



The First Letter of Peter  
**Bible Study Session 15**  
**1 Peter 3:13-22**  
**“Suffering Unjustly”**



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**Greek NT**

13 Καὶ τίς ὁ κακῶσων ὑμᾶς ἐάν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ γένησθε; 14 ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι. τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ παραχθῆτε, 15 κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἔτοιμοι αἰεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαὶν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, 16 ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνειδήσιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαεῖσθε καταισχυνῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφὴν. 17 κρείττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιοῦντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιοῦντας. 18 ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ, θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι. 19 ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, 20 ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτώ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος. 21 ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπτου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 22 ὃς ἔστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.

**Gute Nachricht Bibel**

13 Kann euch überhaupt jemand Böses antun, wenn ihr euch mit ganzer Hingabe darum bemüht, das Gute zu tun? 14 Wenn ihr aber trotzdem leiden müsst, weil ihr tut, was Gott will, dann dürft ihr euch glücklich preisen. Habt keine Angst vor Menschen; lasst euch nicht erschrecken! 15 Christus allein ist der Herr; haltet ihn heilig in euren Herzen und weicht vor niemand zurück! Seid immer bereit, Rede und Antwort zu stehen, wenn jemand fragt, warum ihr so von Hoffnung erfüllt seid. 16 Antwortet taktvoll und bescheiden und mit dem gebotenen Respekt – in dem Bewusstsein, dass ihr ein reines Gewissen habt. Dann werden alle beschämt sein, die euch verleumden, wenn sie sehen, was für ein einwandfreies Leben ihr in Verbindung mit Christus führt. 17 Wenn Gott es aber anders beschlossen hat und es auf sie keinen Eindruck macht, ist es auf jeden Fall besser, für gute Taten zu leiden als für schlechte. 18 Auch Christus hat ja für die Sünden der Menschen gelitten, der Gerechte für die Schuldigen, ein für alle Mal. So sollte er euch – als Mensch getötet, aber durch den Geist Gottes zum Leben erweckt – den Zugang zu Gott eröffnen. 19 In der Kraft dieses Geistes ging er auch zu den Geistern im Gefängnis und verkündete ihnen seinen Sieg. 20 Sie waren ungehorsam gewesen zur Zeit Noachs, als Gott in seiner Geduld mit der Strafe noch wartete, solange Noah die Arche baute. Nur wenige Menschen, nämlich acht, wurden damals in die Arche aufgenommen und durch das Wasser gerettet, das die Arche trug. 21 Das ist ein Hinweis auf das Wasser der Taufe, die euch jetzt rettet. Denn der Sinn der Taufe ist ja nicht, dass der Körper vom Schmutz gereinigt wird. Wer sich taufen lässt, bittet

**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, 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

**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 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

damit Gott, sein Gewissen von aller Schuld zu reinigen. Das ist möglich, weil Jesus Christus von den Toten auferstanden 22 und zum Himmel aufgestiegen ist. Dort hat er den Ehrenplatz an Gottes rechter Seite eingenommen, und die Engel und alle überirdischen Mächte und Gewalten sind ihm unterworfen.

angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

the angels and authorities and powers are bowing before him.

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### Introduction to Study

With his rhetorical question at the beginning, “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?,” Peter turns a corner in his letter to the believers in ancient Anatolia. To be sure, he hinted at this new topic in the previous section (3:8-12) that closed out his discussion of “obligations” in 2:11-3:12.<sup>1</sup> But with 3:13 Peter begins a lengthy discussion about “persecution” in 3:13-5:11 that will occupy the remainder of the letter body. Very rich discussion of the Christian experience of suffering under persecution will follow.

In parts of our modern world Christianity is experiencing persecution today. And these words of Peter have particular relevance to believers caught up in hostility to their faith. To the rest of us, suffering hardship does not usually have anything to do with our Christian faith. We simply live in a sinful world and pay the consequences of it with difficulties coming our way. Yet, Peter’s words still have something to say to those who are not being persecuted for their faith.

## I. Context and Background<sup>2</sup>

### a. Historical

**External History.** In the copying of this text during the first eight hundred years of Christian history, some variations of wording have surfaced among the many surviving manuscript copies. The UBS 4th revised edition Greek New Testament lists six variations in wording that the editors considered important for Bible translators to be aware of. The Nestle-Aland 27th revised edition Greek text list twenty-six variations of wording in this passage.<sup>3</sup> We will consider the six UBS variations in our discussion.

**Verse 14.** In a few late manuscripts the phrase μηδὲ παραχθῆτε (*neither be intimidated*) is replaced with καὶ οὐ μὴ παραχθῆτε (*and absolutely be not intimidated*).<sup>4</sup> Also a small number of manuscripts completely omit the

<sup>1</sup> Peter 3:9, NRSV, “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.”

<sup>2</sup>Serious study of the Bible requires careful analysis of the background and setting of the scripture passage. Failure to do this leads to interpretive garbage and possibly to heresy. Detailed study of the background doesn’t always answer all the questions, but it certainly gets us further along toward correct understanding of both the historical and contemporary meanings of a text. This serious examination of both the historical and literary background of every passage will be presented in summary form with each of the studies.

<sup>3</sup>It is important to note the different goals for the ‘apparatus’ that lists variations in wording for both printed Greek New Testaments. In the 4th revised edition Greek New Testament, “the apparatus includes only those textual variants that involve significant differences in meaning for translators. For each variant, extensive manuscript evidence is cited, and an indication is given of the relative degree of certainty for each textual decision. A separate apparatus provides information on major differences in punctuation.” But in the Nestle-Aland 27th edition Novum Testamentum Graece, “the text of this edition is identical to that of the 26th edition, but the critical apparatus and the appendices have been thoroughly revised. Those textual witnesses that are essential to the constitution and the history of the text are more precisely selected and clearly arranged. A new appendix deals with special information regarding the source material.” These two different goals dictate the amount of material that is listed, as well as the format of the listing. For more details, see “The New Testament,” United Bible Societies online.

<sup>4</sup>These manuscripts are numbers 1292, 1505, 1611, 1852, 2138. All of these are very late and not major witnesses to the original reading of the text.

phrase.<sup>5</sup> As is reflected in the translations of each variation, the meaning of the text remains essentially the same with the difference being on how much emphasis is placed on not being intimidated.

**Verse 15.** Here the variations are between the text reading of κύριον τὸν Χριστὸν (*Christ as Lord*) and the alternative of κύριον τὸν θεόν (*the Lord God*).<sup>6</sup> The text reading of κύριον τὸν Χριστὸν has much greater evidence both externally and internally in its support, and thus should be considered original.

**Verse 16.** The text reading of ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε (*while you are being slandered*) is replaced by ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν (*while they slander you as evildoers*) in the pattern of 2:12, with several variations of this alternative reading in different manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> Again, the weight of the evidence falls on the shorter reading of the printed text: ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε.

**Verse 18a.** Several variations of wording from the printed text, περι ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν (*for sins he suffered*), surface here. The core alternative reading is περι ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπέθανεν (*for sins he died*) with numerous variations of the alternative reading.<sup>8</sup> Because the weight of evidence is not heavily favoring one reading over the others, different translations will adopt different readings of the Greek text as the basis for their translation.<sup>9</sup> Although some evidence for ‘died for sins’ exists, the evidence favors ‘suffered for sins.’

**Verse 18b.** A second variation in verse 18 concerns a pronoun. The printed text reads ὑμᾶς προσαγάγη τῷ θεῷ (*he might lead you to God*). Substantial manuscript evidence favors ἡμᾶς (*us*) over ὑμᾶς (*you*).<sup>10</sup> The

<sup>5</sup>“A few witnesses (P<sup>72</sup> B L) lack μηδὲ παραχθῆτε because the eye of the copyist passed from φοβηΘΗΤΕ to παραχΘΗΤΕ, omitting what lies between.” [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 621.]

<sup>6</sup>“In place of Χριστόν, the Textus Receptus substitutes θεόν (God) with a few later uncial manuscripts and most minuscules. The reading Χριστόν, however, is strongly supported by early and diverse external evidence. It is also more likely that a copyist replaced the less familiar expression κύριον τὸν Χριστόν (Christ as Lord) with the familiar expression κύριον τὸν θεόν (the Lord God) than vice versa.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 487.]

<sup>7</sup>“The shorter reading in the text is supported chiefly by Egyptian (Alexandrian) witnesses. This reading most easily explains the origins of the other readings. Recalling the words ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν (in which they speak evil of you as evildoers) in 2:12, copyists modified the shorter reading by adding ὡς κακοποιῶν (as evildoers) or by changing the second person plural passive verb καταλαλεῖσθε (you are spoken evil of) to the third person plural active verb καταλαλοῦσιν or καταλαλῶσιν and adding the plural pronoun ὑμῶν (you) or ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν (of you as evildoers). In languages where passive verb forms do not exist, it will be natural to say ‘when they speak evil of you,’ regardless of the text followed.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 487.]

<sup>8</sup>“The manuscripts contain a confusing number of different readings. The reading in the text, followed by NRSV, FC [1997], and TOB, is preferred for the following reasons: (1) the verb ‘suffered’ (ἔπαθεν) is a favorite of the author, occurring elsewhere in 1 Peter eleven times, and here it carries on the thought of v. 17, whereas the verb ἀποθνήσκειν (to die) abruptly introduces a new idea (2) in view of the presence of the expression περι ἁμαρτιῶν (for sins), copyists would be more likely to substitute ἀπέθανεν (died) for ἔπαθεν (suffered) than vice versa and (3) the readings with the pronouns ἡμῶν (our [sins]) or ὑμῶν (your [sins]) (which in later Greek had the same pronunciation) are natural additions that we would expect copyists to make.

“REB follows the variant reading ‘suffered for our sins,’ while other translations follow the variant ‘died for sins’ (NIV, TEV, FC [1982], Seg, and NJB). Regarding the writer’s use of the verb ἔπαθεν here, Senior (1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter, p. 100) comments that ‘by referring to Christ’s ‘suffering’ the author can more readily use the example of Christ to give meaning to the sufferings of his community. In any case, the formula ‘Christ suffered for sins ...’ surely includes the notion of his redemptive death (which is explicitly mentioned in the latter half of the verse).” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 487-88.]

<sup>9</sup>For example: “*suffered for sins*,” NRSV, ASV, HCSB, NCV; “suffered...for sins,” KJV, ESV, NKJV; “suffered when he died for our sins,” NLT; “suffered because of others’ sins,” Message; “también Cristo murió por los pecados una,” BdA; “también Cristo padeció una vez por los injustos,” VR-V; “hat ja für die Sünden der Menschen gelitten,” GNB; “went through pain for sins,” BBE; “hat...für Sünden gelitten,” Elberfelder 1905; “für unsre Sünden gelitten hat,” Luther 1912; “a souffert une fois pour les péchés,” Segond; “*died for sins*.” TEV, NASB, NIV, Nlrv, RSV.

