

CHRIST AS THE BASIS
OF VICTORY FOR A SUFFERING CHRISTIAN
IN 1 PETER 3:18-22

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Much has been written to resolve the numerous difficulties¹ in 1 Pet 3:18-22. This, however, is done at the expense of understanding how its details work together to explicate its main point. William Joseph Dalton's² study on this passage almost 20 years was an excellent attempt at explaining both the details and thrust of this passage. More recently, Paul J. Achtemeier also wrote a voluminous commentary on 1 Peter in which he devoted two sections³ to evaluate various views on the main point. Insufficient attention, however, has been given to explaining how the details work together to support its thrust. In view of this lacuna, I shall attempt to demonstrate exegetically how these details relate to each other to bring out the thrust of this passage which I posit it to be the salvific work of Christ as the basis of victory for a suffering Christian.

Methodology

This paper will first structure and translate the passage to reveal its major sections. The main point of this passage will then be ascertained. Discussion limited to details that highlight

1. E.g., the function of the dative participles in verse 18 which can be datives of reference or instrumental datives; the antecedent of ἐν ᾧ in verse 19 which can refer to the nearest antecedent or the entire preceding context; the identity of the "spirits" in verse 19 which could be those of humans or of demons; how baptism in verse 22 saves.

2. William Joseph Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits*, 2d ed. (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989).

3. Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 244–46.

ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σφάζει
 βάπτισμα (A),
 οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου (B)
 ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς (B')
 ἐπερώτημα (A')
 εἰς θεόν,
 δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,
 ὃς ἐστὶν ἐν δεξιᾷ θεοῦ
 πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανόν
 ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ
 ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.

Because even,
 Christ has suffered
 once for all for sins
 the righteous for the unrighteous ones
with the result that
 he has led you to God
 by means of, on the one hand, having died to the flesh,
 on the other hand, having been made alive by the Spirit

In which state also
 he proclaimed
 when he went to the spirits in refuge
 who were at some time disobedient
 when the patience of God waited
 during the days of Noah
 while he was building an ark
 into which few were saved
 that is, eight souls
 by water

which is also
 now an anti-type that saves you,
 that is baptism (A)
 not a removal of the dirt of the flesh (B)
 but a good conscience (B')
 an appeal to God (A')
 by means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ
 who is at the right hand of God
 who entered heaven
 by subjecting to him
 angels, authorities and powers

The above structural layout reveals three sections: (1) the scope of Christ's salvific work;
 (2) the patience of God, and (3) baptism, as I will show exegetically, as an assurance of salvation.
 Before explicating these three sections, I will examine the main point of this passage.

grammar and contextual flow, opts for the reading ᾧ. However, not only is this reading supported by inferior manuscript evidence and is the less difficult reading, taking the reading as ὃ is no less grammatically possible (see exegesis in paper).

EXEGESIS

The Main Point of 1 Peter 3:18-22

Three Most Plausible Views Considered.

Christ's Example of Suffering. This view interprets the author to be using Christ's example of suffering to support verse 17, that it is better for Christians to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.⁷ This view is predicated on the contrast between Christ's suffering which led to victory and the evil spirits' wickedness which led to their imprisonment.⁸ However, such a division is artificial: the fate of the evil spirits *does not contrast* the fate of those who do good. What the argument says is that the fate of the evil spirits *was determined* by the "good" that Christ did in suffering for sins.

Christ's Salvific Work as Confidence for a Suffering Christian. Whereas in the previous view, Christians are exhorted to suffer for righteousness *just as* Christ did, in this view, Christians are exhorted to suffer for righteousness *because* Christ has suffered for sins. Dalton views 3:18-22 as providing a Christian confidence, in a somewhat psychological sense, for not fearing his adversary.⁹ I would argue, however, the salvific work of Christ is actually appropriated in a Christian's life.

Christ's Salvific Work as the Basis for Victory for a Suffering Christian. The view taken by this paper¹⁰ takes the main point of the passage to be providing the grounds for Christians to have the ability to suffer for righteousness. The reason is that Christ has overcome

7. So C. E. B. Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude*, Torch Bible Commentaries (London: SCM Press, 1960), 100–01. More recently, Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 134.

