

First Peter – An Exchange Like No Other

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[0 : 00] We've been working our way through 1 Peter and we're now at verse 18. We can read verse 17 as well. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.

And we'll just focus mostly on the first part of verse 18. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

Now, Peter, as you recall, has been giving direction and comfort and assurance and encouragement to those that he's writing to, in circumstances where they're suffering for what they believe, for their testimony to Christ.

And although he doesn't specify much of that, it's obvious that he is actually directing his thoughts to them in these circumstances. And of course, as we've seen going through these chapters already, the way he does this is to present them, especially with God's truth in Christ, which is really what you and I always need to come back to in any case, because everything at the last focuses on Christ himself.

[1 : 32] And that is so true for our study tonight, as we'll see in verse 18. In verse 17, what he's saying, in reiterating something of what he said earlier, is, for it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

He's been speaking about various types of situations where people find themselves suffering for doing good. What he's saying is there's no benefit and no profit in suffering for something you deserve to suffer for.

What he's talking about is suffering as a Christian, suffering for doing good in the name of Christ, and experiencing suffering in relation to that, from some source or other, in the context in which you're doing that good.

And he's saying it's better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

And then he comes immediately to verse 18, for Christ also suffered for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

In other words, what he's saying in verse 18 is really undergirding or reinforcing what he said in verse 17, where he's saying that it is better for us, more profitable for us to suffer for doing good, obviously, than for doing evil.

[2 : 52] But then he undergirds it by saying, for this is what is true of Christ. This is really how it was with Jesus himself. It's not just that his people are placed into this category by Peter here.

He's saying this is how it was for himself, for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous. What applies in verse 17 to the people of God actually applies in verse 18 in principle to Christ himself.

He was never, of course, in any way doing evil anyway. But for doing good, and doing good in the ultimate sense and in a perfect way, he suffered.

And that's an element in the sufferings of Christ. We've seen him before in chapter 2 as our supreme example of the spirit in which we ought to meet and to persevere under sufferings.

And here he is again, bringing up Jesus himself as one who suffered to undergird what he's saying there about suffering unjustly, but suffering for doing good.

[4 : 01] But there's more to verse 18 than that. Very often you'll find the Bible in the scripture writers, especially Paul and Peter, that they make a point and then they get carried on into something else to enlarge on a point that they've just made.

And that's what's happening. In verse 18, he's not just talking about Christ as an example of suffering for doing good. He then gets led into speaking of him as suffering once for sins and doing so as the righteous for the unrighteous and doing so so that he might bring us to God. In other words, he expands on the sufferings of Jesus so that they are inclusive of his death. The sufferings did not end when he reached the cross.

The sufferings in their intensity, in fact, are the sufferings that he experienced on the cross in his soul in that mysterious cry from the cross regarding his forsakenness by God.

And he's saying that he suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, the just for the unjust, and the purpose of God in that is that he might bring us to God.

[5 : 16] In other words, he's saying that as we are joined by faith to Christ, as we think of union with Christ, and all that that means in the teaching of the New Testament especially, what he's saying here is that as Christ suffered the way he did, and as he was then not only suffered unto death, but was made alive in the Spirit, in other words, that's his resurrection especially, and all that follows on from it that Peter mentions there, as we are joined to him as a sufferer, it's so that we will be something of what he says in verse 9.

Verse 9, remember, is what he says, do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you are called that you may obtain a blessing.

In other words, as he said in chapter 2, this is what was the case with Jesus. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. He was not one who committed any sin.

When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he continued entrusting himself to the one who judges justly. That's to God the Father. That's our supreme example.

That's how we actually endure and go on under suffering. That's the spirit. That's the mindset.

That's when we are joined to him, and he's encouraging us in saying that by saying, join to him as a sufferer.

[6 : 43] It's so that you'll appreciate this. This is how the mindset of the Christian ought to be. But then if you're joined to him in terms of him being a conqueror of death, he didn't just die, he was made alive.

He was resurrected or he rose from the dead. And that's so that it will encourage us to be as you find in verse 14. So that, have no fear of them.

