

A Study in 1 Peter 1:12–17

*The Spirit of Christ in the Prophets — Gird Up the Loins —
Children of Obedience — Be Ye Holy — January 20, 2008*

We are reading 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 11.

"Searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

"Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

The Spirit of Christ in the Prophets — A Distinct Operation

Verse 11 speaks of the Spirit of Christ which was in them — the Old Testament prophets. This should not be read as the same thing as the indwelling of the believer in the present dispensation. Verse 12 makes the distinction explicit: these things are now reported to you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is a line of demarcation. Before Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ was in

the prophets in the sense of causing them to prophesy — moving them to utter what God had given them to speak. After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is sent down from heaven to dwell in and seal all believers, forming one body.

The same distinction applies to Israel's future. God will put His Spirit in them to cause them to walk in His statutes (Ezekiel 36:27). That operation — the Spirit in them in connection with enabling obedience to the law of God — is distinct from the sealing of the believer now. Under the new covenant for Israel, the law will be written in their hearts and they will walk in God's statutes. That is not what is true of the Christian. For the Christian, it is not the law that is written in the heart — it is Christ. And Christian obedience is the obedience of Christ (verse 2), governed by the law of Christ and the rule of the new creation (Galatians 6). These distinctions matter, and blurring them leads directly into the error of placing the Christian under the Ten Commandments as a rule of life.

The Sufferings and the Glory — the Mystery in Between

The prophets searched into the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. Both were there in the prophetic word: Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 speak of the sufferings; the kingdom Psalms and the later prophets speak of the glory. What the prophets could see was the suffering Servant and the reigning King — with an interval between them. Psalm 110 establishes that interval: sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. There was a period when the Son would be at God's right hand, awaiting the moment for His enemies to be made the footstool. What filled that interval, the prophets did not know.

Hosea spoke of two days, and on the third day He would raise them up — not literal days but epochs; and indeed an epoch lies between the suffering and the glory. The mystery of the church fills that interval. It was hidden from ages and generations (Colossians 1:26), kept in silence (Romans 16:25–26). If we accept those statements at face value, we cannot then say the prophets were partially

aware of it. The mystery was fully hidden. What takes place in the interval between the sufferings and the glories is not a subject of Old Testament prophecy. When the mystery is completed and the church is taken home, the prophetic clock resumes, the last week of Daniel opens, and the events the prophets described unfold.

It was revealed to the prophets that not unto themselves but unto us they did minister. They knew, in some measure, that what they wrote was for those who would come after. Daniel was told to seal things until the latter times. But they did not know who those persons would be, or the character of the blessing that would come. The grace that has come to these Jewish believers through the gospel is something that anticipates and elevates what the prophets foresaw — believers enjoying now, by anticipation, the blessings that are to come in their fullness in the kingdom, and enjoying them in a still higher way by virtue of their union with Christ.

Gird Up the Loins of Your Mind — the Aorist Tense

Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end. Darby renders the first phrase having girded up the loins of your mind, treating it as an aorist — an action that is complete in itself, settled. The exhortation assumes a condition that is to be established once and thoroughly: the mind gathered in, not loose or scattered, not wandering toward the world or distracted by lesser things. Having established that, then: be sober. And then: hope with perfect steadfastness.

The aorist matters throughout this passage. In verse 15, be ye holy — the tense is again aorist: not be approaching holiness, not be working toward it as an asymptotic goal, but be in that state as a settled matter. It is not a striving after something. It is an action complete in itself. This comports with verse 13's having girded up — the whole posture is one of a settled, established orientation, from

which sobriety and steadfast hope naturally flow.

And hope to the end — Darby has hope with perfect steadfastness. Not a hope that flags or is subject to revision when the trials press heavily. A hope unwearied and unflinching, going straight forward. And what is the object? The grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Not earned, not merited, not the result of qualifying — brought. Divine action. Grace. The sovereignty of God in bringing His own to the fullness of what He has appointed for them.

Children of Obedience — Not the Former Lusts

As obedient children — Darby has children of obedience, which captures the Greek construction better. The obedience is not something these children produce; it is what they are. In Ephesians 2:2–3 the corresponding expression is sons of disobedience — persons fully matured in it, formed by it. Here, children of obedience are those whose new nature is characterized by submission to God.

Not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. For Jewish readers, this carries particular weight. They had had the law, the prophets, the oracles of God. And yet they had their former lusts even so. The Lord's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees was total — leaven, whitewashed tombs, devouring widows' houses. They were sticklers for certain kinds of law-keeping while completely out of the spirit of it. The ignorance Peter refers to is not merely intellectual lack of information — it is the moral darkness of those who have not yet come to the knowledge of the truth in Christ, whatever their former religious standing.

The true light has come into the world and gives light to every man — that is, by the very nature of His coming, light has been cast on the true state of every person in the world. His coming exposed what was always there in the human heart. Those who love darkness rather than light demonstrate by their choice

what the light revealed about them.

Be Ye Holy — the Meaning of Holiness

As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy. The word for is significant here — not as. Not in the sense of: copy the pattern. But for: because He is holy. He is holy; therefore be holy. The holiness of God is not simply a standard to imitate — it is the nature of the one who has called us, and since He has called us and we belong to Him, His character is to be expressed in those who are His.

Darby's footnote on the meaning of the word holy is instructive: when applied to God, it designates Him as knowing good and evil perfectly and absolutely willing good and no evil. When applied to men, it designates them as separated — set apart to God from evil and from common use. The corresponding verb is to sanctify, and the word as a substantive is the ordinary word for saints. So holiness here is not primarily about external behaviour, important as that is. It is about an internal reality — the intrinsic quality of what God is, and the separation to Him that marks those who belong to Him.

The Holy Spirit is the power of the new nature's walk. The new nature itself does not have power — it is a nature, not an engine. The Holy Spirit is the energy by which what the new nature wants is made actual in the life. So the call to be holy is not an exhortation to strain and strive, but to be, in the settled aorist sense — to be in the state that corresponds to what we are in Christ, by the power of the Spirit who indwells us.

1 Peter and 2 Peter — Government in Two Directions

The contrast between the two epistles of Peter is sharp. In the first, the subject is the government of God in support of His people in the wilderness journey: the

precious things, the inheritance, the living hope, the sustaining grace, the holiness to which they are called. The tone is positive, encouraging, concerned with the saints' wellbeing in adverse conditions. In the second, the subject is the government of God against the world: corrupt teachers, false prophets, the coming judgment on the ungodly, the day of the Lord consuming the present order. That shift of emphasis is so striking that even some of the ancient writers doubted both epistles had the same author.

But the same author wrote both, and the unifying principle is the government of God — exercised in one direction for the saints, and in the other against a world that has refused the truth. The second epistle develops the coming of the Lord Jesus in power and great glory — as was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration (2 Peter 1:16–18) — and that coming will be the instrument of judgment on the transgressors. The first epistle presents the same appearing as the goal of the saints' hope. Same event, two sides: for the saints it is the culmination of their journey; for the world it is the stroke of judgment.

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— for I am holy.*