

The Suffering Jesus: An Example for Every Christian

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:21–23

Code: 60-29

INTRODUCTION

First Peter 2:21-25 says, "You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

The name Jesus Christ evokes many images in the minds of people. Some picture Him as a baby in a manger--the Christ of Christmas. Others picture Him as a child, perhaps living in the home of a carpenter or confounding the religious leaders of Jerusalem. Many picture Him as a compassionate and powerful healer who healed the sick and raised the dead. Still others picture a bold and fiery preacher speaking the Word of God to great crowds. And there are those who see Him as the consummate man--a model of goodness, kindness, sympathy, concern, care, tenderness, forgiveness, wisdom, understanding, and trust in God.

Yet the one image of Christ that surpasses all the rest is Jesus Christ on the cross. The apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). To know Christ crucified is to know Him as the author and finisher of your faith--the truest picture of His Person and work.

Christ's suffering on the cross is the focal point of the Christian faith. That's where the deity, humanity, work, and suffering of Christ is most clearly seen. First Peter 2:21-25 shows that the suffering of Jesus had three great effects: it allowed Him to serve as our example, substitute, and shepherd.

REVIEW

According to the previous verse, Christians have been called to suffer with patient endurance (see pp. xx-xx). Because we are at odds with the world, we will suffer persecution at various times and in various ways. That pleases God because He knows it will mature us and perfect our ability to glorify Him in heaven (see pp. xx-xx). Beyond those realities, such suffering identifies us with our Lord Jesus Christ, for we suffer as He suffered (see pp. xx-xx).

LESSON

I. CHRIST IS OUR EXAMPLE (vv. 21b-23)

"Christ . . . suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

The suffering of Christ sets the standard for the suffering of Christians. The greater our suffering for righteousness in this life, the greater our glory in the life to come.

Jesus was executed as a criminal on a cross. Yet He was guilty of no crime--no wrong, no trespass, no sin. He never had an evil thought or spoke an evil word. His was the most unjust execution ever

perpetrated on a human being. Yet it shows us that though a person may be perfectly within the will of God--greatly loved and gifted, perfectly righteous and obedient--he may still experience unjust suffering. Like Jesus he may be misunderstood, misrepresented, hated, persecuted, and even murdered.

Are Suffering Christians Out of God's Will?

Some contemporary false teachers say that Christians who suffer are out of God's will. Such teaching reflects a shallow and ungodly interpretation of the Bible. Scripture clearly states that Christians will suffer for their faith (Matt. 5:11-12; 10:17; 24:9; Luke 21:12; John 15:20; 16:2; 2 Tim. 3:12). To say that believers who are suffering for their faith aren't "claiming their resources" is heresy. Jesus Christ was perfectly in the will of God--perfectly righteous, gifted, and loved by God--yet suffered unjustly on a cross. Those who suffer for their faith in Christ are like their Master and perfectly within God's will.

A. We're to Follow His Pattern (v. 21b)

"Christ . . . suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."

The Greek word translated "example" (hupogrammos) refers to a pattern that is placed under a piece of paper to be traced. Like children who learn their letters using tracing paper over a pattern, we are to trace our lives according to the pattern Jesus Christ has laid down for us.

We follow His pattern by walking "in His steps." "Steps" translates the Greek word ichnos, which refers to a track or line of footprints. We are to walk in Christ's footprints because His was a righteous walk. It was also a walk of unjust suffering, which is part of the walk of righteousness. Some suffer more than others, but all who follow after Christ experience some suffering.

B. We're to Follow His Reactions (vv. 22-23)

"[Christ] committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

Peter wanted his readers to look closely at the suffering of Christ. The cross was the time of maximum suffering for our Lord, and would have been prominent in Peter's mind because he personally witnessed his Lord's pain--though from afar. So verses 22-23 take us to the cross, explaining in the process the meaning of Isaiah 53--the clearest Old Testament chapter on the suffering of the Messiah.

1. He committed no sin in word or deed

Isaiah 53:9 says, "He [the Messiah] had done no violence." "Violence" is translated "lawlessness" in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament. The translators understood that the violence spoken of in Isaiah 53:9 is violence against God's law--or sin, which "is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, understood the violence spoken of in Isaiah 53:9 in the same way. Thus 1 Peter 2:22 is saying that in spite of the unjust treatment Christ had to endure, He committed no sin. Christ was impeccable--He did not and could not sin (cf. 1 Pet. 1:19). Isaiah 53:9 adds, "Nor was there any deceit in His mouth." That strengthens the idea that Jesus committed no sin because sin usually first makes its appearance in us by what we say. The Hebrew word translated "deceit" refers to any sin of the tongue, such as deception, innuendo, or slander. James 3:2 says, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man." That's because only someone who is perfect can avoid sinning with his mouth, for what we say is but a reflection of what's in the heart (Mark 7:21). In Jesus there was no sin either externally or internally.

