

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory	Pastor/Teacher
Number:	72	Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	1 Peter 2:21-25	
Date:	February 2, 2020 (a.m.)	

CHRIST BEARING OUR SINS

We come again to another Lord's Day and to the Lord's Table. As you gather here, one with another, take time to focus your attention on Christ as He is displayed before you in the bread and the wine. We should always come in worship with our minds actively engaged. It is all too easy to be distracted in church. We are not used to simply sitting still and pondering the great things of God. On the contrary, we are accustomed to not thinking as we plop down in front of the TV or turn on our radios or CD players. That is one of the reasons people complain that church services are boring. Anything that would make demands on our time and our minds is considered to be something of a nuisance. I am going to challenge that mindset today. I am going to ask you to do some serious thinking over our text in 1 Peter 2:24. Along the way, as we prepare for communion, I am going to hopefully stimulate you to ponder or meditate on the significance of Christ bearing our sins of His body being broken and His blood being shed to make atonement for our sins. "Mere thinking," wrote Kuyper, "is not meditation, this is something quite different, and, in view of the wide-awake preparedness necessary to withstand the constant onslaught waged from the gates of hell against the church of the living God, with a fierceness that neither respects nor spares, this *other something* is an undeniable need of the soul."¹ Kuyper goes on to spell out the true importance of biblical meditation as composed of contemplative thought and reflection on the meaning of Scripture. The heart as well as the mind is engaged.²

Our text today speaks of a very precious doctrine – one that is at the very center of Christianity.³ This particular and essential truth has always had its enemies – even within the rank and file of those who profess to be evangelical.⁴ If we intend to preserve the doctrine of substitutionary atonement (the technical way of saying Christ died for our sins), we must make sure we do so in a scriptural fashion. This will require us stating briefly what is **not** meant by the phrase, "Christ bore our sins," as well as stating its real meaning. H. D. McDonald, in his excellent work on the atonement, provides us with this summary of Peter's message: "There is only one reference in 2nd Peter to redemption through Christ (2:1). Christ is, indeed, called Savior on five occasions, and in knowledge of him we are purged from our old sins (1:9). But it is with the first epistle that interest lies, with its several passages in which the saving work of Christ has stress. There are, in fact, no fewer than eight references by Peter to Christ's blood, death, or sufferings. These passages are all the more impressive when brought together rather than given isolated comment. Those addressed by the apostle are said to be *chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood* (1:2). The prophets of old predicted *the sufferings of Christ* (1:11), and we are redeemed *with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot* (1:19). *When [Christ] suffered . . . He bore our sins in his body on the tree* (2:21-24). *For Christ also died for sins once for all* (3:18); *he suffered in the flesh* (4:1): therefore *rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings* (4:13) as *a witness of the sufferings of Christ* (5:1). All these passages unite to focus on the cross as vital for man's salvation. Note must be taken of the manner and spirit in which Peter alludes to the Calvary deed. Not now, as in his Acts speeches, does he censure those lawless men by whose hands Christ was crucified and slain. That, it may be assumed,

was in the first days of his contemplation of the recent event of the crucifixion a natural reaction. But even then the death of Jesus was referred to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. In his epistle the manward cause of the cross in human wickedness is lost in its Godward purpose in relation to man's sin. When the passages quoted above are considered in the light of their immediate context, and in that of the epistle as a whole, two facts follow. On the one hand, a mere exemplarist view of Christ's death is not adequate; and, on the other hand, an actual saving understanding of Christ's work is required.”⁵

I. ***WHAT THIS DOES NOT MEAN.***

- A. ***Christ Was a Sinner.*** We read only a few verses earlier that “He did not sin, neither was guile found in His mouth” (2:22). We read elsewhere that Christ is “holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). He was tempted in every way, just as we are, “yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

NOTE: In theological terms, we speak of Christ as being impeccable (the Latin word for sin is *peccata*). Although there have been a handful of soundly orthodox men who affirmed that Christ in His human nature could have sinned (but did not), the vast majority of the churches' great theologians have taught that Christ was not only sinless, but also incapable of sinning because of the *unio personalis* – the union of the two natures in the person of Christ. Wisely does G. C. Berkouwer write, “Not a shadow falls over his life – at least no shadow issuing from his own sins and weaknesses. The Bible does not picture for us an ideal man who reached one of the top rungs on the ladder of human development and was thus appointed as a brilliant example to us; instead it witnesses to the Son, the course of whose entire life was absolutely oriented to the will of the Father and therefore, even in the most painful moments of his life, spread the radiance of absolute personal holiness. At no point in Scripture does the guilt of the world as borne by Christ cast a shadow upon his personal devotion to the Father. Precisely his guilt-bearing and spotless holiness can go together.”⁶

