COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 28 2 OF 3

The Everlasting Gospel

STUDY GUIDE 2 OF 3:

Why Is The Gospel Preached

An overview of why salvation must be proclaimed.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

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PREFACE

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The everlasting Gospel has one message and one Saviour, but Scripture also makes clear that the Gospel is preached for a definite purpose. It is not proclaimed simply to give people religious knowledge or make them familiar with Christian teaching. The Gospel confronts people with their true spiritual condition and directs them to the life found in Jesus Christ.

Peter gives one of the clearest statements concerning this purpose in **1 Peter 4:6**:

> *"For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."*

Those words provide the foundation for this Study Guide. Peter says, *"For for this cause was the gospel preached."* There is a reason the Gospel must be proclaimed. It brings judgment upon the life lived according to the flesh so that people may turn from sin and receive the life God gives through Jesus Christ.

This judgment is not the final purpose of the Gospel. The Gospel reveals what is wrong so that the remedy may be received. It exposes spiritual death, but it points to spiritual life. It shows the sinner the need for repentance, but it also reveals the Saviour who can make alive.

John expressed the purpose of Jesus Christ in **1 John 3:8**:

> *"He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."*

The purpose of the Gospel cannot be separated from the purpose of Jesus Christ. He did not come simply to describe the problem of sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil and to bring people into life.

That life is not produced by human effort or by an outward attempt to imitate Jesus. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer as Spirit. His indwelling life is the source of the new spiritual life into which the Gospel calls those who hear and believe.

This Study Guide will therefore examine carefully what Peter meant when he spoke of those who were *"dead,"* what it means to be *"judged according to men in the flesh,"* and what it means to *"live according to God in the spirit."* We will also examine the *"spirits in prison"* mentioned in the previous chapter of Peter's letter and ask how Christ preached to the people of Noah's generation by the Spirit.

These passages have sometimes been used to teach that Jesus descended into hell after Calvary to preach to physically dead souls. That teaching is incorrect. We will establish from Scripture what Peter's words mean in their proper context.

The Gospel is preached because people need more than information. They need to see their condition, turn to God, and receive life in Jesus Christ.

- The purpose is not simply to reveal death.
- The purpose is to bring people to life in Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is the Gospel preached to those who need spiritual life rather than merely religious information?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever heard the Gospel as familiar teaching without allowing its message to examine your own heart?

Action Step

Identify one truth you have heard but avoided facing personally. Consider what response to Jesus Christ that truth now calls for.

INTRODUCTION: WHY IS THE GOSPEL PREACHED?

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Why must the Gospel be preached at all? Jesus Christ has already accomplished the work of salvation, yet people still need to hear the truth of what He has done and respond to Him. The Gospel is the means by which the saving message of Jesus Christ reaches the human heart, reveals the need for salvation, and calls the hearer to choose the way of life.

Paul wrote in **Romans 1:16**:

> *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."*

Paul does not describe the Gospel as powerless religious information. He calls it *"the power of God unto salvation."* The Gospel brings the truth of Jesus Christ before the hearer and calls for faith.

The Gospel Requires a Response

Notice the words *"to every one that believeth."* Hearing the Gospel does not automatically save a person. The message confronts the hearer with truth, but there must be a response.

The Gospel reveals what God has provided and calls people to believe Him. It brings a person to the place where the way of life and the way of death can be seen clearly. This is why Gospel preaching cannot be reduced to passing on religious facts.

A person may know many facts about Jesus, understand Bible history and even agree with Christian teaching, yet still refuse to turn to God. The Gospel calls for more than knowledge. It calls for a response of faith and repentance.

The Gospel Reveals the Need to Turn

The prophets had already expressed this principle long before the New Testament.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 55:7**:

> *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."*

Notice the movement within the verse. The wicked person must forsake his way, and the unrighteous person must forsake his thoughts. Then the call is: *"let him return unto the LORD."*

The Gospel brings this same call. It does not simply tell people that God loves them while leaving them unchanged in the way they are living. It reveals that there is a way that must be forsaken and a God to whom they must return.

Yet the message is not without hope. Isaiah continues: *"he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."* The Gospel reveals the need for change because it also reveals the mercy of God.

The Gospel Reaches Beyond the Ear

A person may hear the words of a preacher without allowing those words to reach the heart. True Gospel preaching is therefore more than sound entering the ear. The Word of God must awaken the conscience and bring the hearer face to face with spiritual reality.

The preacher may not know which particular words will reach someone. The hearer may later forget much of the sermon. But when the Gospel reaches the heart, the central issue becomes clear: will I continue in my own way, or will I turn to God?

The power does not belong to the personality of the preacher. It belongs to the Gospel of Christ. Paul said that it is *"the power of God unto salvation."*

The Gospel Brings the Choice Into the Light

This helps us understand why the Gospel must be proclaimed. People cannot respond to truth that has never been brought before them. The Gospel brings God's truth into the light and places the hearer before the reality of Jesus Christ.

It shows that sin leads to spiritual death. It reveals that God calls people to repentance. It announces that mercy and pardon are available. And it points to Jesus Christ as the One in whom life is found.

The Gospel is therefore preached so that people may see clearly enough to respond. Peter will take us further by explaining that the Gospel brings judgment upon the life lived according to the flesh so that people may *"live according to God in the spirit."*

But before we examine those words in detail, this foundation must be settled:

The Gospel is preached because God uses His truth to bring people to the place where they can turn from death and receive life in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the Gospel call for faith and repentance rather than simply agreement with religious facts?

Personal Reflection

Is there an area in which you understand what God says but have not honestly responded to it?

Action Step

Name that area and the reason for your hesitation. Explain what turning towards Jesus Christ would mean instead of continuing only to agree with the message.

FOR THIS CAUSE WAS THE GOSPEL PREACHED

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Peter does not leave us to decide for ourselves why the Gospel should be preached. He gives a direct statement of purpose. His words move beyond the fact that the Gospel is proclaimed and explain what God intends that proclamation to accomplish.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 4:5-6**:

> *"Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."*

The expression *"for this cause"* means for this reason or for this purpose. Peter is not simply telling us that the Gospel happened to be preached. He is telling us why it was preached.

The Purpose Is Written Into the Verse

The structure of **1 Peter 4:6** is important. Peter first tells us that the Gospel was preached "for this cause," and then explains the purpose:

> *"that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."*

There are therefore two movements within the one purpose. The Gospel brings judgment upon the life according to the flesh. It also opens the way for a person to live according to God in the Spirit.

These are not two unrelated messages. They belong together. The Gospel reveals what must be left behind and directs the hearer towards the life that God provides.

A Gospel that only exposes what is wrong but never directs people to life in Jesus Christ has stopped too soon. But a message that speaks about life while refusing to expose the condition from which people must be saved has also failed to proclaim the whole purpose.

Peter gives us both.