8. K. Gschwind, *Die Niederfahrt Chrisit in die Unterwelt* (Münster, 1911), 97–111: cited by Dalton, *Spirits*, 123.

9. Dalton, *Spirits*, 126–27.

10. Also, Achtemeier, *I Peter*, 246, and Elliot, *I Peter*, 638, who sees its main point as Christ's vicarious suffering and death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to God's right hand "demonstrates his ability to bring believers to God."

the power of sin.

Ascertaining the Main Point of 3:18-22. To establish the main point, I shall first demonstrate that 2:11-12 serves as a prologue to frame our understanding of 2:13-3:17. I will next analyse 2:11-12 to argue that a Christian's ability to endure sufferings for righteousness is determined by whether he is free from the dominion of sin. Finally, the preceding context, 3:13-17, will be used to ascertain the main point of 3:18-22.

2:11-12 as Prologue to 2:13-3:17. That 2:11-12 is the prologue of 2:13-3:17 is evident. First, the readers are called ἀγαπητοί (“beloved”) which occurs again in the letter only in 4:12 where it refers to Christians in general. Second, their adversaries are ἔθνεσιν (Gentiles) which include those in 2:13-3:17: masters, unbelieving husbands, and possibly unbelieving wives.¹¹ Third, the exhortation to keep a good conduct before unbelievers is an injunction found also in 2:13-3:17.

Analysis of 2:11-12. The participle ἔχοντες (“keeping”) denotes the result of the infinitive ἀπέχεσθαι (“to abstain”). That means that abstaining from fleshy desires will enable the believers to keep a good conduct among unbelievers. Two observations evidence this. First, the participle is in the present tense and follows the main verb. That makes it possible to classify it as a resultative participle.¹² Second, that a Christian's ability to live righteously when suffering (signified by the participial clause ἔχοντες καλὴν τὴν ἀναστροφὴν ὑμῶν [“keeping your a good conduct”]) is determined by whether he has overcome the power of sin (signified by the infinitival clause ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν σαρκικῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν [“to abstain from fleshy desires”]) is a

11. Karen H. Jobes, *I Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 207, notes that members in a Greco-Roman household would follow the religion of the male head of the household. In view of that, the wife of a Christian would typically convert to Christianity. That perhaps explains why the author does not mention the antagonistic attitude present in the other groups above (unbelieving masters, unbelieving husbands). Hence, the possibility of an unbelieving wife cannot be excluded. Hence, Jobes is probably right to say that an “unbelieving wife is not outside the purview of this exhortation.”

12. Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 638.

recurring motif in the sub-sections of 2:13-3:17 which are addressed to servants (2:18-25), Christian wives (3:1-6), Christian husbands (3:7), and Christians in general (3:8-17).

Inference. The two related main ideas that for Christians to live righteously when suffering before Gentiles (2:12), they will have to abstain from sin (2:11) should frame our understanding of 2:13-3:17 and what follows (3:18-22). Since 2:13-3:17 contains injunctions to Christians to keep a good conduct before Gentiles, it seems reasonable that the focus of 3:18-22, as borne out by its details, is about the ability to abstain from sin which otherwise will inhibit a believer from being able to suffer for righteousness. That source is the salvific work accomplished by Christ.

The Scope of Christ's Salvific Work

Christ has suffered for sin once and for all to annul the power of sin over believers. By that, he has led them to live righteous lives for God. In his empowerment by the Spirit, he proclaimed victory to the spirits in refuge to decapitate their power over believers.

Christ has Annulled the Power of Sin. Christians can live righteously under suffering because “Christ has suffered [ἔπαθεν] once and for all [ᾧπαξ] for sins.” That the aorist ἔπαθεν is consummative is evident from two observations. First, it is modified by ᾧπαξ which implies that Christ's suffering has ended and is not to be repeated. Second, applying 3:18-22, the author declares that “the one who has suffered in the flesh has ceased [πέπαυται] from sin” (4:1) and hence, the reader should “live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men but for the will of God” (4:2). This determines the force of πέπαυται as an intensive perfect that emphasises result. That in turn informs the meaning of “the righteous one [has suffered] for the unrighteous ones” (δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων): the unrighteous ones (the readers) are free from the power of sin.

