

Precious Doctrines of Christ

I Peter 3:18

“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.”

In the previous section, verses 13 through 17, Peter instructed us on what to do when we suffer for righteousness' sake. In verse 18 and following, Peter lifts up Christ as an argument for patience under suffering. This morning I want us to focus on just verse 18, because this verse teaches us so much about Jesus Christ and His work on our behalf. As we study these precious doctrines of Christ this morning remember, Peter is lifting up Christ as an argument for patience under suffering. As we study who Christ is and what He has done on our behalf, we are encouraged and equipped to live for God.

I. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins.”

Jesus suffered. This is not the first time Peter has reminded us of Christ's suffering. In I Peter 2:21 Peter uses nearly identical wording as he points to Christ as the perfect example of patiently enduring wrongful suffering. There he wrote: “Christ also suffered for us.”

Peter again mentions Christ's suffering in I Peter 4:1, "Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh." Again and again Peter reminds us that Christ's suffered. He suffered for us. He suffered for sins.

Consider the nature and extent of Christ's suffering. Often when we think of Christ's suffering, we think of the terrible physical pain He endured on the cross. He did face terrible physical suffering on the cross, but the suffering of Christ encompasses far more than just the physical pain of the cross.

He suffered throughout His life. Jesus matured as a man through suffering. Hebrews 5:8 says, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

Jesus suffered temptation. Mark 1:13 tells us that Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness tempted of Satan. You and I have never faced such strong temptation. Jesus suffered Satan's strongest assaults 40 days.

Jesus suffered tremendous opposition from the religious leaders of Israel. He suffered their rejection, their ridicule, and their wrath.

He experienced suffering and grief at the death of loved ones. John chapter 11 records Christ's emotional response to the death of His friend Lazarus. John 11:35 says, "Jesus wept." This wasn't a few silent tears. This was weeping that came from a broken heart. We know because the people who were there and saw Jesus weep said, "Behold how he loved him!" (John 11:36). There is no question

that Jesus suffered the same pain and grief that we feel at the loss of a dear friend or family member.

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

Jesus suffered the cross. There was the physical suffering. Crucifixion is a terrible way to die. Each breath for a crucified man comes with excruciating pain as he must push against the nail driven through his feet in order to draw breath into his lungs. When the pain can no longer be endured, he suffocates. However, the cross held more than just physical pain for our Lord.

He suffered the pain of bearing the guilt of our sin. We understand the burden of guilt that sin brings. It weighs upon us. It is tangible. We can feel it. The Psalmist cried out in Psalm 38:4, "For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me." Upon the cross Christ suffered as He bore the guilt for our sin.

On the cross, Christ suffered abandonment. Jesus had to endure the suffering of the cross alone. There was no one who could join Jesus in suffering for our sins. No one could take a portion of this terrible burden.

He suffered loss of fellowship and comfort from man. When Jesus was taken in the garden His disciples scattered in fear. We know that Peter followed at a distance for a while, but he ultimately denied Christ 3 times. Some other friends

and followers of Jesus were present at the crucifixion. But most of His followers, even His closest friends and disciples, abandoned Him at the very end.

Far greater than the loss of fellowship and comfort from man, was Christ's loss of fellowship and comfort from God the Father. In Matthew 27:46 Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" As Jesus hung upon the cross, He bore the weight of our sin alone.

He suffered the wrath of God. The holiness of God demands that sin be punished. God does not "forgive and forget." He cannot. For God to forgive us, someone else must pay the price for our sin. Jesus Christ paid that price. He suffered the wrath of God for our sins. Jesus is the "propitiation," the perfect satisfaction, for our sins (I John 2:2).

Peter reminds us three times in this epistle that "Christ suffered." Keep this precious truth fresh in your mind and near to your heart: "Christ suffered." There is even more to be gleaned from the first part of verse 18.

We are told Christ suffered for "sins." Jesus didn't suffer to pay man's debt to Satan. This view is called the "Ransom to Satan Theory." This view was held by an early theologian named Origen. A more modern example of someone who taught this false view of Christ's sacrifice is C. S. Lewis. His book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, contains an allegory of Christ's death on the cross. In that allegory C. S. Lewis teaches that the messiah died to pay man's debt to Satan.

This simply does not line up with what the Bible teaches. Satan has no right to make demands of God. Nowhere in the Bible are we told that we owe a debt to Satan for our sin. Rather, we are told over and over again that it is God who requires a payment for our sins. Jesus didn't suffer to pay a ransom to Satan.

Jesus didn't suffer to influence us to love God. This is called the "Moral Influence Theory." People who believe this teach that Christ's death was simply a way in which God showed how much He loves us by identifying with us in suffering, even to the point of death. Christ didn't die for our sin. He died to influence us to love God. It is through love for God that we are forgiven. This teaching does not line up with what the Word of God teaches. Jesus didn't suffer merely to influence us to love God.