- B. ***Christ Suffered Personally the Pain of Conscience.*** As sinners we all experience remorse and regret. This is one of the necessary consequences of sin. Since Jesus Christ never sinned, He could never suffer remorse or regret that springs from a guilty conscience. He could suffer many things like you and I do. He knew hunger, thirst, weariness, even sorrow and fear. As Warfield notes, “It belongs to the truth of our Lord's humanity, that He was subject to all sinless human emotions.”⁷

- C. ***Christ Was Personally Displeasing to God.*** He bore the wrath of God, but He did so as a representative substitute. He did not assume in this vicarious role any unholy taint of His own. “We hold fast,” said Alexander, “to the great and precious truth, that never for a single moment was the Mediator displeasing to His Father in heaven.”⁸

II. ***WHAT THIS DOES MEAN.***

- A. ***Christ Did Bear the Penalty Due Our Sins.*** He did suffer fully in His human nature, as fully as was possible. He actually endured pain, sorrow and shame. All of these sufferings were directly connected with His bearing the guilt and penalty that our sins deserved. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4), He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5), He died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6), He died for our sins (1 Thessalonians 5:10), He suffered for us (1 Peter 3:18), and He did so in a real human body (1 Peter 4:1). Many, many passages could be appealed to in order to prove this point.

B. ***Christ Did Bear Our Sins in Order to Deliver Us from Our Lost Condition.*** In other words, He died to redeem or ransom sinners from destruction. He purchased a people out of the slave market of sin to be His own precious possession (Titus 2:14). The old puritan preacher Ezekiel Hopkins pointed out that the Greek word *anēnegken* means, “*He lifted up our sins on himself, as a load and burden which he was to undergo: a load indeed so weighty, as would have crushed and sunk any into the lowest hell; but him, who was of infinite power, and almighty to save. And, that this bearing of our sins by Christ was so as to free us from the burden and punishment of them, appears by what the Apsotle presently adds, By his stripes ye are healed.*” And what can be more plain and express, to prove that Christ suffered in our stead? For, first, he takes our sins upon himself: i.e., he suffers the punishment due unto them: and, then, by his suffering, frees us from suffering: which is properly to suffer for us, in our place and in our stead; or, else, all sense and meaning of words is perished and lost among men.”⁹

CONCLUSION: The saving knowledge of this glorious truth should cause us to look on sin with shame and horror. It should move us to be people who love holiness. In turn, when we do sin (and we need to be aware of the fact that we are sinners in word, thought and action on a daily basis, either in terms of the commission of sin or in the neglect of duties that are commanded, e.g., loving God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves), we need to be constantly reminded of this precious truth. Because Christ died for us, we have an advocate before the throne of grace (1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:14-16). Christ died for sinners. This table constantly reminds us of what He did for lost sinners.

ENDNOTES

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near Unto God* (rpt. P&R, 1979), p. 15.

² Kuyper warns that a creedal confession, divorced from a true devotion (or piety) that warms the soul, runs into a dry and lifeless, barren orthodoxy. On the other hand, he cautions, there is the very real danger that the mind will be ignored and the emotions so excited that we will sink in the bog of irrational mysticism (p. 16).

³ “The supreme truth which Christianity proclaims is not that God will punish the impenitent. Conscience and the Mosaic law had already proclaimed that, and Christianity simply reaffirms it. Its proper message is that man may be saved from sin and from its consequences.” – G. T. Purves, *The Sinless Christ* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1902), p. 130.

⁴ The so-called “New-Model Evangelicals,” like Clark Pinnock and Robert Brow, are the foremost spokesmen for this group. They openly question the classical Protestant understanding of the atonement. For a complete analysis and rebuttal of this position, see S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “Behold the Lamb: The Gospel and Substitutionary Atonement” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, ed. J. H. Armstrong (Moody, 1996), pp. 119-138.

⁵ H. D. McDonald, *The Atonement of The Death of Christ* (Baker, 1985), p. 109.

⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Person of Christ* (Eerdmans, 1954), p. 250.

⁷ B. B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (rpt. P&R, 1950), p. 93.

⁸ J. W. Alexander, *God Is Love: Communion Addresses* (rpt. Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), p. 179.

⁹ *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins I* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), p. 576.