

CLARITY: *How to Live and Why*

Got Hope? Messages from 1 Peter

April 10 & 11, 2010

1 Peter 3:8-22

Intro:

When I was a kid, my mom would tell me to be a good boy. She said this often. In fact, *everyone* told me to be a good boy - all my teachers, and even the principal on many occasions.

"Be a good boy," my mom would say as I'd go off to school or out to play. *I guess I didn't look like that was my plan.*

The problem was that I wasn't sure just *how* to be good. And I didn't really understand *why* I should. *I had no reason to comply.* Frankly, I lacked clarity on *how to live and why.* We need not remain in that *confusion*, clarity is available.

Today I'll continue our series of messages from 1 Peter. We will be studying 3:8-22. In these verses we will see three things: *imperatives, incentives and enigmas.*

Imperatives are commands - *what God says about how to live.* *Incentives* explain *why* we should obey what God says. And *Enigmas* are puzzles, difficult knots that only unravel with time and effort. I enjoy dealing with tough theological issues, but *the quagmire* at the end of this chapter is so deep that I'm not sure I could *get you all out safely* in 35 minutes! So, *in the interest of us all getting home sometime today*, I told myself *not to get stuck in the mud*, but to convey what is clear. What is clear is that *God gives good reasons for his commands.*

This passage presents a *model* for good behavior and the *motives* to live according to it. We don't have to sit around and wonder, the Scriptures tell us both *how to live and why.* Each *exhortation* here includes an *explanation.* So, let's turn to the passage, looking at it verse by verse, and derive some *practical instructions* and *good reasons to follow them.*

3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Peter turns from the specific individualized

instructions he's just given to more general rules to live by that apply to everyone. *Harmony* contrasts with dissonance - *get along! Blend. To be sympathetic to feel with others.* Rom 12:15 - *Rejoice... Weep...* Connect at the heart! *Crawdad story. We wept over their predicament. How about people?*

With the level of suffering that surrounds us, it's easy to become insulated against getting emotionally involved. It's like a deluge and we tend to protect ourselves. This passage challenges us to *dare to care* like Christ cares.

love as brothers, this is the *ultimate command.*

be compassionate Translated: *kind hearted*, but the literal translation is: *be of good bowels! Tell someone that.*

This list of five traits culminates in another of Christ's attributes: *be humble.* Vs 8 is about attitudes and actions, vs 9 is about reactions, and it provides the first incentive - the first reason why we should adopt this pattern of living. **9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.** Jesus taught that we should pray for those who persecute us (Luke 6:27-36). He also set this example (23:34). This is *not natural*; we can think of it as *unnatural* or realize that it is *supernatural.* The incentive is that we *are called* to live this way and it leads to blessing! I hope you've experienced this. I have seen it work. **Pr 15:1.** What we *want to do* is to return *evil for evil* and *up the ante*, but *doing what you want to do* isn't always healthy. My youngest boy came down with bronchitis on Thursday. He still wanted to go out and shoot baskets. *If you want to play in the tournament this weekend, you can't do what you want now.* It's like that often. If we do what we want to do immediately (lash out), we won't get what we really want later. You want to receive a blessing, give one, even when it's undeserved. **10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.** Want to live a good life? Don't slander others. Prov

13:3 - He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin. Watch how you talk *to* and *about* others. Save yourself a lot of trouble by steering miles away from gossip. Ever been sorry for something you said? You can't take it back. *Shaving cream illustration.* **11 He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.** Living life this way takes effort. We need to take initiative. Don't just turn from evil, keep turning all the way to good. *Pursue peace. Go after it. Hunt it down like a deer.*

Heb 12:14 - Make every effort to live in peace with all men....

Rom 14:19 - Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. I've known people like this and they *see good days*. It's worth it because it works.

Now, the big incentive is in vs 12.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." This leads to my first point:

How to live and why? • **Get rid of selfishness and slander because God sees what we do and hears what we say and *there are rewards for living right.***

As I was studying this last night, Annie was reading her Bible (*that's what pastor's wives do*). She was in Deut and called my attention to one of the many verses that say *life is going to be better if we live it God's way*. Don't fight him; trust him and surrender to his ideas of what is right and wrong and good and bad. When people live to *build themselves up, tearing others down, it backfires*. That path doesn't lead to good things but to disaster. We've seen this played out in our lives, our kids' lives, and our friends' lives through the years. God is aware - he sees and hears, so that no one really ever gets away with anything. It is so clear: how are we to live and why? **R**. There is the imperative and the incentive. The model and the motive.

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

It happens, but it isn't nearly as common as suffering as a consequence of your own mistakes.

14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

When it does happen, and you are unjustly persecuted, God is there for you. So you can be confident.

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. This is the central affirmation of the Christian. But what does it mean here? If we are serving him first, and not self-serving, then we will *be ready, willing and able* to represent him accurately.

Our behavior should arouse curiosity. When it does, we're to speak up without fear or shame. **But do this with gentleness and respect,** Abrupt arrogance isn't very winsome. Remember the goal: to both communicate and demonstrate the love of God! **16 keeping a clear conscience,** Maintain the kind of behavior that causes you to stand out.

so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. They will be silenced by your non-retaliation and simple faith.