Judgment Prepares the Way for Life

The word judgment can immediately sound like final condemnation, but that is not the purpose Peter is describing here. The Gospel brings the Word of God to bear upon the present life of the hearer. It reveals whether a person is living according to the flesh or according to God.

That revelation is necessary because people can be sincerely mistaken about their spiritual condition. A person may consider himself moral, respectable or religious and still be separated from God. Human comparison cannot reveal the true condition of the heart. The Word of God must make that judgment.

The Gospel therefore brings God's standard into view. It exposes what human reasoning may excuse and what religious tradition may overlook. It brings the hearer to the place where the truth about sin, separation from God and the need for salvation can no longer remain hidden.

Yet God does not reveal the problem without providing the answer. The judgment of the Gospel is intended to lead towards life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do judgment of the flesh and life in the Spirit belong together in **1 Peter 4:6***?*

Personal Reflection

Do you resist the Gospel's correction because you hear only condemnation and overlook the life it offers?

Action Step

Consider one correction that has made you uncomfortable. Examine it by God's Word and respond to Jesus Christ as the One who provides the remedy.

The Purpose of the Gospel Agrees With the Purpose of Jesus Christ

John uses equally direct language when explaining why Jesus Christ was manifested.

John wrote in **1 John 3:8**:

> *"He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."*

Notice again the language of purpose: *"For this purpose."* Jesus Christ did not come simply to observe what sin had done. He came to *"destroy the works of the devil."*

This agrees with Peter's explanation of the Gospel. The Gospel exposes the condition produced by sin because Jesus Christ came to deliver people from that condition. The purpose of Gospel preaching and the purpose of the Saviour cannot be separated. The Gospel proclaims the One who has power to accomplish what the message declares.

Jesus also said in **John 10:10**:

> *"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."*

Here again we see the movement towards life. The works of the enemy lead towards destruction, but Jesus Christ came to give life. The Gospel stands between those two realities and calls people towards the One who gives life.

The Gospel Does Not Simply Improve the Flesh

Peter's words are also important because he does not say that the Gospel is preached so that people may become slightly better versions of themselves. The purpose is not to educate the flesh until it becomes acceptable to God.

There is a contrast in the verse:

"according to men in the flesh"

and:

"according to God in the spirit."

The Gospel brings a person face to face with the need for something more than outward improvement. Human effort cannot produce spiritual life.

This is why the Gospel ultimately leads to the new birth. Jesus Christ does not simply reform the old life from the outside. He gives new spiritual life and comes to dwell within the born-again believer as Spirit. The Christian life then flows from His life within.

The Quick and the Dead

Peter introduces this purpose immediately after saying that God is *"ready to judge the quick and the dead."* The word *"quick"* in the KJV means living. Peter therefore places life and death before us before explaining why the Gospel was preached.

This raises an important question: Who are *"the dead"* to whom Peter says the Gospel was preached?

That question must not be answered by assumption. Peter's words have sometimes been interpreted as though he were speaking of physically dead people receiving the Gospel after death. But the Bible also repeatedly uses death to describe a spiritual condition while a person is physically alive.

That distinction will become essential as we continue. Before identifying the dead and later examining the *"spirits in prison,"* we must hold firmly to the purpose Peter has already established.

The Gospel is preached because something must happen in the hearer. The life according to the flesh must be brought under the judgment of God's Word. The spiritual condition must be revealed, and the person must be brought to the place of response.

The direction of the Gospel is towards life according to God in the Spirit.

Peter's statement therefore gives us the controlling thought for everything that follows:

The Gospel is preached to bring people out of the way of death and into the life that is found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does Peter's mention of the quick and the dead require us to distinguish spiritual death from physical death?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed that every mention of death in the Bible refers to the body rather than the heart's condition before God?

Action Step

Read **1 Peter 4:5–6** *alongside* **John 5:25**. *Identify an assumption that needs correction and explain how the distinction changes your understanding of salvation.*

THE GOSPEL IS PREACHED TO THE SPIRITUALLY DEAD

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When Peter says that the Gospel was preached *"to them that are dead,"* we must determine what kind of death he is describing. The word dead does not always refer to physical death in Scripture. A person may be physically alive while being spiritually dead because of sin.

Paul makes this distinction very clearly. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:1-5**:

> *"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"*

These people were not physically dead. Paul says that they had *"walked"* according to the course of this world and had lived according to the desires of the flesh. Yet while physically alive, they were *"dead in trespasses and sins."*

Spiritual Death Is Separation From God

Spiritual death describes separation from God through sin. Physical life may continue normally. A person may work, study, raise a family, participate in society and even practise religion, yet still be separated from God.

Isaiah explained what sin does. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 59:1-2**:

> *"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."*

Notice the word *"separated."* That is the condition spiritual death describes. The problem is not that God has lost His power to save. Isaiah says His hand is not shortened. The separation has been produced by sin.

This helps us understand why the Gospel must be preached to those who are spiritually dead. They need more than moral advice. They need to be brought out of separation and into spiritual life.

The Dead Can Hear the Voice of the Son of God

Jesus Himself used the language of death and life in this spiritual sense. Jesus said in **John 5:25**:

> *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."*

Jesus said that the hour *"now is."* He was speaking of dead people who could hear His voice and live. These were people physically alive who needed spiritual life.

This gives us an important companion Scripture for Peter's words. When **1 Peter 4:6** says that the Gospel was preached to those who were dead, Scripture already provides a clear spiritual use of the same language.

The spiritually dead can hear. The spiritually dead can respond. The spiritually dead can be made alive.

That is precisely why the Gospel is preached.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can someone be physically alive yet spiritually dead in trespasses and sins?

Personal Reflection

Are you relying on respectable conduct or religious knowledge as though either could give spiritual life?

Action Step

Examine what you have trusted as evidence of life with God. Consider whether your confidence rests in being born again through Jesus Christ.

To Be Quickened Is to Be Made Alive

Paul uses the word *"quickened"* when describing what God does for those who were dead in sins. He wrote: *"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ."*

To be quickened is to be made alive. Salvation therefore involves a genuine change of spiritual condition. A person who was separated from God through sin is brought into life through Jesus Christ.

This is more than learning a better way to behave. The spiritually dead do not simply need education, refinement or greater religious discipline. They need life, and this is why the new birth is essential.

Jesus said in **John 3:3-5**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

Nicodemus immediately thought in physical terms, but Jesus was speaking about spiritual birth. The answer to spiritual death is not another physical birth. It is birth of the Spirit.

Darkness Also Describes This Condition

Paul uses another picture when describing people before salvation. He wrote in **Ephesians 5:6-8**:

> *"Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:"*

Paul does not simply say that they were in darkness. He says, *"ye were sometimes darkness."* Then he describes the change: *"but now are ye light in the Lord."*

Death to life. Darkness to light. Separation to relationship with God.

These expressions describe the saving change that the Gospel announces.