a) Luke 23:41--One of the thieves crucified with Jesus said to the other, "We indeed [suffer] justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man [Jesus] has done nothing wrong." b) John 8:46--Jesus said, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" No one could truthfully accuse Jesus of sin. c) 2 Corinthians 5:21--Paul said of God's working in Christ, "He made Him who

knew no sin to be sin on our behalf."d)Hebrews 4:15--Jesus "has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."e)Hebrews 7:26--Jesus, our High Priest, is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens."f)1 Peter 3:18--"Christ . . . died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust."g)1 John 3:5--"In [Jesus Christ] there is no sin."

In all the circumstances of His ministry on earth our Lord was absolutely sinless. He was the most unjustly treated person who ever lived on earth because, unlike you and me, He never did anything wrong. He is the perfect model of how we are to respond to unjust treatment because He endured far worse treatment than any person who will ever live, yet He never sinned.

2. He didn't strike back

Isaiah 53:7 says of the Messiah, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth." That reflects the attitude of Jesus before His tormentors: "While being reviled, He did not revile in return" (1 Pet. 2:23). Though under sustained provocation, Jesus spoke no evil because there was no sin in His heart.

However, under similar provocation our reaction would be more like that of the apostle Paul's. When Paul was on trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest Ananias ordered that he be struck on the mouth. His immediate response to Ananias was, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!" (Acts 23:3). Paul immediately had to apologize--such an exclamation was against the law (vv. 4-5; cf. Ex. 22:28). Paul wasn't perfect, and he's not the standard of righteousness. Only Christ is a perfect standard of how to handle the reviling of one's enemies.

The Greek word translated "reviled" pictures the continuous piling up of abuse on top of another. Jesus was consistent in His response to such treatment: He was silent (cf. Matt. 26:57-68; 27:11-14; Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-5; Luke 23:8-9). Christians, like their Master, are never to abuse those who abuse them.

3. He didn't make threats

Jesus "uttered no threats" in the face of incredible suffering (1 Pet. 2:23). He was spit on, His beard was pulled out, a crown of thorns was crushed onto His head, and nails were driven through His flesh to pin Him to a cross. In any other person such unjust treatment would have caused feelings of retaliation to well up and burst, but not in Christ. He was the Son of God--creator and sustainer of the universe, holy, sinless, and with the power to send His tormentors into eternal flames. Yet instead of threatening them He said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Christ died for sinners, including those who persecuted Him. He knew the glory of salvation could be reached only through the path of suffering, so He accepted His suffering without bitterness, anger, or a spirit of retaliation.

4. He entrusted Himself to God

First Peter 3:9 says Christians are not to be "returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead." That was Jesus' attitude. He was able to do that because He "kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). The word translated "entrusting" (Gk. , paradid[ma]omi) means "to hand over for someone to keep." In every instance of suffering our Lord handed over the circumstance and Himself to God. The word "Himself," though not found in the Greek text of 1 Peter, accurately reflects the full meaning of the text.

Christ's last words on the cross show His trust in God: "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Our Lord was confident in the righteous judgment of God and the glory that would be His. That allowed Him to calmly accept tremendous suffering. That's the way we're to respond when confronted with unjust persecution on the job or in our families or other relationships. When we retaliate we forfeit the blessing and reward that suffering is meant to bring. It shows we lack the confidence we ought to have in God's ability to make things right in His own time, which will include punishing the unjust and rewarding those who are faithful in suffering.

Bible commentator Alan Stibbs wrote, "In . . . the unique instance of our Lord's passion, when the

sinless One suffered as if He were the worst of sinners, and bore the extreme penalty of sin, there is a double sense in which He may have acknowledged God as the righteous Judge. On the one hand, because voluntarily, and in fulfillment of God's will, He was taking the sinner's place and bearing sin, He did not protest at what He had to suffer. Rather He consciously recognized that it was the penalty righteously due to sin. So He handed Himself over to be punished. He recognized that in letting such shame, pain and curse fall upon Him, the righteous God was judging righteously. On the other hand, because He Himself was sinless, He also believed that in due time God, as the righteous Judge, would vindicate Him as righteous, and exalt Him from the grave, and reward Him for what He had willingly endured for others' sake by giving Him the right completely to save them from the penalty and power of their own wrongdoing" (The First Epistle General of Peter [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], p. 119). When we entrust ourselves to God as the righteous judge, we are following Christ's example by looking to God for vindication, exaltation, and reward.