That's those opponents of theirs. Nor be troubled, but in your hearts, sanctify Christ the Lord or as Lord, set him apart as Lord, as we saw last time, in your hearts.

So that's the outline, really, of the argument that he's using. But the two things we want to notice from that tonight, specifically with regard to Christ in his sufferings, is first of all, that it says, Christ suffered once for sins.

And secondly, that Christ suffered once for sins in order to bring us to God. He suffered once for sins.

[7 : 52] And that once is very important. He mentions here being put to death in the flesh. That's in terms of what he came to be by taking our human nature to himself, by joining that to himself, and by continuing as a man as well as divine son of God.

He was put to death. It's not something, in this context, that's focusing on what he himself did. And of course, you have to remember the activity of Jesus in his life as well as in his death, or in his death as well as in his life.

As he died on the cross, he was not dying inactively or passively. He was dying himself, giving himself, and offering himself. It's the activity of Jesus, our high priest.

But he's focusing here on what was done to him. He was put to death. He was taken. He was tried. He was abused. He was mistreated. He was misrepresented.

He was lied about. He was physically abused. And on top of that, you have the forces of evil that were active against him as he was taken to the cross and crucified, and as he hung on the cross.

[9 : 10] Every single aspect of opposition, both worldly opposition and human opposition and also spiritual opposition.

Indeed, Hugh Martin, in his wonderful book on the atonement, somewhere in it, he says something like that these three great powers were conspiring against him, the powers of earth and the powers of hell, and even the powers of God himself.

But his doing outlived and outlasted them all. You see, what he's saying by that is that, yes, all of that was being done to him by these agencies, but he himself overcame.

He actively overcame in his obedience and in the death that he died. But that's taking us a bit beyond this. He's saying he was put to death once. Why does he say once?

Once. Well, it's to contrast, as we read in Hebrews, with the way in which what represented him in the Old Testament was a repetitious offering of sacrifices.

[10:17] It was being done not just on a yearly basis, but more regularly, the sacrifices that were offered daily or weekly, whatever. And they were there as types of representations of Christ.

The high priest came once a year, especially into the Holy of Holies with the blood of atonement, but that had to be repeated every year. And what he's contrasting with that here is that Jesus died once.

Why was it just that he died once? Well, because not only did he fulfill everything in the Old Testament, he fulfilled it perfectly. He fulfilled it by way of his successful death.

As we'll see in a minute, his death was successful in dealing with sin. And because of the success of his death and the acceptance of that work of Christ in his death by God the Father, there is no more need of death anymore, of that death, of that sacrifice, of an offering to God of that kind.

And that once is still important for us. He suffered for sins once. Once.

[11:31] That's something that is important to maintaining in our thoughts and in our presentation of the gospel and our witness the integrity of Christ, the completeness of Christ, the way in which Christ himself in his integrity is seen as acceptable to God in his death.

That's where the Reformers, of course, laid such emphasis on this particular point that Jesus was sacrificed himself once for all. It's not repeated. They oppose the teaching of Roman Catholicism especially, and it's still something that's there to this day in Roman Catholicism.

The idea being that in the Mass there is not just a remembrance of the death of Christ or even a commemoration of the death of Christ. There's in some way a reenactment of it.

It is a bloodless sacrifice, which is by the ability of the priest offered to God. Now that is an assault upon the integrity of Christ, the completeness of his death, the sufficiency of his death, the fact that he died once in his own activity.

It's not dependent on anyone else. He died once. He suffered once this death that he died. Once for sins. He died once for sins.

[12:52] You don't need anything tonight by way of a minister coming to represent you before God even though we seek to pray for you. You don't need somebody like a priest to come and offer something to God on your behalf without which you will not be accepted.

You don't need somebody to come through something like the Lord's Supper to do something that changes the elements of the Lord's Supper so they become literally the body and blood of Christ. Christ. It's not just theologically incompetent but it's also completely unnecessary. He suffered once for sins.

And in your theology it's one of the things that's important that you and I have to protect the integrity of Christ in every possible way and especially when there are major defects that assault that integrity.

And this is what he's saying, he suffered once for sins. And that's the second thing he suffered once for sins. Not just once but once for sins.

