

The Suffering Jesus: Our Substitute and Shepherd

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:24–25

Code: 60-30

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."

Those verses have much to say about the kind of life that will most effectively manifest Christ to an ungodly culture. As believers we are called to a submissive role in society, just as our Lord was.

REVIEW

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

LESSON

II. CHRIST IS OUR SUBSTITUTE (v. 24)

"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."

Peter was saying that Christ suffered on our behalf, alluding to Isaiah's description of the substitutionary, sin-bearing death of the Messiah (Isa. 53:4-5, 11). The substitutionary death of Christ is an essential truth of the Christian faith.

Commentator Leon Morris wrote, "Redemption is substitutionary, for it means that Christ paid the price that we could not pay, paid it in our stead, and we go free. Justification interprets our salvation judicially, and as the New Testament sees it Christ took our legal liability, took it in our stead. Reconciliation means the making of people to be at one by the taking away of the cause of hostility. In this case the cause is sin, and Christ removed that cause for us. We could not deal with sin. He could and did, and did it in such a way that it is reckoned to us. Propitiation points us to the removal

of the divine wrath, and Christ has done this by bearing the wrath for us. It was our sin which drew it down; it was He who bore it. . . . Was there a price to be paid? He paid it. Was there a victory to be won? He won it. Was there a penalty to be borne? He bore it. Was there a judgment to be faced? He faced it" (The Cross in the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], p. 405). Redemption, justification, reconciliation, removal of sin, and propitiation are all corollaries of the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross.

The apostle Paul also emphasized the substitutionary work of Christ. He said that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21)--that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "To put it bluntly and plainly," says Morris, "If Christ is not my Substitute, I still occupy the place of a condemned sinner. If my sins and my guilt are not transferred to Him, if He did not take them upon Himself, then surely they remain with me. If He did not deal with my sins, I must face their consequences. If my penalty was not borne by Him, it still hangs over me" (p. 410).

Was Christ's Suffering Unfair?

Some say it's immoral to teach that God would take on human flesh and bear the sins of men and women in their stead. They say it's unfair to transfer the penalty of sin from a guilty person to an innocent person. But that's not what happened on the cross.

Morris explains, "In the process of salvation God is not transferring penalty from one man (guilty) to another man (innocent). He is bearing it Himself. The absolute oneness between the Father and the Son in the work of the atonement must not for a moment be lost sight of. When Christ substitutes for sinful man in His death that is God Himself bearing the consequences of our sin, God saving man at cost to Himself, not at cost to someone else. As Leonard Hodgson puts it, 'He wills that sin shall be punished, but He does not will that sin shall be punished without also willing that the punishment shall fall on Himself.' In part the atonement is to be understood as a process whereby God absorbs in Himself the consequences of man's sin" (p. 410).

On the cross Christ willingly took on our sin and bore its penalty. Nothing was pushed on Him. If He had not willed to take our sin and accept its punishment, as sinners we would have borne the punishment of sin in hell forever. Christ's work on the cross wasn't unfair--it was God's love in action!

First Peter 2:24 says that Christ "Himself bore our sins." The Greek word translated "Himself" is emphatic--it was Christ Himself who took on sin and bore its penalty. He bore it willingly and voluntarily--and He bore it alone. He indeed was "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Jesus Christ Superstar?

Some think Jesus died as a martyr--that He is a great example of someone dying for a cause. That's the "Jesus Christ Superstar" mentality. It pictures Jesus as someone who was so committed to a cause, He was willing to die for it. But while a martyr can be a great example of suffering, he can't be a substitute or remove sin. Only God could do that, and that's exactly what Jesus did.

A. The Meaning of His Sin Bearing

First Peter 3:18 speaks of the substitutionary death of Christ: "Christ . . . died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust." When Peter said He "bore" our sins (1 Pet. 2:24), he used a term that means "to carry a massive, heavy weight." That's what sin is. It's so heavy that Romans 8:22 says, "The whole creation groans and suffers" under its weight. Only Jesus could remove such a weight from us.

The express idea of Christ's bearing our sins is stated only in 1 Peter 2:24 and Hebrews 9:28. The concept is more frequently declared in the Old Testament.

1. Numbers 14:33-34--God said to Israel, "Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they shall suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness. According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you shall know My opposition." When God brought Israel out of Egypt and led them to Kadesh Barnea, Israel sent spies into Canaan. But even though God had promised Canaan to Israel, the spies brought back a report that dissuaded Israel from entering the promised land (Num. 13). When God Israel would bear its guilt (Num. 14:34), He meant the people would bear the punishment of their sin of rejecting God and failing to trust Him (cf. Num. 14:11).

2. Ezekiel 18:20--"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son" (KJV). To "bear the iniquity" means to be punished. In this case the punishment was death.

3. Numbers 18:1--"The Lord said to Aaron, 'You and your sons and your father's household with you shall bear the guilt in connection with the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the guilt in connection with your priesthood'" (cf. 18:23).

