

Excerpts from Life-Study of 1 Peter, Message 25

**THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS  
SUFFERINGS (7)**

**Bible Verses:**

**1 Pet. 3:17** For it is better, if the will of God should will it, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

**1 Pet. 3:18** For Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, on the one hand being put to death in the flesh, but on the other, made alive in the Spirit;

**1 Pet. 3:21** Which water, as the antitype, also now saves you, that is, baptism, not a putting away of the filth of the flesh but the appeal of a good conscience unto God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

In the book of Exodus the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea. The waters of the Red Sea were

a judgment upon Pharaoh and his Egyptian army. Pharaoh and his armies were drowned in that water of judgment. But that same water separated the children of Israel from Egypt, separated them from the corrupted world. As Noah and his family were separated from their corrupted generation by the waters of the flood, so the children of Israel were separated from the corrupted world, typified by Egypt, by the waters of the Red Sea.

In the New Testament we also have water, the water of baptism. Baptism saves us from the world and separates us from it.

First Peter 3:21 says, “Which water, as the antitype, also now saves you, that is, baptism, not a putting away of the filth of the flesh but the appeal of a good conscience unto God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” As we will see, this verse does not teach baptismal salvation. Therefore, we do not hold the belief that the waters of baptism put away the filth of the flesh. But, according to this verse, baptism is the appeal of a good conscience unto God.

The words which water here refer to the water mentioned in the preceding verse, of which the water of baptism is the antitype. This indicates that Noah and

his family's passing through the flood within the ark was a type of our passing through baptism. The water of the flood delivered them out of the old manner of life into a new environment. In like manner, the water of baptism delivers us out of the inherited vain manner of life into a manner of life of resurrection in Christ. This is the main emphasis of this book. Christ redeemed us for this (1:18-19). Christ's redemption was accomplished by Christ's death and was accepted and applied to us, in baptism, by the Spirit through Christ's resurrection. Now our daily walk should be in the Spirit of the resurrected Christ; it should be a walk in which we live Christ in resurrection through the life power of His Spirit (Rom. 6:4-5). This is a new and excellent manner of life that glorifies God (1 Pet. 2:12).

Baptism itself does not and cannot put away the filth of our flesh—the dirt of our fallen nature and the defilement of fleshly lust. The erroneous teaching concerning baptismal salvation, a teaching based on 3:21 and Mark 16:16 and Acts 22:16, is corrected here. Baptism is only a figure. Its reality is Christ in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit, who applies to us all that Christ passed through in His crucifixion and resurrection, making these things real in our daily life.

The Greek word rendered “appeal” is *eperotema*, “a question, an inquiry.” Its meaning is very much disputed. The right meaning of the phrase seems to be indicated by Alford—“the seeking after God in a good and pure conscience.” It is this that governs the proper Christian life. This kind of question, which asks for something, can be considered an appeal or demand. Peter’s thought here may be that baptism is the baptized one’s appeal to God for a good conscience toward God. Baptism, as a symbol, a counterpart of our belief in all the accomplishments of Christ, testifies that all the problems we have before God and with God have been solved. Hence, it is also a testimony, witnessing that in our conscience there is no more accusation and that instead we are full of peace and are confident that we have been baptized into the Triune God (Matt. 28:19) and have been organically united with Him through the resurrection of Christ, that is, by Christ in resurrection as the Spirit of life. Without the Spirit of Christ as its reality, baptism by water immediately becomes an empty and dead ritual.

In 1 Peter 3:21 we see that baptism is first our appeal, the appeal of the baptized ones, to God for a conscience that is both good and pure. A proper

baptism will always bring the baptized one into such a situation. Before we believed in the Lord and were baptized, we were sinners. But when we were enlightened through the preaching of the gospel, we came to realize that we are very sinful. Both before God and toward man we have had many transgressions, trespasses, and offenses, and we had a great deal of guilt. Then we repented, believed in the Lord, received His forgiveness, and were saved. But our repentance and believing need an outward expression. This expression is baptism. Therefore, baptism and our believing, our faith, are two aspects of one thing. For this reason the New Testament speaks of believing and being baptized (Mark 16:16). Believing and being baptized can be compared to using our two feet to take a single step. First, we believe, and our believing can be compared to the half-step forward of one foot. Then we are baptized. Our baptism can be compared to the completion of the step with the other foot. Together, believing and baptism make one complete step.

