

Example and Exchange

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Date: 11 October 2015

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together to 1 Peter chapter 3, and in this passage we read together, we're going to look especially at verse 18 this morning. 1 Peter 3 verse 18, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

And these words in the verse particularly, I want to look at certain aspects of the death of Jesus and some of the matters that are related directly to it as taught in Scripture between now and the communion in a few weeks' time, God willing.

As we come here to this particular verse, you can see that it's set in the context of Christ being an example to us. But he moves on from that to go further into the matter.

It's not just an example to us, but he then brings us into certain aspects of his death and what was involved in that. You don't often, I suppose, get spoked wheels now apart from alloy wheels in cars and so on.

But in my younger days when you had a bike, you had a bike with spokes on the wheels and the spokes were quite numerous. And that was obviously something that was very common.

[1 : 24] But the thing is, in a spoked wheel like that, it doesn't matter where on the circumference of the wheel you begin, but you can follow a spoke right through to the very centre point of the wheel.

The centre point being a very important point of the wheel. Because all the spokes eventually, from wherever you are on that wheel, actually lead directly to that centre point.

And you can start on one side or the other, on opposite sides of that wheel. And if you follow the spokes, they still meet in the centre point. Well, what's all that about in relation to our text this morning?

Well, it's something like this. Scripture, actually, for a start, is like that in respect to the person of Jesus Christ. It doesn't mean that Jesus Christ is explicitly mentioned in every verse of the Bible, not even in every chapter of the Bible.

But it does mean that wherever you begin in Scripture, we're of course taking it that we regard Scripture as one, that this is the book, that this is the word of God.

[2 : 28] It's a unity in itself, so that wherever you begin in Scripture, on whatever topic, with whatever topic you begin, there is a line from that to Jesus Christ in some way or other.

And even in terms of salvation that God has provided for us in Christ, it doesn't actually matter which part of salvation you begin with, what bit of salvation, what topic of salvation you begin with, but it will lead you to Christ.

And even if you start at any point of that wheel, if you like, of Revelation, or that wheel of salvation, Christ is at the middle of it. Jesus is there, the very hub of it, and from anywhere on the circumference, you can find a line directly, or at least in directly, to him.

It just shows you, doesn't it, how Christ-centered the Bible is. God's revelation of himself to us in Scripture is Christ-centered. Third, it shows you how Christ-centered salvation is.

Everything to do with salvation is connected to him. He's at the center of it. You can trace from your topic a line directly to him.

[3 : 51] And in this particular context, as we're saying, the matter that Peter is dealing with is suffering, and suffering in a way that is for doing good.

And he draws a sharp distinction between suffering for doing something that's wrong, something that's bad, something that's evil, as he calls it, and suffering for what is good. Now he says, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. Who's he talking about? He's talking about those who are reviling them, those who are slandering them, those who are finding fault with them for being Christians, those who are ridiculing their Christian life, those who are actually against them just because they happen to believe in Christ and to follow Christ.

They were people, as you find at the beginning of the letter, who were scattered abroad, who had suffered persecution to the extent that they had become dispersed. They had to move.

And you find that that's, of course, such a current thing in our own world. I'm not saying that everybody who's moving from there are moving because they're Christians or because they're persecuted Christians.

[5 : 08] But these people were. And Peter's concern in this letter is, how do they regard that? Where does that fit into God's plan?

Where does that fit into the progress of their Christian life? Why is it happening to them? Why does God actually allow that? Why is that part of his plan? And that's where he actually leads them directly to Jesus.

Here he is saying to them, It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil, because Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

So the two things before us in that are, first, Christ is our supreme example of how we should live. In all circumstances. Not just in the circumstances where you suffer because of what you believe.

Christ is our supreme example for our way of life. Secondly, Christ is here as a sufferer for sins. He's not just telling us he's an example for us how to live, but he goes into the matter further and tells us he once suffered for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, and the purpose for that was that he might bring us to God.

[6 : 37] Let's look at him as an example, first of all. Verse 9, you find it there, suffering for doing good, do not repay evil for evil, or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless.

Verses 13 to 14, as we've read them out, even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Verses 16 to 17, you find the same emphasis there.

In other words, what he's reminding them of is that good behavior does not ensure that you will be kept from suffering. Being a Christian does not mean that God takes you and places you above the level of suffering.

