

Dealing With My Suffering At the Cross

1 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:

Dealing with suffering in the life of a believer is a common theme in the writings of the inspired apostles. Paul says all trials are common to man in 1 Cor. 10:13. The Lord will, at the same time that we suffer trials or temptations, make a way of deliverance for His people. He will save us from being entirely overcome by them.

Furthermore, Paul writes in Romans 8:28 that even the worst suffering we experience in this life is working out for our good.

The Apostle Peter has a lot to say on the subject of suffering as well. We read in **1 Peter 4:12**, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.”

Although Peter's focus is on the persecution that comes because of our faith in and identification with Jesus Christ, Peter's use of the expression "fiery ordeal" in 1 Peter 4:12 could refer to any type of trouble.

In both the New Testament and the Greek Old Testament, the word translated "fiery" is used for a furnace. In the Old Testament it referred to a smelting furnace in which metal was melted down to be purged of foreign elements.

Psalm 66:10 says, "For Thou hast tried us, O God; Thou hast refined us as silver is refined."

Here in 1 Peter, therefore, fiery ordeal is symbolic of the affliction that God designs "for your testing"—for your purification.

Scripture teaches that believers will suffer in this world. Peter addresses the very important question, not *why* we suffer but *how* do we deal with our suffering? Dealing with our suffering effects not just us. It can effect how we relate to others and how we relate to the Lord.

In I Peter 3 we read of brethren in the church who were going through tremendous suffering. We read in verses 14-18,

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. 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.

Peter is encouraging his readers in their sufferings which they incurred by the doing of good, for Christ's example made it clear to them that they also would receive blessing and reward for suffering when doing good.

Peter is saying in essence, *“Yes you are suffering but Christ suffered also. So don't lose hope. Let the truth that follows about the suffering of Christ serve to encourage you.”*

Therefore, we, as God's people must deal with our sufferings in light of Christ's sufferings, and the sufferings of Christ are seen most definitely at the Cross where He died for the sins of his people. The title of my message is, **Dealing with my suffering at the Cross**. We must learn to deal with our trials and tests by going to Calvary where our Savior died for His people. Let us consider first.

1. Dealing with my suffering at the Cross stirs me to patient endurance.

1 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:

For means because, since. **For** shows us that Peter is beginning to explain why it is sometimes God's will for us to suffer for doing what is right . He wants to remind them not to be surprised nor discouraged by suffering. Peter offers encouragement to his suffering readers because any suffering they might endure for Christ pales in comparison to His glorious suffering in our place at the Cross.

Peter is saying, “Go to the Cross with your burdens, and you will see just how heavy Christ’s burdens were.”

Christ dealt with his sufferings in patient endurance.

Turn with me to Luke 21:19. We read the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, “In your patience possess ye your souls.”

Christ had just been telling his followers that they must expect tribulations as the result of being his disciples during the present time when sin abounds, when Satan is the ‘prince of this world’.

They must expect opposition from various quarters; but he assured them that, nevertheless, they would be fully under Divine care and protection even though persecutions would be permitted to reach and to affect them.

Then followed the words, “In your patience [patient endurance, cheerful constancy] possess ye your souls.”

Are you possessing your soul? Are you patiently enduring?

A Christians writer observes, “So implicit should be our faith in our Father’s love and care that all these persecutions will be recognized and rejoiced in as the agencies of his providence in chiseling, shaping and polishing us as living stones for the glorious temple which he is constructing, and which is now so soon to be set up.”

Viewing our trials from this standpoint, we can, indeed, rejoice and can possess our souls, our lives, even amid tribulations, with cheerful endurance. Yea, we may realize that the soul cannot be injured by the persecutions of the flesh.

The Cross puts our suffering in perspective to Christ’s suffering. He who was perfect Righteousness, willingly suffered for totally unrighteous men.

Obviously, believers can never suffer the way Christ did (for His was redemptive suffering), but we can suffer for righteousness because He suffered and brought us into the kingdom of light which automatically puts the believer in contact with the kingdom of darkness.

Peter's intent in this section is to help believers **arm** themselves (1Pe 4:1-note) with the faith to suffer for the sake of Christ and His kingdom.

Many of those in evangelical churches in North America do not realize that suffering is the norm for believers in many (probably most) places of the world.

Christianity in North America is the exception not the rule.

For example, I just read a story of evangelical missionaries who entered Cambodia in the 1920's but were expelled in 1965 at which time there were by best estimates only about 600 believers.

However from 1965-1975 civil war ravaged Cambodia and yet during that time the Christian population soared to an estimated 90,000, clearly indicative of the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to spread and convert the lost.

It was an amazing work of God. But when cruel leaders took control and unleashed their maniacal fury on the nation, most of the believers in Christ were either martyred or fled the country. Surely the truths of Peter's first epistle helped believers in Cambodia arm themselves for suffering even as their Lord suffered.

Our ability and strength as God's people to patiently endure should increase as we progress in the narrow way. We should grow "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." But we cannot possibly develop this essential trait of character without trials—experiences intended to call for the exercise of cheerful endurance. So, let us not think it strange if we are called upon to pass through protracted trials which prepare us for a place in the kingdom.

James draws our attention to the importance of patient endurance. He says, "The trying of your faith worketh patience." (James 1:3) That is to say, if our faith stands the trial, it will work out in our conduct this patient endurance.