Jesus didn't suffer to give us an example of a perfect life. This is called the "Example Theory." The founder of the Unitarianism began to teach this in the late 1500s. People who believe this teach that Christ's death was merely an example for us to follow. Christ's death merely shows us how we should trust and obey God, even if that trust and obedience leads to a terrible death. This view is supported with verses like I Peter 2:21, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."

It is true that Christ provides an example for us, even in His death. However, this is not a complete explanation of the atonement. Jesus didn't suffer merely to give us an example to follow.

Jesus didn't suffer as an illustration of God's just demands. This is called the "Governmental Theory." It was first taught by a Dutch theologian in the early 1600s. People who believe this teach that because God is omnipotent, he could have set aside the requirement of payment for sin. God could have simply forgiven sin without anyone paying the penalty for sin. Christ died merely to demonstrate that God's laws had been broken and that God, as a moral lawgiver, required some kind of penalty. God had already decided to forgive man's sin. Christ only died to demonstrate that God is just.

This view discounts and ignores the Scriptures, like our text this morning, that teach Christ died as an actual payment for our sins. Jesus didn't suffer as an illustration of God's just demands.¹

Jesus suffered for sins. Only God's righteousness could satisfy God's wrath. God the Son volunteered to pay the price God the Father demanded. He paid that price. He actually came and suffered and paid the price for sins. If anyone teaches that Jesus died for some other reason, they are teaching a false gospel. "For Christ also hath once suffered *for sins*."

Note also, this verse doesn't teach that Jesus died for "sin," but "sins." Jesus did not suffer generally for "sin." Rather, He suffered particularly for "sins." Jesus didn't die to make salvation a general possibility. He died to make salvation a

¹ For a more information on these different theories of atonement see Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, p. 581-582.

particular reality. If you have trusted in Christ for salvation, every single one of your sins, past, present, and future, have been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. He suffered for “sins.”

The first part of verse 18 also teaches us that He suffered once. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins.” Christ’s one sacrifice upon the cross was sufficient. He does not need to be offered up over and over and over again. Jesus does not need to be present in our communion elements as an “unbloody sacrifice,” as the Catholic church teaches, for us to have our sins forgiven and attain closer communion with God. Jesus suffered once, and once was sufficient. Communion doesn’t repeat this sacrifice. Communion doesn’t bring a literal sacrifice before God over and over again. Communion isn’t to remind God of Christ’s sacrifice, but to remind us. Jesus said, “This do . . . in remembrance of me” (I Corinthians 11:25). He suffered once, and once is enough. We don’t recreate that sacrifice with communion, we remember that sacrifice.

In Christ, none need to suffer again. If you are in Christ, if you have turned from your sin and cried out to God for salvation, your sins have been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Not just some or most of your sins or just the really bad sins you couldn’t pay for on your own, but all your sins. Jesus suffered once for all your sin.

There are some who teach that Christians will have to suffer a time in purgatory before they are pure enough to enter heaven. The Catechism of the

Catholic Church defines purgatory as a "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified"² Friend, if you die imperfectly purified, it means you have died apart from the one sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ. When you become a Christian, you receive Christ's imputed righteousness. You will never be called upon to suffer as payment to God for your sins. Christ suffered *once*.

So far we have looked at just the first part of verse 18: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins." Christ suffered. He suffered for sins. He suffered once. These precious doctrines of Christ provide the foundations of the faith that can patiently endure unjust suffering.

II. "The just for the unjust."

He who committed no sin suffered for sinners. So many critics of the Bible deplore the justice of God. People say things like, "If God is good, how can He allow so much evil?" Man brings suffering upon himself because of sin; but man, in his arrogance, accuses God of injustice.

If you want to see injustice, true injustice, look at the cross of Christ. Jesus Christ was perfectly just. He was perfectly righteous. He had never sinned. He

²<https://www.catholic.com/tract/purgatory>

lived a perfect life before God the Father. He gave His life for sinners like you and me.

We were unjust. We had broken God's laws. Every facet of our existence was marred by sin. We were under the just and holy wrath of God. Jesus took our sin and gave us His righteousness. Romans 5:8 says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The just gave Himself for the unjust.

Peter lifts up these precious doctrines of Christ as an argument for patience under suffering. How will this truth help us patiently endure unjust suffering? In the trials of life, in the storms that come, when the righteous suffer, when we are tempted to think that no one has endured the pain and suffering and injustice that we have endured, remember: Jesus gave Himself for us, the just for the unjust. May our hearts be humbled when we consider this precious doctrine of Christ.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." Verse 18 then says, "That he might bring us to God."

III. "That he might bring us to God."

How can people reach God? This is the question that every belief system tries to answer. Some teach that through offerings and sacrifices man can reach god. Some teach that through good works man can reach god. Some teach that god

is all and in all, therefore, becoming one with all is how you “reach god.” Even the atheists answer this question. They say God doesn’t exist, so there is no need to reach Him.