Christ has Led Believers to a Life of Righteousness. The purpose of Christ's salvific work is "that he might bring us to God" (ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ). The word προσάγω¹³ occurs in the context of bringing someone before God. I posit that specifically, it means the ability to live righteously under suffering.¹⁴ Two observations point in this direction. First, in his application (4:1-3) of 3:18-22, Peter exhorts his readers that "he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" must purpose "that he should no longer live for the desires of men but for the will of God" (εἰς τὸ μηκέτι ἀνθρώπων ἐπιθυμίαις ἀλλὰ θελήματι θεοῦ ... βιώσαι [4:2]). Second, as elaborated below, the explanation of προσαγάγῃ provided by the two subsequent participial clauses reinforces this meaning.

Christ is Empowered by the Spirit. The two participial clauses form an antithetical couplet framed by μὲν ... δέ:

θανατωθεῖς μὲν σαρκὶ

ζωοποιηθεῖς δὲ πνεύματι

Achtemeier¹⁵ construes the datives as instrumental. By interpreting σαρκὶ as "humanity" (c.f. 1:24), he explains how Christ could have been put to death *by* the flesh.¹⁶ Πνεύματι refers to

13. Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 875–76, lists several possible meanings: "to bring someone forward; to bring someone to someone" (as in the literature during the Hellenistic period including the LXX; Luke 9:41; Acts 16:20); "to bring someone before God" (as in the literature during the Hellenistic period including the writings of Josephus); it can also be a technical term for bringing sacrifices to God (as used in Classical Greek and writings during the Hellenistic period including the LXX).

14. L. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 253, comes close to this interpretation. He sees in the image connoted by the word προσάγω "concepts of discipleship (2:21) and of participation in Christ's path (4:13)".

15. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 250–51.

16. Elliot, *1 Peter*, 645 correctly highlights the need to interpret the datives in a consistent manner. Also, J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1988), 204; Dalton, *Spirits*, 141.

the Holy Spirit. More likely, however, is the view of a majority of commentators that sees them as datives of reference. Davids correctly explains σάρξ (“flesh”) as the “mode of existence of unregenerate humanity” and πνεῦμα (“spirit”) as “the mode of existence of the regenerate or those pleasing to God.”¹⁷ This view is evidenced by two observations. First, in a majority of places where σάρξ is contrasted with πνεῦμα, it has that meaning.¹⁸ Second, in the author’s application of 3:18-22 to the readers in ὁ παθὼν σαρκὶ πέπνυται ἁμαρτίας (“the one who suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” [4:1]), σάρξ is associated with ἁμαρτία. Thus, the couplet can be paraphrased as “on the one hand, Christ was put to death with reference to the weakness of fallen human nature. On the other hand, he was made alive with reference to the victorious life in the Spirit.”¹⁹

This couplet modifies the preceding προσαγάγη (“he might lead”) as it is nearer than the more distant ἔπαθεν (“has suffered”). Also, the sense of victory in προσαγάγη coheres better with a similar sense of victory in the couplet. Specifically, the participles relate to the main verb προσαγάγη instrumentally.²⁰ This is evident in that the thought of the first line of the couplet is in effect the thought of 3:18a: Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, κτλ. Since 3:18a leads to the result ὑμᾶς προσαγάγη τῷ θεῷ (“that he might lead us to God”), the couplet should also be regarded as instrumental to the verb προσαγάγη. As the emphasis of the couplet²¹ is on the

17. Davids, *I Peter*, 136–37. Similarly, Dalton, *Spirits*, 141; Michaels, *I Peter*, 204; Elliot, *I Peter*, 645.

18. Where σάρξ and πνεῦμα are mentioned together in the NT, 17 out of a total of 25 occurrences carry this meaning. E.g. Mat 26:41; Rom 8:4, 9; Gal 5:16.

19. Michaels, *I Peter*, 205 correctly describes it as “‘Spirit’ is the sphere of power, vindication, and a new life.”

20. When the main verb and the participles are in the aorist tense, they are likely contemporaneous. This makes it possible to classify them as instrumental participles.

21. Michaels, *I Peter*, 205 correctly notes that “the pairing of the two participial expressions by the use of μέν ... δέ has the effect of subordinating the first to the second.”

second line, the point of this section is that the Spirit empowers Christ. But such empowerment is for a specific purpose spelt out in verse 19.

Christ has Destroyed the Power of Evil Spirits.