17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. That's clear and it leads to the 2nd point:

• **Get ready to gently explain what makes you different, because even the people who mock you will want to know.**

This whole section is telling us that we're to be different and why. We've got clear directions and plenty of motivation. Now, we're to *get ready* to let others know that Jesus is behind all this. Don't just get ready once. Don't go to Bible school then forget everything and rely on old dried up notes. *Get ready* and *stay ready*. Stayed tuned. It says to

always be prepared! Even when you're getting mistreated. That's when people will be watching the most closely! These verses remind us that life is going to be rough. Especially if you *march to a different drummer*, ...if you *don't follow the crowd*, ...if you *stand for something and don't stand for some things*, ...if you *resist the system and set a high standard*, ...if you're *willing to be politically incorrect*, ...if you *don't acquiesce to cultural pressure and don't conform to the world*, ...if you *live for Christ*...that will lead to you *sticking out* and that won't always be fun. But it will arouse interest. It will attract attention. It will lead people to wonder why - why you're different. They really *want to know*. I hope you've been asked that. *What is it about you?* I hope you're living in a way that is conspicuously non-complacent.

When they ask, let them know why you aren't hopeless. It's Jesus. Be willing to open your mouth for Christ's sake, because *people want to know. They need to know.*

T - As I said earlier, the end of this chapter includes a couple theologically sticky spots. Since they are so hard to navigate, I've written a paper and I've posted it on our website and placed printed copies at the Welcome Center. It is not easy reading, I'll warn you. But if I took the time to unravel the interpretive knots here and now, I wouldn't have been able to cover anything else in this passage.

Some of you may take the opportunity to study the *confusing* verses in detail later, but I don't want any of you to miss the *clear* teaching of the rest of this. I'll read the remaining verses with just a few comments and then come back to make my last point. **18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,** Peter is talking about the resurrection and continues to do so all the way to the end of the chapter, but in 19-22 he heads into a parenthetical comment on what Jesus did in

his resurrected state which leads him to think of Noah, ...water, ...baptism, and that leads back to what Jesus did. **19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.**

This says Jesus made an announcement of his victory in the spiritual realm to incarcerated fallen angels. You have to go to Gen 6 to learn what all this has to do with Noah.

Referring to the ark, he goes on to say, **In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—** *the physical act of baptism saves us?* This would contradict the *clear teaching* of Scripture that *we are saved by grace through faith, not by our works but by Christ's finished work.* The verse goes on to clear away the confusion: he's not referring to the physical thing but what it represents. ...**not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.** It's a heart-thing, in response to what Christ has done. **It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,** I'm glad he comes back here *to the power of our living Lord.* This is where the focus belongs and it is the emphasis as the chapter closes: **22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.**

T - *We've been talking about how to live and why. I've said get rid of selfishness, and get ready to explain, now...* • **Get right with God, because Jesus died as a sacrifice, he rose to give us life, and he lives as Lord of all.**

There are some *confusing* concepts in these verses, but this much is *clear* as can be. **R.** There's some serious incentive! Look at Jesus. Vs 18 provides the gospel in a nutshell. Jesus died for our sins so we wouldn't have to. Instead of bearing our sins into eternity, we can trust in what Christ did for us

and come to God by faith. I love the way this explains the reason for the cross: *it was all to bring us to God.*

This whole section has contained instructions that are applicable to every one of us. We've seen *how* God wants us to live and we've learned *why*. This last idea about getting right with God is the pinnacle because it is the most important thing you can do. Really, this is the necessary first step because I don't think you can change the way you live, your attitude and actions, until you receive the power that comes from receiving Jesus as your Savior and giving your life to him as your Lord. If you aren't right with God, you can take care of that today. I'd guess you've got something to take care of in prayer right now.

Concl: *How are you going to live? Which of these points hits you today? Do you need to get rid of selfishness and slander? Do so because God sees what we do and hears what we say and there are rewards for living right. Do you need to get ready to gently explain what makes you different? Do so because even the people who mock you will want to know. Or do you need to get right with God? Do so because Jesus died as a sacrifice, he rose to give us life, and he lives as Lord of all.*

Pray

LARRY'S NOTES FOR ADDITIONAL STUDY

OR

BRAIN STRETCHING EXERCISES

1 PETER 3:19-21

This section of 1 Peter is fraught with difficulties. Through the years, commentators sharing the same presuppositions and commitments have not been able to arrive at a consensus concerning the meaning of these verses, which rank among the Bible's toughest problem passages. We occasionally stumble across verses in our Bible reading that, at first glance, appear

obscure and unintelligible, or appear to conflict with the overall teaching of the Word. When we encounter these enigmas, we must pray that God would teach us through the Spirit and we should also do our homework! Our trust in God leads us to have confidence that an explanation does exist, even if it is not immediately obvious to us. Jesus said that God's Word is truth and that not even the slightest part of it would fail. We are assured that all will harmonize in the end – even if we have to wait for eternity for some answers!