And in fact, he says in some cases that that's really what attracts suffering. You go back to chapter 2, where Jesus, again, has used as an example to us.

But in chapter 2 there, verse 12, look at how he puts it there, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

[7 : 47] Or then jump ahead to verse 18 of chapter 2. Servants, be subject to your own masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. You see, he's taking it right into the area of employee-employer relations, particularly there were slaves who were employed by certain people in their households who would employ slaves.

And he says, it's not just that you are required to be subject to your master if they're good to you, even to the unjust.

You're Christians, he says. Your conduct, your way of life, your attitude is very important. How you put up with suffering, how you deal with suffering, how you react to that or don't react to that is going to be important in your witness, he's saying.

For this is a gracious thing when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it when you sin and you're beaten for it, you endure?

But if you do good and suffer for it, you endure. This is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, and then he brings, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps.

[9 : 03] And then he tells us certain things about Jesus. So there you are. That's him mentioning Christ in relation to how we actually respond to and relate to sufferings that come our way because of the fact that we are his.

Because of the fact that we're following him. Because of the fact that we're regarded as his people. And even if he, as he says, even if that is suffering unjustly, it's still important how we actually react to that or don't react to that and respond to that.

Now, of course, maybe these people were asking questions like, why is this actually happening? Why has God's people, why when we've put our trust in the Lord, why when we've come to follow him and he's our master, why hasn't he arranged that things would be better than this for us?

Why have we had to leave our homes? Why have we had to actually depart from all the things that we once had before we were Christians and now we've had to leave all that behind? And these are questions that will constantly be in the mind of people as things get difficult for us or for them as Christians in this world.

But of course, there is a simple answer to it and it's there all through the Bible. Absolutely clear throughout the Bible. There isn't any mystery to this really. It's not just a case that the Christian life is an opposite way of life to the life of those who would find fault with them and even come to lay sufferings or afflictions upon them.

[10 : 41] They're not just opposites. They're actually in conflict. They are opposed the one to the other. And you've only got to look to Jesus himself in the way that he lived in this world.

As we'll see in a minute, Jesus lived a perfect life. He never thought a wrong thought about anyone. He never spoke in the wrong way about anyone.

He never did anything that was wrong. Every single aspect of his life is perfect. And however much people, even like Herod and the authorities of the time when he was coming near his death, near the time of his death, he was put on trial, he was examined, and all of these authorities examined him.

And they examined him as much as they could. They examined him in relation to their own customs, their own laws. They examined him in relation to the law of God, to the requirements of God that he himself lived by.

They could not find fault with him. Herod sent him back to Pilate saying, I cannot find any fault in this man. Nobody ever lived like that since Adam fell.

[11 : 58] But did that mean that Jesus didn't suffer for the way he lived? Of course not. It attracted suffering to him. It attracted opposition.

It attracted ridicule. It attracted even the accusations that he was being led by the devil and not of God at all. So suffering for doing good is part of what is really inbuilt into the life of Christ.

And what Jesus himself really warned his disciples or taught his disciples at least about was to expect that as he had been dealt with, so they would be dealt with as well.

If they have kept my words, they will keep your words. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you. because they are two world views in conflict.

And the Sermon on the Mount is basically that. It's setting out these two points of view as to how to view the world, how to view God, how to view the Christian life, how to view basically everything.

[13 : 04] The one is Christian point of view, the way that God gives us to see it from Christ's perspective, from being in Christ. the other is the opposite.

And these two are in conflict and always will be in conflict. That's part of what lies behind this. And that's where Jesus is our example as the perfect human in actions and responses in his words.

Now, it's important to us that as we see Jesus as an example, it's not just confined to Peter. Philippians chapter 2 has the same sort of thing where Paul in Philippians chapter 2 is actually setting before the Philippians how they need to be of the same mind, how they need to have the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Then he says, have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus. He talks about Christ humbling himself, the Son of God, to become a servant, to give his life in his death on the cross.

[14 : 27] same thing essentially as Peter is talking about here in his letter and here in this passage, Christ is our supreme example.

Now that's not just in relation to suffering and how to respond to suffering, how to actually deal with the issue of suffering or opposition in your life.

The fact is that Christ is your example for every aspect of the Christian life. No, because you don't find everywhere in the Bible verses that specifically say this is how Christ is our example.