The Referent of Ἐν ᾧ. Achtemeier appeals to a natural reading where ᾧ would most naturally refer to the preceding πνεύματι.²² However, this referent does not fit the usage of ἐν ᾧ in its other four occurrences (1:6; 2:12; 3:16; 4:4) where they clearly do not refer to their nearest antecedents.²³ More likely then, consistent with its use in this epistle, it refers to what precedes, either to “a state or condition”.²⁴ Michaels is probably right that it refers to being “made alive in the Spirit.”²⁵ This coheres with the preceding argument: Christ’s suffering climaxes with his life in the Spirit. This means that the preceding context is as an integrated whole with its emphasis on the empowered state of Christ. The referent of ἐν ᾧ should capture this emphasis. Thus, it refers to the resurrected or Spirit empowered state of Christ.

The Identity of Πνεύματα. There are two broad interpretations. It may refer to spirits of human beings who have died.²⁶ Grudem defends this view on several grounds. First, to say that this word, unless qualified, refers to non-corporeal beings is an artificial distinction. He adds that he could just as well argue on the same basis that “no examples of πνεῦμα meaning ‘angelic

22. Achtemeier, *I Peter*, 252. Dalton, *Spirits*, 145, appeals to Clement of Alexandria and Origen, that they are “men of culture and certainly skilled in Greek ... all had no difficulty in accepting ἐν ᾧ as a relative depending on πνεύματι.” Without doubting their expertise in the Greek language, the fact of the matter is that no evidence that has a direct bearing on this understanding has been rallied in support of this position. Similarly too John S. Feinberg, “1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 318–19, who did not give sufficient evidence with direct bearing.

23. Thus correctly Davids, *I Peter*, 138.

24. Andrew J. Banstra, “‘Making Proclamation to the Spirits in Prison’: Another Look at 1 Peter 3:19,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38 (April 2003): 121, correctly observes that such is the case in at least two instances (1:6; 4:4).

25. Michaels, *I Peter*, 206.

26. Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude*, 102; Goppelt, *I Peter*, 259.

spirits’ can be found without further definition from context.” Second, his extensive survey of extra-biblical literature concludes that Peter’s readers could not have identified the “spirits” as disobedient angels because there is “simply no evidence in extra-biblical literature.”²⁷

More likely, however, the “spirits” are those of fallen angels or demons. First, only two out of a total of 34 occurrences of the word πνεύματα refer to human beings. Regarding the first occurrence (1 Cor 14:32), Fee explains that “the phrase ‘spirits of the prophets’ means ‘the prophetic Spirit’ ... ‘the S/spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets’”.²⁸ The point is that “spirits” is used because a reference to the Holy Spirit is also intended. The other occurrence is in “the spirits [πνεύμασιν] of the righteous who have been made perfect” (Heb 12:23). This is a clear reference to human beings. But even this occurs in a somewhat similar vein. Lane²⁹ aptly comments:

‘the spirits of righteous persons,’ refers to those who have died but who now inhabit the heavenly city that is the goal of the pilgrimage ... The choice of this designation for those righteous persons who have died and who now enjoy the divine presence is consistent with the writer’s use of the old biblical expression ὁ πατήρ τῶν πνευμάτων ... That description contemplates God in his character as the one to whom the heavenly realm is subject.

The point is that in these two occurrences, there is an intended reference to either “the Holy Spirit” or “heaven/the Father in heaven”. Neither of these is emphasised in our passage. This rules out views that see them as human souls. Second, Grudem also denies that the readers could have understood the meaning of “spirits” as those of non-human beings. But this denies its usual NT meaning where 32 out of 34 occurrences of this word refers to non-human beings. Third, contrary to what Grudem insists, this understanding is not foreign to the epistle.

27. Wayne Grudem, “Christ Preaching Through Noah: 1 Peter 3:19–20 in the Light of Dominant Themes in Jewish Literature,” *Trinity Journal* 7 (1986): 6–18.

28. Correctly, Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994), 254.

29. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1991), 470–71.

Understanding the “spirits” as referring to non-human beings which disobeyed and plagued Noah’s generation also coheres with what Peter says towards the end of the epistle. The author recapitulates: “the Devil ... resist him ... because you know that the same kinds of suffering are being completed by your brothers ...” (5:8-9). Peter regards Satan as the ultimate source of sufferings the Christians presently face.³⁰

The Identity of Φυλακή. For those who take πνεύματα as referring to fallen angels or demons, φυλακή can mean a place of imprisonment.³¹ The other possibility is, as Michaels aptly suggests, “refuge”:³² a place that is guarded for the safety of those who reside in it (as opposed to for the safety of those outside it). Despite the fact that the meaning “refuge” is infrequent when compared to “prison,” this is more probable on two counts. First, this word occurs with πνεῦμα in only one other place (Rev 18:2)³³ where the word in that context has the meaning of “refuge”. Second, this fits the nature of Christ’s proclamation as explained below.

