὕμᾱς : Pers Pron - Acc (Dir Obj) - P - συ - you

ἐὰν : Subordinate conjunction introducing 3rd class conditional protasis dependent clause - if

τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ : Adj (Subst) - Gen (Obj) - N - S - ἀγαθός, -ή, -όν - for good

ζηλωταὶ : 1 - Nom (Pred) - M - P - ζηλωτής, ὁ - zealots

γένησθε; : 2 Aor (Const) - Dep - Ind (Potent) - 2 - P - γίνομαι - if you become

3:14

ἀλλ' : Coordinate conjunction introducing sentence with strong contrast to the previous one - but

εἰ καὶ : Subordinate conjunctory phrase introducing 3rd class concessive protasis dependent clause - even it

πάσχοιτε : Pres (Desc) - Act - Optative (Potential) - 2 - P - πάσχω - you might / may suffer

διὰ δικαιοσύνην, : 1 - Acc (Cause) - F - S - δικαιοσύνη, ἡ - because / for the sake of righteousness

μακάριοι. : Adj (Pred) - Nom (Pred) - M - P - μακάριος, -ία, -ον - blessed (are you, ἐστε )

τὸν φόβον : 2 - Acc (Pred Obj) - M - S - φόβος, ὁ - their fear (their ability to induce fear)

δὲ : Postpositive coordinate conjunction introducing independent clause with mild contrast to previous one - but

αὐτῶν: Pers Pron - Gen (Poss) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - their

μὴ φοβηθῆτε : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (Causal) - Imp (Prohibi) - 2 - P - φοβέω - don't fear (their fear) = don't let them terrorize you

μηδὲ : Coordinate negative correlative conjunction with negative thrust - neither

ταραχθῆτε, : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (Causal) - Imp (Prohib) - 2 - P - ταρασσώ - let them upset

3:15

κύριον : 2 - Acc (Pred) - M - S - κύριος, ὁ - Lord

δὲ : Postpositive coordinate conjunction introducing independent clause with mild contrast - but

τὸν Χριστὸν : 2 - Acc (Dir Obj) - M - S - Χριστός, ὁ - Christ

ἀγιάσατε : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Imp (Com) - 2 - ἀγιάζω - sanctify (Christ as Lord)

ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις : 1 - Loc (Sphere) - F - P - καρδία, ἡ - in your hearts

ὕμῶν, : Pers Pron - Gen (Poss) - P - συ - your

ἔτοιμοι : Adj (Pred) - Nom (Pred) - M - P - ἔτοιμος, -η, -ον - ready, prepared

ἀεὶ : Adverb of time - always, unceasingly

πρὸς ἀπολογία : 1 - Acc (Ref) - F - S - - for a defense speech

παντὶ : Adj (Pred) - Dat - M - S - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - to everyone

τῷ αἰτοῦντι : Pres (Desc) - Dat (Ref) - M - S - αἰτέω - to everyone asking

ὕμᾱς : Pers Pron - Acc (Dir Obj) - P - συ - you

λόγον : 2 - Acc (Appos) - M - S - λόγος, ὁ - a message, word

περὶ τῆς ...ἐλπίδος, : 3 - Gen (Ref) - F - S - ἐλπίς, ἐλπίδος, ἡ - about the hope

ἐν ὑμῖν: Pers Pron - Loc (Sphere) - P - συ - in you

3:16

ἀλλὰ : Coordinate conjunction introducing independent clause in strong contrast to what preceded it - but, instead, however

μετὰ πραΰτητος : 3 - Gen (Assoc) - F - πραΰτης, -ητος, ἡ - with humbleness, meekness, gentleness

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two nouns - and

φόβου, : 2 - Gen (Assoc) - M - S - φόβος, ὁ - fear, reverence, respect

συνείδησιν : 3 - Acc (Dir Obj) - F - S - συνείδησις, -εως, ἡ - conscience

ἔχοντες : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Temp / Modal) - Nom - M - P - ἔχω - (while) having, possessing

ἀγαθὴν, : Adj (Attrib) - Acc - F - S - ἀγαθός, -ή, -όν - a good (conscience)

ἵνα : Subordinate conjunction introducing a conjunctory adverbial purpose dependent clause - in order

that, so that

ἐν ᾧ : Rel Pron - Loc (Time) - M - S - ὅς, ἧ, ὅ - in which (time, χρόνω) while,

καταλαλεῖσθε : Pres (Desc) - Pass (NAE) - Ind - 2 - P - καταλαλέω - you are being spoken against, slandered

καταισχυνθῶσιν : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Subjunc (Potential) - 3 - P - καταισχύνω - they may be put to shame, embarrassed

οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Subst) - Nom (Subj) - M - P - ἐπηρεάζω - those reviling, mistreating, insulting

ὑμῶν : Pers Pron - Gen (Poss) - P - συ - your

τὴν ἀγαθὴν : Adj (Attrib) - Acc - F - S - ἀγαθός, -ή, -όν - your good

ἐν Χριστῷ : 2 - Loc (Sphere) - M - S - Χριστός, ὁ - in Christ

ἀναστροφῆν. : 1 - Acc (Dir Obj) - F - S - ἀναστροφή, ἡ - manner of living, lifestyle

3:17

κρεῖττον : Adj (Pred) - Nom (Pred) - N - S - κρείττων, κρείσσω, -ον, -ονος - better, greater, superior

γὰρ : Postpositive coordinate conjunction introducing causal independent clause - for

ἀγαθοποιῶντας, : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc. (Adj: Subst) - Acc (Ref) - M - P - ἀγαθοποιέω - you who are doing good, while you are doing good.

