

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	24		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	I Peter 3:8-22; Isaiah 53:1-12		
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Our Lord... Suffered (Part I)

15. Lord's Day

Question 37. What dost thou understand by the words, "He suffered"?

Answer: That he, all the time that he lived on earth, but especially at the end of this life, sustained in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind: (a) that so by his passion, as the only propitiatory sacrifice, (b) he might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, (c) and obtain for us the favour of God, righteousness and eternal life. (d)

(a) Isa. 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 1 Pet. 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. 1 Pet. 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: 1 Tim. 2:6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (b) Isa. 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Isa. 53:12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Eph. 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. 1 Cor. 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Rom. 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; Heb. 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. Heb. 10:14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. (c) Gal. 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: Col. 1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and that translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: Heb. 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. 1 Pet. 1:18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 1 Pet. 1:19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: (d) Rom. 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 2 Cor. 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave

his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Heb. 9:15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. Heb. 10:19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

In 1983 Rabbi Harold S. Kushner wrote an immensely popular book titled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.¹ Written in simple language, the author took human suffering very seriously and, to his credit, refused to offer glib or simplistic answers. Indeed he was, as he painfully relates, driven to write this book because of the excruciating suffering he personally endured during the lingering illness and final death of his young son. As much as I may sympathize with Kushner in his desire to help people cope with suffering, the book is terribly flawed theologically. God, says Kushner, is not all powerful. In fact, Kushner believes God to be quite limited.² Bad things happen simply because God cannot prevent them from happening. Kushner likewise does not take sin seriously. He assumes that since people are *good* they are innocent and do not *deserve* hardship or suffering.

The Apostles' Creed stresses the fact that Jesus, the only Begotten Son of God, our Lord (note the emphasis on His Lordship) *suffered* under Pontius Pilate. The New Testament over and over again declares that suffering was something Jesus had to endure. Luke 9:22 tells us plainly that He *must*³ suffer many things. We later learn that this was decreed⁴ (Luke 22:22). In other words, it was His vocation that He should suffer. It is important to note that our Lord did not view His suffering as coming from the arbitrary hand of fate or as attributed to pure chance. On the contrary, Jesus saw the hand of His Father in every aspect of life (cf. Matthew 16:21; Matthew 17:12, 22, 23; Mark 8:31, 4:12; Luke 17:25).

Calvin highlights the significance of the way Christ died. "For since by Christ's death sins had to be wiped away and the condemnation which they deserved removed, it would not have been enough for him to suffer a different kind of death. To duly fulfill every part of our redemption, it was necessary to choose death in a form which allowed him to take upon himself our condemnation and the payment owed to God's wrath, and do deliver us from both.

"To begin with, he suffered under the governor of the province, having been condemned by judicial sentence so as to free us from condemnation before the judgment seat of the sovereign Judge. If thieves had cut his throat, if he had been murdered in an affray by the hands of individuals, there would have been no semblance of satisfaction in such a death. But in that he was brought as an accused before a court of law, was denounced by witnesses and condemned by the mouth of the judge, we recognize that he appeared as a criminal. Two things should be considered here which had been foretold by the prophets, and which are particularly comforting to our faith. When we read that Christ was taken from the court to this death and hung between two thieves, there we find fulfilled the prophecy quoted by the Evangelist: 'He was counted among the transgressors' (Mark 15:28; Isa. 53:12). Why was this so? It was to pay the penalty incurred by sinners and to take their place, since he clearly suffered death not for justice but for sin. On the other hand, when we read that he was absolved by the very lips which condemned him – for Pilate was forced a number of times publicly to attest his innocence – we should recall the words of another prophet: 'He repaid what he did not steal' (Psa. 69:4)."⁵

I. SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST, EXCEPTIONAL AND UNIQUE

- A. Not explained on personal grounds (Hebrew 4:14)
- B. Essential to His mission (Isaiah 53:10; Luke 22:15)
- C. Their purpose was redemptive (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45)

II. SUFFERING OF CHRIST CAUSED BY SINS OF OTHERS

- A. Vicarious in nature (Galatians 3:10)
- B. The Ground of Reconciliation
 - 1. The need for (Psalm 7:11, 24:16; Isaiah 59:2; Romans 1:18)

2. Official (Romans 5:9-11; II Corinthians 5:7)
- C. Sacrificial (I Corinthians 5:7)
 1. Voluntary (John 10:17, 18; Matthew 16:23; Luke 9:51)
 2. Propitiatory (Romans 3:25; I John 2:2, 4:10; Hebrews 2:17; 9:5)
 3. Personal (Galatians 2:20)

III. SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST IMPOSED BY GOD

A. Spiritual (Mark 14:33; Luke 22:44)

B. Physical (Psalm 22)

Douglas Kelly, one of my former professors, writes, “How far may we humans enter into the profound mystery of the Son somehow being forsaken by the Father, who loved him from all eternity? Martin Luther has been often quoted as saying somewhere: ‘How could it be: God forsaken by God?’ Peter Lombard showed insight when he pointed to the Old Testament ceremony of the scapegoat being run off into the wilderness as a prophecy of Christ going into hell for our sins, so as to bear them all away. Like many others in the Christian theological tradition, he discussed the mysterious separation between the Father and the Son after the Son’s cry of dereliction, but Lombard did so in terms of the scapegoat: ‘So let us profess that God abandoned that man at death in some way, because for a time he exposed him to the power of his persecutors; God did not defend him by displaying his power so that he would not die. The Godhead severed itself because it took away its protection, but did not dissolve the union; it separated itself outwardly so that it was not there to defend him, but was not absent inwardly in regard to the union. If at that time the Godhead had not held back its power, but had displayed it, Christ would not have died. Christ died because the Godhead receded, that is, did not manifest the effect of its power in his defense. – This is the scapegoat, which after the other goat had been sacrificed, was sent *into the wilderness*, as we read in Leviticus [Lev. 16:22].’

“Some five hundred years after Lombard (of twelfth-century Italy), Thomas Goodwin (of seventeenth-century England) looked at this unfathomable mystery in similar fashion: ‘For it was not a forsaking in respect of the essence of the Godhead, but of his presence, and so in a way of sense. The Godhead was not separated, though the operation of comfort from the Godhead were sequestered. The union hypostatical continued still with his soul, now filled with the sorrows of death, as well as it did with his body when it lay in the grave. And so as although his body was united to the fountain of life, yet it might die in respect of a natural life: so his soul, although the hypostatical union continued, might yet want comfort, which is life.’”⁶

CONCLUSION: The sufferings of Christ do not manifest the love of God apart from their atoning efficacy. The just suffered for the sins of the unjust (1 Peter 3:17, 18). We also are informed that the sufferings of Christ serve as a model or pattern of the trials and tribulations that Christ's followers are to expect in this life (Hebrews 12:1-3; I Peter 2:20, 21; II Timothy 1:8, 9; 3:1; Colossians 1:24). The sufferings of Christ are therefore at the very center of the Gospel and, as a result, form an important element in our Christian faith and daily lives.

ENDNOTES

¹ H.S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (Avon, 1983). The book was so popular that it gave birth to a host of books accenting the same theme. Warren Wiersbe, in an attempt to give a distinctively Christian understanding of suffering, produced a helpful book titled *Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People* (Revell, 1985). Richard E. Wentz in turn wrote *Why Do People Do Bad Things in the Name of Religion?* (Mercer, 1987).

² Kushner, p. 38.

³ The word translated “must” is the Greek word DEI – it refers to that which must necessarily take place, often with the implication of inevitability. B.B. Warfield refers to the “DEI of the Divine decree, as it has been appropriately called, by which is suggested the necessity which rules over historical sequences. It is used with a view to Jesus’ own plan of

redemption (by Jesus Himself, Luke 2:49, 4:43, 9:22, 13:33, 17:25, 24:7; John 3:14, 10:16, 12:34; by the evangelist, Matthew 16:21), to the underlying plan of God (by Jesus, Matthew 24:6, Mark 8:7, 10; Luke 21:9; by the writer, Matthew 17:10, Mark 11:11, Acts 3:21, 9:16), anon to the prophetic declaration as an indication of the underlying plan (by Jesus, Matthew 26:56, Luke 22:37, 24:26, 44; by the writer, John 20:9, Acts 1:16, 17:3). This appeal, in either form, served an important apologetic purpose in the first proclamation of the gospel; but its fundamental significance is rooted, of course, in the conception of a Divine ordering of the whole course of history to the veriest detail.” *Biblical and Theological Studies* (rpt. Presbyterian & Reformed, 1968), p. 304.

⁴ HŌRISMENON is the perfect passive participle of HORIZŌ which means to limit or define, appoint, mark off. Our English word “horizon” comes from this Greek word. Listen again to the words of B.B. Warfield: “The whole Bible doctrine of the decree revolves, in a word, around the simple idea of purpose. Since God is a Person, the very mark of His being is purpose. Since He is an infinite Person, His purpose is eternal and independent, all-inclusive and effective. Since He is a moral Person, His purpose is the perfect exposition of all His infinite moral perfections. Since He is the personal creator of all that exists, His purpose can find its final cause only in Himself.” *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*. Translated from the first French edition of 1541 by Robert White (Banner of Truth, 2014), p. 246.

⁶ Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology II* (Mentor, 2014), p. 383.