The Nature of Christ’s Proclamation. There are two broad views on the nature of Christ’s proclamation. First, some hold that Christ preached repentance through Noah and offered salvation to his generation of people.³⁴ This view falters on three counts. First, it goes

30. This coheres with Barth L. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995), 199, who correctly sees 4:12-5:14 as the letter’s *peroratio*. It functions to recapitulate the affirmations and arguments of 1:1-4:11. He also aptly comments that “Peter significantly uses the epithet for Satan in order to identify him as the ultimate source behind the slander flung at his readers” (Campbell, *Honor, Shame, Rhetoric*, 224).

31. This is well-attested in both the NT (Mark 5:25; Acts 8:3; 2 Cor 11:23) and LXX (Gen 40:3; Jud 16:25).

32. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 208–09. This meaning is attested in the LXX (2 Sam 20:3; 1 Ki 2:3), other Jewish literature (4 Mac 13:13), and the NT (Luke 2:8).

33. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 208.

34. Feinberg, “Intermediate State,” 33. Also Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 160. M. Eugene Boring, *1 Peter*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press,

against the lexical usage of “spirits” which does not refer to human beings in this context (as discussed above). Second, Grudem used “Νῶε δικαιοσύνης κήρυκα” (“Noah, a preacher of righteousness” [2 Pet 2:5]) as his support³⁵ that Christ preached through Noah repentance and salvation to Noah’s generation. But the emphasis of 2 Pet 2:5 is not on κήρυκα (preacher) but on δικαιοσύνης (righteousness) as the immediate context makes clear. The writer of 2 Peter begins the chapter by predicting that false prophets would surface and deceive many (2 Pet 2:1-3). To discourage Christians from following them, he compares the fate of righteous people and unrighteous people (2 Pet 2:4-8). At the end of that comparison he summarises their differing fates: “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pet 2:9). Here, Noah is not a *source* of salvation but an *example* of salvation. Third, κηρύσσω in the NT usually means to preach salvation (Luke 4:18; 9:2; Rom 10:14; 2 Cor 1:19;). It can also mean to make a proclamation in a general sense (Luke 8:39; Rom 2:21; Rev 9:2). But In 1 Peter, when preaching of the gospel is meant, the word used is *always* εὐαγγελίζω (1:12; 1:25; 4:6).³⁶ Thus, the view that Christ is making a proclamation to fallen angels or demons is more probable.

What is unclear is the nature of that proclamation. Most interpret it to be Christ’s proclamation of victory to the spirits. But this view does not explain the purpose of such a proclamation. Michaels³⁷ is probably right to interpret it not only as a proclamation, but one that decapitates the power of evil spirits. His comments on the casting out of demons is instructive:

On one occasion, when he [Jesus] drove out these “spirits”, they asked for a haven (Mark 5:10, 12) and he granted their request (Mark 5:13). They feared that he had come to

1999), 136–37, notes that this view was advocated by Augustine, partly to oppose the Alexandrian view which teaches a second chance for salvation after death.

35. Grudem, *1 Peter*, 160.

36. That the author could have used κηρύσσω to refer to gospel preaching to vary his style of writing is possible but improbable because of a lack of such use in three other places where preaching of the gospel is meant.

37. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 209–10.

torment them “before the time” (Matt 8:29) ... without question he set limits to their power ... their kingdom was shaken by Jesus’ ministry ... but not yet overthrown. If the “spirits in refuge” in our text are seen against this background, then Christ’s proclamation to them after his death and resurrection may simply have been that their “prison,” or “refuge,” was no longer inviolate. They too, like all other powers in the universe, must now submit to their sovereignty.

Such a view also agrees with the fact that Christ through his death and resurrection “disarmed the rulers and authorities” (Col 2:12-15). Henceforth, evil spiritual powers can no longer assert their authority on them.³⁸ Thus, in summary, Christ in a state of empowerment by the Holy Spirit through his proclamation, has removed the stranglehold of the power of the evil spirits over Christians so that they can lead lives of righteousness whilst suffering.