We have pointed out that believing in Christ requires an expression and that this expression is

baptism. Baptism, therefore, is the counterpart to our believing in Christ.

Furthermore, when we are baptized, we, as baptized ones, appeal to God for a good and pure conscience. After we have been baptized and rise up out of the water, we have a conscience that is good and pure, a conscience without condemnation. All our sins, offenses, transgressions, and trespasses have been forgiven, and all the problems that have entangled our life and our being have been buried in the water. This means that through baptism we have a clearance of our sinful past. Because of this clearance, we can have a good and pure conscience.

We would emphasize the fact that baptism itself does not put away the filth of the flesh. But baptism does enable us to have the assurance and the testimony that we appeal to God for a good and pure conscience. Then, after we are baptized, God answers us by indicating that we now have a conscience that is good and pure.

Baptism is a figure indicating that all negative things have been dissolved and buried in the water. But baptism also signifies the resurrection of Christ. It is

through the resurrection of Christ that we have the reality of what is signified in baptism.

We have seen that through baptism we have been put into Christ, and now we have an organic union with Him. The Christ to whom we have been joined organically is not only the resurrected One but also the ascended One. Therefore, through the organic union, we are brought not only into Christ's resurrection but also into His ascension and exaltation. This means that, because we are in Christ, the angels, authorities, and powers are subject to us as well as to Him. Hallelujah, we are one with the crucified, resurrected, and exalted Christ!

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**Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the [audio message](#) in addition to reading the [life-study message](#) for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.**

**[Commentary]:**

### **Introduction**

[MM]: The Apostle Peter said that the water of baptism saves us, and he referenced the picture in the Old Testament of Noah's family being saved in the ark from the judging water, and separated from the condemned world of that time through the water of the flood. This is Matt Miller with Bob Denker for another enlightening life-study from 1 Peter. Bob, thanks for joining me for this special program today.

[BD]: It's very good to be with you, Matt. Actually, this portion of Peter is quite marvelous because it takes us back to the Old Testament picture of Noah building an ark with his family, entering into that ark and passing through a flood, and then being deposited into a new world where he had a new living. It's quite a marvelous picture. And in a book like 1 Peter, where Peter stresses our being saved from our old way of living, our old manner of life, and now having an excellent, holy manner of life in resurrection, this is a marvelous picture that shows us how we can be saved.

[MM]: This is really the main view in Peter. I really hope we can see it today because it's an important emphasis that the apostle Peter had, this matter of being saved from our vain manner of life and being brought into a whole new realm with an excellent, holy manner of life. And Noah was a perfect picture of that. And Peter brought that picture in in chapter 3 of his first epistle, verses 20 and 21. I'm going to read those verses. The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared; entering into which, a few, that is, eight souls, were brought safely through by water. Which water, as the antitype, also now saves you, that is, baptism, not a putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience upto God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Critical ending to the verse there, that it's through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without that, baptism is just a vain ritual. Really happy for that last phrase there, Bob.

[BD]: Very good.

[MM]: Let's go to Witness Lee for a life-study of 1 Peter message number 25, which was originally spoken in December 1982.

### **Part 1**

[MM]: Bob, that's a good point to stop and fellowship, this point about Christ making these things real to us through baptism. And I really want to get into that. As Witness Lee said, the main focus of the entire epistle of 1 Peter. But before we do, I'd like to at least address this matter of this wrong understanding of baptismal regeneration. I had actually never heard of such a thing until someone actually accused Witness Lee of teaching baptismal regeneration, which obviously he doesn't because of what he just said.

