

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism	Pastor/Teacher
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Text:	I Peter 2:21; 3:18; 5:1	
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Our Lord... Suffered (Part II)

15. Lord's Day

Question 38. Why did he suffer "under Pontius Pilate, as judge"?

Answer: That he, being innocent, and yet condemned by a temporal judge, (a) might thereby free us from the severe judgment of God to which we were exposed. (b)

(a) John 18:38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he has said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. Matt. 27:24 When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Acts 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, Acts 4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. Luke 23:14 Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: Luke 23:15 No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. John 19:4 Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. (b) Ps. 69:4 They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away. Isa. 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. Isa. 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 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. 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.

Charles Finney (1792-1875), the highly influential 19th century evangelist, has, in many ways, shaped the character of much that passes for Evangelicalism today. Finney contended that salvation is primarily a matter of moral improvement, individually and socially. In doing so, he categorically rejected such important biblical doctrines as original sin and total depravity. He spoke with contempt of such doctrines as penal substitution¹ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the grounds for justification by faith alone.² "Charles Finney totally redefined the Christian message along the lines of the arch-heretic Pelagius, the latter condemned by more church councils than anyone else in history, and no one seemed to blink. . . . Nobody cared about theology as long as the show was going on (evangelism) and moral victories were being won (politics). The modern Church growth movement and the Christian Right are merely perpetuating this moralistic stream in American revivalism. Impressively sprawling buildings may have replaced giant tents, and moral crusades might be conducted through high-tech

direct-mail marketing, but the capitulation to secular sentiment and ideology runs throughout its two-century history.”³

What has all of this to do with the cross of Christ? The Apostle Paul instructs us that in the preaching of the Gospel we must set forth Christ as crucified (Galatians 3:1). The Lord’s table not only presents us with the bread and wine as symbols of Christ’s Body and Blood, but serves as well to proclaim the Lord’s death (I Corinthians 11:26). What is the point? How are we to understand the New Testament when it speaks of Christ being crucified and dying for sinners? The creed tells us He “suffered...was crucified, dead and buried.” Why? What did God do at the cross? What did Christ do? What did He suffer?

“The Greek verb *paschō*, I suffer, occurs forty-two times; the noun *pathēma*, suffering, sixteen times, and other forms make up our total to sixty-two.

“The word is used for physical human suffering, e.g. in Mt. 17:15 and Mk. 5:26. But of course its primary use in the New Testament is in connection with the sufferings of Christ (twenty-eight times). We know how hard it was to make a Jew believe that the Messiah must, or even could, suffer. He was to be a glorious deliverer, above anything degrading of that sort. Hence Jesus’ strong emphasis (Mk. 8:31; Mt. 16:21; Lk. 9:22) on the necessity for His suffering: ‘The Son of man *must* suffer’. Paul describes this to Agrippa in Acts 26:23 as one of the main themes of his preaching. It had been hard even for a close disciple like Peter to accept the idea at first (see Mk. 8:32), but it was not very long before he himself was speaking of Christ’s suffering as the way by which He brought men to God (1 Pet. 3:18).

“How this works has never been fully explained, but the fact is that it does. Peter himself hints that simply looking at Christ’s sufferings has something to do with it (1 Pet. 5:1). Hebrews (5:8, 9) connect obedience with suffering. Christ Himself learnt obedience through suffering, and so He could offer salvation to all who obey Him. 1 Pet. 2:21 goes on to speak of Christ’s suffering as an example for us to copy in dying to self. The New Testament does not go further than this with the word ‘suffering’. It is in connection with Christ’s *death*, not simply with His suffering, that Paul, for example, has his deepest things to say. He uses the noun only twice, and the verb never, in speaking of Christ.”⁴

I. HE SUFFERED AND DIED UNDER THE JUSTICE OF GOD

All that the righteousness of God demanded for the broken Law, Christ satisfied. All that the Law demanded from you and me, the Lord Jesus fulfills, not only in His perfect obedience, but also in His enduring the penalty of the broken Law.

A. What did God do?

He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). God *set Him forth* to be a propitiation (Romans 3:25). God *spared Him not* (Romans 8:32). What the holiness and righteousness of God required against sinners, the Lord Jesus paid to the fullest. He redeemed (paid the price) us from the curse of the broken Law being made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). The misguided notion that God forgives sin simply because He is magnanimous is contrary to Scripture. The great Reformed theologian Francis Turretin summed it up this way: “First, sin, which renders us guilty and hated of God and binds us over as debtors to punishment, may be viewed under a threefold relation (*schesei*) either as a debt, which we are bound to pay to divine justice, in which sense the law is called ‘a handwriting’ (Col. 2:14); or as an enmity, whereby not only are we haters of God (*theostygeis*), but God himself looks upon us with hatred and indignation; or as a crime by which, before God, the supreme Ruler and Judge of the world, we become worthy of everlasting death and malediction. Hence, sinners are sometimes called ‘debtors’ (Mt. 6:12), then ‘enemies’ [*echthroi*] of God’ (both actively and passively, Col. 1:21), and again ‘guilty before God’ (*hypodikoi to theo*, Rom. 3:19). Hence we infer that three things were required for our redemption – the payment of the debt contracted by sin, the appeasing of divine hatred and wrath and the expiation of guilt.”⁵