[13:57] Of course the death of Jesus as you well know is vitally inseparably connected with sin and sins. Romans chapter 8 is a great example of that where you read that what the law could not do that is secure a release from its own sentence secure righteousness by our obeying it by our compliance with it and by ourselves because of our sinfulness.

What the law could not do God has done and how has he done it? By sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.

He condemned sin in the flesh. He came for sin that's what sent him into the world. That was his purpose in coming into the world. That was the Father's purpose in sending him.

That was his own purpose in willingly coming. It was for sin. The coming of Jesus into the world is meaningless unless you take account of human sin.

Of our sin against God and of the need for that sin to be dealt with. That's what Romans 8.3 says. He didn't just come for sin. He came to condemn sin.

[15:15] To give sin its death sentence. To do away with it and its repercussions and its consequences for his people. And that's what he did.

He actually came for sin and he condemned sin where? Not just at Calvary. Yes, it was at Calvary. It was in that great event of the cross of the death of Christ on the cross.

But God condemned sin more precisely than at Calvary because you have to say he condemned it in his Son, in his flesh, in the incarnate Son of God as he came to die the death of the cross.

As he died that death, that is what God was dealing with. He died, he suffered once for sins being put to death in the flesh.

And that once for sins is the ground of the preaching of the gospel. Well, at least part of it. Because without it there cannot be any prospect of success in preaching the gospel or in witnessing to Christ.

[16 : 29] This is the Christ we witness to. This is the Savior we witness to. This is the transaction we witness to. This is what the gospel is really all about. It's all about him. As the beginning of Romans tells us, it's about the Son of God, the God who sanctified or set Paul apart to be an apostle.

Why did he set him apart? To be a preacher of the gospel. What is the gospel? The gospel concerning his Son. Concerning his Son. Jesus.

You can really just narrow it down to that. It's all about God in Christ dealing with sin.

But you see, sin is not just sin. You mustn't think of it as an abstract. You mustn't think of it as separate from people. Because when God actually sent his Son into the world, when Christ suffered once for sins, it wasn't just for sins in an abstract way as if they have no connection with us, as if it's something that just exists outside of our human condition or our human nature, our human being.

He died for sins that are people's sins. The sins of human beings. Your sins. My sins.

[17 : 54] Because that's what sin is. It is an action in thought or an outward action of human beings.

You see, that's why we have to also hold on to the very, very precious truth that Christ did not merely die for sins or come to condemn sin in the flesh.

He came and died for sinners. For real people. People in need. People who needed his death to redeem them from sin and from the guilt of sin and from the condemnation attached to sin.

This is really all within the Lord. It's not specified in the text. You cannot leave it out. That's what he actually came to do. That's what he accomplished. He suffered once for sins.

What type of thing is sin? It's our sin. It's human sin. It's our transgression against God. It's our rebellion against God. It's our unfaithfulness to God. That's what he dealt with.

[18 : 57] He died for sinners. And you can even be more precise than that. Because if you're saved tonight especially you can actually say with Paul in Galatians that the life you now live you live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

For me personally. He didn't just come for sins. Not even for sins of human beings. You should be able to say as I should be able to say he came for my sins.

He died for my sins. There's nothing more precious in any confession than to be able to say the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

Remember one time a few years back at an assembly time when George Reid who was then the presiding officer in the Scottish Parliament he came to visit the assembly and he gave a very acceptable speech at the assembly and then he asked could he possibly see the disruption painting that famous painting which is over in the Free Church College and he said yes of course that will be fine so I went over with him during a break and of course Bill Anderson who was then caretaker and curator in the college with such expertise of that painting and many other things besides and as we were looking at the painting there George Reid suddenly said you know he said there's an ancestor of mine I can't remember just what it was a great grandfather or something like that actually in this painting somewhere he was part of the disruption movement and quick as a flash Bill Anderson said yes he said that's him now Bill hadn't his vision was very poor but he knew that painting so well he pointed up near the back row of those who were lined up in that painting and he said yes that's him there and he pointed out his face and George Reid was thrilled that there was his ancestor that he could see him picked out his face there he was in that great throng of people that had been painted by D.O. Hill now that's what it is for you tonight as a Christian as a child of God someone saved by Jesus Christ in the whole company of the redeemed that Jesus came to save it's such a precious thing to you isn't it that you can go to that whole company and you can pick out your own face and say yes he died for me he loved me it's not just a company of people without personal without personal attention to the detail of your life and that means that following on from that every single