[BD]: That's right, Matt. Witness Lee does not teach baptismal regeneration. This is an erroneous teaching, the teaching that just by being baptized alone, a man can be regenerated and can be saved. Well, this verse here, 3:21, does say that the water of baptism saves us. But it also says that this water cannot put away the filth of the

flesh. It doesn't have that kind of power. Actually, the water of baptism is only a symbol or a figure. It is not something that operates in and of itself. The operating factor in baptism and in our living after baptism is the Spirit of Christ. And this Spirit is Christ himself in His resurrection. This Spirit actually is the Spirit of reality. He's the Spirit who makes Christ real to us and makes Christ's death real to us so that we can actually experience the putting away of all negative things that are related to us and to our old manner of life and also makes Christ's resurrection power real to us so that we can have a new, holy, and excellent manner of living in the resurrection of Christ. So here, Peter's focus is not just so that we would be saved from God's judgment and God's condemnation. Most people, when they think of salvation, they think, well, we need to be saved from God's eternal judgment, right? And Christ's redemption saves us from that. And if we have the wrong teaching of baptismal salvation, some will say baptism saves us from that. But that's not correct. Peter's focus is not on being saved from hell, let's say, although that is part of salvation. But Peter's focus is to be saved out of our former manner of life which we inherited from our fathers. You know, before we believed in the Lord Jesus, we lived in a certain way. We lived in the flesh. We had a fleshly manner of living full of sin, full of self, full of corruption, and full of defilement. This was our, not only our person, but our way of living was like this. So the salvation of the Lord should save us out of that into a new, holy, and excellent manner of life. But this can be realized not merely by the water of baptism. It can be realized only by the life-giving Spirit operating in us to make Christ with His death and resurrection real to us in our daily life.

[MM]: It sounds like the key really is the resurrection of Christ. If there's no resurrection of Christ, then Christ does not become the life-giving Spirit. As it says in 1 Corinthians 15:45, the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. If there's no life-giving Spirit, then the whole thing becomes just an empty, dead, vain ritual, which I'm fearful many people, that that's all they know in baptism is something that's just empty without the experience of Christ as resurrection.

[BD]: That's very good, Matt. Actually, the reality is not in the water. The reality is in the life-giving Spirit. And as you said, this life-giving Spirit is the resurrected Christ. We all know that Christ's death redeemed us from our sins and from God's condemnation. But it's His resurrection and the fact that He is now the life-giving Spirit to apply to us all the reality of His death and resurrection that saves us from our old way of living and ushers us into a holy manner of life that glorifies God, that lives out God, that expresses God, that lives Christ and not lives out the flesh. Only the Spirit can enable us to put away all our fleshly person and our fleshly living and live a life that glorifies God.

[MM]: And when we have the experience of the life-giving Spirit through salvation, an outward testimony follows, and that outward testimony is baptism.

[BD]: That's right.

[MM]: So I'm going to read a verse, Mark 16:16, which is another verse that talks about baptism related to salvation and which is another one of those verses that people use for baptismal regeneration, but it doesn't teach that. Here's what it says. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned. Let's return to Witness Lee and see how this salvation has two steps to it, to believe and to be baptized. Here's Witness Lee.

## **Part 2**

[MM]: Bob, this is a really good definition of baptism that Peter gives us and we better stop here and develop it a little bit and kind of chew the cud, so to speak, and digest this a little bit more.

[BD]: Yes, Matt, actually, Brother Lee gives us a wonderful definition of believing and being baptized. To believe, he said, is a reflection of all Christ's accomplishments for us. When we hear the gospel, actually the main content of the gospel is Christ and His accomplishments. His incarnation, human living, crucifixion on the cross, and His resurrection to become the life-giving Spirit. All these are accomplishments of Christ and these are included in the gospel that we hear. When we hear this gospel, the Spirit operates in us to enlighten us and to cause us to reflect what we have heard and eventually we say, "Yes, I believe." That is a great reflection of what we have heard concerning Christ. That is our faith. But this all happens within us. No one can see this. But baptism is the expression, the outward expression, of what has taken place within us. When we believe in the Lord, we receive Him.