<sup>10</sup>“Both the second person plural pronoun ὑμᾶς (followed by most translations) and the first person plural pronoun ἡμᾶς (followed by RSV, REB, and NJB) have good manuscript support. It is likely that copyists would have changed the pronoun ὑμᾶς (you) to ἡμᾶς (us), in order to make the direct object include all Christians, rather than vice versa.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 488.]



evidence slightly favors ὑμᾶς (you).

**Verse 21.** The relative pronoun ὃ (which) is replaced by ὡς (as) by a few manuscripts, or just omitted completely by some others. These ‘corrections’ seem to be efforts to reduce a grammatical difficulty raised by the relative pronoun.<sup>11</sup> In spite of some uncertainty over what ὃ refers to, the evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of it being the original reading.

As can be seen from the above examples, the variations of readings including the additional ones listed in the apparatus of the N-A 27th edition text do not pose major difficulties to understanding the wording of this passage.

**Internal History.** The time and place markers in the passage are fairly numerous. In present time, Peter speaks of his readers going through suffering. The issue here is how extensive was this suffering? And what was its nature? Was it spasmodic and localized persecution? Or, systematic and wide spread? Was it coming from Roman governmental authorities? In Rome? Or from regional governors? Or, was it being generated by hostility locally from city leaders, Jewish synagogue leaders etc.? The answers to these questions are best analyzed in each passage where persecution is referenced, and then an evaluation of the larger picture made at the end.

The reason for the importance of this is mostly coming out of modern studies, where assumptions about governmental persecution of Christians across the empire are sometimes read into these texts as a basis for denying that Peter had any thing to do with the composition of this letter. Widespread systematic persecution of Christians across the Roman empire cannot be documented before the end of the first Christian century and mostly in the second century. Peter had long since died by this time. Additionally, the counter argument of placing this letter in the time of Nero’s reign in the middle 60s wrongly assumes that Nero’s persecution of Christians in the city of Rome at that time was also an empire wide mandate -- something simply not supported by ancient Roman and Christian writings. Thus forming a clearer picture of what Peter means is important to understanding the picture of persecution painted in the letter.

The other time / place markers more directly referenced in this passage allude to Christ’s death on the cross that had happened around thirty years prior to the writing of this letter (cf. vv. 18-20). But very curiously in this description Peter alludes to Christ, while in the grave, having “made a proclamation to the spirits in prison” which seems to be linked to disobedient people alive many hundreds of years before in the time of Noah and the flood. This very obscure reference has occasioned huge diversity of interpretation, along with controversy. Since the issues are doctrinal as much as historical, we will treat them under the exegesis below. The final time / place reference is in verse 22 and refers to Jesus’ ascension to Heaven and being seated at the right hand of God where He exercises authority over “angels, authorities, and powers.” This is also more an exegetical issue than an historical one.

### **b. Literary**

**Literary Form (Genre).** The small genre issues here are centered on a generalized paraenesis for most of the passage that doesn’t exhibit traits of any of the sub categories of paraenesis. Also present is Peter’s use of Isaiah 8:12-13 in verses fourteen and fifteen. How closely does he follow the LXX text of this Old Testament text? How does he use this to refer to Christ? Thirdly, the question of verses 18-19 is whether or not Peter uses a piece of pre-formed Christian tradition or not? The Nestle-Aland 27th edition text places this in poetic form reflecting the editors’ views that it does come from pre-existing Christian writings. But most other printed Greek texts do not format this in poetic structure reflecting the opposite view that Peter was responsible for this material. These genre issues are very oriented toward exegetical concerns, and thus will be discussed in greater detail in the explanation of the text below. Here we just need to know they exist.

**Literary Context.** The literary setting for 3:18-22 is illustrated in the chart on the next page. The passage stands as the first sub-unit of three in 3:13-4:11 where Peter gives **encouragement** to believers who

<sup>11</sup>“This neuter singular relative pronoun has strong and widespread manuscript support. It is, however, grammatically difficult, and for this reason the other readings appear to be attempts to improve this more difficult reading. The relative pronoun is most likely to be taken as the subject of the verb σώφει (saves). The antecedent of ὃ is probably ὕδατος (water; so Michaels, 1 Peter, pp. 213–14; and Achtemeier, 1 Peter, p. 266) and not the entire preceding clause (so Senior, 1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter, pp. 104–5). Some interpreters, however, consider βάπτισμα (baptism) to be the antecedent. The interpretation of v. 21 is very difficult, and this textual problem must be considered in connection with grammatical and lexical difficulties also (see Elliott, 1 Peter, pp. 668–82).” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament : An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 488.]



2.18 Because  
also  
once for all  
for sins

48 **Christ...suffered,**

49 **just suffered**  
for the unjust,  
in order that he might lead you to God,  
having died on the one hand in the flesh  
but  
having been made alive by the Spirit;  
3.19 having gone  
2.20 while he also preached to the spirits in prison,  
| disobeying  
formerly
while the patience of God was waiting
in the days of Noah
-----
in the building of the ark
in which a few were saved
through water
that is eight lives  
/-----|  
2.21 which also now baptism as a type saves you  
not the putting away of filthy flesh |  
but |  
the answer of a clear conscience to|God  
/-----|  
through the resurrection  
of Jesus Christ,  
/-----|  
2:22 who is at the right hand of God  
after having gone  
into Heaven  
with angels and authorities and powers being subject to Him.

The organization of ideas in this passage is relatively easy to understand from the above block diagram. The text is introduced by a rhetorical question (# 41; v. 13). The rest of the passage answers this question in two fundamental ways. *First*, both a beatitude blessing (#42; v. 14) and three admonitions (#s 43-45; vv. 15-16) are set forth. *Next*, two sets of supporting reasons for the blessing and admonitions are presented (#s 46-49; vv. 17-22). The first set (#s 46-47; v. 17) is the primary reason (γὰρ). The second set (#s 48-49; vv. 18-22) is secondary (ὅτι), although the example of Christ is the central focus.

## II. Message

The structural organization of the passage as explained above forms the basis of our exegesis around the two ideas: a question and its answer.

### a. Who can oppose those doing good? v. 13

13 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

13 Καὶ τίς ὁ κακῶσων ὑμᾶς ἐὰν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ γένησθε;

#### Notes:

This beginning rhetorical question serves both to signal a shift in topic and an introduction to the subsequent passage that functions as an answer to the question. In a manner typical for First Peter, some of the key words in the question reach back to the quote from Psalm 34 in verses ten through twelve: κακῶσων

looks back to ποιούντας κακά in verse twelve, and τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ echoes ποιησάτω ἀγαθόν in verse eleven. This is Peter's way of linking vv. 13-22 to vv. 8-12. Yet, the rhetorical question structure along with the somewhat different meaning attached to these words signals a new topic coming on to the table for consideration.<sup>12</sup> In reality, Peter has already alluded to unjust suffering several times,<sup>13</sup> but without any details of discussion. Now he moves toward a much more detailed discussion of this theme.<sup>14</sup>

The component elements of the question deserve consideration. τίς ὁ κακῶσων ὑμᾶς, "who will harm you," identifies the potential source of opposition.<sup>15</sup> The verb itself, κακῶω, generally specifies physical harm being done to someone.<sup>16</sup> The precise nature of this is not spelled out, although some signals are given in the context with πάσχοιτε (may suffer, v. 14), ἐν ᾧ καταλαλεῖσθε (while you are being slandered, v. 16), and the example of Christ's death (vv. 18-19).<sup>17</sup> Both the verb meaning and the context allude to persecution, mostly of a hostile physical and potentially violent nature, but can include verbal abuse as well. This does not imply a solely governmental source, although it does not exclude governmental driven hostility to Christianity.

These believers in the provinces of ancient Anatolia certainly lived in an environment that was at best suspicious of this new religious movement. At times the surrounding society, including town leaders along with neighbors, verbally misrepresented this new religion as questionable and very likely on some occasions resorted to physical violence against the believers in order to stamp out its growing influence. How often governmental authorities were brought into the situation and how often simple mob-rule prevailed are not spelled out. No clear indication is given that the Jewish synagogue became the source of such hostility. But the likelihood is that on some occasions it did. Clearly this was the case in Paul's missionary activity in two of these provinces, Galatia and Asia, several years earlier, as is spelled out in Acts 13-14 and 19.

But what was the harm that could be inflicted on the believers? Physically it was being ostracized from the community, imprisonment, and possibly martyrdom. But is that all that Peter has in mind? Very likely Peter was alluding in the question that such 'harm' done physically could in no way do spiritual harm to their

<sup>12</sup>"The previous section called for honorable behavior (2:13–3:12) and concluded with a quotation from Ps 33[34], stressing the importance of 'doing what is right' (cf. also 3:6). Expanding on this point, our author now relates upright behavior to the issue of handling abuse from outsiders and the suffering that it brings. This problem of suffering despite doing what is right was already touched on earlier (1:6; 2:12b, 15b, 19–20, 21–24; 3:9ab) but now becomes the subject of sustained attention." [John H. Elliott, *I Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 618.]

<sup>13</sup>Cf. 1:6; 2:12b, 15b, 19–20, 21–24; 3:9ab. Particularly important is the somewhat similar discussion targeting Christian slaves suffering unjustly from non-Christian owners in 2:18-25. Parallel terms and similar emphases are found between 2:18-25 and 3:13-22. The implication of this is clear: what was applicable to Christian slaves in the first century is also applicable to the entire Christian community. Both will experience persecution because of their Christian faith. Their reaction should be the same, primarily to look to the example of Jesus.

<sup>14</sup>"Points touched on elsewhere are here made thematic: Christians are not to give offense (v. 13; cf. 3:9), they are to hold Christ as Lord (vv. 14–15a; cf. 1:3), they are to give the lie to accusations of evil by living a good life (v. 16; cf. 2:12, 15) because it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (v. 17; cf. 1:6; 2:19–20). Indeed, ideas expressed repeatedly in this letter are concentrated in these verses: (1) Christians regularly suffer rejection and disgrace; (2) they must do what is good even if their goodness is the occasion for suffering; (3) suffering is to be due only to their doing good, not to any evil they do; (4) because they suffer for doing good they are blessed; (5) Christian lives must witness to their hope, because Christ's triumphant resurrection carries with it the promise for the Christians' future." [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *I Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 229.]

<sup>15</sup>"The participial phrase ὁ κακῶσων ('the one who harms') derives from a verb (κακῶω) that is relatively rare in the NT, occurring most often in Acts, where it states or implies persecution of Christians;<sup>18</sup> but the context in which it is used here indicates that more than mere social persecution is meant." [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *I Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia—a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 229.]