4. Ezekiel 4:4--God gave Israel a symbolic demonstration of sin's punishment by telling Ezekiel, "Lie down on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; you shall bear their iniquity for the number of days that you lie on it" (cf. 44:10-12).

When Peter said that Christ "bore our sins" (v. 24), he meant that Christ bore the penalty for our sins. He endured physical and spiritual death. When Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46), His was the cry of spiritual death. That was the penalty for bearing our sins.

B. The Extent of His Sin Bearing

Christ bore the sin of all sinners.

1. John 3:16--"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The atoning work of Christ was as extensive as the love of God toward the world: it embraced all.

2. 2 Corinthians 5:19--In Christ's sacrificial death "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Many think that Christ bore the sins and punishment only of the elect. But I believe that God loved the whole world and therefore provided a sacrifice as great as His love.

3. 1 Timothy 2:6--Christ "gave Himself as a ransom for all."

4. 1 Timothy 4:10--God in Christ "is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." Christ has shown Himself to be the savior of all men, but that becomes a spiritual reality for believers only. God gave a gift to the world by paying the penalty of sin, but only those who believe receive that gift (John 1:12).

5. Titus 2:11--"The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men."

6. Hebrews 2:9--"We do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone."

7. 1 John 2:2--Christ "is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

8. 1 John 4:9--"The love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." In the word "our" is embodied an extensive provision--one that provides a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all men, but is only applied to those who believe.

"Our Hope Rests Here"

The British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon loved the doctrine of substitution. Here are assorted nuggets taken from his preaching on this precious topic (cited from Tom Carter's Spurgeon at His Best [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988], pp. 200-01):

"In one word, the great fact on which the Christian's hope rests is substitution. The vicarious sacrifice of Christ for the sinner, Christ's suffering for the sinner, Christ's being made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, Christ offering up a true and proper substitutionary sacrifice in the place of as many as the Father gave him, who are recognized by their trusting in him--this is the cardinal fact of the gospel."

"There is no doctrine that fires my soul with such delight as that of substitution."

"Substitution is the very marrow of the whole Bible, the soul of salvation, the essence of the gospel. We ought to saturate all our sermons with it, for it is the lifeblood of a gospel ministry."

"I am incapable of moving one inch away from the old faith. One thing I know--the gospel of substitution. And one thing I do--preach it."

"If you put away the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, you have disembowelled the gospel, and torn from it its very heart."

"I pray God that every stone of this [church] may tumble to its ruin and every timber be shivered to atoms, before there should stand on this platform a man to preach who denies the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, or who even keeps it in the background, for this is our watchword."

Spurgeon's attitude should be ours as well.

C. The Means of His Sin Bearing

Jesus bore our sins "in His body on the cross [lit. , "wood"]." It was God's plan that Christ be lifted up to die (cf. John 12:32-33). Paul says that Christ had to be hung on a tree to fulfill the prediction of becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13; cf. Deut. 21:23). Jesus bore our sins by enduring the wrath of God as He hung on a cross of wood.

D. The Reason for His Sin Bearing

The purpose for Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice was that "we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24). The text doesn't say Christ died so we could go to heaven, have peace, or experience love. Christ died to bring about a transformation: to make saints out of sinners.

The Greek word translated "die" (apoginomai) is used only here in the New Testament. It means "to be away from, depart, be missing, or cease existing." The Greek particle apo is used in classical Greek with reference to the dead as the "dearly departed." Christ's substitutionary work enables a person to depart from sin and enter into a new life pattern: a life of righteousness.

The apostle Paul said, "Our old self was crucified with [Christ], that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:6). Our identification with Christ in His death results in our walking "in newness of life" (v. 4). We have died to sin, thus it no longer has a claim on us. First Peter 2:24 echoes that thought: our identification with Christ in His death is a departure from sin and a new direction in life (see John MacArthur, Freedom from Sin: The Believer's Ongoing Battle [Panorama City, Calif. : Master's Communication, 1989]).

E. The Punishment for His Sin Bearing

Peter's statement "by His wounds you are healed" is an allusion to Isaiah 53:5. The Greek word

translated "wounds" (m[ma]ol[ma]ops) refers to the scars, bruises, and welts from a whipping. The punishment Jesus bore in His body--the scourging, mockery, and crucifixion--became a means for our spiritual healing. Both Peter and Isaiah were not referring to physical but spiritual healing in their references to the suffering of Christ.

Physical Healing in the Atonement?

There is a sense in which physical healing took place in the atoning work of Christ. But that healing waits to be realized in the future. The healing of the atonement will bring about our resurrection in glory, where there will be no pain or suffering (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-3).

Matthew 8:16 says of Jesus' healing ministry, "When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases.' " Some say that means we're to claim healing in the atonement, and in a sense that is correct. Jesus healed people to illustrate the healing in the glory to come. But that's not yet realized. If the healing of the atonement were fully realized now, no Christian would ever be sick or die. The atoning work of Christ spiritually transforms us now and will physically transform us in the future.