This Helps Us Read Peter Correctly

We should therefore not begin with the assumption that Peter's statement about preaching *"to them that are dead"* means preaching to physically dead people after they have died. Scripture already gives us a clear category of people who are physically alive but spiritually dead.

This becomes especially important when we later examine Peter's reference to the *"spirits in prison."* Before deciding where that prison is or when the preaching occurred, we must allow Scripture to establish what spiritual death means.

Peter's language belongs within the wider testimony of Scripture. Paul speaks of people *"dead in sins."* Jesus says that *"the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."* Isaiah explains that sin separates people from God, and the new birth brings the spiritually dead into life.

The Gospel is therefore preached to people who desperately need something they cannot produce for themselves. They need spiritual life, and that life is found in Jesus Christ.

When the Gospel reaches the spiritually dead, its purpose is that they should hear the voice of the Son of God and live.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does being quickened mean receiving spiritual life rather than improving outward behaviour?

Personal Reflection

Have you confused a changed routine, better habits or religious activity with the new birth?

Action Step

Compare Ephesians 2:4–5 *with* **John 3:3–5**. *Explain what needs correcting in your understanding of the life Jesus Christ gives.*

TO JUDGE MEN IN THE FLESH

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Peter says that one purpose of the Gospel is that people might be *"judged according to men in the flesh."* This does not mean that Gospel preaching exists simply to condemn people. It means that the light of God's Word exposes the condition of a life governed by the flesh and brings that life under divine judgment.

Until that judgment takes place, a person may measure himself by human standards, depend upon good works or take confidence from religious involvement. The Gospel removes those false measurements and brings the hearer before the standard of God's Word.

The Gospel Reveals Our True Condition

The Gospel does not begin by asking whether a person appears respectable to other people. It asks whether that person is living according to God.

Paul describes the contrast clearly in **Romans 8:5-8**:

> *"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."*

Paul places two ways of living before us: according to the flesh and according to the Spirit. One leads to death; the other is life and peace. The Gospel brings that distinction into the light.

A person may be kind, disciplined, hardworking and outwardly moral, yet those qualities alone do not prove that the life is governed by God. Paul says plainly, *"they that are in the flesh cannot please God."* The Gospel therefore reaches deeper than outward conduct. It exposes the governing direction of the life.

What Does "the Flesh" Mean?

In Romans 8, Paul repeatedly uses the language of *"the flesh."* The Greek word behind this expression is SARX. In this context, Paul is not teaching that the physical body itself is sinful, nor that people inherit a sinful substance through natural birth.

That distinction is important because the flesh describes life viewed and governed from the natural, earthly and self-directed standpoint rather than from the Spirit of God. A fleshly mind evaluates life according to human desire, advantage, appetite, fear, ambition and temporary circumstances without submitting those things to God.

The problem is not that the body exists. The problem is a life governed apart from God. This also protects the teaching from the doctrine of inherited sin.

The Gospel does not judge people because they inherited Adam's guilt or were born containing a sinful substance. It judges actual spiritual condition and personal response to the truth God makes known.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does being judged according to men in the flesh concern the direction of the life rather than the physical body itself?

Personal Reflection

Where have you judged your spiritual condition by appearance or by comparing yourself with other people?

Action Step

Identify one measure of goodness you have relied upon. Set it beside **Romans 8:5–8** *and consider what the Gospel calls you to recognise.*

The Carnal Mind Cannot Please God

Paul continues:

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

The word *"enmity"* speaks of opposition. A mind governed by the flesh does not naturally place God's will first. It measures decisions from the standpoint of self and the present world.

That may appear in obvious sin, but it can also appear in respectable forms. A person can receive the approval of others while still leaving God outside the centre of life. This is why human goodness cannot replace the new birth.

The Gospel does not simply tell the flesh to become more religious. It reveals that a life governed by the flesh cannot become spiritual through education, ceremony or greater self-discipline.

Something more is needed.

Judgment Is the Mercy of Truth

Because judgment is often associated only with punishment, people may resist a Gospel message that exposes sin or calls for repentance. Yet the judgment of the Gospel is merciful because it reveals the problem while there is opportunity to turn to God.

If a person is spiritually dead but believes he is spiritually well, he will see no reason to seek life. If a person is separated from God but believes outward respectability is enough, he will not recognise his need for reconciliation.

The Gospel tells the truth. It does not flatter the hearer into remaining unchanged, nor does it expose the problem in order to leave the person hopeless. It brings the condition into the light so that the remedy can be received.

The Gospel judges in order to lead towards life.

Love Does Not Remove Obedience

Some may imagine that speaking of God's love means that obedience no longer matters. Jesus joined love and obedience together.

Jesus said in **John 14:15**:

> *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."*

Jesus did not present love as a substitute for obedience. Genuine love for Him is not simply an emotion or a religious claim. His Word has authority in the life of the believer.

This is another reason the Gospel must bring judgment. It must expose any claim to know or love God that leaves the person unwilling to submit to His Word.

At the same time, obedience must not be presented as an external attempt to earn salvation. The Gospel first brings us to Jesus Christ. At the new birth, He comes to dwell within the believer as Spirit, and His life within becomes the source of true spiritual obedience.

Judgment reveals the need. Jesus Christ provides the life.

The Word of God, Not Human Comparison

A person cannot discover his true spiritual condition by asking, *"Am I better than someone else?"* The question is whether the life agrees with the Word of God.

Human standards continually move. What one generation condemns another may excuse, and religious traditions can also distort the standard.

The Word of God remains the plumb line.

Therefore Gospel preaching must be willing to bring the hearer under the authority of Scripture. The preacher is not the judge in the sense of inventing the standard. The message itself reveals what God has said.

This protects Gospel preaching from both personal harshness and compromise. We do not invent the standard, and we do not soften what Scripture clearly says.

The Judgment of the Gospel Calls for a Decision

When the Gospel reveals that a person is living according to the flesh, the purpose is not that he simply agrees with the diagnosis. Truth requires a response.

The hearer must decide whether to continue in the way that has been exposed or turn towards God. This is where Gospel judgment becomes deeply personal. The Word moves beyond a general statement about humanity and reaches the conscience of the individual.

The Gospel says, in effect: this is the way you are living; this is where that way leads; and Jesus Christ is calling you to life.

The first movement of Peter's statement is therefore essential:

"that they might be judged according to men in the flesh."

The flesh must be exposed for what it is. Human goodness cannot become the standard. Religious profession cannot hide spiritual death. Sin cannot be made harmless by changing its name.

But Peter does not stop with judgment. The purpose moves immediately towards something greater:

"but live according to God in the spirit."

The Gospel judges the life according to the flesh because God is calling the hearer out of that condition and into a new life governed by His Spirit.

Judgment reveals the need. Jesus Christ is the answer.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the Gospel expose the life governed by the flesh before calling a person into life in the Spirit?

Personal Reflection

When a Bible teaching challenges you, do you justify yourself or receive the correction it brings?

Action Step

Recall a correction you resisted. Explain what your response revealed and how truth should now govern your choice before God.