<sup>16</sup>κακῶω fut. κακῶσω; 1 aor. ἐκάκωσα; pf. 2 sg. κεκάκωκας 3 Km 17:20. Pass.: 1 aor. ἐκακῶθην LXX; pf. inf. κεκακῶσθαι.

**1. to cause harm to, harm, mistreat** w. acc. (Hom.+; PTebt 407, 9 [II A.D.]; LXX; TestSol 8:11; Test12Patr; Philo, Spec. Leg. 2, 135; Jos., Vi. 121; Just., D. 109, 3 [s. Mi 4:6]) **Ac 7:6** (Gen 15:13), **19; 12:1; 18:10; 1 Pt 3:13**. Pass. 1 Cl 16:7 (Is 53:7).

**2. to cause someone to think badly about another, make angry, embitter** τὰς ψυχὰς τινῶν κατὰ τινος poison the minds of some persons against another **Ac 14:2** (cp. Jos., Ant. 16, 10; pass., 16, 205; 262; Ps 105:32).—DELG s.v. κακό. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 502.]

<sup>17</sup>The Christian slave in 2:18-25 may suffer unjustly (πάσχων ἀδίκως, 2:19) and suffer while doing good (εἰ ἀγαθοποιούντες καὶ πάσχοντες, 2:20). Believers generally may be slandered as criminals (ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν, 2:12). They may also experience various kinds of grief in suffering (ὀλίγον ἄρτι εἰ δέον [ἐστίν] λυπηθέντες ἐν ποικίλοις πειρασμοῖς, 1:6).



relationship with God.<sup>18</sup> Thus the persecution inflicted by non-believers ultimately would have no impact on the believers.

The believers are assumed to have become zealots for good: τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ γένησθε. This assumption is not presented as universal, but rather as likely in most instances; ἔάν introduces a third class protasis in the conditional sentence structure here.<sup>19</sup> What does τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ mean?<sup>20</sup> The larger context suggests possible references. It is suffering *because of righteousness* (πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, v. 14), *being ready to defend our Christian hope* (ἔτοιμοι ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογία πάντῳ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, v. 15), *the noble lifestyle in Christ* (τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν, v. 16), *doing good* (ἀγαθοποιοῦντας, v. 17). Also included are the Christian traits mentioned in 3:8-12, along with the other moral admonitions in the letter. The unusual phrase τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ, *zealots for good*, underscores the passionate commitment of believers to live according to the God's will in incorporating character traits, speaking words, and doing actions that flow out of God's leadership in our lives.

The point of the rhetorical question is to stress that ultimately no spiritual harm can ever come to those who are following God's leadership in their lives. To be certain, physical harm can happen in persecution, but given the ultimate picture of eternity, such harm doesn't matter and has no ability to impact our relationship with God in a negative manner.<sup>21</sup>

Here is the challenge to pleasure oriented modern society. Persecution can and does happen. Sometimes it can be severe, leading to the death of the believer. But ultimately what harm can the persecutors do? Absolutely none is the bottom line. Nothing they can do will harm our relationship with the Heavenly Father, and thus their hostility to our faith is of no consequence. In this we can rejoice. In this we look beyond the moment of pain and suffering to see the eternal gain. Compromising our faith just to avoid persecution is not an option. The eternal joys of faithfulness to our God far outweigh the momentary pain and suffering of persecution.

#### **b. Remain faithful even when they do oppose you, vv. 14-22**

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

<sup>18</sup>“The thrust of the verse is therefore not to deny the presence of social persecution in the lives of Christians, something the author knows as both possibility (e.g., 1:6; 3:14) and reality (4:12–19), but rather to point out that such persecution is not capable of removing them from the divine favor shown them in Jesus Christ. Such awareness will give them courage to remain steadfast in their faith despite suffering at the hands of those who reject the gospel.” [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 230.]

<sup>19</sup>The third class condition protasis here presents a hypothetical possibility with ἔάν, which is used only here in First Peter out of 329 uses in the New Testament generally. It stands closely with the second class concessive protasis introduced with εἰ καὶ (plus the optative mood verb πάσχοιτε) in verse 14. This stands in contrast to the fourth class conditional protasis εἰ ἐέλτοι... in v. 17 (also w. the optative mood verb), which suggests less likelihood of suffering. The first class concessive protasis καὶ εἴ τινες ἀπειθοῦσιν τῷ λόγῳ in 3:1 sets up a greater likelihood of occurrence. The first class conditional protasis εἰ διὰ συνείδησιν θεοῦ ὑποφέρει τις λύπας πᾶσχω ἀδίκως in 2:19 makes an assumption of occurrence. What this illustrates is that Peter generally assumes that believers will face persecution and abuse, but he doesn't assume that this is automatic for every believer in every hostile situation. It can -- and does -- happen but it isn't automatic that it will.

<sup>20</sup>“The phrase ‘zealots for the good’ (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ) employs a word (ζηλωτής) that is used in the LXX principally to describe God as ‘jealous,’<sup>19</sup> but that is fairly common in Hellenistic Greek in connection with the pursuit of various moral ideals.<sup>20</sup> It is in the latter sense that it is used here,<sup>21</sup> though the primary meaning is not to be devoted to good behavior that is correct in the eyes of civil authorities,<sup>22</sup> though that of course is not ruled out, but to be devoted to the good (e.g., v. 11) which keeps one under the benevolent gaze of God (v. 12a).” [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 229-30.]

<sup>21</sup>“καὶ τίς ὁ κακῶσων ὑμᾶς ἔάν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ζηλωταὶ γένησθε, ‘who then is going to harm you if you are partisans for what is good?’ The καί, introducing a conclusion to be drawn from the last part of the preceding Scripture quotation, should be rendered ‘then’ or ‘and so’ (see BDF §442.2). If God is on the side of the righteous and against those who do evil, what harm can possibly come to those who do good? The sentiments here expressed can be found across a wide spectrum of biblical literature: e.g., Pss 56:4; 91:7–10; 118:6; Isa 50:9; Matt 10:28–31//Luke 12:4–7; 21:18; Rom 8:31.” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 185.]



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, 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.

14 ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι. τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ παραχθῆτε, 15 κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἔτοιμοι αἰεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαὶν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, 16 ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνειδησὶν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαεῖσθε καταισχυθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφῇ. 17 κρείττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιοῦντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιοῦντας. 18 ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ, θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι. 19 ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, 20 ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτῶ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος. 21 ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ρύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 22 ὃς ἔστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.

### Notes:

This lengthy answer to the beginning question is divided into two parts: an assertion of the correctness of unjust suffering (vv. 14-16) and two sets of supporting reasons for unjust suffering (vv. 17-22). We will consider each segment separately.

**Be willing to suffer unjustly**, vv. 14-16: “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.” [14 ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι. τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ παραχθῆτε, 15 κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἔτοιμοι αἰεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαὶν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, 16 ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνειδησὶν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαεῖσθε καταισχυθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφῇ.]

*The first answer* to the question in verse 13 is to pronounce a blessing on those who do undergo persecution. Verse 14a contains a beatitude.<sup>22</sup> These ancient literary forms in both Judaism and early Christianity were used to invoke God's blessing upon individuals meeting specified conditions. Peter sets up the beatitude as a concessive idea, that is, something that might happen and if it does in spite of the negative condition something positive is to be gained. Contrast between the negative of suffering physically and the positive spiritual benefit from it is made. This forces us to go deeper than the merely human level in order to see the positive divine benefit to be acquired from the negative human suffering.

Peter very possibly had in the back of his mind the pronouncement of Jesus in Matthew 5:10-12:

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.<sup>23</sup>

Thus he was standing in the tradition of Jesus who saw potential spiritual blessing in suffering unjustly for the

<sup>22</sup>For more details on ancient beatitudes see my “Literary Forms of Beatitudes,” cranfordville.com: <http://cranfordville.com/Beatitudesexplained.htm>. The beatitude in First Peter takes a modified second person form of the beatitude, where the required condition for blessing is defined in the ‘if’ class, which is a second class concessive protasis dependent clause: “even if...” (εἰ καὶ...).

<sup>23</sup>GNT: 10 μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

11 μακάριοί ἐστε ὅταν ὀνειδίσωσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ διώξωσιν καὶ εἴπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθ' ὑμῶν ψευδόμενοι ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ. 12 χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς προφῆτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν.

Also see the Lukan parallel in Lk. 6:22-23 and 26:

22 “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets....

26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

cause of the Gospel.<sup>24</sup> Peter will essentially repeat this beatitude later in 4:14.<sup>25</sup>

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.

Here the beatitude form is more completely expressed with the causal clause (ὅτι...) defining the content of the blessing. But the use of the first class conditional protasis with the indicative mood verb assumes that his readers are being reviled for the name of Christ.

What Peter affirms to his readers is that unjust suffering for the sake of religious devotion to Christ has positive benefits. We should not just see the negative pain and suffering at the human level. Something deeper and good is taking place at the spiritual level when we endure such unjust suffering. The early church understood this far better than most believers today.

The second answer to the question consists in a set of admonitions found in a single sentence contained in vv. 14b-16; see above Block Diagram for visual effect. The thrust is threefold:

- 1) don't fear their fear,
- 2) neither be intimidated,
- 3) but sanctify Christ in your heart.

These admonitions assume persecution, just like the beatitude does. The first two admonitions are taken from Isaiah 8:12 where Peter follows the LXX Greek text very closely.

1 Peter 3:14b

**τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μῆδὲ παραχθῆτε**  
**Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated**

Isaiah 8:12

Μήποτε εἶπητε σκληρόν· πᾶν γάρ, ὃ ἐὰν εἶπη ὁ λαὸς οὗτος, σκληρόν ἐστιν·  
**τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτοῦ οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆτε οὐδὲ μὴ παραχθῆτε·**  
Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and **do not fear what it fears, or be in dread.**

The most significant variation is between 'their' (1 Peter) and 'his' (Isa.). But this is due to a shift in context between Isaiah's reference the king of Assyria and Peter's reference to the persecutors of believers.<sup>26</sup> This background is important for understanding the admonition to not fear a fear. The essence of it then is to not be afraid of the persecutors. Although they may possess the ability to inflict severe pain and suffering, believers should not be afraid of them. Additionally the second admonition, μῆδὲ παραχθῆτε, repeats the idea of the first with different words: **don't let them shake you up**. Thus the double emphasis of the two admonitions from Isaiah underscore the need of a bold stance in the face of persecution.