The Patience of God

God delayed delivering Noah because of his patience towards the unbelieving generation. That patience is great because he waited for the construction of an ark that saved only eight souls. Yet, as God eventually saved Noah, Peter assures his readers that God will save them too.

The Point of this Section. Two clues hint that the emphasis of this section is the patience of God towards human beings who were disobedient in Noah’s time. First, this section begins with a main clause ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἀπεξεδέχετο (the patience of God was waiting). It should be noted that the subject of this clause is ἡ μακροθυμία and not ὁ θεός as some translated it.³⁹ This observation underlines the thrust of this passage to be concerning the patience of God and not just God. Second, the contextual flow of this section, as explained below, demands it.

Analysis of this Section.

38. Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), 128 correctly comments that Christ “divested the principalities and powers of their dignity and authority on the cross...God exposed to the universe their utter helplessness.” In a similar vein, also James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 168.

39. NIV and NRSV incorrectly translate it as “when God waited patiently.”

The Extent of God's Patience. Two observations evidence that this section shows the extent of God's patience. First, the grammatical flow of the text requires it. God's patience waited for the building of an ark. This patience, signified by the word ἀπεξεδέχετο ("it waited"), is further explicated by the genitive absolute κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ⁴⁰ ("building an ark") whose significance is indicated by the content that the prepositional relative pronoun εἰς ἣν encapsulates. Its content is then unpacked by what follows: the patience of God waited for the building of an ark that saved ὀκτὼ ψυχαί ("eight souls") whose significance is described by the adjective ὀλίγοι ("few"). Thus, the significance of "few" is to emphasise the patience of God. In other words, the patience of God is measured by his willingness to wait for the construction of an ark that saved only a "few", that is, eight souls.

Second, such an understanding coheres with 2 Peter⁴¹ in "the Lord ... is patient [μακροθυμεῖ]⁴² to us, not willing any to perish" (2 Pet 3:9): here, the patience of God is related

40. Wallace, *Grammar*, 655 correctly observes that the "the participle is normally (about 90% of the time) *temporal* [his emphasis], though it can on occasion express any of the adverbial ideas ... [It is] always adverbial (i.e., it cannot be adjectival or substantival)." This implies that it must be dependent on some main verb.

41. E.g., Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), 158–62, argues that 2 Peter belongs to "testament" genre which fits the need of a pseudepigrapher, and the book was written late. Against him, Daniel Wallace, "Second Peter: Introduction, Argument, Outline," available <http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1363> (24 August 2007), cogently argues against a date of 80 CE on the grounds that the occasion of the letter fits the date of 64 CE better. First, Paul had just died and he saw the need to ensure continuance of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. Second, Peter's death and infiltration of false teachers were imminent. These necessitated the writing of 2 Peter.

42. It is significant that the noun μακροθυμία and its verbal forms all occur in similar contexts (1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 3:3; 3:15). Not only are 1 Pet 3:20 and 2 Pet 3:9 related in content, 2 Pet 3:3 and 2 Pet 3:15 are also closely related as this is the major concern in 2 Pet 3: Peter was responding to the allegations of the false teachers (2 Pet 3:3-4) that the Lord is not keeping his promise about returning to judge the world. These occurrences in similar contexts support my thesis that the patience of God is reflected in God's willingness to wait for the salvation of even eight souls.

to the salvation of “a few”. The author’s intent here is to assure them of their salvation despite the delay of God’s judgment of the adversaries. This concern is what the author next takes up.

Salvation Despite God’s Patience. This section ends with διεσώθησαν δι’ ὕδατος (“they were saved by means of water”). Διὰ is instrumental.⁴³ Two facts support this interpretation. First, “they were saved by means of water” keeps the parallel with its application “baptism saves you”. Second, to argue otherwise would be to miss the author’s point in 3:18-22. Just as Noah and his family were saved by means of the water that removes agents of sin (the unbelieving generation), the readers are enabled to live righteously under suffering by breaking free from the power of sin.

The patience of God is concessive to διεσώθησαν δι’ ὕδατος because God’s patience implies a delay of the salvation of believers, *and* a delay of judgment on the Christians’ adversaries. Peter’s intent is to explain the delay and hence assure his readers that *despite* a delay due to God’s patience, salvation through destruction of the ungodly *will surely* come. This assurance takes the form of baptism which is the author’s next concern.