THAT THEY MIGHT LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD IN THE SPIRIT

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Peter does not end with the life according to the flesh being judged. He immediately gives the purpose towards which the Gospel is moving: *"but live according to God in the spirit."* The Gospel exposes the old condition because God is calling the hearer into a new spiritual life.

God does not simply show people that they are wrong. He calls them to repentance, brings them to the new birth, and gives them the life of Jesus Christ within.

The Gospel Leads to a New Heart

The prophets looked forward to this inward work of God. Ezekiel wrote in **Ezekiel 36:26**:

> *"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."*

The Gospel reaches deeper than outward behaviour because the problem reaches deeper than outward behaviour. A person may change habits, adopt religious practices or discipline certain actions and still need the inward work of God.

God promised, *"A new heart also will I give you."* This is why the Gospel does not simply produce reformation. It leads to regeneration. The sinner is not simply instructed to behave differently; he is called to receive new spiritual life.

The New Birth Is Necessary

Jesus made the necessity of spiritual birth unmistakable when He spoke with Nicodemus. Jesus said in **John 3:3-7**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

Nicodemus first understood Jesus in physical terms, but Jesus immediately distinguished the two births.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."

"That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

The Gospel is preached because a natural birth cannot produce the spiritual life required for the kingdom of God. No amount of human effort can turn flesh into Spirit. A person must be born of the Spirit.

This is not a second religious experience added sometime after salvation. The new birth is the Spirit birth itself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is being born of the Spirit necessary for entering the Kingdom of God?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated human improvement or religious effort as though it could produce the new birth?

Action Step

Read John 3:3–7 *and examine where your confidence rests. State clearly why only the spiritual life Jesus Christ gives can answer the need revealed here.*

Born of the Spirit

Paul explains how believers are brought into the body of Christ. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

The baptism of the Spirit is not a later addition to salvation. By one Spirit we are baptised into one body. The believer receives the Spirit at the new birth and is brought into the body of Christ.

This is why Peter's statement, *"live according to God in the spirit,"* cannot be reduced to trying harder to live a spiritual life. The Gospel brings the hearer to the new birth, where Jesus Christ comes to dwell within as Spirit.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Paul speaks of *"the Spirit of God"* and *"the Spirit of Christ."* He does not describe two different Spirits. The Spirit who dwells within the believer is the Spirit of Christ.

To belong to Christ is to have His Spirit.

The Christian Life Flows From Christ Within

This changes how we understand the words *"live according to God in the spirit."* The Christian life is not an attempt to imitate Jesus from the outside. Jesus Christ dwells within the born-again believer, and His life within becomes the source of spiritual life.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:16**:

> *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."*

Paul does not tell believers simply to suppress the flesh through stronger human determination. He directs them to walk in the Spirit.

The answer to the flesh is not better flesh.

The answer is life in the Spirit.

Dead to Sin, Alive Unto God

Paul describes this change again in Romans 6. Paul wrote in **Romans 6:1-2**:

> *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"*

Grace does not leave the believer in the old life. Paul speaks of being *"dead to sin."*

He then explains the newness of life that follows. Paul wrote in **Romans 6:4**:

> *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*

This newness of life belongs to the spiritual reality of salvation. Paul elsewhere explains that by one Spirit believers are baptised into the body of Christ. The emphasis is not upon an outward ceremony supplying spiritual life, but upon the work of God by His Spirit.

Living According to God

Peter's words describe far more than a change in outward conduct. To *"live according to God in the spirit"* is to possess spiritual life from God and to have that life govern the believer.

This does not mean the believer becomes passive or has no responsibility. Scripture still commands believers to walk, obey, watch, pray and remain faithful. But those commands are not an invitation to produce Christian life by natural strength. They are lived through the reality of Christ dwelling within.

The believer is not spiritually incomplete, waiting for another experience to supply what the new birth failed to give. At the new birth, the believer receives the Person.

The Gospel Moves From Judgment to Life

We can now see the full movement of Peter's statement. The Gospel judges the life according to the flesh because that life cannot please God, but it does not leave the hearer under judgment.

It calls the sinner to repentance, leads to the new birth, brings the Spirit of Christ within, and opens a new life according to God in the Spirit. This is why the Gospel is good news. It does not simply reveal what humanity is without God. It reveals what God has provided in Jesus Christ.

The final purpose is life.

Not improved flesh.

Not religious self-effort.

Not an outward attempt to copy Jesus.

Jesus Christ dwelling within.

Peter's words bring us to the heart of the Gospel:

"but live according to God in the spirit."

The Gospel is preached so that those who were spiritually dead may receive the life of Jesus Christ and live according to God by His Spirit within.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the Spirit of Christ received at the new birth enable a believer to live according to God?

Personal Reflection

Are you depending upon determination alone to live a life that can only flow from the Christ already within you?

Action Step

Identify one present choice where you have relied upon your own strength. Explain how dependence upon Christ within should govern your response.

WHO ARE THE SPIRITS IN PRISON?

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Peter's words about the 'spirits in prison' are often misread as describing disembodied souls in a place of punishment after death. Peter's own explanation identifies who these people were, when they were disobedient, and the spiritual condition in which they lived.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 3:18-20**:

> *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."*

The passage itself identifies the people under consideration.

Peter Points Us to the Days of Noah

The *"spirits in prison"* were those *"which sometime were disobedient"* when God's longsuffering waited *"in the days of Noah."* Peter therefore places their disobedience in a specific period of history: the time before the flood while the ark was being prepared.

These people are often called the antediluvians, meaning those who lived before the flood. This is important because Peter does not first direct our attention to a place after physical death. He directs us to people who were alive during Noah's generation and describes the spiritual condition in which they existed.

The question then becomes: what kind of prison held them?

The Prison Was Spiritual

The Bible repeatedly describes sin as bondage, darkness and death. A person does not need to be physically imprisoned to be in spiritual captivity.

Isaiah used the language of prisoners and darkness when prophesying of God's saving work. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 42:6-7**:

> *"I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house."*

Here prison and darkness describe a condition from which people need deliverance. The picture is spiritual. God would bring people out of darkness and release those held captive.

The people of Noah's generation were likewise living in deep spiritual darkness. Genesis describes a world in which wickedness had become great and the imagination of the thoughts of the human heart was continually evil. Their prison was the bondage and darkness of sin.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Who were the spirits in prison in Peter's account, and what does the passage tell us about their condition?

Personal Reflection

Have you accepted an explanation of the spirits in prison without considering Noah's generation and spiritual bondage?

Action Step

Read **1 Peter 3:18–20** *with the account of Noah. Identify what the passage says about the hearers and explain how this corrects your earlier understanding.*

They Were Spiritually Dead

Peter later says in **1 Peter 4:6**:

> *"For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."*

The previous section established that Scripture uses death to describe people who are physically alive but separated from God through sin.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:4-6**:

> *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"*

Paul and the Ephesian believers had once been *"dead in sins,"* yet they were physically alive during that condition. Spiritual death describes separation from God, not the absence of physical life.