In the third admonition, Peter spells out the content of such a response to persecution by believers. The

<sup>24</sup>εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην, μακάριοι 'No, even if you should have to suffer in the cause of justice, you are blessed.' = These words probably represent a Petrine adaptation of a saying of Jesus very similar to the eighth beatitude in Matthew: μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης (Matt 5:10; cf. also Pol. Phil. 2.3). πάσχειν, with twelve occurrences, belongs to the characteristic vocabulary of 1 Peter, and the placement of μακάριοι is a characteristic feature of his style. Though μακάριος appears in the apodosis of a conditional clause in John 13:17; Luke 6:5d; and Herm. Man. 8.9, none of these passages exhibits the distinctive beatitude form found here. The closest parallel in thought and structure is 1 Pet 4:14, which similarly reflects Peter's adaptations of a beatitude of Jesus (see Comment). [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 185-86.]

<sup>25</sup>εἰ ὀνειδίξεσθε ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ, μακάριοι, ὅτι τὸ τῆς δόξης καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἀναπαύεται.

[Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Matthew Black et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1993), 606.]

<sup>26</sup>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 ἐπηρέζοντες) in v 16. Selwyn notes correctly that 'had St. Peter not been quoting, he could have written μὴ φοβηθῆτε αὐτούς' (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.' [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 186-87.]

core admonition is κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, “but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.” Verses 15b-16 expand that core admonition with qualities and actions based on the core expression.

What is meant by κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν? Literally the idea is to make the Lord Christ holy in your heart. But this doesn’t make any logical sense. One clue is that this admonition represents Peter’s interpretive understanding of Isaiah 8:13: “But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.”<sup>27</sup> With the κύριον αὐτὸν ἀγιάσατε of the LXX, Peter merely inserted τὸν Χριστὸν for αὐτὸν, and then added several comments. Thus Peter’s point is that when faced with persecution the first line of defense is to focus on the holiness of Christ as Lord. That is, reaffirm Christ as the divine Lord over your life. Make certain that He stands as the first priority and complete authority over your life.

Peter’s extension of Isaiah’s words begin with ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, “in your hearts.” The heart was the choosing / deciding part of humans in the ancient world, rather than the feeling / emotion side as in the modern western world. Thus Peter’s emphasis is that this prioritizing of our life must be a deliberate decision on our part. It won’t happen automatically; we must intentionally choose to put Christ at the top of the list in authority over our life.

Once Christ is in full control of the believer facing persecution, the appropriate response is a defense of the religious faith of the believer to the persecutor: ἔτοιμοι αἰεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογία πάντῳ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.” The detaching of this secondary phrase from the core admonition wrongly suggests that defending one’s faith is a separate action from sanctifying Christ. Actually, the constant readiness to defend one’s faith comes out of how we allow Christ to take control. This connection grows out of Christ’s words in Luke 21:12-19,<sup>28</sup> especially verses 14-15: “14 So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; 15 for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.” Jesus had earlier promised His disciples that when they faced bitter persecution He would stand by them through the Holy Spirit to assist them in their defense. Peter recalled this promise and admonishes his readers to be ready to defend their religious hope in Christ.

The defense<sup>29</sup> of one’s religious commitment, however, must be done in a specific manner, which Peter spells out as: ἀλλὰ μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, “yet do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear.” The defense that Peter alludes to is not limited to a court room situation, but instead covers any situation where individuals ask about our religious commitment.<sup>30</sup> Highly questionable

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<sup>27</sup>κύριον αὐτὸν ἀγιάσατε, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται σου φόβος. The above NRSV is based on the Hebrew text which was considerably shortened by the LXX translation.

[Septuaginta: SESB Edition, ed. Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), Is 8:13.]

<sup>28</sup>NRSV: “12 But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. 13 This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14 So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; 15 for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17 You will be hated by all because of my name. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

<sup>29</sup>ἀπολογία, ας, ἡ (s. ἀπολογέομαι; Pre-Socr., Thu. et al.; pap, e.g. BGU 531, 21 [I.A.D.]; PLips 58, 18; Wsd 6:10; TestSol; Jos. C. Ap. 2, 147; Ar., Just.) freq. as legal term.

**1. a speech of defense, defense, reply** ἀκούσατέ μου τῆς πρὸς ὑμᾶς νυνὶ ἀπολογίας hear the defense which I now make to you Ac 22:1 (ἅ. πρὸς τινα as X., Mem. 4, 8, 5). ἡ ἐμὴ ἀ. τοῖς ἐμὲ ἀνακρίνουσιν my reply to those who sit in judgment over me **1 Cor 9:3**. Written defense, apology Qua (1).

**2. the act of making a defense, defense**

a. in court (Jos., Bell. 1, 621) ἐν τ. πρώτῃ μου ἀ. at my first defense **2 Ti 4:16** (s. πρώτος 1aακ). τόπον ἀπολογίας λαμβάνειν περὶ τίνος receive an opportunity to defend himself concerning someth. **Ac 25:16**.

b. gener. of eagerness to defend oneself **2 Cor 7:11**. Of defending the gospel **Phil 1:7, 16**. ἔτοιμοι πρὸς ἀπολογία πάντῳ ready to make a defense to anyone **1 Pt 3:15**.

**3. claim of extenuating circumstance, excuse**, οὐκ ἔχειν ἀπολογία εἰπεῖν be unable to say in defense PtK 3 p. 15, 23 (cp. Just., A I, 42, 2 ἀ. παρέχειν).—DELG s.v. λέγω B. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 117.]

<sup>30</sup>Occasionally in the NT the noun *apologia* (‘reply’) is used in reference to a personal ‘defense’ before juridical officials



though is the use of this text as justification for the whole discipline of Christian apologetics! Peter isn't talking about anything as complex as this discipline, which depends on Enlightenment rationalism as a primary foundation. Instead, the apostle simply wanted believers to be prepared to explain their religious experience<sup>31</sup> to those who inquired as to why they were Christians.<sup>32</sup>

What Peter recognized was that elaborate, rational based arguments for the existence of God etc. had no persuasive force at all. Instead, what mattered for persuasion purposes was the attitude and manner in which believers explained their Christian commitment. Thus he stresses a series of postures from which an explanation is to be given: ἀλλὰ<sup>33</sup> μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου, συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν, “with humility and reverence, having a clear conscience.”

First such an explanation of one's hope in Christ is to be given with humility and reverence: μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου. These two important postures must shape the tone of our explanation of our religious commitment.<sup>34</sup> Similar postures were already advocated for Christian wives seeking to influence their husbands toward the Christian faith in 3:4.<sup>35</sup> The non-believer inquiring about the religious faith of the believer must be able to sense a humble reverence toward the God of the believer. Arrogance and boasting of the superiority of one's Christianity will drive away the non-believer. If, on the other hand, the non-believer senses in the believer

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(Acts 22:1; 25:16; 2 Tim 4:16).<sup>238</sup> Elsewhere, however, it denotes a reply to accusations of a general rather than a legal nature (1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11; Phil 1:7, 16).<sup>239</sup> The term *apologia* is used here in this latter sense, as the context demonstrates. First, the generalizing expressions ‘always’ (*aei*) and ‘to everyone who requests’ (*panti tōi aitounti*) point to an ongoing state of preparedness for a response to inquiry from any quarter. The situation envisioned is ‘a running debate in everyday life with people who have a different way of thinking’ (Goppelt 1993, 244; so also Selwyn 1947, 193–94; and Michaels 1988, 188). In contrast to Luke 12:11 and 21:12–15, which refer to ‘rulers and authorities,’ ‘kings and governors,’ before whom a defense is to be made, our author speaks of ‘any and all’ (*panti*) who are curious. Second, the verb *aiteō* (‘request,’ ‘ask,’ ‘seek’), occurring with a double accusative of the person asked and of the thing requested,<sup>240</sup> involves the action of requesting (contrary to Beare 1970, 164) rather than of demanding or commanding, as would be the case in official hearings. Third, in this context the question and the reply concern ‘an account (*logon*) of the hope that fills you.’ Curiosity about hope, a personal attitude rather than a legal crime, indicates that the author is referring here not to formal defenses before legal authorities (who would be concerned not with expectation concerning the future but culpable behavior in the present) but rather to replies to informal inquiries concerning the nature and basis of Christian hope, whenever and from whomever they should come.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 627.]

<sup>31</sup>“An account (*logon*). The common term *logos* has a broad range of meanings depending on context (‘word,’ ‘statement,’ ‘speech,’ ‘reckoning,’ etc.); for an ‘account’ given in private, see Plato, *Pol.* 285e. With the accompanying words ‘of the hope that fills you,’ it denotes that which the believers are requested to provide curious inquirers: an account of the hope that fills them. It is employed again with the same sense in 4:5 in reference to the ‘account’ that those who malign the believers will themselves have to give to the One ready (*hetoimōs*, an adverb related to the adjective *hetoimoi* of the present verse) to judge the living and the dead. Together, these two texts point to an eventual ‘turning of the tables,’ when those who once requested an account from the believers will themselves be called to account by God.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 628.]

<sup>32</sup>In no possible way can this text be twisted to argue for a formal persecution of Christians, and thus seen as a confirmation that First Peter is second century in origin when such judicial persecution of Christianity became wide spread. John Knox's argument that the Pliny-Trajan correspondence of the second century stands behind Peter's statement has no basis at all.

<sup>33</sup>“The words involve not a contrast (note the omission of *alla* in P<sup>72</sup>) but a qualification of the manner in which the believers are to reply. Accordingly, the force of the particle *alla* (included in most witnesses) is not adversative as in v 14a but qualitative or asseverative (‘but surely’). The qualification implies some verbal expression such as ‘offer it’ or ‘do so.’” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 629.]

<sup>34</sup>One of the interpretive issues here is whether the humility and reverence is pointed toward God or to the inquirer about one's faith. The context argues that one is humble before God and reverent toward God. But such posture will be noticeable by the inquirer who is treated with proper courtesy. Note Michael's observations:

Peter may simultaneously be urging reverence toward God and gentleness toward human beings (cf. 2:17). But more likely he has in view the same ‘gentle (πραΰς) and quiet spirit’ before God that should characterize Christian women (3:4). If so, *πραΰτης* is an inward quality or attitude of mind (cf. 3:3–4), a profound acknowledgment of the power of God, and of one's own poverty and dependence on Him (cf. Matt 5:5). Yet this God-centered quality of the heart finds expression also in one's behavior toward others.

[J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 189.]

<sup>35</sup>NRSV: “rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a *gentle and quiet spirit* [πραέως καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος], which is very precious in God's sight.”



that God is truly revered<sup>36</sup> and has produced genuine humility<sup>37</sup> in the believer, he will be much more likely to open himself up to the possibility of commitment to this same God. Out of the believer's posture toward God comes proper courtesy toward the non-believer in making his inquiry.