Baptism as an Assurance of Salvation

The author uses the baptisms of his readers to remind them that God will save them as he saved Noah. The reality of salvation represented by the reminder in baptism is predicated by the resurrection of Christ which subjected the evil spirits to Christ. This results in a decapitation of their power to cause believers to sin.

The Referent of “O.” The parallelism between baptism and water implies that the relative pronoun ὃ refers to ὕδατος. But Michaels correctly points out, by referring to Noah’s time as ποτε and the reader’s time as νῦν means that the ὕδωρ (“water”) is different for both.⁴⁴ More

43. So Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 265. Elliot, *1 Peter*, 667, despite taking διὰ as locative, yet recognises the significance of its clear parallel with baptism which implies an instrumental use. Thus, he agrees with Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1952), 202, that it can be both locative and instrumental.

44. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 214.

precisely, although the antecedent δ is the water of Noah's flood, that which saves the present readers is the ἀντίτυπον of this water. Also, the tightly interwoven argument as reflected in the grammatical structure,⁴⁵ together with δ which ties together the flood water and baptism water, attaches to the water of baptism the significance represented by the *entire* preceding narrative of Noah's account.

Two related ideas are signified. First, just as God was patient towards Noah's generation, God's delay in saving the present readers is also due to his patience towards the Christians' adversaries and does not imply that God will not deliver the Christians. This assurance is precisely what baptism, when tied to Noah's flood water, is supposed to recount. Second, just as God finally destroyed the sinful generation of Noah, God will also deliver the Christians by breaking the power of sin to enable Christians to suffer righteously so as to reward them with final eschatological salvation in the future. What follows serves to explain the implication such a baptism has for a Christian. But first, a note about the structure of this section is in order .

Structural Considerations. Positioning ὑμᾶς at the front of the sentence emphasises application for the reader. Similarly, placing ἀντίτυπον in front emphasises that the water which saved Noah serves as an anti-type for the readers now (νῦν). Its anti-type βάπτισμα, placed in simple apposition to ἀντίτυπον is left to the end of the sentence to develop a chiasm⁴⁶ for elaboration:

βάπτισμα (A)

οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου (B)

ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς (B')

ἐπερώτημα (A')

45. Achtemeier, *I Peter*, 240, astutely notes that "additional structural elements provide a measure of coherence to this catena of clauses, and thus provide clues to the meaning of the passage."

46. That it is a chiasm is evidenced by assonance (-μα) in its outer ring (A A') and semantic parallelism in its inner ring (B B'). My exegesis also verifies this structure.

εἰς θεόν

Analysis of B B’. Baptism is described by an antithetical couplet (B B’) framed by οὐ ... ἀλλὰ (“not ... but”) which implies that it is a spiritual cleansing. As “baptism” is grammatically tied to the preceding Noah’s account, it implies that just as God saved Noah by destroying a sinful generation that plagued Noah and his family, God has now cleansed the readers from sin so that they may experience salvation. That salvation or deliverance is in view coheres with the author’s couching of cleansing in terms of “conscience”: keeping a clean conscience will gain grace from God (2:19); God will also put a Christian’s adversary to shame in the eschatological judgment (3:16).

Analysis of A A’. The above understanding of “conscience” explains the next couplet A A’ in the chiasm, specifically, the meaning of ἐπερώτημα. Among its several meanings,⁴⁷ “appeal” best fits the significance of a good or clean conscience (B B’): a good conscience is the basis for an appeal to God for grace. Interpreting “A” in light of “A’” yields the meaning of baptism as an appeal to God for grace made possible by the cleansing of one’s conscience.

“Baptism” is mentioned for three reasons. First, Paul’s frequent appeals to his readers’ experience of baptism to correct some aberration in their Christian walk or beliefs implies that baptism was a vivid experience.⁴⁸ Second, the rite of baptism was administered at the time of their conversion to the Christian faith (Acts 2:38-41; 8:21; 8:36; 10:47). Third, it signified a cleansing from sin (3:21). These three factors together imply that baptism serves as a reminder to Christians that they have been cleansed from sin. It is a *reminder*, not a *basis* of salvation, that

47. BAGD, 3rd ed., 362, lists possible meanings as request, pledge, appeal. In the NT, it occurs only here as a noun; its verbal form occurs 56 times in the NT, often with the meaning of “question,” (Matt 12:10) and occasionally “request something of someone” (Rom 10:20).