The same biblical language helps us understand Peter. The *"spirits in prison"* were spiritually dead people held in the darkness and bondage of disobedience.

"Spirits" Does Not Require a Post-Death Setting

The word *"spirits"* can easily cause the reader to imagine disembodied beings. But Peter does not leave the identity of these spirits undefined. He immediately tells us that they were the ones who had been disobedient in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared.

Their identity must therefore be determined from Peter's description, not from an assumption about the word spirits. They were people who were disobedient, lived in Noah's generation, and were held in spiritual bondage. The Gospel reached them while God's longsuffering waited.

This keeps the interpretation anchored in the actual words of the passage.

The Longsuffering of God Waited

Peter includes another important detail:

"when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing."

The preaching occurred in a setting of divine longsuffering. God had not yet brought the flood. The ark was still being prepared, and the people of that generation still had opportunity to hear the warning God was giving.

This agrees with what Peter later says about God's longsuffering. Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:9**:

> *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

God's longsuffering gives opportunity for repentance. That principle fits naturally with Noah's generation. While the ark was being prepared, God's Word was being proclaimed and people had opportunity to respond.

The Dead Can Hear and Live

Jesus also spoke of spiritually dead people hearing His voice and receiving life. Jesus said in **John 5:25**:

> *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live."*

Notice again that Jesus says, *"and now is."* He was not speaking only about a future event involving physical graves. He described spiritually dead people hearing His voice and living.

That is the purpose of the Gospel. The spiritually dead hear, the truth exposes their condition, and they are called to respond. Those who receive the Word are brought towards life.

Children of Disobedience in Darkness

Paul gives another description that closely matches Peter's language. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 5:6-8**:

> *"Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:"*

Peter describes the people of Noah's day as those who *"were disobedient."* Paul calls the unsaved *"children of disobedience"* and says they were once darkness.

The language agrees. Spiritual prison is the condition of those who are held in sin, darkness and disobedience while separated from God.

Peter Identifies the Prisoners

We therefore do not need to invent an unknown group of souls or place the preaching after their physical death. Peter has already given us the identifying marks.

The spirits in prison were the disobedient people of Noah's generation. Their prison was spiritual darkness and bondage. Their death was spiritual death. Their opportunity to hear came while God's longsuffering waited during the preparation of the ark.

One question still remains: How did Christ preach to people who lived many centuries before His manifestation in flesh?

Peter gives the key words:

"By which also he went and preached."

The answer lies in the Spirit.

That is the next part of Peter's teaching we must examine.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the Bible describe the captivity of people who are spiritually dead while physically alive?

Personal Reflection

Do you sometimes view spiritual captivity as a distant place rather than recognising the real bondage of sin?

Action Step

Compare Isaiah 42:6–7 *with* **Ephesians 2:1–5**. *Consider how recognising spiritual darkness should change your concern for people who need the Gospel.*

CHRIST PREACHED THROUGH NOAH BY THE SPIRIT

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Having identified the *"spirits in prison"* as the disobedient people living in Noah's generation, another question must be answered: how could Christ preach to people who lived centuries before He was manifested in flesh?

Peter gives the answer within the passage itself. Christ preached to them by the Spirit.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 3:18-20**:

> *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."*

The key expression is *"By which also he went and preached."* Peter has just spoken of Christ being *"quickened by the Spirit."* He then says, *"By which"* He preached to the spirits in prison.

The preaching was therefore by the Spirit.

Christ Did Not Need to Be Physically Present

Jesus Christ had not yet been manifested in flesh during Noah's lifetime. The incarnation came much later, but that does not mean Christ was absent from God's dealings with humanity. God worked by His Spirit through those who spoke His Word.

Peter gives this principle clearly in **2 Peter 1:21**:

> *"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

The prophets did not speak from their own thoughts. God moved upon them by His Spirit, and through them His Word reached the people.

The same principle helps us understand Noah. Christ did not need to stand physically before Noah's generation in order for His Spirit to work through a preacher. God spoke through Noah while Noah proclaimed the truth given to him.

Noah Was a Preacher of Righteousness

Peter specifically identifies Noah as a preacher.

Peter wrote in **2 Peter 2:5**:

> *"And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;"*

Scripture does not record a complete sermon preached by Noah, so we should be careful not to invent words the Bible has not given us. What Scripture does tell us is sufficient: Noah was *"a preacher of righteousness."*

He had received the Word of God concerning the coming flood. He believed that Word, obeyed it and lived according to it. While the ark was being prepared, the surrounding generation remained in disobedience, but God had not left them without witness. Noah was proclaiming righteousness among them.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did God's Spirit work through Noah while he proclaimed righteousness to his generation?

Personal Reflection

Have you thought a messenger's personal skill matters more than whether the message comes from God?

Action Step

Examine the source of your confidence when you speak about God. Consider how this account should move your trust from human ability to His Word.

The Message Came From God

Noah's authority did not come from personal wisdom. His message mattered because it came from God. This agrees with Peter's statement that holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Noah was not creating a human philosophy about how people should live. God had revealed truth, and Noah responded to that truth by faith.

The Gospel principle is the same today: the messenger is not the source of the message. The Word belongs to God, the power belongs to God, and the spiritual work in the heart belongs to God. Human beings speak the Word, but God must deal with the heart.

Christ Was the Reality Behind the Message

Noah did not possess the fulness of New Covenant revelation that came through Jesus Christ. He lived long before Calvary and Pentecost, yet the saving purpose of God was already centred in the same Saviour.

Jesus said in **John 14:6**:

> *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

Noah preached righteousness, the right way before God. The fulness of that way is revealed in Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that Noah preached every detail later proclaimed by the apostles. Scripture does not say that. It means that the truth God gave Noah could not lead in a direction contrary to the everlasting Gospel.

The light was less complete, but the saving purpose was the same.

The Preaching Occurred While the Ark Was Being Prepared

Peter gives us an important time marker. The people were disobedient *"when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing."*

The preaching therefore occurred during the lifetime of Noah's generation, while the ark was under construction and while God's longsuffering was still waiting. Peter does not say that Christ waited until those people had physically died and then preached to them in another place. He directs us to the period *"when once the longsuffering of God waited."*

They were alive. Noah was preaching. The ark was being prepared. God was waiting. The opportunity to respond was present.

God's Longsuffering Gave Opportunity

The description of God's longsuffering is consistent with Peter's later words.

Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:9**:

> *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

Longsuffering is not indifference towards sin. It is God allowing opportunity for people to hear, repent and respond before judgment comes.

That is what we see in Noah's generation. The coming flood had been announced, but judgment had not yet fallen. The ark was being prepared, and Noah was a preacher of righteousness. God's warning and God's mercy were present together.

