

## The Book of I Peter – Part Sixteen

### May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011

1). Since we've been away from Peter's first letter for the last month, let's do a review of what he's said so far (and what it all means) before we pick up in Chapter 4 and continue studying what the Spirit is saying to us through him.

a) Peter is writing a letter of encouragement to "pilgrims of the Dispersion," i.e. faithful kingdom-seeking Christians scattered about various regions, many of whom are undergoing severe persecution for their convictions of faith. Many are enduring emotional, mental, and especially physical suffering because of their belief in, and allegiance to, Christ. Peter is reminding them that this life is fleeting and temporary, and they have been born again to a living hope that they will be able to realize (their inheritance) if they would just continue to endure their present sufferings and stay faithful to the Word of God, Christ Himself. He adamantly exhorts his brethren to continue to "do good," no matter what the situation is that they are facing, and to behave in a godly and upright manner, fixing their hope "completely on the grace that is to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ." He goes on to warn them that they need to abstain from all fleshly behavior because it wars against their soul by causing them to be disobedient, thereby jeopardizing their receiving their inheritance. Peter has already emphasized that the goal of their faith is the salvation of their soul, so it is this that they are to focus on (*future focus*). Peter even emphasizes this point by pointing out that the prophets of old and the angels themselves spoke about and longed to see this salvation [of the soul] which is being revealed to them now.

b) So, if they choose not to behave in a holy manner, they may be disqualified from receiving their inheritance, for there is a very real possibility of stumbling on the Rock of Offense, the Stone of Stumbling, the Chief Cornerstone, just as their parent's generation – and even their own generation – had done 30 or so years earlier.

c) Peter then gives these faithful Christians some idea of what it looks like to behave in a godly manner. Peter focuses on their human relationships, starting with the slave and master relationship, then moving on to the husband and wife relationship, and ending with the relationships with one another within the body of Christ and with those around them in the world. Remember, Peter doesn't focus on the rightness or wrongness of the situation of slave ownership or of an unequally yoked marriage; he simply encourages each individual within that type of relationship to behave in a pleasing manner to the Lord, disregarding the unfairness and the unrighteousness of whatever situation they find themselves in. He doesn't try to change the situation (man-made creations/institutions), he simply states how each person should conduct themselves as they sojourn through this brief life, no matter their circumstances.

This we know is not only directed to the recipients of the letter in that day, but is also directed towards *us*, those who are seeking the kingdom also.

d) After Peter speaks about submitting to man's institutions and the dynamics of the slave and master relationship, but *before* Peter moves on to suggest to the wives and husbands how they should behave (within their kingdom-seeking marriages), he makes sure to mention that we already have an example of what it looks like to have to endure the suffering inflicted on us by unrighteous people – Christ Himself. Peter had already pointed out that we have been “called” to endure suffering in this world, as Christ endured suffering for us. We are reminded that Christ suffered a horrific death *for us*, “[bearing] our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds [we] were healed.” And because of this, the fact that we were redeemed with God's “precious blood” (I Peter 1:19), we are to “conduct [ourselves] in fear during the time of [our] stay on earth” (I Peter 1:17). And this is how we do it – we emulate what Jesus did. Jesus, amidst all His suffering, entrusted Himself to His Father who judges all things righteously, and even though Christ could have at any time called down legions of angels to deliver Him from that situation, He did not, but rather chose to endure the shame because of the joy that was set before Him, because it was His Father's will.

d) So Peter then tells wives to put themselves under their husbands as they both seek after the kingdom, and he tells husbands to live with their wives “in an understanding way.” Peter tells wives that, when your husband is disobedient, fall back and behave properly before the Lord because that is the best way that you can perform your role as “helper” for your husband, in order to get him back on the road of obedience. Peter makes sure to emphasize how important it is for the wife to be inwardly gentle and quiet and in obedience to the Lord, so as to receive the promise of the inheritance (which he points out by commenting back on Abraham and Sarah and her quiet, inward spirit towards her husband). Peter tells husbands to remember how precious and valuable their wives are... and how *easily broken* they are, as he challenges husbands to behave properly towards them as well. Peter even warns husbands that if they do not behave in the proper way towards their wives, their prayers to God may be “cut off.”