II. HE SUFFERED AND DIED FOR SINS

Our passage tells us that “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” The New Testament uniformly teaches that Jesus died for sinners who need forgiveness. According to data gathered by the likes of Gallup, Barna and Harris, most people today, however, do not sense any need for forgiveness. What they want is not forgiveness but acceptance. One prominent Evangelical theologian has accented this therapeutic approach to the Gospel by attempting to recast the gospel along lines that are in harmony with modern self-esteem psychology. “If our sin is viewed as causing the death of Jesus on the cross, then we ourselves become victims of a ‘psychological battering’ produced by the cross. When I am led to feel that the pain and torment of Jesus’ death on the cross is due to my sin, I inflict upon myself spiritual and psychological torment.”⁶ Peter and the rest of the New Testament writers do not share Anderson’s perspective. They did see the death of Christ exclusively in terms of His sacrificing Himself for our sins (cf. also I Peter 1:19; 2:24 and Hebrews 5:1-5; 10:12-26; Romans 8:3-5 and Isaiah 53:5). The death of Christ effectively carried away the sins of Christ’s people, i.e. it secured forgiveness (Colossians 3:13-14).

III. HE SUFFERED AND DIED TO RECONCILE US TO GOD

The unjust or unrighteous *need* to be reconciled. The ultimate benefit of Christ’s death is not simply conversion but reconciliation to God. Robert Leighton, the famed 17th Puritan divine, captures the essence of this when he wrote: “This the Apostle hath excellently expressed, Ephesians ii.16, *He hath reconciled us by his cross, having slain the enmity: he killed the quarrel betwixt God and us, killed it by his death; brings the parties together, and hath laid a sure foundation of agreement in his own sufferings; appeases his Father’s wrath by them, and by the same, appeases the sinner’s conscience. All that God hath to say in point of justice, is answered there; all that the poor humbled sinner hath to say, is answered too. He hath offered up such an atonement as satisfies the Father, so that he is content that sinners should come in and be reconciled.*”⁷

CONCLUSION: Obadiah Sedgwick, another of the great Puritan pastors and a member of the Westminster Divines, duly noted that unless there is a clear understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone (and all that it implies, i.e., penal substitutional atonement, imputation of Christ’s righteousness), we will always be on a performance treadmill and full of doubts. We need, therefore, to grasp the great significance of Christ’s death on our behalf. He placed Himself in our stead, putting His soul in the place of our souls, His person in the place of our persons. He underwent our punishment. Why did He do this?...to bring us to God, to make us acceptable to God.⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. has written: “Recent theological history indicates that the denial of penal substitution has led to a modification or perversion of several orthodox doctrines. The divine attributes are brought under direct attack when we eliminate penal substitution. Among those doctrines directly affected are (1) retributive justice based on God’s perfections, (2) God’s immutability, and (3) the proper biblical emphasis on the infiniteness of sin’s evil.” *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. J.H. Armstrong (Moody, 1996), p. 120. Clark Pinnock, one of the foremost critics of traditional Reformational Christianity, follows in Finney’s line by likewise questioning the validity of the doctrines of original sin and substitutionary atonement and makes this gleeful announcement: “It is my strong impression, confirmed to me by those not pleased by it that Augustinian [read here Reformational] thinking is losing its hold on present-day Christians.” *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Zondervan, 1989), p. 26.

² C. Finney, *Lectures On Systematic Theology*, ed. J.H. Fairchild (Doran, 1878), p. 384. He refers to the Reformation’s doctrine of justification alone on the basis of Christ’s imputed righteousness as “impossible and absurd.” B.B. Warfield accurately

said of Finney's theology, "God might be eliminated from it entirely without essentially changing its character." *Perfectionism: Part Two* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 193.

³ M.S. Horton, *Beyond Culture Wars* (Moody, 1994), p. 116.

⁴ H.K. Moulton, *The Challenge of The Concordance* (Bagster & Sons Ltd., 1977), p. 78.

⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology II* (P & R, 1994), p. 418.

⁶ R.S. Anderson, *The Gospel According to Judas* (Helmer & Howard, 1991), p. 99.

⁷ R. Leighton, *Commentary On First Peter* (rpt. Kregel, 1972), p. 348.

⁸ Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Doubting Believer* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), pp. 109-122.