But when you look at the life of Jesus Christ and when you realise that Christ's life was perfect, then when you go for example to the book of Psalms and that little Psalm 15, the same thing you find in Psalm 24, O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent?

Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart, who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbour nor takes up a reproach against his friend, in whose isles a vile person is despised but who honours those who fear the Lord.

[15 : 48] He does not take a bribe against the innocent who does these things shall never be moved. Who did that perfectly? Who is the Psalm about? It's about Jesus Christ particularly and then you seek to follow that because that's your supreme example in every aspect of life.

Not just how to deal with difficulties and trials because you're a Christian. Every single aspect of life is taught by the way you see Jesus Christ.

In other words, you can go to the Ten Commandments as the moral code for human beings and not just for Christians and you find in the Ten Commandments all of these things that God has specified we ought to give attention to in our lives.

You shall not do this. You shall not do this. You shall not do this. You shall do this. Every single one of these was kept by Christ. Kept perfectly.

So whenever you look to these commandments and you ask where can I find a life that actually matches this exactly you go to Jesus Christ. You actually see in Him that perfect life in relation to the law of God to the requirements of God.

[17 : 11] He is your supreme example. Then you see we have to be careful because being right with God is not a matter basically or primarily of trying to follow Christ's example.

There is a view of the atonement. There is a view of the death of Christ as an atonement for sin that regards it as merely exemplary. In other words it's there as God setting before us the example of a perfect life and as you look at that perfect life of Christ you are inspired to live the Christian life.

You are inspired to live a life for God. You are inspired in the way that you see the death of Christ and the commitment of Christ and the obedience of Christ. You are inspired to actually follow Him.

You are inspired by that to live a life that's pleasing to God. And that view says that's what the atonement is. Nothing to do with this stuff about substitutionary death and all of that stuff that reformed teaching has insisted on and still insists on.

Well let's test it out. If there's nothing more to the death of Jesus than an example as to how to live I can never be saved.

[18 : 32] Why can I never be saved? Because I can look for the whole of my life and for the whole of eternity on Christ as my example and I can try and reach that level so that I have that ability and that I have that perfection in the presence of God and I will never do it and I know that I will never do it because I can't achieve it.

I can't go through one day without sinning against God however hard I try. I need more than to have Jesus as my example. Supreme example though He is.

Yes He is your supreme example for every aspect of how to live. but I need more than that to be saved. I need something more in the death of Christ than just an example set before me to follow that God has provided for me and of which He says now if you follow that as your example you will reach eventually a level by which you will have my favour and my approval.

That's why Peter you see he goes in to say that He suffered once for sins. He's not just saying He suffered once as an example as to how to live He suffered once for sins is what He says and that brings us to Jesus the sufferer for sins.

He's the supreme example but He's the sufferer for sins. And notice this word once Christ also suffered once for sins.

[20 : 05] Now that might be a bit puzzling to you. How can that be? How can He say He suffered once for sins? When you look back over the description in the Gospels doesn't it say that He suffered more than once?

That He suffered many times? That there were many instances of suffering in His life? Of course there are. But what Peter means is particularly with regard to His death that he mentions being put to death in the flesh.

What he mentions what he means especially is that the once is this unique life and death that He lived and died.

Because the Gospel writers often take the whole span of Christ's time on earth to be just one complete unit if you like. His birth His incarnation that is His life then from that point onwards until it came to the cross and His death and then His resurrection of course and ascension follows that.

But the whole thing is really one unit. It happened only once. None of that is repeatable. And especially His death that He focuses on here.

[21 : 20] Christ also suffered once for sins being put to death. He only died once. He didn't need to die again. He didn't need to go through all that again.

His life as it was leading to the death that He died. Why not? Because it was a complete success. We can put it that way.

Because it was a complete success. It did everything. Or He in His death did everything that God required in order for you and me to be saved.

This was the means that God used. This was the person. This was His own Son that He sent into the world for this specific purpose as we'll see for sins.

And it happened once. And once means accomplishment. Once means fulfillment. Once means that it's all complete in one go.

[22 : 25] Everything that God required was fulfilled perfectly. Everything was answered on God's side. Every need of ours was met.

It's all there. It's once. It's unrepeatable. Not just because it couldn't be repeated, but particularly because it needn't be repeated.