The Spirit Worked Through the Messenger

This gives us the simplest way to understand Peter's statement. Christ preached by the Spirit, and the Spirit worked through Noah. Noah preached righteousness to the people of his generation, who were the *"spirits in prison"* because they were held in spiritual darkness and disobedience.

They heard while they were physically alive and while God's longsuffering waited. The passage therefore does not require Christ to travel physically to another realm after Calvary in order to preach to dead souls. Peter has already directed us towards Noah's generation and the work of the Spirit.

Christ preached by His Spirit through Noah. Noah was the human messenger, and the disobedient people of Noah's day were the hearers.

This prepares us to examine the next question directly:

Did Jesus descend into hell after His death to preach the Gospel?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is the timing of Noah's preaching important for understanding Christ's work by the Spirit?

Personal Reflection

Have you assumed that people in Noah's day first heard the Gospel after they died?

Action Step

Place **1 Peter 3:18–20** *beside* **2 Peter 2:5**. *Identify the time of the preaching and explain how this truth should affect the urgency of your witness today.*

DID JESUS DESCEND INTO HELL?

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The statement that Jesus descended into hell after His death is widely repeated, but it must be tested carefully against Scripture. Two passages are usually brought together to support the

idea: **Acts 2:27**, where Peter says that Christ's soul was not left in hell, and **1 Peter 3:19**, where Christ is said to have preached unto the *"spirits in prison."*

These verses are often combined to teach that Jesus went into hell between His death and resurrection and preached to people who had already died. That interpretation is incorrect. When each passage is read in its proper context and harmonised with the words of Jesus Himself, Scripture establishes what actually occurred.

Jesus Said He Would Be in Paradise

While Jesus was upon the cross, the repentant thief beside Him asked to be remembered.

Luke records in **Luke 23:42-43**:

> *"And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."*

Jesus did not tell the thief that He would first go into hell. He said plainly: *"To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."*

That statement must be allowed to carry its full weight. Jesus knew where He was going after death. His promise was direct, personal and time-specific: *"To day."* Any interpretation of another passage must therefore harmonise with what Jesus Himself said.

Jesus Committed His Spirit to God

At the moment of death, Jesus also spoke concerning His Spirit.

Luke wrote in **Luke 23:46**:

> *"And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost."*

His physical body remained behind. Joseph of Arimathaea later requested that body from Pilate and placed it in the tomb.

John wrote in **John 19:38**:

> *"And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus."*

This distinction is important. Jesus' body went into the grave, while He had committed His Spirit to God and had promised the thief that they would be together in paradise. That gives us the framework for understanding Peter's words in Acts.

What Did Peter Mean by "My Soul in Hell"?

Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and quoted from **Psalm 16:10**.

Peter said in **Acts 2:27**:

> *"Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."*

At first glance, the expression *"my soul in hell"* appears difficult. But Peter was quoting an Old Testament prophecy and then explaining its fulfilment in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The original Psalm says in **Psalm 16:10**:

> *"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."*

The important question is not what the English word hell may suggest to a modern reader. The question is what the verse is saying in its biblical context.

Peter's subject in Acts 2 is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Peter use Psalm 16 to explain the resurrection of Jesus Christ rather than a visit to a place of torment?

Personal Reflection

Have you formed a belief about Jesus descending into hell from the English word alone, without considering Peter's explanation?

Action Step

Read Acts 2:27–32 *together. Identify Peter's stated subject and explain how that changes the meaning you give to the prophecy.*

Peter Himself Explains the Prophecy

We do not have to guess what Peter was trying to prove. He continues by explaining David's prophecy.

Peter said in **Acts 2:29-32**:

> *"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."*

Peter tells us exactly what Psalm 16 was pointing towards: *"the resurrection of Christ."* He joins the statements *"his soul was not left in hell"* and *"neither his flesh did see corruption."*

The emphasis is that Jesus Christ would not remain in the state of death and His body would not remain in the grave until corruption took place.

Peter is preaching resurrection, not a journey into a place of torment.

Understanding "Hell" in Psalm 16

In **Psalm 16:10**, the Hebrew word translated hell is SHEOL. The KJV translates this Hebrew word in different ways according to context, including grave and hell. We therefore cannot simply assume that every occurrence refers to a place of punishment. Context must determine the meaning.

For example, **Ecclesiastes 9:10** says:

> *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."*

The word translated *"grave"* there is also SHEOL.

In Psalm 16, the second half of the verse gives us the controlling clue: *"neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."* Corruption concerns the body in death, and Peter repeats that same connection in Acts 2 when speaking about Christ's resurrection.

The passage therefore points to Christ not being abandoned to the grave and His body not being left to decay.

What About the Word "Soul"?

The Hebrew word translated soul in **Psalm 16:10** is NEPHESH. Like many biblical words, its meaning must be determined by context. It can refer to life, the person or the inner being, and in some passages it is used in connection with the physical life of a person.

Numbers 6:6 provides an example where the same Hebrew word is used in a setting referring to a dead body. This reminds us of an important Bible-study principle: we must not force one English definition onto every occurrence of a Hebrew or Greek word.

In **Psalm 16:10**, the immediate parallel statement is *"neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."* Peter then interprets the prophecy as speaking of Christ's resurrection.

Peter's own explanation establishes the meaning: Christ was not abandoned to death, and His flesh did not remain in the grave to see corruption.

Acts 2 and 1 Peter 3 Must Not Be Confused

Another important mistake occurs when **Acts 2:27** and **1 Peter 3:19** are combined as though they describe the same event.

They do not.

Acts 2 concerns the resurrection of Jesus Christ and quotes Psalm 16. First Peter 3 concerns Christ preaching *"by the Spirit"* to the people who were disobedient *"in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing."*

We have already seen that Peter identifies those hearers historically. They were the people of Noah's generation. Christ preached to them by the Spirit through Noah, whom Scripture calls *"a preacher of righteousness."*

First Peter 3 does not teach that Jesus journeyed into hell after Calvary.

The Two Passages Harmonise

When the passages are kept in their proper contexts, the apparent contradiction disappears. Jesus said, *"To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."* He committed His Spirit into the Father's hands, while His physical body was taken down and placed in the tomb.

Psalm 16 prophesied that He would not be left in the grave and would not see corruption. Peter used that prophecy in Acts 2 to preach the resurrection. First Peter 3 describes Christ

preaching by the Spirit to the disobedient people of Noah's generation while God's longsuffering waited.

Scripture therefore does not place Jesus in hell preaching to physically dead souls.

Why This Matters

This is an important doctrinal truth because it affects how we understand the Gospel itself.

If 1 Peter 3 is made to teach that people who rejected God during life later received another opportunity after death, the whole purpose of Gospel preaching in this present life becomes confused. Peter teaches that the Gospel came to Noah's generation while they were alive and while God's longsuffering waited.

The Gospel came to Noah's generation while they were alive. God's longsuffering waited while the ark was being prepared. Noah preached righteousness, and the people had opportunity to hear and respond before judgment came.