e) The focus on this, from Peter's point of view, is those kingdom seeking Christians who may be tempted to act as they did formerly, as the Gentiles do, but should not and cannot so as to not dishonor their being called to be “a kingdom of priests.”

f) And then Peter transitions his focus to *all* of those kingdom seeking Christians within the hearing/reading of his letter and exhorts them to behave godly in all that they do, “not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead.” This is easier to say than do, for sure, but the command is there nonetheless. We are to “speak well” of all people, especially those who perpetrate evil against us.

g) Peter points out, by using a quote from the Old Testament, that if we want to “see good days” (relative to receiving our inheritance, so this has a future focus) we will refrain our tongues from evil speech and we will turn away from evil. We are reminded that the eyes of the Lord are on those who practice righteousness and His face is against those who do evil.

h) And then Peter again states that there is nothing in this world that can harm you, really, if your focus is where it should be – you need to “do good” regardless of your circumstances...regardless of whether it brings suffering or not. He adds that we (kingdom-seeking Christians) need to always be ready to vocalize our convictions of faith, without any fear of worldly, present consequences. We must stand firm for Christ, and Christ Himself will take care of the rest.

i) And Peter reminds us that Christ has already suffered death for us, once for all, a death which made possible our initial salvation and makes possible the salvation of our souls. So really, what could happen to us that would somehow even come close to that which He already did? Since Christ died and that death was a part of a divinely perfect plan, who are we to somehow see our physical death as a defeat? And not only that, but Christ gained ultimate victory in that death... victory for all men (who so choose it) over the world, the flesh, and the devil. That victory is so sure that Christ Himself went and made a proclamation to the “spirits” in prison regarding this victory.

j) And those “spirits” in prison are those fallen angels who, specifically referencing the time of Noah, had brought the level of unrighteousness to such a degree on the earth (through their intermingling with women and producing offspring in order to corrupt the lineage of man in order to keep the promised “seed of the woman” from coming) that God brought about a destruction of all the inhabitants of the earth, save Noah and his family – a total of 8 people.

k) Peter tells us that Noah and his family “being brought safely through water” is a picture of baptism, and that baptism now saves us – though it’s not a removing of the dirt of the flesh, but an “appeal to God for a good conscience.” And this baptism “saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

l) Which brings us back to the whole idea that baptism represents, which is exactly what Peter had been talking about the whole time: faithful obedience to God’s Word, which necessitates keeping the old man under a place of death and allowing your new man in Christ, by the Spirit, to lead you, which will result in your salvation... the salvation of the soul, yet future.

m) All of this is done through the power of Christ's resurrection, as He presently sits at the right hand of God in His position of victory, with all authorities and powers having been subjected to Him.

2). And now we can pick up in Chapter 4 and continue to study –

#### I Peter 4:1

4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. 4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. 5 They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

a) The “therefore” here takes us right back to the idea just presented about baptism “saving us,” as we are told to “arm ourselves” with the “same mind” as Christ, since He suffered for us in the flesh and we must suffer in the flesh. Now clearly the Lord never had to keep His “old man” in the place of death, since He never had an old man, but it is the example that He gives that is the focus. Christ's suffering in the flesh with patient endurance resulted in His exaltation, with angels, authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. The same awaits us, those who pick up their cross daily and follow Him.

b) It's what Peter has already been talking about, which is that suffering must precede glory. (Don't confuse “suffering” with just physical suffering, as that may well be what you have to endure, but the idea here is what “baptism” represents... the suffering connected with the death of our “old man.”)

c) And you can definitely see the connection that Peter makes concerning suffering *unjustly*, as Christ did, at the hands of unrighteous men. As Peter has already said –

#### 1Peter 2:21

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...

And -

1Peter 3:17

For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

d) And Peter continues with -

I Peter 4:2

...that he [the one who suffers in the flesh] no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

e) You can clearly see Peter's focus, which is to do this "for the will of God." For God is the One that we will ultimately answer to, not any man.