He has done it. He's done it perfectly. He's done it lastingly. There's no need for anything else.

And it's for sins. He suffered once for sins. In other words, the death of Jesus is no mere example, but it's inseparably connected with sin and sins, as he puts it here in the plural.

And that corresponds to other passages in the Bible. Romans chapter 8 verse 3 for example, which talks about us being unable to keep the law of God perfectly.

[23 : 37] Just what we're saying a minute ago. If it's just an example, then it's an example we cannot possibly match. We cannot accomplish righteousness through following the example of Christ ourselves because we're sinners, because we're incapable of keeping the law of God.

But he says what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, that's our sinfulness, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.

Now you don't need to go further for the moment because that's what it's saying. For sins. That's what Romans 8 3 is saying. God sent his son into the world for sin. God was going to deal with sin.

God was going to deal with this great problem that is between us and himself that we cannot remove because we caused it but we can't remove it. We're under his condemnation. We're under his wrath because of sins.

Sins is really the big barrier. And what's going to deal with sins? Your sins, my sins, human sins.

[24 : 45] What's going to deal with sins so that we can be brought back to God? This is what's going to deal with it. The death of Christ, Christ and his death.

He sent him for sins so that we might be brought to God.

In other words, the death of Jesus while it was to do with sins. It wasn't to do with his own sins.

And it is interesting he's emphasizing here the element of suffering. He suffered even if we're taking it that that of course involves his death as he says there. He still wants to major and to focus and to emphasize this matter of his suffering in that.

He suffered for sins. Whose sins did he suffer for? Did he come into the world to suffer for his own sins? No, because he didn't have any sins. So why should there be suffering in his life?

[25 : 50] What is the explanation as to why in the life and the experience of this perfect human being, unflawed in his character, in his mind, in his actions, in his words, in everything about him, why should there be any element of suffering let alone the suffering of the death that he died?

Because he suffered for the sins of others. He made the sins of others, the sins of his people, he made them his own.

That's where our mind breaks down, isn't it? It's not surprising in some ways that people find fault with that kind of theology, even though it's arising directly out of the Bible's teaching.

it doesn't seem right, does it, to us, that you should put somebody's guilt, somebody's sins, onto someone who's innocent, and make him pay for them.

And in ordinary cases that may well be so. But remember this is God providing salvation. salvation. This is God in the sovereignty of his plan and of his will doing something to bring us back to himself.

[27 : 20] And he's saying, I can look out on all of these human beings and none of them and not all of them together can do what I need to be done regarding sin so that they will be saved.

there's only one way to do it and that's to send my son for him to take their nature for him to suffer for sins in their place and for him then to become the means by which they're saved.

And that's why he says here the righteous for the unrighteous. You see he's building up these points about the death of Jesus.

He suffered once for sins. Once for all accomplishment but it was for sins. But they weren't sins of his own though he made them his own which is why it's the righteous for the unrighteous.

Now what does this word for mean? Righteous is obviously the opposite of unrighteous they're complete opposites. He's the righteous one and he suffered once for the sins of the unrighteous.

[28 : 41] But what does it mean that it's the righteous suffering for the unrighteous? Well strictly speaking it really means the word for means to represent someone to act on the behalf of someone.

So what it's really saying in that word itself is that it was the righteous acting for the unrighteous. It was the righteous one acting on behalf of or representing those who are unrighteous.

And some people again would say that's as far as you go with the atonement. It's a representative thing. There's no substitution in it. It's not the righteous in the place of the unrighteous.

But you can't really reach that conclusion because there are other passages of the Bible that use a different word than this word for. You find the same word for in 2 Corinthians 5.21 for example.

He has made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might be made or become the righteous of God in him.

[29 : 53] That's really one of the great verses of the Bible. And it's a great verse for many reasons but amongst them is this that it talks about a great exchange, a transfer.

The transfer of our unrighteousness, our sins to the righteous one and the transfer of his righteousness to us.

See that's what it's saying. God made him who knew no sin, that's Jesus, to be sin for us. That's the opposite. He made him to be sin.

He's a sin offering. He takes the place of those who are sinners to bear what they deserved. Why? So that we sinners might become the righteousness of God in him.

There's the exchange. he took our sin, he took our guilt, he took our place under the wrath of God, under the condemnation of God, under the curse of God.