thing in your life is under his gaze and control and pastoral care because there's a shepherd who knows his sheep he came in his love for his people and in his love for each one of his people he came and died for them and he died for them individually and therefore they can say that's the Lord who's looking after me now and when he died for me

I know that now he's looking after me and no one else can do that but himself the one who loved me and gave himself for me and then he puts it further we can leave it to that point at that he's saying the righteous for the unrighteous now obviously these are opposites whether you use the word righteous or the word just it comes to the same thing the righteous for the unrighteous what he's saying is Jesus the righteous one died for the unrighteous and these are opposites but what is the meaning or the impact of that word for it's the righteous for the unrighteous it could be that he represented them and he did represent them he died on behalf of his people he was representing his people before God but when you take account of other passages in the Bible that speak about the death of Christ as an atoning death a death dealing with sin for example 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21 when you take the context of these other passages into account then you have to include substitution as part of what happened when Jesus died the righteous for the unrighteous even if this verse itself doesn't make it specific with the unity of scripture under the authorship of

[24 : 05] God the Holy Spirit this is what we take from it that he died not just to represent his people before God but to be in their place the death which he died is the death they deserve to die and the death he died for them they will never have to die and the righteousness that is in him as one who died that death becomes their righteousness that is the logic isn't it of the transfer of 2nd Corinthians 5 verse 21 the one who knew no sin who was not in himself a sinner in any respect God has made him to be sin why so that the righteousness of God might be ours that we might become or be made the righteousness of God in him in him that's the transfer that's the logic if you like of the

Old Testament sacrifices as well why did the high priest or even sometimes as in Leviticus chapter 1 somebody coming with their sacrifice for the burnt offering God required that that person would put his hand on the head of the animal coming to be sacrificed then he was the animal was put to death the blood was then used in a ritual why was that what did that signify well it signified a transference of the guilt and therefore of the death that was due to that person as a sinner it was being transferred to another death the death that he deserved to die that was forfeit because of sin the life if you like the life that was forfeit because of sin the death he deserved to die it was transferred and that was a symbol or a representation of what happened on the cross what happens what is true of the death of

Christ the sin of his people is not simply applied to him yes the Lord has laid on him Isaiah 53 the iniquity of us all you have to remember that Jesus willingly took it to himself he's not there against his will he's not there complainingly lo I have come to do your will oh my God and he took delight in it in fulfilling the will of the father though it meant this death for him so clearly it's an exchange the righteous for the unrighteous the death we deserve as sinners which is the death of hell the damnation of hell you must never confine the death of

Jesus to a physical thing there is that in it but the death of hell the condemnation the damnation of hell is what he died in the mystery of that moment of those hours of that transaction that's why he's such a magnificent savior because he died once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous then secondly there's our second main point and we must move on he did so so that we might be that he might bring us to God and notice what this is saying that he might bring us to God it's by what he did that we are brought to God and this is dealing really I think more with the idea of being separate from God we're away from God we're alienated from God that's one of the results of our sin against God and that's what God dealt with in the death of

Christ through the obedience of Christ he dealt with our alienation he died so that he might bring us to God that he might actually restore that broken relationship which only by this death could be restored and that alienation begins at the very moment we sinned against him in the garden of Eden because God drove out the man from the garden he didn't say in a kindly way to him now please will you leave these premises they no longer belong to you he drove him out it's the Lord's judgment it's the Lord dealing with sin and with the sinner who has sinned he drove him out and there's no way back as it was previously but he has made a new and living way as