3). Now going back to us "arming" ourselves with the same mind as Christ, the word "arm" means "to equip [as in, with weapons].

a) In its secular use this word would refer to a heavily armed foot soldier who was well protected with a large shield, and was well prepared with weapons for the battle ahead of him. It's easy to see how arming ourselves with the same mind as Christ had with regards to 'enduring grief, suffering wrongfully' would be a reference to the spiritual armor we are to put on in order to stand firm against our adversaries -

Ephesians 6:10

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. 17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

3). The second half of I Peter 4:1 may appear a little difficult - "for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" - and the difficulty comes through the word translated 'ceased', which suggests from our English usage that the person who has 'suffered in

the flesh' doesn't sin any more. (And the idea of "flesh" in this context is the physical body, not the "sin nature.")

a). In the original language however, this verb "has ceased" is passive and would be literally translated, 'has been released from sin'. This would be the very same idea we saw in Romans –

Romans 6:6

...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.

b). It's about being released from bondage to sin; not that we've been released from sinning entirely. It's amazing how word usage dictates how we interpret a sentence, isn't it?

c) The person who 'endures grief, suffering wrongfully', having the same mind and therefore displaying the same attitude to this as Christ did, is witness to the fact that the power of sin is broken in their life. They do not respond in the same way that the world would respond, or as those Christians who still act out of their flesh, but rather they respond in faithful obedience, aligning themselves with the commands of scripture. And here is the truth of the matter: having been eternally redeemed and therefore having died with Him, the power of sin, *through the power of God*, has been broken in the lives of each one of us. What we will now do in response to the word of God really comes down to our own individual choice –

Romans 6:16

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

4). Looking at this section again –

I Peter 4:1

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

a) Verse 2 gives us the reason why we have been released from sin – it is so that we should not spend the rest of our life in the sphere of the lusts of men, but that we should instead live the rest of our lives in the sphere of the will of God.

b). This is the same idea that Peter has already presented in –

1Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

c). There is no reason why we should not live the rest of our lives for the will of God, but it does still remain a choice.

4). And Peter goes on –

1Peter 4:3

For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles-- when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

a). That which is translated ‘our past lifetime’ here, in the original language, refers to a period of time that is complete, closed and over. Basically, this scripture teaches us that we had more than enough time before the point of our eternal salvation to sin until we busted, but that time is now over... and is not to be repeated.

b). During that past time we did ‘the will of the Gentiles’ – we followed the direction and the mindset of the world, which resulted in the practice of the sins cataloged in the second half of our verse, but our life now is separated from these, so that those things that we once did in our ignorance should now become the object of our rejection –

1Peter 1:13

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

c). Our whole life now has (or *should have*) a totally different focus and a set of values that should be determined by scripture alone. The wisdom of man with regards to morality, ethics or anything else should be of no consequence to us whatsoever. It really is the pure milk of the word and our scriptural response to it, *to the exclusion of all else*, that will bring us to the salvation of our soul –

2 Timothy 3:15

...and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

James 1:21

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

5). And Peter continues –

1Peter 4:4

In regard to these [the things listed as being “the will of the Gentiles”], they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

a). Peter points out that with regards to our former way of life, when we were in ignorance, those who still continue in that former way ‘think it strange’ - literally *think it is foreign to our nature* - that we don’t continue to ‘run with them in the same flood of dissipation.’ And as a result, because we now appear to be so different, they will speak evil with regards to us. This is the same thing as Peter already said –

1Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.

b). I’m sure we already know this, but let’s be absolutely clear – once we have set our face like flint towards the coming kingdom, and determine to allow the word of God to change us, then hostility will always come our way. And although it may come from the unsaved, it is much more likely to come from other Christians who do not want to walk the same path.

c). Evil will be spoken of us, and whether it is from within or without of the family of God shouldn’t matter. From the Lord’s perspective, those who reviled Him and caused His suffering He left alone, knowing that His Father judges righteously –

1Peter 2:23

...who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

d). And as we continue in Chapter 4 we are reminded of this very thing -

1Peter 4:5

They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

e). The judgment of God on every human being that has ever lived is absolutely certain. He will judge those who are eternally saved as well as those who are eternally lost, the living and the dead (both literally and spiritually), and all judgment will be with respect to one thing only -

Matthew 16:27

"For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

f). And so we need to take responsibility for our own faithful obedience to the Word and allow God to deal with the rest. Which He will, at the appropriate time.