[31 : 00] And in exchange, we have righteousness instead of sins. what a swap. What an exchange.

What a truth. It's the righteous for the unrighteous. Yes, it's representing them as this word for encapsulates. But when you go into other contexts, you find that it's clearly an exchange and a substitution.

You can trace it, in fact, all the way back in your Bible to the likes of Leviticus, chapter 5 and verse 6 and other similar passages where you find a description of God's regulations regarding sacrifice.

There's the person coming with their animal sacrifice to be sacrificed, to be given to the priests, that the animal will be sacrificed for them. Whatever people's views are of this nowadays, it's immaterial.

That's the regulation that God laid down. But just think what's happening there. The person is coming with their animal. And that animal is being sacrificed instead of the person themselves.

[32 : 14] Death comes to that animal in sacrifice instead of the person whose sins are being dealt with. In other words, it's the exchange, isn't it?

The sin of the person is transferred to the animal who's going to die, figuratively at least, ceremonially. and that's a picture for you of what happened in the death of Christ.

The sin of his people laid upon him, as Isaiah 53 put it, and therefore the visitation of God comes to him for sins.

And we come in him to be righteous. And that's really the purpose, isn't it, here? his death is not simply for sins.

It's also for sinners. Sin is not an abstract thing. It's not something that exists somewhere on a bit of paper without any actual connection to you and I as persons.

[33 : 23] Sin does not have any meaning at all, unless you attach it to a person. It's my sins, my doings, my actions.

And they were transferred to him. He took them to the extent that Christ was regarded as if he had sinned all of these sins that he took to himself.

That's how God viewed him. That's why he was made a curse. That's why you have the kind of death he died on Calvary's cross.

In my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. And why?

Well, so that he might bring us to God. Well, where were we? God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God's sins.

[34 : 31] We were under his condemnation. We were open to everything that our sin deserved. God's We were away from God. This is not just like you might say a mere falling out between different parties.

When we sinned against God, we didn't just fall out to him. We didn't fall out with him. We did fall out with him, but it's not just like you would call a minor dispute.

Ephesians chapter 2 puts it so exactly and so graphically and so pointedly. We were the children of wrath even as others.

Children of wrath. And it's that that Jesus dealt with, that God dealt with in sending his son into the world.

So that we who were children of wrath, who were alienated from God, and children of wrath means that we were regarded as guilty and condemned.

[35 : 40] And as you find judges in court of those who have been accused and found guilty, especially of serious crime, one of the last things you'll hear the judge saying is take him down.

Take him to the cells. take him to imprisonment. That's really the verdict that God, because of our sin and his seriousness against him, that's really where we were, where we are by nature.

We are found guilty, we are condemned, and God has said, take him down. That's why Christ came to take us back up again, to open the prison gates.

And more than that, to clear the verdict and replace it with that of being righteous, that he might bring us to God.

And you do notice that he might bring us to God. God, you can try and come back to God without Christ, but never do it.

[36 : 50] You can try and find some other mechanism by which you come back to God. If it's not in your own efforts, it might be in some other creed, some other way of living your life other than what God commends to us in the gospel.

but it cannot be because this Jesus is the only one who brings us back to God.

He suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, that he would bring us, he would bring us back to God.

The only one who could do it. is the one who has done it. Does that mean you are saved?

Not in and of itself. All this is doing is telling you, this is what God has provided in this person.

[37 : 55] Now you need to make him your own. Because until you make him your own, nothing of what he has done becomes yours personally. you need to receive him, to welcome him, you need to open your heart to him.

Otherwise, all of that remains out of your grasp. But when you have him, when you've taken him, when you've welcomed him, when you've opened your heart to him, when you've given your life into his hands, everything that's his, as God's saviour, becomes yours.

Yours by rights, God's rights. That's why you today and I must have him, must be in him, must receive him, must live for him, must say, without you, Lord, I'm done for.

Let's pray. Lord, our gracious God, we thank you today for the cross, for the death that was died on it. We thank you for the person of your own son.

We thank you for the way in which that is presented to us in your gospel. We bless you for your word that contains such great teaching for us.

[39 : 37] So many things, O Lord, that will draw us to you. So many things that we need to know in order to know where our salvation rests. We pray today that you bless to us your word once again and we ask that what you have done and what remains done and accomplished will be received by us gladly.

So hear us we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.