[29 : 14] Hebrews put it so that we come in Christ to be restored to a relationship with God of friendship of acceptance companionship of communion salvation indeed for us and that alienation

is what Paul deals with in many of his passages Colossians chapter 1 is just one of them I can read this to you chapter 1 verses 21 to 22 where he speaks there about God for you he said you were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death that's Christ's death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him in other words we've come from being alienated and the separation that sin has caused what has God done what has Jesus done he's died the death by which we are brought back to God that doesn't mean it's automatic that now everybody is in a right relationship with God you have to then take account of what the Bible speaks of and teaches us about repentance about turning back to God about accepting Christ about putting your faith and trust in Christ all of that is important but this is the basis on which all of that is set the death of Christ that he might bring us to God he took our sin and he took our death for our readmission into friendship with God now two points in conclusion from all of that what are we going to conclude of course he's dealing with this in a way that as we said at the beginning reinforces or undergirds his encouragement to go on following the Lord even through opposition and through difficulty but let me just put two points in relation to this text itself as we've looked at it tonight here's something that speaks to you if you are yet unsaved if you're not yet saved if you're not in

Christ if you haven't accepted Christ if you haven't repented and turned to God whatever definitions you give to being unsaved here's a text here's a verse here's a teaching as we've gone into it briefly that speaks to you tonight and it's really saying to you what is your reason for being unsaved or for remaining unsaved it certainly can't be this it cannot be that Christ has not done enough for you it cannot be that that is at all a reason and of course you know that that's no reason a reason is not in Christ or in God or out with yourself it's in your own heart it's in your will it's in your resistance it's in your sinfulness now Christ has died once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to

God and are you still outside of that companionship of God of that acceptance with God for which Jesus died how can you be why should you be indeed you could say how dare you be when he has done all of this can you remain unsaved can you go on without Christ can you just stay as you are surely not secondly it speaks to you who are saved but have not yet been open about it why is that if the reason for those who are not saved if it cannot be that he has not done enough for them well for you it can't be that he requires too much of you it is not that he requires too much of you to come and show that you are a believer to come and show that this is your savior to come openly and say this is where

I stand I love this Jesus he is my savior he died for me to bring me back to God I have come to know God even if I am not as sure of things as I would like to be I know I'm not what I used to be he does not require too much of you all you have to do is measure what he requires of you however great it might seem measure it against what he has done for you it pales into insignificance so as I say to those who are not saved on the basis of what this verse says to you accept Jesus take him into your life and I say too to those who are saved but not yet open about it serve Jesus be open about who you are as a Christian the world needs that openness that witness the darkness around us needs the light to shine let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven

[35 : 01] God bless his word to us let's pray Lord our God we do give thanks this evening for the immensity of your work the work of redemption the work of bringing your people to know yourself and back into fellowship with you we thank you Lord for the quality of your obedience for its perfection we give thanks for the achievement of the cross and the many dimensions of it as that is displayed in the life of your people we thank you that you have fulfilled all that was necessary to be fulfilled in the way in which you were represented in Old Testament times O Lord our God help us even tonight to reach out to take you to ourselves and to hold you closely and enable us to follow you and to testify to you to let our light shine for you accept our worship we pray again and cleanse us from all our sin receive us for

Jesus sake Amen we're concluding our worship this evening singing in Psalm 22 verses 27 to 31 that's on page 27 and the tune is Duke Street incidentally if you're here tonight with children and you might be a bit worried that people are hearing their voices don't worry about that it's absolutely brilliant to see children at all services morning and evening and it's thrilling to find children here tonight and to hear childlike noises if you like it's not off putting it's actually encouraging so please don't worry about that so Psalm 22 and verses 27 to the end of the psalm the whole earth will

remember him and turn towards the Lord their God all peoples will bow down to him the nations of the world abroad these verses in conclusion to
God's praise the whole earth will remember him and turn towards the Lord their God all all all people's will bow down to him the nations of the world abroad dominion to the Lord belongs and and all and over nations he is king the rich of all the earth will feast and worship with an offering and and
His throne. They cannot keep themselves alive, for they depend on Him alone.
Posterity will serve the Lord, and generations still to come.
[39 : 16] We'll tell our people, yet unborn, the righteous act that He has done.
I'll go to the side door tonight. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.
Amen.