Likewise, the Gospel is preached now because this is the time to hear, repent and receive life in Jesus Christ.

The biblical picture is consistent. Jesus did not descend into hell to preach the Gospel to physically dead souls. His body was placed in the grave, He promised the thief paradise, and Peter preached His resurrection.

The *"spirits in prison"* had heard Christ by the Spirit through Noah while they were still alive. When Scripture is allowed to interpret Scripture, the passages agree.

Christ was not preaching after death to the dead. He had already preached by the Spirit to the living who were spiritually dead.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must Acts 2 and 1 Peter 3 be read in their own settings before being joined in an interpretation?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever combined two Bible verses because their language sounded similar without checking what each was explaining?

Action Step

Examine one interpretation you have accepted about Jesus and the dead. Compare the two contexts and write what you must now believe or reconsider.

NO SECOND CHANCE AFTER PHYSICAL DEATH

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If the Gospel is preached so that the spiritually dead may hear, repent and live, an important question follows: does that opportunity continue after physical death? Some religious systems teach an intermediate state in which departed souls may still be purified, helped or prepared for heaven. Scripture does not support that teaching. The opportunity to respond to the Gospel belongs to this present life.

The Time to Respond Is Now

The account of Noah has already shown this principle clearly. God's longsuffering waited while the ark was being prepared, and Noah preached righteousness while the people were still alive and able to respond. Once judgment came, that period of opportunity ended.

The same principle applies to the Gospel today. God calls people while they are living, while they can hear His Word, repent and turn towards Him. Physical death does not begin another period of Gospel opportunity.

Where the Tree Falls

Solomon used a simple picture to describe finality.

He wrote in **Ecclesiastes 11:3**:

> *"If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be."*

A fallen tree does not move itself to another location. The picture expresses settled finality. This helps us understand why the condition of the heart cannot be treated lightly during life.

The Gospel calls people now because the spiritual direction chosen in this life is not something Scripture presents as being changed after death.

The Great Gulf Was Fixed

Jesus gives an even clearer picture in His account of the rich man and Lazarus.

He said in **Luke 16:26**:

> *"And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."*

The words *"a great gulf fixed"* are important. Jesus does not describe a temporary separation that could later be crossed. He describes a fixed condition, and those on one side could not pass to the other.

This is completely different from the idea that people may die without God and afterwards receive another opportunity to change their spiritual condition.

The gulf was fixed.

The Rich Man Did Not Ask for Another Chance

The rich man in Luke 16 understood something significant after death. He did not ask to return and begin his own life again. Instead, his concern turned towards those still living.

Jesus continued in **Luke 16:27-29**:

> *"Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."*

His brothers still had something he no longer had: the opportunity to hear and respond. The answer was not that someone should preach to the rich man again after death. The answer concerned those who were still alive: *"let them hear them."*

That brings us straight back to the purpose of Gospel preaching. People must hear while they can respond.

Purgatory Cannot Replace the Gospel

The teaching of purgatory presents an intermediate condition after death in which departed souls undergo purification before entering heaven. That teaching cannot be allowed to overturn the plain picture Jesus gives in Luke 16.

The gulf is fixed. The rich man does not move from one condition to another. The people who still need warning are those who remain alive.

The Gospel therefore does not direct our hope towards purification after death. It directs us towards repentance and salvation through Jesus Christ now.

This Also Clarifies the Spirits in Prison

This truth strengthens the interpretation we have already established concerning **1 Peter 3:19**. Peter is not teaching that Christ went to physically dead people and offered them the Gospel after their earthly lives had ended. The people of Noah's generation heard while they were alive. God's longsuffering waited. Noah preached righteousness. They had opportunity before the flood came.

The Gospel Is Urgent Because Life Is Present

The Gospel is therefore not something to postpone. God's mercy is available now. His Word can be heard now. Repentance can take place now. Jesus Christ can give spiritual life now.

The purpose of Gospel preaching is not to prepare people for another opportunity after death. It is to call them to life before death comes.

This gives Gospel preaching its urgency without turning it into fear-driven religion. The urgency comes from reality. Human life is temporary, the condition of the heart matters, and God is calling people while they can still hear and respond.

The message is therefore simple:

Hear the Gospel now.

Turn to God now.

Receive life in Jesus Christ now.

There is no promised second opportunity after physical death.

The Gospel is preached in this life because this is the time to respond to Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the Gospel be heard and answered during this present life?

Personal Reflection

Have you postponed a response to God's Word or assumed that someone can safely delay repentance?

Action Step

Identify one response to God that should not be postponed. Consider what you can do now, rather than treating another opportunity as guaranteed.

THE GOSPEL CALLS PEOPLE TO REPENTANCE AND NEW LIFE

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The Gospel does not simply reveal that a person is spiritually dead or living according to the flesh. It calls for a response. Once the Word of God brings the true condition of the heart into the light, the hearer must decide whether to continue in that way or turn towards God.

This is why repentance belongs at the heart of Gospel preaching. The Gospel does not simply inform people that salvation exists. It calls them to turn from sin and receive the life God has provided in Jesus Christ.

God Calls People to Repentance

Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:9**:

> *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*

God's longsuffering is connected with repentance. He does not desire that people perish, but His mercy must not be mistaken for indifference towards sin. The verse does not say that everyone is automatically saved. It says that God is longsuffering, giving opportunity for people to repent.

Jesus also made the necessity of repentance unmistakable. Jesus said in **Luke 13:3**:

> *"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

Repentance cannot therefore be removed from the Gospel without changing the message Jesus Himself proclaimed.

Repentance Means Turning

Repentance is more than feeling sorry about what has happened. A person may regret consequences without turning from the way that produced them.

Scripture describes repentance as a change of direction. Ezekiel wrote in **Ezekiel 33:19**:

> *"But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby."*

Notice the word *"turn."* The wicked person turns from wickedness and turns towards what is right before God.

This is why repentance may be pictured as a complete change of direction. The person does not simply admit that the old way is wrong and then continue walking in it. Genuine repentance involves abandoning that way and turning towards God.

The Gospel makes that turning possible by bringing truth to the conscience and showing the hearer that another way exists in Jesus Christ.

Godly Sorrow Is Not the Same as Regret

Paul makes an important distinction between godly sorrow and ordinary sorrow. Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 7:10**:

> *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."*

Not every feeling of sorrow produces repentance. A person may be sorry because sin has brought embarrassment, loss, damaged relationships or painful consequences. Such sorrow may focus mainly upon what has happened to the person rather than upon the fact that he has sinned against God.

Godly sorrow goes deeper. It recognises the wrong before God and produces repentance *"to salvation."* The sorrow is therefore not the destination. It produces a turning.

Conviction should move the heart towards God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What is the difference between godly sorrow leading to repentance and regret over consequences?

Personal Reflection

When you feel sorry about a wrong choice, are you mainly troubled by its consequences or by having gone against God?