Second, the believer is to give explanation of his faith while having a clear conscience: συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθῆν.<sup>38</sup> In answering questions about our faith, we speak with integrity and honesty, not with inflated exaggerated description. Our response must emerge from a faith genuinely lived out in obedience to God's will. This is the witness to our faith that the Spirit of God can use for convicting the inquirer of his need of God in his life as well.

The purpose of our explanation is given by Peter: ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαεῖσθε καταισχυθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφὴν, "so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame." This expression is very similar to the one in 2:12b: ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλοῦσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν ἐκ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ἐποπτεύοντες δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς, "so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge." When the inquiry about the believer's faith is motivated by hostile intent (ἐν ᾧ καταλαεῖσθε<sup>39</sup>), the changed life of the believer (ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφὴν) that gives foundation to his explanation of his faith will nullify the validity of the hostility. Those hostile to Christianity will have observed the inherently good

<sup>36</sup>2. b. *reverence, respect*

a. toward God (Polyaenus 1, 16, 1; LXX; PsSol 6:5 al.; EpArist 159 ὁ περὶ θεοῦ φόβος; 189; cp. φόβος τὰ θεῖα τοῖσι σώφροσιν βροτῶν TGF, Adesp. no. 356 p. 906) and Christ, w. τρόμος **Phil 2:12** (s. τρόμος). W. ἀλήθεια 1 Cl 19:1; Pol 2:1. W. ἀγάπη 1 Cl 51:2. W. εὐλάβεια Pol 6:3. W. πίστις, εἰρήνη and other good things and virtues 1 Cl 64. W. ὑπομονή B 2:2. W. ἐλπίς: εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν 11:11. W. πίστις and ἐγκράτεια Hm 6, 1, 1. W. objective gen. φόβος (τοῦ) θεοῦ (PLond 1914, 12 φόβον θεοῦ ἔχοντες ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ; Philo, Spec. Leg. 4, 199; TestLevi 13:7; TestNapht 2:9; Theoph. Ant. 1, 7 [p. 72, 26]) **Ro 3:18** (Ps 35:2); **2 Cor 7:1** (ἀγάπη P46); 1 Cl 3:4; 21:6; cp. 8; B 4:11; 19:5; 20:2; Pol 4:2; Hm 10, 1, 6a; 12, 2, 4bc; D 4:9. φόβος (τοῦ) κυρίου (TestReub 4:1; TestSim 3:4) **Ac 9:31**; 1 Cl 22:1 (Ps 33:12); 57:5 (Pr 1:29); B 11:5 (Is 33:18 v.1.); Hm 7:4b; 8:9; 10, 1, 6b; 12, 2, 4a; 12, 3, 1. Some place here **2 Cor 5:11** (s. 1b above). φόβος Χριστοῦ **Eph 5:21**.—For **1 Pt 1:17** s. 2aα beg.

β. toward humans, **respect** that is due officials (cp. Byzantinische Papyri [Munich], ed. AHeisenberg/LWenger, 1914, no. 2, ln. 13 p. 43: ἔχοντες τὸν φόβον ... τῆς ὑμετέρας ἐνδόξου ὑπεροχῆς=having respect for your esteemed authority) Ro 13:7ab (CCranfield, NTS 6, '60, 241–49: the ref. may be to God); fr. slave to master **1 Pt 2:18**; **Eph 6:5** (w. τρόμος); B 19:7=D 4:11 (w. αἰσχύνῃ); wife to husband **1 Pt 3:2** (cp. SEG XXXV, 1427, 5 [III A.D.]). Gener. **3:16** (w. πραῦτης).—Wlütgert, Die Furcht Gottes: MKähler Festschr. 1905, SBerkelbach v. der Sprenkel, Vrees en Religie 1920, 165ff; RSander, Furcht u. Liebe im palästin. Judentum '35.—B. 1153. DELG s.v. φέβομαι I. M-M. EDNT. TW. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1062.]

<sup>37</sup>α. **πραῦτης, ἡτος, ἡ** (πραῦς; Appian, Bell. Civ. 4, 123 §518 διὰ πραῦτητα; Aesop, Fab. 168 P.=94b H.//247 Ch.//H-H. 178; CIG 2788; LXX [Thackeray p. 91; 181]; Sextus 545) and older Gk (since Thu., also Appian, Basil. 1 §5; PLond 1912, 101 [41 A.D.]; Philo; Jos., Bell. 6, 383, Ant. 19, 334; IPol 2:1; 6:2), **πραότης, ἡτος, ἡ** (so in Ign. and Hermas, while in the NT πραῦτης is the predom. form and πραότης appears as v.l.; for the lit. s. πραῦς) **the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness** in the older favorable sense (s. πραῦς) w. ἐπιεικεία (Plut., Caesar 734 [57], and, occasionally, other qualities, as Lucian, Somn. 10; s. also Plut., Pyrrh. 398[23, 3]) **2 Cor 10:1** (RLeivestad, NTS 12, '66, 156–64); 1 Cl 30:8; Dg 7:4; cp. **Tit 3:2**; 1 Cl 21:7. W. other virtues (Ps 44:5) **Gal 5:23**; **Col 3:12**; **Eph 4:2**; B 20:2; D 5:2; Hm 12, 3, 1. ἐν π. with or in gentleness (Sir 3:17; 4:8) **2 Ti 2:25**; IPol 2:1; 6:2; with humility **Js 1:21**; **3:13** (ἐν πραῦτητι σοφίας in wise gentleness; cp. Appian, Bell. Civ. 3, 79 §323 ἐπὶ σοφία τε καὶ πραότητι); ἐν εἰρήνῃ καὶ π. 1 Cl 61:2. Also μετὰ π. (so in PLond above) **1 Pt 3:16**; Hm 5, 2, 6. As a characteristic of a bishop ITr 3:2 (as political virtue, s. LRobert, Hellenica 13, '65, 223). The devil is thwarted by humility 4:2. πνεῦμα πραῦτητος **1 Cor 4:21**; **Gal 6:1**.—AvHarnack, 'Sanftmut, Huld und Demut' in der alten Kirche: JKaftan Festschr. 1920, 113ff; JdeRomilly, La douceur dans la pensée grecque '79; RAC III 206–31.—DELG s.v. πρᾶος. M-M. TW. Spicq. Sv." [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 861.]

<sup>38</sup>α. συνείδωσιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθῆν, 'with a good conscience.' 'Conscience' in 1 Peter involves a moral or spiritual awareness of God, and of oneself before God, whether explicitly (2:19; 3:21) or (as here) implicitly. The phrase 'good conscience' occurs in Acts 23:1; 1 Tim 1:5, 19; 1 Clem 41:1 (and, with καλός, Heb 13:18; 2 Clem 16:4). Along with equivalent expressions such as a 'clean' (1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3; 1 Clem 45:7; cf. Heb 9:14; Ign. Trall. 7:2), or a 'blameless and pure' (Pol. Phil. 5:3) conscience, it denotes personal integrity before God. This is the stance from which Christian believers are urged to make their 'defense.'" [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary : 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 189-90.]

<sup>39</sup>By the adverbial temporal relative clause, Peter intends to specify occasional situations when the inquiry may have hostile intention. This clause does not imply that every inquiry has such a negative motivation.

manner of living by believers and thus be ashamed<sup>40</sup> to bring criticisms against believers, even though they have been abusive<sup>41</sup> toward the believers living such a life.<sup>42</sup>

Peter has thus re-focused our attention on unjust suffering. When it does happen, we need to be reminded of how God can bless us in the midst of it. Thus suffering can turn into something good. When it comes, we must not give into fear or intimidation from our enemies. Instead, we must be prepared to explain to everyone why we have hope in Christ Jesus. And we are to give this explanation with humility and reverence for God that produces a courteous reply to those inquiring about our faith. When suffering comes from abusive opponents to our faith, we must exemplify true Christian living as our best defense against criticism. Such a noble manner of living will 'de-horn' the abuse of our opponents!

**Why you should be willing to suffer unjustly**, vv. 17-22. Two reasons are given in v. 17 and vv. 18-22. Peter now turns for two foundations for a willingness to suffer unjustly. The first one in verse 17 is primary, and the second one in vv. 18-22 grows out of the first reason.

**1. God's will, v. 17:** "17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil." [17 κρείττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιῶντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιῶντας.] Peter next adds an explanatory comment about his purpose statement: κρείττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιῶντας, εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιῶντας, "For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil." This axiom<sup>43</sup> is an echo of the earlier one in 2:19-20 offered to Christian slaves suffering unjustly.<sup>44</sup> Later in 4:14-16 a somewhat similar expression will surface as well.<sup>45</sup> The heart of the comparison

<sup>40</sup>“Shame” in the OT and in Jewish literature often connotes utter defeat and disgrace in battle, or before God. To be ‘put to shame’ is to be overthrown and left at the mercy of one’s enemies. A frequent promise is that those who trust in God will not be put to shame or that their enemies will (e.g., Pss 6:11 [10]; 21:6 [22:5]; 24[25]:2,3; 30:2, 18 [31:1, 17]; 34[35]:4; 39:15 [40:14]; 43:8 [44:7]; 69:3 [70:2]; 126[127]:5; Isa 28:16; Jer 6:15; 17:13, 18). Peter has already cited the οὐ μὴ καταιοχνηθῆ of Isa 28:16 and applied it to the believers to whom he is writing (2:6–7). Implicitly, the ones put to shame are ‘those who stumble, disobeying the word’ (2:8).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 190-91.]

<sup>41</sup>ἐπηρέαζω (s. next entry; Hdt.+; ins, pap; Philo, Mos. 2, 199, De Jos. 71; Just. A I, 1, 1) to treat someone in a despicable manner, threaten, mistreat, abuse usu. w. dat. (as Ael. Aristid. 23, 28 K.=42 p. 777 D.; PFlor 99, 10 [I/II A.D.]; Jos., Bell. 1, 13); τινά (OGI 484, 26 [II A.D.]); περὶ τῶν ἐπηρεαζόντων ὑμᾶς for those who mistreat you (in something they do, as PFay 123, 7; PLond II, 157, 4f p. 255 [II A.D.]) Lk 6:28, cp. Mt 5:44 v.l. (Just., A I, 15, 9). τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἀναστροφὴν disparage/malign (your) good conduct 1 Pt 3:16.—Schmidt, Syn. IV 275–78. DELG s.v. ἐπήρεια. M-M.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 362.]

<sup>42</sup>It is possible that Michaels is on target with his contention that the being put to shame is eschatological in nature. That is, the moment of shame for the critics of believers will be the day of judgment. They will be humiliated in final judgment to realize that they were abusing God’s people with their slanderous criticisms of the faith of believers.