εἰ : Subordinate conjunction introducing 4th class conditional protasis dependent clause - if (possibly)

θέλοι : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - - it wishes, wills, desires

τὸ θέληματοῦ : 3 - Nom (Subj) - N - S - θέλημα, -ητος, τό - the will of God

θεοῦ, : 2 - Gen (Poss) - M - S - θεός, ὁ - of God, God's

πάσχειν : Pres (Desc) - Act - Infin (S: Subj) - πάσχω - to be suffering

ἢ : Disjunctive coordinate conjunction setting up second option to the first - than (w. comparative adjective above)

κακοποιῶντας, : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc. (Adj: Subst) - Acc (Ref) - M - P - κακοποιέω - you who are doing bad, while you are doing bad.

3:18

ὅτι : Subordinate conjunction, possibly used as substitute for coordinate conjunction γὰρ to introduce causal sentence - for

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction here used as correlative adverbial modifier in ascensive function - also

Χριστός : 2 - Nom (Subj) - M - S - Χριστός, ὁ - Christ

ἅπαξ : Sequential adverb - one time, once

περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν : 1 - Gen (Adv) - F - P - ἁμαρτία, ἡ - for sins

ἔπαθεν, : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - πάσχω - he suffered

δίκαιος : Adj (Subst) - Nom (Subj) - M - S - δίκαιος, -α, -ον - the just, righteous one

ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, : Adj (Subst) - Abl (Exchange) - M - P - ἄδικος, -ον - in behalf of the unjust, the unrighteous

ἵνα : Subordinate conjunction used to introduce conjunctory adverbial purpose dependent clause - in order that

ὑμᾶς : Pers Pron - Acc (Dir Obj) - P - συ - you

προσαγάγη : 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Subj (Potential) - 3 - S - προσάγω - he might lead

τῷ θεῷ : 2 - Dat (Indir Obj) - M - S - θεός, ὁ - to God

θανατωθεῖς : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - M - S - θανατόω - after having been put to death

μὲν : Post positive particle of emphasis used in correlative connection to δὲ below: on the one hand...

σαρκὶ : 3 - Loc (Place) - F - S - σάρξ, σαρκός, ἡ - in the flesh, physically

ζωοποιηθεῖς : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - M - S - ζωοποιέω - after having been made alive

δὲ : Post positive coordinate conjunction used to introduce ptc phrase in contrast to preceding one - but

πνεύματι : 3 - Loc (Place) - N - S - πνεῦα, -ατος, τό - in the spirit

3:19

ἐν ᾧ : Rel Pron - Loc (Time) / (Sphere) - N - S - ὅς, ἧ, ὅ - The relative clause can be understood in one

of two ways. If the pronoun functions in the Locative of time, with χρόνος being understood, the meaning of the relative clause is 'after having been made alive in the Spirit he preached to the spirits.' But if the relative pronoun is Locative of sphere, the resulting clause is an attributive modifier of Spirit and means that Christ preached to the spirits in the Spirit, or in his spirit.

καὶ :

τοῖς...πνεύμασιν : 3 - Dat (Indir Obj[if modifying verb]) / Dat (Ref [if modifying ptc])- N - P - πνεῦμα, -ατος, τό - to the spirits

ἐν φυλακῇ : 1 - Loc (Sphere) - F - S - φυλακή, ἡ - in prison

πορευθεῖς : 1 Aor (Const) - Dep - Ptc. (Adv: Temp) - Nom - M - S - πορεύομαι - after having gone

ἐκήρυξεν, : 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - κηρύσσω - he preached, proclaimed, heralded  
3:20

ἀπειθήσασιν : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Attrib / Subst) - Dat (Appos) - M - P - ἀπειθέω - to those disobeying, living in disobedience

ποτε : Adverb of past time - once, formerly

ὅτε : Subordinate conjunction introducing conjunctory adverbial temporal dependent clause - when

ἀπεξεδέχετο : Imperf (Desc) - Dep - Ind - 3 - S - ἀπεκδέχομαι - it was eagerly awaiting, expecting

ἡ...μακροθυμία : 1 - Nom (Subj) - Ind - 1 - S - μακροθυμία, ἡ - the patience, endurance