Christianity is unique. Christianity teaches that man cannot reach God. Man is insufficient to reach God.

We cannot bring ourselves to God. Our good works are insufficient to reach Him. We cannot find God by striving after Him. Different methods of striving after God are ever popular. Different brands of pseudo-Christianity have offered all sorts of different ways to strive after God. Works that can be done. Penance that can be paid. Prayers that can be prayed. But none of these things are sufficient to bridge the gap between God and man. They fail on a cosmic scale. We cannot climb or run or walk or crawl to God.

There is only one way for man to reach God: through Jesus Christ. We must realize that we cannot reach God on our own. We must rest upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. We can’t move ourselves to God, we must be moved. We can’t bring ourselves to God, we must be brought. It is Jesus who brings man to God.

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” Jesus is not a way, a truth, and a life. He is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no other way to the Father, but through the Son, Jesus Christ.

IV. “Being put to death in the flesh.”

The first thing we see here is Christ’s incarnation. For Christ to have died in the flesh, He must have lived in the flesh. Jesus had a human body, just like you and me. He was born as a baby and grew into a man (Luke 2:52). He felt tired (John 4:6), and thirsty (John 19:28), and hungry (Matthew 4:2).

Jesus had a human mind. Luke 2:52 tells us that as Jesus grew from a boy into a man he “increased in wisdom.” In Mark 13:32 Jesus said that He didn't know the day or hour that He would return, but only God the Father knew.

Jesus also had a human emotions. We are told in the Gospels that Jesus sorrowed and marveled and cried. Jesus didn’t merely “appear” as a human. He was truly incarnate: God in man.

Christ’s incarnation is a foundational doctrine of Christianity. So much of Christ’s ministry on our behalf is rooted and grounded in this precious doctrine of Christ’s incarnation. Christ represented us, as a man, in obedience to God. He stood in as a substitute sacrifice for us. He is the mediator between God and man. God became a man, and He died.

Christ actually died. He didn’t merely faint or go into a coma. He didn’t separate His deity from His flesh as the Gnostics taught. The crucifixion isn’t symbolism of hyperbole. This actually happened: Christ died in the flesh.

Here we have testimony from the apostle Peter himself. A man who was there. He saw these things happen. He walked with Jesus while He was on this earth. He assures us: Christ died.

How much was our Savior willing to suffer for us? He was willing to become man and die in our place. He submitted Himself to suffering, and humbled Himself even to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8). In light of what Christ suffered for us, what are we willing to suffer for Him?

“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.” Jesus came as a man and died on the cross.

V. “But quickened by the Spirit.”

If Christ died, and that was the end of the story, we should pack up and go home. If Christ stayed dead, then none of this matters. Christ’s suffering, Christ’s righteousness, Christ’s ministry, and even Christ’s death are vanity without the resurrection. Without the resurrection, these precious doctrines mean nothing.

Christ’s resurrection is a vital Christian doctrine. Christ’s resurrection proved His deity. God cannot be killed by men. Jesus said in John 10:18 that He had the power to lay His life down and take it up again. The resurrection is the proof of Christ’s deity.

Christ's resurrection proved God was satisfied with His sacrifice. If Christ's sacrifice upon the cross was insufficient, He would have died in sin, our sins. Had He died in sin, He could not have raised again. But as Christ drew his last breath upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30). How do we know? How do we know Jesus finished the redemptive work God the Father sent him to accomplish? We know because He rose from the dead.

Christ's resurrection gives us hope. The death that surrounds us in this fallen world is not natural. Death is a result of sin. When Jesus rose from the dead, He showed that he had broken the power of sin. Now we can rejoice with the apostle Paul and say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (I Corinthians 15:55).

Christ's resurrection empowers us to live for the glory of God. Why is Peter teaching us or reminding us of all these precious doctrines of Christ? The context is suffering: Suffering injustice, suffering for righteousness sake.

Because of the resurrection, we know that our suffering for the Lord is not in vain. We may be called upon to endure terrible trouble and trials for a season, but we have hope. That hope is grounded upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He was "quickenened by the Spirit."

This morning we have looked at just one verse from I Peter. I Peter 3:18, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins.” He suffered. He suffered once. He suffered for sins.

“The just for the unjust.” May our hearts be humbled when we consider that He gave Himself for us.

“That he might bring us to God.” There is only one way man can reach God the Father: through God the Son, Jesus Christ.

“Being put to death in the flesh.” Jesus came as a man and died upon the cross.

“But quickened by the Spirit.” Death had no power over Him. He rose from the grave.

When the waves of life tower over you, do not be tossed to and fro like a ship without an anchor. Ground yourself upon these precious doctrines of Christ and stand unshaken by the grace of God.