If he draws on such a tradition here, it is simply to reinforce the preceding καταλαεῖσθε. Instead of turning to God (as in 2:12) these accusers persist in their slander. As a result, instead of “glorifying God on the day of visitation,” they will be “put to shame” (καταιοχνηθῶσιν). Although the “day of visitation” is not mentioned in 3:16, the logic of the parallelism suggests that καταιοχνηθῶσιν, no less than the δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεόν of 2:12, has an eschatological reference.

[J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 190.]

<sup>43</sup>“The ‘better’-proverb, or *Tobspruch*, was first isolated and studied in OT wisdom literature by W. Zimmerli (ZAW 51 [1933] 192–95), but the form exists in the NT as well, whether with κρείττον (1 Cor 7:9; 1 Pet 3:17; 2 Pet 2:21), καλόν (e.g., Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Matt 18:8, 9; cf. Mark 14:21), or even συμφέρει (e.g., Matt 5:29, 30; 18:6). The most complete form of the *Tobspruch* in the NT includes three elements: a word for “good” or “better,” two infinitives expressing the actions or experiences being weighed against each other, and a word of comparison (ἢ or μᾶλλον). In the synoptic tradition, the *Tobspruch* is characteristically used to set forth eschatological alternatives. It is “better” to enter the kingdom of God minus an eye or a limb than to escape such mutilation and be sent away to eternal fire. It is “better” to drown in the sea than cause an innocent believer to fall into sin. It is “better” never to have been born than to betray the Son of Man. If 1 Pet 3:17 is read as a *Tobspruch* of this kind, it yields a coherent meaning: it is ‘better’ to suffer in this life at the hands of persecutors for doing good, than at God’s hand on the ‘day of visitation’ for doing wrong (for the thought, cf. Matt 10:28).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 191-92.]

<sup>44</sup>NRSV: 19 For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20 If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval.

<sup>45</sup>NRSV: 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. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. 16 Yet if any of you

is not suffering, but why is suffering occurring? Interpretatively, the suffering for good is unjust suffering in this life. But the suffering for doing evil can be understood as punishment inflicted by human authorities in this world, or as eschatological judgment imposed by God in final judgment. Michaels in identifying the saying as a standard *Tobspruch* sees this as eschatological punishment.<sup>46</sup> But most other commentators see a ‘this world’ comparison, with the implication to believers: make sure your suffering in this world is unjust, rather than justified because of having broken some human law. Peter injects into the saying “if suffering should be God’s will,” εἰ θέλοι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, to remind his readers that he is dealing with a possibility and not an inevitability.<sup>47</sup> God doesn’t desire His people to suffer unjustly, but on occasion such will indeed happen.

The will of God is the benchmark here: τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ. The phrase expresses God’s pleasure and desire. Here it is linked to suffering, in particular, unjust suffering. Essentially Peter here asserts that God does not find pleasure in His children suffering unjustly.<sup>48</sup> But when believers do suffer unjustly, God is committed to acknowledging such both now and eschatologically. In that believers can find encouragement as Peter will later on declare in 4:19, “Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.”<sup>49</sup> One must not mistakenly associate all suffering with God’s will and thus assume divine blessing no matter why the suffering occurs. Peter makes it clear that the will of God is only connected to unjust suffering for our faith; only this kind of suffering will bring divine blessing and affirmation.

**2. Christ’s example, vv. 18-22:** “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, 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.” [18 ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ, θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι· 19 ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, 20 ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχeto ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ὀκτὼ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι’ ὕδατος. 21 ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 22 ὃς ἔστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.]

This lengthy text is appended to the axiom in verse 17 as an additional reason (ὅτι) for unjust suffering. Here, just as in 2:21-25, the example of Christ in unjust suffering is set forth as the defining model for believers to follow.<sup>50</sup> The emphasis is upon the positive outcome of such unjust suffering, and it stands as encourage-

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suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.

<sup>46</sup>This interpretation finds support in the context. The end of the quotation from Psalm 34 in vv 10–12 had divided all human beings into two groups: the ‘righteous’ (δικαίους) and the ‘evildoers’ (ποιοῦντας κακά). God looks with favor on the one, but sets his face in judgment against the other. The readers of the epistle are invited to pursue the good and to claim the promises of the psalm for their own. The ‘evildoers’ are anonymous at first (e.g., the αὐτῶν of v 14b), but assume definite shape in the οἱ ἐπιπράζοντες of v 16. Seen in this light, the distinction of the ἀγαθοποιοῦντας and κακοποιοῦντας of v 17 is not (as in 2:13–20) between good and bad citizenship in Roman society as two options for the Christian, but is rather a distinction between two groups that comprise the whole human race: ‘doers of good,’ who may have to suffer in this age, and ‘doers of evil’ who surely will suffer in the next. It is ‘better’ (i.e., more advantageous) to belong to the first than to the second. V 17 is thus to be taken not as a word of admonition (i.e., make sure, when you suffer, that it is for doing good and not for doing evil), but as a word of assurance (i.e., remember, when you suffer, that you are infinitely better off than the evildoers who oppress you). This is why it follows so naturally on vv 13–14a, and helps to frame the admonitions of vv 14b–16 (cf. Michaels, 398–400).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 192.]

<sup>47</sup>The fourth class conditional protasis here sets up a highly remote possibility, rather than something likely to happen.

<sup>48</sup>Here, as in the qualifying formulation of 1:6 (‘if it must be,’ *ei deon*), Christian suffering is viewed in relation to the will of God. In 1:6, as in 4:12, moreover, suffering is interpreted as a means of the divine testing (*peirasmos*) of faith and fidelity. In the present context the author twice makes it clear (vv 14, 17) that God’s will involves not suffering for suffering’s sake but suffering for doing what is right. It is innocent suffering for doing what is right, as modeled by Christ himself (2:21–24; 3:18; 4:1) in obedience to the Father’s will,<sup>252</sup> that has God’s approval (2:20) and that ultimately will be vindicated by God (5:10), as Christ himself was vindicated (3:18–22).” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 634-35.]

<sup>49</sup>ὥστε καὶ οἱ πάσχοντες κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ πιστῶ κτίστη παρατιθέσθωσαν τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν ἐν ἀγαθοποιῶ.

<sup>50</sup>One should note that 2:21-25 and 3:18-22 mostly complement one another, rather than mirror each other. In 2:21-25 the



ment to believers that God can accomplish good from the unjust suffering of all His children as well. This point should not be lost in the midst of deep and controversial statements by Peter in these verses.<sup>51</sup> Was Peter alluding here to an *descensus ad inferos*, a descent into Hell, by Christ between His death and resurrection? Christian tradition has often assumed as much, although careful examination of the text raises serious objections to such an understanding.

Has Peter drawn extensively on pre-formed Christian tradition here? Opinion is seriously divided on this issue.<sup>52</sup> The formatting of the Nestle-Aland 27th rev. edition Greek text assumes that verses 18-19 reflect traditional material in their poetic formatting of these two verses, while verses 20-22 are Peter's comments on it, assumed by the narrative format of the text. But no consensus on any reconstruction can be found, and thus conclusions must at best remain highly subjective. The better option is to see Peter alluding to pieces of tradition but feeling no need for incorporating extensively them into his expression while retaining their original forms. Thus the better approach can be seen in the UBS 4th revised Greek New Testament that uses only narrative format for all of these verses, thus avoiding the highly speculative assumptions about sources.

What then was Peter saying about the unjust suffering of Christ as an example for believers to follow? The structure of vv. 18-22 is complex, but many of the ideas present are more difficult to grasp than the grammar structure:

Verse 18: Christ's redeeming death.

Verses 19-21: Christ's strange preaching trip as a symbol of baptism

Verse 22: Christ's exaltation in Heaven

The first and the last of these three units are not that difficult to understand, and represent beautiful affirmations of the significance of Christ as Savior and as Lord. It's the middle unit that is extremely obscure and difficult to grasp. And as one might expect, this is the unit that typically receives more attention, and also serves as the foundation of some really screwballish theology. The surrounding context must not be lost in the process, since it provides important correctives to interpretive conclusions about vv. 19-21.

**Christ's redeeming death, v. 18:** ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα

dominant emphasis was upon Jesus' suffering, especially in connection to His Passio experience of the cross. The second passage, 3:18-22 moves to the next stage of resurrection and exaltation as the dominating emphasis in Christ's experience. His suffering is mentioned at the beginning (v. 18) but resurrection and exaltation dominate verses 19-22.

<sup>51</sup>“On the long history of the interpretation of these verses, 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. In this commentary, the question of the place of vv 18–22 in the structure and argument of 1 Peter itself will be given precedence over the question of their place in the later history of Christian doctrine.” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 196.]

<sup>52</sup>“Because most of the characteristics of traditional material are found in 3:18 and 22,<sup>31</sup> and because they appear more hymnic in form than vv. 19–21,<sup>32</sup> one can argue that they alone are drawn from the tradition.<sup>33</sup> Yet there is a strong possibility of an allusion to traditions about Enoch in v. 19,<sup>34</sup> and the reference in vv. 20–21 to baptism has led to the suggestion that they originated in a baptismal catechisms, and were inserted here by the author.<sup>35</sup> Attempts to reconstruct the original form of a hymn from which part or all of material in this passage was drawn have led to no conclusive results. Proposals have ranged from seeing here a coherent Christ hymn<sup>36</sup> or a baptismal hymn<sup>37</sup> to a more extensive hymn from which the author has excerpted elements.<sup>38</sup> Lack of agreement about the reconstructed form indicates that such attempts owe at least as much to the imagination of those reconstructing them as they do to evidence in the text itself. The best conclusion remains to see traditional elements underlying these verses, traditions that were probably familiar to the readers and hence needed only allusive reference (thus contributing to our difficulty in determining their precise meaning), but whose original form must necessarily elude us.<sup>39</sup> Whatever their origin, however, and whatever their original meaning, they now constitute part of the text of 1 Peter, and hence must be understood within the overall context and argument of that letter.” [Paul J. Achtemeier and Eldon Jay Epp, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1996), 242-43.]



ὁμᾶς προσαγάγη τῷ θεῷ θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι, “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...” This passage does overlap 2:24-25 although the wording is distinct for each passage.<sup>53</sup>

**2:24-25**

24 ὃς τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς ἀνήνεγκεν ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον,

ἵνα ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἀπογενόμενοι τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ ζήσωμεν· οὗ τῷ μύλωπι ἰάθητε.

25 ἦτε γὰρ ὡς πρόβατα πλανώμενοι, ἀλλὰ ἐπεστράφητε νῦν ἐπὶ τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν.