Our careful study should include an examination of the context in order to determine what the verses mean in their setting. Key phrases should be cross-referenced so we can allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Word studies, with the help of reference tools like an analytical concordance, Bible encyclopedia, expositing dictionary, and other books, can add richness to our understanding of the significance of certain terms.

Although the statement concerning salvation and baptism in 3:21 is enough to curl anyone's theological hair, probably the most confusing verses are 3:19 and 20, which present us with a plethora of questions. Here I'll take a stab at presenting one possible explanation.

Verse 19 begins by referring back to the last phrase in v.18, which is best understood not as not being a contrast between the death of Christ's flesh and the life of the Holy Spirit, but between the physical sphere and the spiritual sphere of Christ's life. Rather than indicating agency, the preposition is pointing to what grammarians refer to as a locative of state or a dative of reference. This means that v. 9 begins, "in which (state)..." as the NASB translates, rather than "through whom" (referring to the Holy Spirit), as the NIV translates.

So Christ, in the sphere of his spirit, went and preached to spirits. We need to ask if these spirits are the disembodied spirits of men after death awaiting judgment, which is unlikely because this word is nowhere used to refer to human spirits without a

qualifying genitive (Hebrews 1:14; Luke 10:20); or, if these are actually angelic beings, which has difficulties of its own including the fact that a message of redemption would land on deaf ears because angels are not saved by Christ's sacrifice (Hebrews 2:16). Interestingly enough, the word translated "preached," in the NIV, is not the same word used in 4:6, meaning "preached the gospel," but simply a word meaning "proclaimed." In other words, Christ's proclamation to these spirits may have been bad news to them – rather than the "Good News." He may have simply announced his victory following the crucifixion (Col. 2:15).

These spirits are described as being in prison. This word is not used in the Bible for the place of departed men. Furthermore, 1 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 both mention fallen angels being held for judgment. Jude 6 labels their sin as abandoning their home, or stepping out of bounds, and links it in v. 7 to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah of gross immorality – "going after strange flesh." 2 Peter 2:4 is also in a context that teaches sin will be judged and it mentions both the times of Noah and Sodom and Gomorrah.

All of these pieces appear to be coming together. Because 1 Peter 3:20 links the disobedience of these spirits in the days of Noah, we should turn to Genesis 6:1-5 and read what happened just before the flood. When we do, we find ourselves facing a very difficult passage which can be understood to teach that fallen angels ("the sons of God" is used only three other times in exactly this construction; each of them referring to angels and, yet, some parallel phrases indicate that this could refer to men) cohabitated with human women ("the daughters of men") and produced a race of mighty men. This view – although pretty wild – would tie together 1 Peter 3:19, 20; 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 very well. Though this sounds like the plot of some second rate science fiction story, some very reasonable conservative scholars believe this view best accounts for all of the biblical references, although other possibilities have merit. We may have to suspend judgment until we someday come to know as we have been

known (1 Corinthians 13:12). In the meantime, we can use exercises like this one to become skillful with the Scriptures.

An alternative view is that this Genesis 6 passage is speaking of the despicable intermarriage between the godly Sethite line and the pagan descendents of Cain. This view is supported by the fact that the judgment of the flood was upon men, not angels. Furthermore, the fact that angels are spirits would lead us to question their ability to engage in sexual relations with humans. Matthew 22:30 says they do not marry in heaven, but is it because they are all of male gender? Or do they even have gender when in spirit form? We simply do not know. Speculation may be intellectually stimulating, but it is probably of no benefit. What we do know is that the Bible substantiates that when angels are on earth, they have the ability to appear in human form (Genesis 19:1ff).

Alternative views on this difficult passage would suggest yet more cross-references. We could explore the possibility that this text is saying that Christ preached to unrepentant pre-flood men through Noah (which ignores the chronology of 1 Peter 3:18-22) or that Christ offered these men a second chance at salvation (which would contradict Hebrews 9:27). If we take that view, then why would he not offer a second chance to all men?

If you feel like pursuing these matters, watch out for articles on the internet. It is very hard to discern fact from fiction. Anyone can post anything on line. Even if this type of study leaves you cold, we must all understand the clear practical application of these verses: Sin will be judged and Christ is victorious, even over angels and authorities and powers (1 Peter 3:22).

A few more unused ideas and verse (**More Meat**)

in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

There are 5 positive traits in vs 8.

1 neg command with its alternative in vs 9. And a reiteration in vs 10.

8 1 Cor 12:25-27 when one suffers they all suffer...

Love: 1 Th 4:9-10

Christ's character (Mat 11:29).

9 Mt 5:44

1 Cor 6:7 - why not rather be defrauded, and set aside rights.

Rom 12:14 - bless those who persecute you, bless and curse not.

James 1:20 - anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God.

You live this way and you will stick out.

1 Cor 4:12 - *when cursed, we bless...*

Prov 20:22 - Do not say I will repay evil for evil. Wait for the Lord and he will save you.

10 Prov. 21:23

We can't speak poorly of others if we want to live well.

11 Same in Rom 12 and 1 Th 5.

Rom 12:18

17 Col 4:5,6 - Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

2 Tim 2:24,25 - And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Those who oppose him he must gently instruct,