τοῦ θεοῦ : 2 - Gen (Poss) - M - S - θεός, ὁ - God's, of God

ἐν ἡμέραις : 1 - Loc (Time) - F - P - ἡμέρα, ἡ - in the days

Νῶε : Proper Name - Gen (Ref) - M - S - Νῶε, ὁ - of Noah

κατασκευαζομένης : Pres (Desc) - Pass (NAE) - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Gen Abs - F - S - κατασκευάζω - while the ark was being built

κιβωτοῦ : 2 - Gen Abs - F - S - κιβωτός, ἡ - the ark

εἰς ἣν : Rel Pron - Acc (Measure) - F - S - ὅς, ἣ, ὅ - introduces a relative adjectival modifying clause linked back to κιβωτοῦ - into which

ὀλίγοι, : Adj (Subst) - Nom (Subj) - M - P - ὀλιγος, -η, -ον - a few

τοῦτ' : Dem Pron - Nom (Subj) - N - S - οὗτος, αὕτη, τοῦτο - this is

ἔστιν : Pres (Desc) - Ind - 3 - S - εἰμί - this is

ὀκτώ : Adj (cardinal #; attrib) - Nom - F - P - ὀκτώ - eight

ψυχαί, : 1 - Nom (Pred) - F - S - ψυχή, ἡ - lives, individuals, souls

διασώθησαν : 1 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Ind - 3 - P - διασώζω - they were delivered, saved, brought safely through the flood

δι' ὕδατος, : 3 - Gen (Measure) - N - S - ὕδωρ, -ατος, τό - through the water

3:21

ὁ : Rel Pron - Nom (Subj) - N - S - ὅς, ἣ, ὅ - introduces adjectival modifying relative clause linked back to ὕδατος - which

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction here function as correlative adverb in ascensive use - also

ὑμᾶς : Pers Pron - Acc (Dir Obj) - P - συ - you

ἀντίτυπον : Adj (Attrib) - Nom - N - S - ἀντίτυπος, -ον - corresponding to (baptism)

νῦν : Adverb of present time - now

σώζει : Pres (Desc) - Act - Ind - 3 - S - σώζω - it saves, delivers

βάπτισμα, : 3 - Nom (Subj) - N - S - βάπτισμα, ατος, τό - baptism

οὐ : Negative negating the first phrase expression - no

σαρκός : 3 - Gen (Ref) - F - S - σάρξ, σαρκός, ἡ - of (filthy) flesh

ἀπόθεσις : 1 - Nom (Appos) - F - S - ἀπόθεσις, εως, ἡ - the throwing off, putting off

ρύπου : 2 - Gen (Desc) - M - S - ῥύπος, ὁ - of filth

ἀλλὰ : Coordinate conjunction introducing implicit independent clause of strong contrast - but

συνειδήσεως : 3 - Gen (Ref) - F - S - συνειδήσις, -εως, ἡ - of a clean conscience

ἀγαθῆς : Adj (Attrib) - Gen - F - S - ἀγαθός, -ή, -όν - clean, good, clear

ἐπερώτημα : 3 - Nom (Appos) - N - S - ἐπερώτημα, -ατος, τό - promise, answer, appeal

εἰς θεόν, : 2 - Acc (Measure) - M - S - θεός, ὁ - unto, to God

δι' ἀναστάσεως : 3 - Gen (Means) - F - S - ἀναστάσις, -εως, ἡ - through the resurrection

Ἰησοῦ : Proper Name - Gen (Poss) - M - S - Ἰησοῦς, ὁ - of Jesus  
Χριστοῦ, : Proper Name - Gen (Appos) - M - S - Χριστός, ὁ - Christ  
3:22

ὃς : Rel Pron - Nom (Subj) - M - S - ὅς, ἦ, ὅ - introducing relative adjectival modifying clause linked back to Ἰησοῦ Χριστου - who

ἐστίν : Pres (Desc) - Ind - 3 - S - εἰμί - who is

ἐν δεξιᾷ : Adj (Subst) - Loc (Place) - F - S - δεξιός, -ιά, -ιόν - at the right hand (χείρασιν) / at the right side

[τοῦ] θεοῦ : 2 - Gen (Poss) - M - S - θεός, ὁ - of God, God's

πορευθεὶς : 1 Aor (Const) - Dep - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - M - S - πορεύομαι - after having gone

εἰς οὐρανόν : 2 - Acc (Measure) - M - S - οὐρανός, ὁ - into Heaven

ὑποταγέντων : 2 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE) - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Gen Abs - M - S - ὑποτάσσω - being subjected (to him),

αὐτῷ : Pers Pron - Dat (Indir Obj) - M - S - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - to him

ἀγγέλων : 2 - Gen Abs - M - P - ἄγγελος, ὁ - angels

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two nouns - and

ἐξουσιῶν : 1 - Gen Abs - F - P - ἐξουσία, ἡ - authorities

καὶ : Coordinate conjunction linking two nouns - and

δυνάμεων. : 3 - Gen Abs - F - P - δύναμις, -εως, ἡ - powers