**3:18**

18 ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων,

ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγη τῷ θεῷ, θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι·

Both passages focus on the suffering of Christ on the cross for the sins of humanity. “Christ carried our sins in His body on the tree” becomes “Christ suffered once for all for sins, the just for the unjust.” The purpose statement (ἵνα...) shifts from “so that having been set free from sins we might live in righteousness” to “so order that He might lead you to God, having been put to death in the flesh but having been made alive in the spirit.” Chapter two verse twenty-five has no counterpart in chapter three. While most scholars agree that Isaiah 53 underlies the ideas in 2:24-25, no known source can be produced for 3:18, even though the formal language of the text strongly suggests that Peter is using a pre-formed text of some sort here. The point of such use would have been to employ ideas already common and accepted in the various Christian communities.

Peter’s emphasis in 3:18 is on the one-time suffering of Christ on the cross.<sup>54</sup> The cross was a one time event that would not be repeated again. And as such the huge load of human sinfulness was piled on Jesus’ shoulders on that cross, intensifying His sufferings immensely.<sup>55</sup> The theme of unjust suffering receives special emphasis in 3:18 with the δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, “just for unjust,” phrase. Thus Peter stresses the example of Christ suffering for believers suffering unjustly for their religious faith. The intention of Christ’s suffering in 2:24 was that “we might live in righteousness.” In 3:18, the intention of Christ’s suffering was that “He might lead us to God.”<sup>56</sup> The cross / resurrection contrast, θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι, is

<sup>53</sup>NRSV: 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

<sup>54</sup>“ὄπαξ adv. (Hom.+; Tat. 6, 1 [Hb 9:26?]) ‘once’.

1. as a numer. term **pert. to a single occurrence, once**, ἄ. ἐλιθάσθην I was stoned once **2 Cor 11:25**. ἄ. πεφανέρωται **Hb 9:26**. ἄ. ἀποθανεῖν vs. **27** (Proverbia Aesopi 141 P.: <πλέον ἢ> ἅπαξ οὐδεις ἄνθρωπος θνήσκει); cp. **1 Pt 3:18**. ἄ. προσενεχθεὶς **Hb 9:28**. W. gen. foll. ἄ. τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ (Hdt. 2, 59; Ex 30:10; Lev 16:34) once a year **Hb 9:7**. ἔτι ἄ. (2 Macc 3:37; Judg 16:18, 28; TestAbr A 85, 15 [Stone p. 18] al.) once more=for the last time (Aeschyl., Ag. 1322; Judg 6:39) 12:26f (Hg 2:6). ἄ. καὶ δὶς (Dionys. Hal. 8, 56, 1 οὐχ ἄ. ἀλλὰ καὶ δὶς; Ael. Aristid. 36, 91 K.=48 p. 474 D.: ἄ. ἢ δὶς; Anna Comn., Alexias 3, 3 ed. Reiff. I 102, 17 καὶ ἄ. καὶ δὶς; 1 Km 17:39; 2 Esdr 23:20; 1 Macc 3:30) again and again, more than once (LMorris, NovT 1, ’56, 205–8) **Phil 4:16; 1 Th 2:18; 1 Cl 53:3** (Dt 9:13). W. weakening of the numer. idea ἐπεὶ ἄ. (Thu. 7, 44, 7; X., An. 1, 9, 10; Menand., PDidot 36 S. p. 329; Menand., Dyscolos 392; Chion, Ep. 14, 1; POxy 1102, 8 ἐπεὶ ἄ. προσῆλθε τῇ κληρονομίᾳ) since for once Hv 3, 3, 4; m 4, 4, 1.

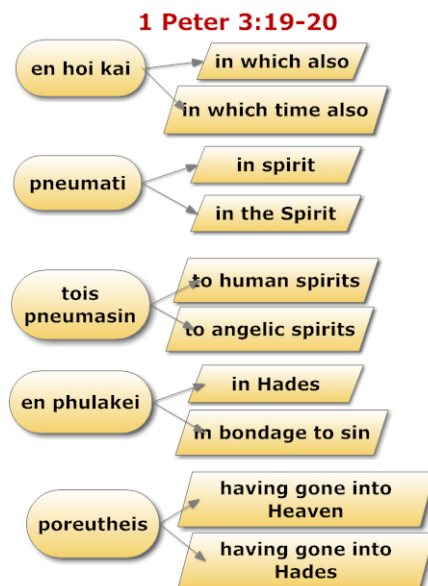
2. **pert. to a single occurrence and decisively unique, once and for all** (Hippocr., Ep. 27, 41; Aelian, VH 2, 30; Philostrate., Ep. 7, 2; PLips 34, 20; 35, 19; Ps 88:36; PsSol 12:6; TestAbr 20 p. 103, 1 [Stone p. 54]; Philo, Ebr. 198; Jos., Bell. 2, 158, Ant. 4, 140; Just., A I, 61, 5) **Hb 10:2; Jd 3, 5**.—Sim. once (Alciphron 1, 8, 4; 1, 10, 2) **Hb 6:4**.—DELG s.v. πάξ and πήγνυμι. EDNT. M-M. TW. Spicq.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 97.]

<sup>55</sup>“The reason Christ suffered was ‘on behalf of sins.’ This formula was well known from the sin offerings of the OT (Lev. 5:7; 6:23; Ps. 39:7; Isa. 53:5, 10; Ezek. 43:21–25) 18 and NT explanations of the death of Christ (Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Thess. 5:10; Heb. 5:3; 10:6, 8, 18, 26; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). It is the formula of substitutionary atonement, the death of the victim on behalf of the sins of another. Thus the traditional formula expresses the fact that Christ also suffered innocently, and not just innocently, but on behalf of others’ sins.” [Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 135.]

<sup>56</sup>“This expression is unusual, but while there is a large number of OT expressions that are similar (leading animals to God for sacrifice, Exod. 29:10; Lev. 1:2; 1 Clem. 31:3, bringing a person to trial or to court, Exod. 21:6; Num. 25:6; Acts 16:20, or leading a person to God for ordination to some office, Exod. 29:4; 40:12; Lev. 8:14; Num. 8:9) as well as similar NT phrases (‘access to God’ in Paul, Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:18; 3:12, and ‘way’ in Hebrews, 4:16; 10:19–22, 25; 12:22), 21 Peter is creating a new metaphor, for no other NT writer has this active picture of Jesus leading the Christian to God. But it fits with Peter’s usual conception of the

the means of Christ leading us to God. Both His death and His resurrection are essential to believers coming to God in salvation. Thus the redemptive work of Christ on the cross also stands as an inspirational example to believers to endure suffering. Just as God was able to bring good out of Jesus' suffering, He likewise will bring good out of the unjust suffering of believers.

**Christ's strange preaching trip and a symbol of baptism, vv. 19-21:** 19 ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, 20 ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτώ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος. 21 ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, "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, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,..." The first statement ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν introduces us to the extremely obscure idea expressed here.<sup>57</sup> The remainder in vv. 20-21 is Peter's comments on this introductory statement. The chart to the right illustrates alternative views of key elements in the passage.



A huge number of interpretive questions arise from these verses.<sup>58</sup> We will try to address these problems in a summary manner, so as to not get lost in a sea of technical details.<sup>59</sup>

Christian life as an active close following of Jesus (2:21; 4:13).” [Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 136.]

<sup>57</sup>“Martin Luther, that master biblical expositor, when struggling with v 19 exclaimed: ‘This is a strange text and certainly a more obscure passage than any other passage in the New Testament. I still do not know for sure what the apostle meant’ (Luther 1967 [1523], 30:113 = *Weimarer Ausgabe* 12:367). Subsequent scholars likewise viewed this passage as one of the most perplexing and vexatious texts in all of Holy Scripture.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 647.]

<sup>58</sup>John Elliott in the Yale Anchor Bible commentary has list most of them: “(1) the Greek text of *en hōi kai*; (2) the antecedent or sense of *en hōi*; (3) the place of the pause between v 19 and v 20; (4) the event to which Christ’s ‘having gone’ refers, including its occasion, time, and direction; (5) the identity of the disobedient spirits in prison and the occasion and nature of their disobedience; (6) the location and nature of this prison; (7) the content of Christ’s announcement to them, the time of this announcement, and the relation between 3:19 and 4:6; (8) the nature of the relation between the Flood and baptism, and between Noah’s family and present believers; (9) the sense of the explanation of baptism; (10) the syntactic and semantic coherence of vv 19–21 and their relation to vv 18 and 22; (11) the possible sources underlying this material; (12) the relation of vv 18–22 as a whole to both the foregoing (3:13–17) and following (4:1–6) units; and (13) the theological and rhetorical function of this passage in the broader context of the letter.” [John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 648.]

<sup>59</sup>The following solutions have surfaced over time, as summarized by Elliott:

“*View 1.* When Christ descended (*poreutheis*) to the realm of the dead in conjunction with his death and prior to his resurrection (i.e., during the so-called *triduum mortis*), he, ‘in the spirit’ (*en pneumati*), made an announcement (*ekēryxen*) to the deceased humans (‘spirits’) whose souls were imprisoned in the lower world (*infera*), the realm of the dead (*Hades*, hell). Frequently this view also assumes a direct relation between 3:19 and 4:6.

“Among the many scholars espousing this view, however, opinions diverge regarding the more precise identity of the spirits and the content of Christ’s announcement. Some (1A) hold that Christ’s spirit preached to the spirits of the deceased of Noah’s generation to convert them and bring them to salvation. Others (1B) view Christ as offering good news only to those of Noah’s generation who were converted before death (or to all of the OT righteous and patriarchs who died prior to Christ). Still others (1C) claim that Christ announced condemnation to the unbelieving contemporaries of Noah, who presumably died without conversion....

“*View 2.* Christ, in his preexistent nature, went to Noah’s contemporaries during their lifetime, particularly through the person of Noah, and preached repentance to these human spirits who were imprisoned in sin. Augustine (Ep. Eud. 64, chs. 14–17) proposed this allegorical interpretation only hesitatingly. Nevertheless, eventually it became the dominant view in the Western Church.<sup>274</sup> Although abandoned by the majority of modern commentators, this view, in various nuanced forms, still finds occasional supporters.<sup>275</sup>

Crucial to establishing a viewpoint is the meaning of ἐν ᾧ καὶ. Clearly it introduces a relative clause with the sense of ἐν ᾧ καὶ Christ preached to the imprisoned spirits. Two possibilities grammatically exist. It can function as an adjective modifying relative clause with ᾧ as a simple relative pronoun referring back to πνεύματι.<sup>60</sup> The sense then is that while Christ was “in the spirit” He did also this preaching. Such allows for the understanding of Christ, while in the grave and before His resurrection, preached to the imprisoned spirits that are connected to Noah’s day (view 1 in above footnote). It also allows for an understanding of Christ as pre-existent and thus in His spiritual existence having worked through Noah to have preached to these imprisoned spirits (view 2 above). This requires a shift in meaning for ‘imprisoned spirits.’ In view 1, they are in the grave awaiting final judgment, but in view 2 they are the disobedient living on earth in bondage to sin. But Michaels persuasively argues for the ἐν ᾧ καὶ expression to allude to the third segment of the triad:



death - resurrection - journey to Heaven by Christ. Thus Christ’s proclamation was the triumphant declaration of the ascension that God’s power over evil prevails without challenge.<sup>61</sup> The imprisoned spirits can be understood as the disobedient people of Noah’s day or disobedient angels who brought on the divine judgment. The alternative understanding of ἐν ᾧ καὶ is adverbial temporal with the sense of ‘in the time which...’. This would allow for the relative clause to define the preaching action of Christ during the time of His being put to death and being made alive. Or, alternatively if the emphasis is on ζῶσθαι πνεύματι, then the preaching took place once Jesus arrived in Heaven after the ascension as stressed in verse 22; cf. πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν.