He enters into us and we are regenerated. Then there should be an outward affirmation or an outward witness to the fact that we have believed and we have repented of our old life. We have had a turn to God and we have received Christ. This expression is our baptism. And baptism is a testimony that all the negative things, our sins, our trespasses, all these things have been forgiven by God and also we are now forsaking our entire old manner of life. We're having a thorough clearing up of our old living. Once we are baptized and we come up out of that water, we have a good and pure conscience toward God that testifies and gives us the inward peace that now we have no more problem with God. Isn't this marvelous?

[MM]: It's really marvelous. In fact, this matter of baptism and salvation being counterparts, going together, is actually, I'll give a personal testimony about it. I grew up as a Catholic, and when I was a baby, I had infant baptism. And then later, when I was in high school, I heard the gospel. As you were describing, I heard of Christ's work for us, and I saw for the first time, I really had an inner impression. Although I had heard it in catechism growing up, it never made the impression in my inner being like a camera. The scenery impressed me in high school to where the point is, I believed. And I said, yes. And it was a real salvation experience. And then as I grew in the Lord in high school, this very verse came to me about he who believes and is baptized will be saved. Because when I was baptized as a baby, there wasn't the counterpart of believing. So later, when I was believing in high school, I felt like I really need to get baptized because I need that counterpart, that expression, to go along with the inward experience of salvation that I was having.

[BD]: Yes, Matt, it's so clear here that baptism by itself, or the water of baptism, cannot wash away the filth of our flesh. It doesn't have the power to do that. But Peter says here that baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience. So when we're baptized, we're making an appeal to God to give us the inner witness that we have a good and pure conscience. And as soon as we're baptized and we come up out of that water, we do have the inner answer from God to our appeal. He says to us, "Yes, you have a good, pure conscience. Everything now between you and Me is fully cleared up, and now there's no more problem." Now we have Christ within us as the life-giving Spirit to empower us to have a new manner of life, a holy manner of life, plus all our old past, all our sins, all our old way of living is now buried in the death of Christ, which is symbolized by our being baptized. Then that results in a good conscience. We have peace.

[MM]: That's the result. And yesterday, Bob, in a radio program with Ron Kangas in verse 16, we talked also about having a good conscience. So there's a lot here, but let's go on to the conclusion of today's life-study. We're going to see more about this matter of Noah's Ark with the floodwaters and how the picture also of the Red Sea from 1 Corinthians 10 is also showing us that baptism separates us as believers from the condemned world of Satan in Egypt. So let's go on to Witness Lee for the conclusion of today's life study and more pictures of this wonderful baptism that we have.

### **Part 3**

[MM]: Bob, to me, this is a really enlightening conclusion to the program today, how the ark saves us from the judgment on the world, but the water saves us from the evil world. Let's talk about this.

[BD]: This is marvelous. Yes, there's really two things going on here. Noah and his family entered the ark, and it was the ark that saved them from being judged and terminated by the flood. But at the same time, the water of the flood terminated the whole corrupted generation that Noah lived in and deposited Noah and his family into a new world. After the water subsided, they had a new life in a new age. This is a marvelous picture of baptism. And in the same way, the water of the Red Sea, when the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea and the Pharaoh and his army entered into it, the waters closed up and they buried Pharaoh and his army. That means the Egyptians were terminated by the water. The people of the corrupted world were buried, and that whole old manner of life that they had in Egypt was behind them. There was no way for them to go back. The same with Noah. There was no way for him and his family to go back to that old way of life. The water saved them. That whole generation was buried under the water of the flood. And so Noah and his family emerged from the ark in a new world. This is exactly what baptism does for us. It brings us into a new world, and that world is Christ as the life-giving Spirit and also the church as the body of Christ. We live in a new world, in a new generation. We live a new life by the power of the Spirit.

[MM]: And the power of the Spirit empowered the Word to make these pictures so real to us today in this program. I feel like this is so real. This is not a fairy tale from a long time ago. This is the picture of the real church life today to terminate the former manner of life, the vain manner of life, and bring us into an excellent and holy manner of life, which is the main focus of Peter's epistle.

[MM]: Bob, we've run out of time. Appreciate you coming into the studio today.

[BD]: It's always a pleasure, Matt.

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