III. CHRIST IS OUR SHEPHERD (v. 25)

"You were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

Here Peter was alluding to Isaiah 53:6: "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." If the Lord had not provided a sacrifice for sin He could never have brought us into His fold.

A. The Turning

The Greek word translated "returned" refers to repentance--a turning from one thing toward another. It's what the prodigal son did when he turned from his sin to his father (Luke 15:11-32). The believer turns to a Person--Jesus Christ--not just a system of theology or religion. Believers have turned over their whole lives to their Shepherd and Guardian.

B. The Title

Jesus referred to Himself as the "good shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). First Peter 5:4 refers to Him as the "Chief Shepherd." Those are significant titles because the Old Testament affirms that "the Lord is my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1, emphasis added; cf. Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24). In 1 Peter 2:25 Peter implicitly affirms the deity of Christ.

C. The Task

The task of a shepherd is to guard sheep. The Greek word translated "shepherd" (poimen) can also be translated "pastor," while the word translated "guardian" (episkopos) is also translated "bishop" or "overseer." Both terms describe the responsibilities of elders (e. g. , 1 Pet. 5:2). Jesus guards, oversees, leads, and supervises His flock. He said that "the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). That's exactly what He did to bring us to Himself.

CONCLUSION

Jesus suffered greatly as our example, substitute, and shepherd. Spurgeon said, "When the pangs shoot through our body, and ghastly death appears in view, people see the patience of the dying Christian. Our infirmities become the black velvet on which the diamond of God's love glitters all the more brightly. Thank God I can suffer! Thank God I can be made the object of shame and contempt, for in this way God shall be glorified" (Spurgeon at His Best, p. 202; emphasis added). That's a good summation of Peter's point: If you're a Christian, expect to suffer.

Because we believers are aliens and strangers in the world, waging war against fleshly lusts and being slandered and persecuted, we must expect to suffer in the name of the One who endured all manner of suffering for us (1 Pet. 2:11-25). The central thrust of Peter's message is to remind us of the necessity of suffering. When in the midst of suffering we sin in thought, word, or deed by retaliating, we lose our victory and damage our testimony.

Revelation 12:11 says that the brethren "overcame [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death." Believers overcome the insults, persecutions, and accusations of Satan by the blood of the Lamb. That's the power of God. They're overcomers because their testimony is not lost by retaliation during times of persecution, and because they won't compromise even to the point of death. They are willing to suffer. If we have those kinds of attitudes we will overcome too.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Like our Lord, as believers we are called to a _____ role in society.
2. What passage of the Old Testament did Peter allude to in 1 Peter 2:24? What does that passage say about the Messiah?
3. According to Leon Morris, what does the word propitiation points us to?
4. What did God do in the process of salvation concerning the penalty for sin?

5. Christ's work on the cross wasn't _____--it was _____ in action.
6. What's wrong with the idea that Jesus is just a great example of someone who died for a cause?
7. What Old Testament passages explain the meaning of bearing sin? What exactly was borne when Christ bore our sins?
8. Christ bore the sin of _____ sinners.
9. What is the great fact on which the Christian's hope rests?
10. How specifically did Jesus bear our sins?
11. Christ died to bring about a _____ .
12. According to 1 Peter 2:24, what does identification with Christ in His death represent?
13. What are the scourging, mockery, and crucifixion of Christ a means of for believers?
14. In what sense did physical healing take place in the atoning work of Christ?
15. By naming Christ as the shepherd of believers, what was Peter implying (1 Pet. 2:25)?

Pondering the Principles

1. We are often prone to be more troubled about a great affliction we must suffer than "trivial" sins we commit. Yet in God's economy, "There is more evil in a drop of sin than in a sea of affliction" (Thomas Watson as cited in More Gathered Gold, John Blanchard, ed. [Welwyn, Eng. : Evangelical Press, 1986], p. 325). Jesus determined to see sinners cleansed from sin rather than escape the affliction of the cross and the outpouring of God's wrath. Are you more concerned about your personal comfort or avoiding sin?
2. We studiously avoid suffering, and surely we are not called to endure unnecessary suffering. Yet at times our faith demands the endurance of trials. Our Great Shepherd was faced with that necessity to save His sheep, and He walked into suffering with open eyes. The British pastor and missionary Oswald Chambers wrote, "He deliberately laid down His life without any possibility of deliverance. There was no compulsion, it was a sacrifice made with a free mind; nor was there anything . . . impulsive about it, He laid down His life with a clear knowledge of what He was doing. Jesus understood what was coming, it was not a foreboding, but a certainty; not a catastrophe which might happen, but an ordained certainty in the decrees of God, and He knew it" (cited in Oswald Chambers: The Best from All His Books, vol. 2, Harry Verploegh, ed. [Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1989], p. 270). In those cases where your faith in Christ demands that you walk the path of suffering, are you willing to walk for Him as He walked for you?

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).