In summary of verse 19, the following points should be understood: **1.** By the Spirit Christ ascended into Heaven where His declaration of triumph was made. **2.** This declaration included but was not limited to the fallen spirits<sup>62</sup> of

“View 3. In order to resolve some of the obvious difficulties involved in the Augustinian view, the Roman Catholic scholar Robert Bellarmine (1586) advanced the view that after Christ died his soul descended to the realm of the dead and announced salvation to those humans of Noah’s generation who, he conjectured, had repented of their sins just prior to their death (Disp. R. Bellarmini de Controversiis, Tom. 1, Cont. 2, Lib. 4, ch. 13). This theory was adopted subsequently by various Roman Catholic commentators (listed by Holzmeister 1937, 315; Reicke 1946, 42–44; and Dalton 1965, 30–31). The notion that these humans had undergone a purging of sin has been argued in recent time by Vogels (1976).

“View 4. Pioneered by the study of F. Spitta (1890), this view is based on the recognized proximity of the thought in 1 Pet 3:19–20 to early Israelite tradition concerning the Flood and in particular the widely influential book of 1 Enoch. Here the ‘spirits in prison’ are regarded as the sinful angelic spirits whose transgression, according to Genesis 6 and subsequent tradition, preceded and instigated the evil that was destroyed in the Flood. To them Christ announced some form of his triumph over death and their condemnation.”

[John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 648-649.]

<sup>60</sup>The Greek πνεύματι can refer to Christ’s spirit or to the Holy Spirit. It is taken both ways in the various understandings.

<sup>61</sup>“The decisive link between ‘made alive in the Spirit’ and ‘gone to heaven’ is accomplished first by the use of ἐν ᾧ καὶ at the beginning of v 19, and second by moving πορευθεὶς up to v 19 so as to anticipate the complete expression, πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν, in v 22. The much-discussed ἐν ᾧ (see Comment) establishes continuity by connecting πνεύματι (implicitly at least) with the third as well as the second element in the traditional three-part sequence; not only the ‘making alive,’ but the subsequent ‘journey’ of Christ as well is understood to be ‘in the Spirit.’ The two events are viewed almost as one continuous divine act. Peter’s apparent intent in vv 19–22 is to answer the question. What did this heavenly journey in the Spirit entail, and what did it accomplish for Christian believers? Specifically he wants to show what it meant for ‘you,’ the readers of his epistle, in the situations in which he imagines them in the provinces of Asia Minor.” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 199-200.]

<sup>62</sup>“Two questions remain: (a) what was the proclamation?; (b) where did it take place? The alternatives as usually stated are: either a proclamation offering forgiveness and redemption to the ‘spirits,’ or a proclamation of judgment and of Christ’s victory  
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Gen. 6<sup>63</sup> who are imprisoned<sup>64</sup> awaiting final judgment. Note the similar emphasis in Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4.<sup>65</sup> The declaration of Jesus' triumph means the doom of the fallen angels, for Satan has been decisively defeated in the resurrection - ascension of Jesus. **3.** The triumphant proclamation of Jesus is blessed assurance to believers suffering unjustly. Christ has subdued all powers and authorities under His control, as verse 22 affirms.

The imagery of Noah awaiting the flood and deliverance from God in vv. 20-21 becomes Peter's amplification of the assertion in verse 19 of Christ's proclamation. What was Peter's point with the reference to Noah? Beyond Jesus proclaiming His triumph over the evil spirits that brought divine judgment upon the world in Noah's day, Peter saw the deliverance of a small group of people, "a few, that is, eight persons," as comparable to his readers in the first century. The building of the ark became the vehicle of deliverance; remember that God is building His house among believers. The waters of the flood were the channel of deliverance (δῖ' ὕδατος) for these eight people. For the unrighteousness in Noah's day, the waters meant death as divine judgment, but for the small group they were deliverance from the corruption that God was

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over them. κηρύσσειν in the NT usually refers either to Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God or his disciples' proclamation of the good news of his death and resurrection. Yet in 1 Peter, the characteristic word for the message of redemption is εὐαγγελίζεω (1:12, 25; 4:6); κηρύσσειν is found only here. The question of what the proclamation was cannot be separated from that of who 'the spirits' were. One major difficulty with interpreting them either as the fallen angels of Gen 6:1-4 or as the generation that perished in the flood is that these interpretations do not explain why Christ was so vitally interested in events that happened several millennia before he began his ministry. Or rather, why would Peter have thought he was vitally interested in such traditions? 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." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 209.]

One difficulty of distancing 'imprisoned spirits' in v. 19 from the fallen angels in Gen. 6 is the defining reference in v. 20a ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε, "who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah,..." This seems to clearly mean 'spirits' at the time of Noah as the primary reference. Michaels' interpretation has merit but lacks clear persuasiveness:

"His choice of words is not accidental, but suggests a close connection in the author's mind between the 'spirits' and the flesh-and-blood opposition he and his readers faced in the Roman Empire. Although there is a historical analogy in vv 20-21 between "then" and "now" (ποτε in v 20, and νῦν in v 21), the fact that Christ went and made proclamation, long after Noah's time, to these same 'spirits' points to something more than just an analogy. The 'disobedient spirits' of long ago still exist, and it is not unlikely that Peter sees their influence behind the ridicule and slander of pagans actively opposed to the Christian movement in his day (cf. Eph 2:2, where 'the ruler of the power of the air' is further identified as 'the spirit now at work among the children of disobedience' [ἀπειθεία]). If Christ has visited the spirits, violated their sanctuaries, and brought them under subjection, then Christians have nothing to fear from the interrogation and insults of those who denounce their way of life (cf. vv 14, 16)." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 211.]

**63Gen. 6:1-7, NRSV:** 1 When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, 2 the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. 3 Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years." 4 The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown. 5 The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

<sup>64</sup>"Where did the proclamation take place? Where was the 'prison,' or 'refuge,' of the unclean spirits? Dalton argues at length (*Proclamation*, 177-84) that it was not under the earth, but somewhere in the heavens, appealing especially to 2 Enoch 7.1-3, where Enoch is taken 'to the second heaven' and shown 'a darkness greater than earthly darkness' and 'prisoners under guard, hanging up, waiting for the measureless judgment' (OTP, 1:112; cf. also T. Levi 3.2). Although Dalton here demonstrates that Jewish traditions about the fallen angels were by no means uniform, he has not demonstrated that the traditions locating their imprisonment and punishment in the heavens were the dominate ones. He is, in any case, still working from the assumption that the 'spirits in refuge' in 1 Peter are the fallen angels of Gen 6 rather than the evil spirits on earth which their sin produced." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 210.]

**65Jude 6, NRSV:** And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day.

**2 Peter 2:4, NRSV:** 4 For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment; 5 and if he did not spare the ancient world, even though he saved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood on a world of the ungodly;...



punishing.<sup>66</sup> Encouragement comes from the emphasis on the small group in Noah's time. Believers in Peter's day represented but a very small segment of known humanity at that time. Thus majority domination gives no clue as to correctness of lifestyle! The remnant of the people of God will be the ones experiencing God's deliverance.

The mentioning of water as a symbol of deliverance for Noah prompts linking it to baptism in verse 21: ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, "And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you." The water baptism of the believer represents God's deliverance now just as the waters of the flood did for Noah and his companions. One clear implication of this statement is that following Christ in believer's baptism is absolutely critical for a genuine profession of faith to happen. Unwillingness to obey Christ's command here raises serious questions about the sincerity of any profession of faith in Him. This Peter clearly assumes.

Peter is quick to qualify his assertion about baptism saving: οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεςις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, "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,...". The act of going down into the baptismal waters does not cleanse of our sins as though we are taking a bath. Instead, it represents the culmination of a faith commitment made sincerely to Christ. It is the appropriate 'follow through' to that commitment. The 'saving power' of baptism is not the water but the resurrection of Christ. For believers in the apostolic age this act of submitting to baptism was the open, official declaration of commitment to Christ. Serious commitment was reflected in it, because at that point the surrounding world realized that one was serious in his determination to follow Christ as Lord.

Thus Peter's readers found encouragement in that they had submitted to believer's baptism in open commitment, and this may very well have occasioned much of the opposition to them that they were experiencing. Peter affirms that they have done correctly, and have not made a mistake in being baptized. The OT example of Noah encourages them to stand fast in suffering unjustly for their faith.

Peter concludes in verse 22 with a powerful affirmation of the full triumph of Christ, which he anticipated at the beginning in verse 19: ὃς ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ [τοῦ] θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων, "who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him." This is the ultimate affirmation of encouragement. Jesus, who suffered unjustly, was crowned with triumph before Almighty God and given authority over not just human powers but over all supernatural powers in existence. This exaltation to the position of ultimate power, the right hand of the Heavenly Father, is the ultimate affirmation that God will acknowledge the rightness of suffering unjustly on this earth.

What we have hopefully noticed here is what Peter seems to be doing in verses 19-22. In Jesus' triumphal ascension into Heaven a message comes to the demonic world: "You are doomed to eternal damnation!" Although these evil spirits have been around causing havoc since the days of Noah, Jesus has defeated them and their days are numbered. God delivered just eight people when the world was first destroyed. Believers represent but a small segment of world population and will be the sole survivors of the destruction of the world in the end. Evil could not defeat God in Noah's day, nor will it be able to defeat God's people who follow Christ. Affirmation of this victory is to be found in baptism as a symbol of deliverance and victory over evil. We as believers move every day closer to that wonderful day when Christ's ultimate power will be revealed at the end of time.

In this we rejoice. In this we have encouragement to endure unjust suffering -- just as did the first readers of this letter.

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<sup>66</sup>The eight were Noah and his wife, along with his three sons and their wives, cf. Gen 7:13.