6). And our section here today from I Peter ends with this verse -

1Peter 4:6

For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

a). This verse has had me confused for a bit, but now I may have a bit more clarity concerning it. And because this verse appears so problematic, we're going to spend a little extra time trying to figure it out. I don't have a definitive stance on its interpretation, but I'll bring you through my thought process on how we can interpret it.

b) The main problem with this verse is that there are a few different ways to interpret it because of the way it is worded.

i/First, the phrase "for this reason" can either be focusing on the preceding thought or the following thought. For instance, it could be bringing the idea of the judgment of the living and the dead (which immediately preceded it) into view regarding the reason for the gospel being preached to "those who are dead." With this view, it would read something like this -

"Because everyone will have to give an account to Him who judges the living and the dead, the gospel was preached to those who are dead."

ii/OR, the phrase “for this reason” can be leading up to giving “the reason” why the gospel was preached to those who are dead...which would give the latter part of the verse the “reason.” With this viewpoint, it would read something like this –

“The gospel was preached also to those who are dead so that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”

iii/ Hold on to those 2 thoughts for a minute as we continue with the rest of the verse.

b) And second, it appears to be saying that the gospel was preached to those who are already physically dead, which gives us this idea that Jesus (or whomever) is preaching the gospel to dead folks. The main problem with that interpretation is that there is no scriptural precedence or evidence to support the idea that dead people are evangelized to. I believe that the Word of God is clear: once you’re dead, your opportunities to make choices concerning your afterlife are gone.

c). However, this verse gets a bit clearer if we view it in context – not only in the context of the judgment of God in the last days, but in the context of being judged *while we’re still alive by those who speak evil of us because we don’t act like they do.*

d) My thought is that, *contextually*, the reference to those who are “dead” is not referring to the eternally lost (as in “dead in trespasses and sin”), and it’s not referencing anything spiritual by the term “dead” (as in “dead works” or “dead” relative to fruit-bearing”). It’s actually talking about those Christians who literally have died *physically*, whose life on earth has ended.

e) Going back to the verse –

1Peter 4:6

For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

f) My current thoughts are that this is saying (allow me to reword it) –

1Peter 4:6

For this reason [God’s judgment of all people] the gospel was preached also to those who are [currently] dead [*it was preached to them before they died*], that [though] they might be [might have been] judged according to men in the flesh

[judged by men, while physically alive (“in the flesh”) and probably after they died (relative to their reputations), referring to their not acting like the Gentiles did], **but live** [they had lived, were able to live] **according to God in the spirit** [while they were still physically alive, they were able to live according to the will of God amidst their circumstances, having already known and been taught the whole gospel].

g) This interpretation, though just one person’s opinion on how to view this problematic verse, seems to be most in line with the overall context of Peter’s letter. His whole focus is that, as a result of hearing the gospel of Christ, Christians who are seeking the kingdom first must determine to be separated from the world and must determine to live in faithful obedience. As a result of this, they/we might be (and probably will be) judged by men who would defame us as evildoers and revile our good conduct in Christ. In Peter’s day this could have, and often did, result in being put to physical death. This is a real, practical, literal truth. However, though this faithful obedience resulted in death from man’s standpoint, from God’s perspective, that same faithful obedience resulted in life, in the Spirit, in the age to come. And herein is the complete dichotomy between the world’s judgment and God’s judgment. Which is really what Peter’s letter is all about.

**1Peter 3:13**

**And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?**

**2Timothy 3:12**

**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**

**Matthew 10:28**

**"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna."**

8). Peter continues with –

**1Peter 4:7**

**The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.**

...which we’ll begin studying next week.