CONCLUSION

I believe that in days to come Christians will become increasingly unpopular with secular society. Strong stands for the truth of Scripture and the gospel message may soon become intolerable. That will result in the unjust treatment of Christians.

The prospect of such treatment ought to drive us to passages like 1 Peter 2:21-25 for reassurance. Here we learn that like our Lord, we are to walk the path of suffering to attain the glory of reward and exaltation in the future. That realization surely prompted Stephen to fix his eyes on Jesus in glory and ask God to forgive his murderers (Acts 7:54-60). He entrusted Himself to God, knowing that He would vindicate him.

In May of 1555 Bishop Hugh Latimer, soon to be burned at the stake for his anti-papal, Reformed convictions, wrote, "Die once we must; how and where, we know not. . . . Here is not our home; let us therefore accordingly consider things, having always before our eyes that heavenly Jerusalem, and the way thereto in persecution" (Harold S. Darby, Hugh Latimer [London: The Epworth Press, 1953], p. 237). Later that year both Latimer and his friend Ridley were fed to the flames, but not until Latimer--astonishingly composed--said to his colleague, "Be of good comfort, master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out" (p. 247).

In no way did Jesus leave His "example" (1 Pet. 2:21) in vain!

Focusing on the Facts

1. What one image of Christ surpasses all the rest as the truest picture of His Person and work?
2. First Peter 2:21-25 shows that Christ is our _____, _____, and _____.
3. The greater our _____ for righteousness in this life, the greater our _____ in the life to come.
4. The suffering of Christ shows us that though a person may be perfectly within the will of God, what still might happen?
5. Show from Scripture that those who suffer for their faith in Christ are like their Master and perfectly within God's will (see p. 2).
6. How does the Greek word translated "example" picture the believer's relationship to Christ (1 Pet. 2:21)?
7. Why are Christians to walk in the footprints of Christ?
8. What Old Testament chapter does 1 Peter 2:22-23 explain?
9. In 1 Peter 2:22 Peter says that in spite of the unjust treatment Christ had to endure, He committed _____.
10. James 3:2 says, "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man." Why is that true? How does that truth reflect on Jesus Christ?

11. Why is Jesus the perfect model of how we are to respond to unjust treatment?
12. How does Isaiah 53:7 reflect the attitude of Jesus before His tormentors?
13. Compare how Jesus and Paul responded to similar unjust suffering. Whose response would we more likely emulate?
14. Christians, like their Master, are never to _____ those who _____ them.
15. Describe the extent of Christ's trust in God.
16. When we retaliate what do we forfeit?
17. What prompted Stephen to ask God to forgive his murderers (Acts 7:54-60)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Jesus suffered unimaginable humiliation. During His trial those present "spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, and said, 'Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?'" (Matt. 26:67-68). One commentator noted, "The mockers received no reply to this question. Jesus was silent. But we may give a different turn to the inquiry, and the answer will prove consolatory. Let those who are earnestly seeking salvation, and the contrite in heart, humbly inquire, 'Who it was that smote the Lord?' and they will receive a satisfactory reply. At first, indeed, it will alarm them; for it will be, 'not those miscreants; but it is thou who hast made Me to suffer with thy sins, and wearied Me with thy iniquities. For thy transgressions was I smitten.' And when He Himself prophesies this to you by His Spirit--how evident it will then become to you; how will you humble yourselves in the dust before Him; how the wish will then depart to lay the blame upon Caiaphas, Annas, and the spearmen; how vitally are you persuaded that they were only your representatives, and how will you hang down your heads, and learn to smite upon your breasts with the publican! How will you tremble for your souls, and earnestly seek for salvation and a Mediator!" (F. W. Krummacher, The Suffering Savior [Chicago: Moody Press, 1947], p. 184). While the example of Christ's suffering ought to hearten us in times of persecution, perhaps even more it ought make us grateful for His willingness to suffer for us sinners (cf. Rom. 5:8). Take time now to express your gratitude to our Lord for His willingness to suffer on our behalf.
2. Your speech indicates the state of your heart--either the evil that's in it or grace that dominates it. A. W. Tozer has written, "The fear that keeps us quiet when faith and love and loyalty cry out for us to speak is surely evil and must be judged as evil before the bar of eternal justice" (cited in Signposts: A Collection of Sayings from A. W. Tozer, edited by Harry Verploegh [Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1988], p. 195). Jesus' speech in His time of trial showed a heart filled with the grace of God--He spoke no evil but answered with the truth. Does your speech show the grace of God even when faced with a severe trial?

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