

## “The Cleansing of Christ”– 1 Peter 3:18-22

- **Author:** Peter the apostle (v1). Written via Silvanus as amanuensis/secretary (1 Pet 5:12).
- **Time:** Peter wrote this epistle near end of his life in the early/mid 60s AD while persecution under Nero is present (1 Pet 2:20, 4:12) but will later intensify. Eventually, Peter himself will be martyred.
- **Theme:** Believers are “elect exiles” -- though they are in this world, it is not their home (1 Pet 4:1-11). Being chosen and set apart by God as holy, we are to live w/ our neighbors confidently (Jer 29:7, Jn 17:5, Jn 18:36, Phil 3:20, Heb 13:14, Rev 18:4) even as we suffer (Mt 5:11-12, Acts 7:52, 1 Pet 1:6).
  - 18 – “For Christ suffered...” brings the current suffering of believers back once again to Christ as the propitiation for our sin as well as our example in suffering (*both* aspects are also present in 1 Pet 2:20-25). “The righteous for the unrighteous” is a glorious declaration of substitutionary atonement, showing the outpouring of God’s love for sinners (cf. Isa 53:3-6 w/ 1 Pet 2:24, John 3:16, 2 Cor 5:21). App: The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper has many beautiful facets of truth to it (corporate, individual) but never miss that *Christ took our place*.
  - 19-20 – V19 tells us the *means* of the preaching of Jesus (“in the Spirit”), v20 tells us *when* (“the days of Noah” – the key for interpreting this difficult text, see 2 Pet 3:16).
  - Who are the “spirits in prison”? Did Jesus descend into hell to “preach” to them? The Apostles’ Creed phrase that Jesus “descended into hell” has been historically understood as “the grave” (or the infinite suffering He bore on the cross), not the place of torment or *Limbus Patrum*.
    - The idea of purgatory taught by Roman Catholicism is utterly unknown to Scripture as well as the concept of *Limbus Patrum* (a sort of “holding tank” of Old Testament saints, contradicted by texts such as Mt 8:11, Lk 16:22 cf. Rom 4, Lk 23:43, 2 Cor 5:8, Heb 11:5, 11:13-16). Note, these spirits are rebels (v20), not faithful/repentant saints.
  - Some see Jesus preaching victory over *demons* in hell, but in the context of Noah’s day, *human spirits* are in view, not demons. And why wouldn’t Jesus preach to demons from other times also? In Gen 6, the “sons of God/daughters of man” contrast refers to the God’s covenant line vs the serpent’s line – i.e., the mighty men called the “Nephilim” are not angels/demons.
  - Remember the *context* of Peter’s epistle here in interpreting this text: It is an encouragement for presenting the gospel to *human beings* when they are rejecting and persecuting believers who give a reason our hope within (1 Pet 1:3, 3:15). While it is not explicitly mentioned in Genesis, the redemption of Noah’s household *implies* the free offer of the gospel to those who refused to enter the safety of the ark he built over a span of many decades (Gen 6-9). In that time, Peter tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. Hence, he preached trust in the Word of God and the substitutionary righteousness of the Messiah to come (Gen 3:15, 3:21).
    - App: The idea behind preaching is that *God* is speaking through His word by a human representative, not merely delivering human thoughts (1 Thess 2:13)!
  - 21 – “Baptism now saves you” is not a statement that proves the sacrament works mechanically/automatically to produce salvation (then it would be a good work that saves, contradicted by many other Scriptures like Rom 3:20, Gal 2:16, Eph 2:8-9, Titus 3:5). God *graciously* saves in just the way represented by baptism, like water removing dirt. App: How good it is to know the saving blood of Christ that washes us whiter than snow, the inward washing of the Spirit (Ps 51:7, Isa 1:18, Ezek 36:25-27, 1 Cor 6:11, Eph 5:26, 1 Jn 1:7, Rev 7:14).
  - 22 – The resurrection and ascension of Christ in victory over sin as our substitute is a very significant encouragement to believers who are suffering. It shows His *permanent* reign and rule, sin and Satan’s power is defeated (Ps 110:1, 1 Cor 15:27, Eph 1:22, Phil 2:9-11). Rejoice!