48. E.g., Paul in his rebuke of Christians who support Judaisers, appeals to their experience of baptism to remind them that they “who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27; c.f. Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 12:13; 15:29; Eph 4:5; Col 2:12).

assures them of the victory they have now through Christ over sin. Seen in light of 2:11-12, it reminds them that they can live righteously under suffering before their human adversaries.

The Basis of Salvation. Salvation comes δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, κτλ. (“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” etc.), and also his ascension into heaven and enthronement at the right hand of God. These three elements belong to a common stock of early Christian tradition which frequently occur in various combinations in the NT to emphasise a privileged status (e.g., “you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power” [Mark 14:62]; “He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God” [Mark 16:19]).

The author adapts this Christian tradition and applies it to the needs of his readers: such a privileged position causes “angels, and authorities and powers to be subject to him.” How subjection to Christ works to the advantage of the readers needs some unpacking. The last clause is a genitive absolute participle which relates semantically (not syntactically) to the main verb σώζει (he saves) instrumentally.⁴⁹ This implies that baptism is able to save a Christian because Christ has subjected the evil spirits to himself. Such an understanding coheres with the thought of the preceding verses (3:19): Christ, in a state empowered by the Holy Spirit proclaimed with the objective of breaking the power of the evil spirits that once plagued Noah’s generation. In this way, these same evil spirits can no longer effectively cause Christians to sin.

CONCLUSION

A Summary

The main point of 1 Pet 3:18-22 is to explain how Christ’s salvific work enables a Christian to live righteously when suffering. This has been analysed under three headings.

First, “Christ’s Scope of Salvation.” Christ, by suffering, has annulled the power of sin over believers that they may live righteously for God. In the Spirit’s power, Christ proclaimed to destroy the power of evil spirits so that they no longer hold sway over Christians to cause them to

49. Not as ἐστὶν as that intrudes into the triad of “resurrection,” “ascension,” and “seated at the right hand of God.”

sin. *Second, “The Patience of God”.* God demonstrated great patience towards the evil generation of Noah’s time by waiting for the construction of an ark that saved only eight souls. Despite that delay, God eventually delivered Noah and his family by destroying the sinful generation that plagued them. Likewise, God’s delay in delivering the readers is due to his patience towards unbelievers. *Third, “Baptism as Assurance of Salvation.”.* Baptism reminds them that God will deliver the suffering Christians: just as water destroyed the sinful generation of Noah, baptism signifies that God has delivered the Christians from sin so that they can live righteously when suffering. Baptism signifies an appeal to God on the basis of a clean conscience that will win them the grace of God to triumph over sin and their adversaries now, and their eschatological salvation in the future. This is possible because Christ’s resurrection, ascension to heaven, and enthronement at God’s right hand has subjected all evil powers to himself that they no longer have effective power to cause Christians to sin. This theological truth is especially precious to Christians who are persecuted by human powers that seem to hold absolute sway over them. However, Peter assures his readers their *almost* absolute power lies in an invisible power that has been critically defeated by Christ at the cross and his resurrection.

A Paraphrase of 1 Pet 3:18-22

18. Christians can now live righteously when suffering at the hands of Gentiles because Christ has suffered to annul the power of sin over believers once and for all. As a result, we can live a life of righteousness to God. This is made possible by Christ’s death in the realm of fallen human nature, thus annulling the power of sin; and resurrection in the realm of the Spirit, thus coming into a state of victorious power. 19. In this victorious state of power, he went to proclaim victory and decapitated the power of the evil spirits in refuge. 20. These same spirits were disobedient and at work in Noah’s time which brought distress to Noah and his family.

Salvation did not come to Noah immediately because God’s patience delayed it as God was waiting for that generation to repent. That delay was a result of great patience that went to the extent of waiting for the construction of an ark that saved only a few, that is eight persons. Nevertheless, God finally saved them by means of water in destroying the evil generation.

21. Similarly, just as God delayed the salvation of Noah and his family, but eventually saved them, your baptism reminds you that you have been and will be saved from the power of sin too. This baptism represents an appeal on the basis of a clean conscience that will bring you grace from God to live righteously under suffering so that you will be rewarded with eschatological salvation. 22. This use of baptism is made possible because Christ, by ascending to a position of absolute power, now rules over all spiritual powers, including the power of the evil spirits that can cause you to sin to inhibit you from living righteously under suffering.

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