We must "run with patience [cheerful endurance] the race set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

Martin Lloyd Jones writes, “Why is the Christian to rejoice when facing persecution and trials, and how is it possible for him to do so? Here we come to the heart of the matter. Obviously the Christian is not to rejoice at the mere fact of suffering. That is always something which is to be regretted. Yet you will find as you read Christian biographies that certain saints have faced that temptation very definitely. They have rejoiced wrongly in their persecution for its own sake. Now that, surely, was the spirit of the Pharisees, and is something which we should never do. If we rejoice in the persecution in and of itself, If we say, "Ah, well; I rejoice and am exceeding glad that I am so much better than those other people, and that is why they are persecuting me," immediately we become Pharisees. Persecution is something that the Christian should always regret; it should be to him a source of great grief that men and women, because of sin, and because they are so dominated by Satan, should behave in such an inhuman and devilish manner. The Christian is, in a sense, one who must feel his heart breaking at the effect of sin in others that makes them do this. So he never rejoices in the fact of persecution as such.”

Dealing with my suffering at the Cross stirs me to patient endurance.

2. Dealing with my suffering at the Cross reminds me that Christ suffered for my sins.

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:

The word **sins** conveys the idea of missing the mark as when hunting with a bow and arrow; missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose.

Once means of perpetual validity, not requiring repetition.

Hebrews 7:27, “Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.”

Peter refers them to the example of Christ, the highest instance that ever was, or ever will be, both of well-doing, and of suffering on account of it. The expression, "hath once suffered," in the New Testament, means once for all; once, in the sense that it is not to occur again.

That is why the Roman Catholic Mass is a blasphemy because it continues to sacrifice Jesus Christ over and over again.

The word **just** means that which is in accordance with high standards of rectitude. It is that which is in right relation to another and so in reference to persons defines the one who is morally and ethically righteous, upright or just. Jesus Christ is just.

Unjust means falling short of the righteousness required by divine laws. Sinners are unjust. We are sinners, therefore we are unjust.

A commentator writes, "The just for the unjust" I can understand. But the "just dying for the just" would be a double injustice—an injustice that the just should be punished at all, and another injustice that the just should be punished for them. Oh, no!

Spurgeon writes, “No soul ever ate a morsel more dainty than this one—**substitution**. I do think that this is the grandest truth in heaven and earth—Jesus Christ the **just** one died for the **unjust**, that He might bring us to God. It is meat to my soul. I can feed on it every day, and all the day.”

The design of the apostle in this reference to the sufferings of Christ, is evidently to remind them that he suffered as an innocent being, and not for any wrong-doing, and to encourage and comfort them in their sufferings by his example.

The reference to his sufferings leads him (1Pe 2:18-22) into a statement of the various ways in which Christ suffered, and of his ultimate triumph.

By Christ example in his sufferings, and by his final triumph, the apostle would encourage those whom he addressed to bear with patience the sorrows to which their faith exposed them.

That he might bring us to God. That his death might be the means of reconciling sinners to God. It is through that death that mercy is proclaimed to the guilty.

It is by that alone that God can be reconciled to men; and the fact that the Son of God loved men, and gave himself a sacrifice for them, enduring such bitter sorrows, is the most powerful appeal which can be made to mankind to return to God.

There is no appeal which can be made to us more powerful than one drawn from the fact that another suffers on our account.

We could resist the argument which a father, a mother, or a sister would use to reclaim us from a course of sin; but if we perceive that our conduct involves them in suffering, that fact has a power over us which no mere argument could have.

To **bring us to God** was Christ's mission
For even the Son of Man did not come to be served,
but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
(Mk 10:45).

Jesus was always a man on the Mission, declaring to His disciples who were worried about physical food.. My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. (Jn 4:34).

Later just before His suffering and crucifixion Christ once again reaffirmed His mission in His prayer to His Father declaring...

I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. (John 17:4)

The divine tearing of the temple veil from top to bottom symbolically demonstrated the reality that He had opened the way to God. Matthew recorded this momentous event writing that just as Jesus cried out and yielded up His Spirit...behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split (Mt 27:51).

Dealing with my suffering at the Cross reminds me that Christ suffered for my sins.

3. Dealing with my suffering at the Cross encourages me to a lively hope.

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:**

Spurgeon...

“One thing I know: Christ thinks more of our sins than he does of our righteousness, for He gave himself for our sins. I never heard that he gave Himself for our righteousness.”

If Christ died, it must be because there was a penalty to be paid for sin committed. Hence he must have died for those who had committed the sin.

Put to death means to kill or cause to be put to death and leaves no doubt that on the Cross Jesus' physical life ceased. The passive voice (speaks of action that comes to the subject from an outside source) indicates the total culpability of His executioners and stresses what man did to Him.

Flesh (4561) (sarx) refers to Jesus' physical body, His "flesh and blood" body.

In His flesh points out that He was no docetic phantom (Docetists deny that the incarnation and the true human life of Christ ever took place) Who only appeared to have a human body, as "flesh" refers to the humanity Christ assumed at the incarnation (Jn 1:14, 1Ti 3:16).

In the spirit is a reference to Jesus' eternal inner person. Christ's eternal spirit has always been alive, although His earthly body was then dead; but three days later His body was resurrected in a transformed and eternal state.

Jesus Christ was victorious over sin, Satan, and death at the Cross. The Cross reminds us that our suffering in this life is short. Soon we will pass over to the other side to be with Christ where there will be no more tears or sorrow but only joy unspeakable. May we always live near the Cross of Christ and rejoice in our lively hope.

In conclusion, dealing with our suffering at the Cross stirs us to patient endurance, reminds us that Christ suffered for our sins, and encourages us to a lively hope. Are you living in the light of the Cross? The Lord's Table is an holy ordinance designed to call God's people to live in the reality of the Cross. May the Lord continue to graciously draw near to us this hour.