Action Step

Consider a specific wrong you have recognised. Explain how a genuine turning to God would differ from merely regretting what happened.

Judgment and Repentance Belong Together

This helps us understand why the Gospel must first bring judgment upon the life according to the flesh. A person cannot genuinely repent of what he refuses to recognise as wrong.

The Word of God brings the condition into the light. The conscience is awakened. The person sees the difference between his own way and God's way. Then repentance becomes possible.

This is why removing judgment from Gospel preaching also weakens repentance. If sin is never identified, separation from God is never made clear, and the hearer is never brought under the authority of the Word, there is little reason to turn.

But biblical judgment is not harshness for its own sake. It reveals the problem so that the hearer may receive the remedy.

Repentance Turns Towards Jesus Christ

Repentance is not simply turning away from certain behaviours. If a person turns from one sinful habit but never turns towards Jesus Christ, the Gospel has not reached its intended end.

The direction of repentance is towards God. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 55:7**:

> *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."*

There are two movements again: forsake his way and return unto the LORD. The Gospel calls people away from the old way and towards the Person who gives life.

Repentance therefore prepares the heart to receive what only Jesus Christ can give.

The Gospel Leads to New Life

The goal is not simply that the sinner stops doing wrong. God gives something greater.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

The Gospel points beyond regret and outward improvement to a new creation in Jesus Christ. The old things pass away, and a new life begins.

This is why repentance must not be presented as though the person saves himself by changing his behaviour. Turning away from sin does not create spiritual life. Jesus Christ gives life. Repentance is the response of the heart that turns from the old way towards Him.

New Life Comes Through the Spirit

Jesus said that entry into the kingdom of God requires spiritual birth. He said in **John 3:5-7**:

> *"Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

The new birth is not an improved version of the first birth. It is birth of the Spirit.

Paul later explains that believers are brought into the body of Christ by that Spirit. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

The person who responds to the Gospel is not left trying to maintain a Christian life through natural strength. At the new birth, the believer receives the Spirit of Christ. Jesus Christ dwells within.

Salvation Brings a Real Break With Sin

Paul does not describe salvation as forgiveness while the old life continues unchanged. He wrote in **Romans 6:1-2**:

> *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"*

Grace does not make peace with sin. The Gospel calls people out of the way of death and into newness of life.

Paul continues in **Romans 6:4**:

> *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*

The Gospel therefore has a definite direction: from sin to righteousness, from spiritual death to life, from the flesh to the Spirit, and from the old life into Jesus Christ.

The Gospel Calls for a Decision

God's longsuffering gives opportunity, but opportunity requires response. The Gospel does not force salvation upon anyone. It brings truth before the hearer and calls for a decision.

Will I remain in my own way, or will I turn towards God? Will I hold to the life that has been judged by the Word, or will I receive the new life offered in Jesus Christ?

Repentance is where that turning becomes real. The end of repentance is not emptiness. God does not simply call people to leave something behind. He calls them into life.

The Gospel calls people to turn from sin, come to Jesus Christ, be born of the Spirit, and walk in the new life He gives.

Repentance turns from the old way.

The new birth brings the life of Jesus Christ within.

That is why the Gospel is preached.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does repentance lead towards the new birth and a life received from Jesus Christ rather than self-reform?

Personal Reflection

Are you relying on a promise to behave better instead of recognising your need for life from Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Examine that reliance in the light of **John 3:3–7**. *State what repentance and faith should mean in your response to the Saviour.*

CONCLUSION: FROM DEATH TO LIFE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Throughout this Study Guide, we have followed Peter's words to understand why the Gospel is preached. The answer is not hidden. Peter says that the Gospel was preached *"for this cause"*: that people might be judged according to men in the flesh, but *"live according to God in the spirit."*

The Gospel therefore reveals before it restores. It brings the life lived according to the flesh under the judgment of God's Word and shows the spiritually dead their true condition. But judgment is not the final purpose. The Gospel exposes death because Jesus Christ came to give life.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 4:6**:

> *"For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."*

We have also seen that the *"dead"* in this passage are spiritually dead, not physically dead people receiving another opportunity after death. Scripture repeatedly describes those separated from God through sin as dead while they are still physically alive.

This understanding also explains the *"spirits in prison."* Peter identifies them as the disobedient people of Noah's generation. They heard while God's longsuffering waited and while the ark was being prepared. Christ preached to them by the Spirit through Noah, whom Scripture calls *"a preacher of righteousness."*

Scripture does not teach that Jesus descended into hell after Calvary to preach to dead souls. Jesus told the thief, *"To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."* His body went into the grave, while Peter's words in Acts 2 point to His resurrection and the fulfilment of Psalm 16.

Neither does Scripture offer another Gospel opportunity after physical death. Jesus spoke of a *"great gulf fixed."* The time to hear, repent and turn towards God is now.

The Gospel calls people to repentance because repentance turns the heart away from the old way and towards God. But repentance is not the end. Jesus Christ brings the spiritually dead into life through the new birth.

At the new birth, the believer receives the Spirit of Christ. The Christian life is not produced by human effort or by trying to imitate Jesus from the outside. Jesus Christ comes to dwell within, and His life becomes the source of spiritual life, holiness and obedience.

This is the purpose towards which the Gospel has been moving from the beginning. It reveals the flesh, exposes spiritual death, calls for repentance and brings the hearer to Jesus Christ.

Through Him, the spiritually dead are made alive.

The Gospel is preached so that people may turn from death and live according to God in the Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the Gospel move from revealing spiritual death to offering life through Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

What has this study exposed in your understanding of sin, repentance or the life of the Spirit?

Action Step

Identify the most important correction you have received. Explain the response it calls for now, whether turning to Christ for life or walking according to His life already within.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

According to **1 Peter 4:6***, why was the Gospel preached, and how do judgment of the flesh and life in the Spirit belong together?*

2. Understanding

How do **Ephesians 2:1–5** *and* **John 5:25** *explain the difference between physical death and spiritual death?*

3. Personal Reflection

Has God's Word exposed an attitude or choice in your own life that needs correction? Explain how you have responded.

4. Response to Truth

How is godly sorrow different from regret over consequences? What should repentance mean when the Gospel corrects you?

5. Action Step

Identify one area in which you need to respond to the truth of the Gospel rather than merely agree with it. What response will you make, and when?

6. Early Response

Have you begun the response identified in Question 5? If so, explain what changed. If not, explain what has prevented you from beginning.

7. Ongoing Practice

What will help you continue to respond honestly to the Bible and walk in the life of Christ rather than depend on outward self-improvement?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do the accounts of Noah, the spirits in prison and Christ preaching by the Spirit help explain **1 Peter 3:18–20** *without teaching another Gospel opportunity after death?*

9. Living the Truth

How would you explain to someone, with care and urgency, why the Gospel calls people to respond during this life?

10. Final Response

How has this study changed your understanding of why the Gospel is preached, and how should that change the way you receive and share it?