

The Christian Pilgrim and Unjust Suffering (2)

At the very core of the Gospel message is the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of the LORD Jesus Christ. If you were to take everything that encompasses the gospel message, everything that encompasses the good news of Jesus Christ, you would be left with the substitutionary atonement. This is the beating heart of Christianity, the LORD Jesus Christ dying in the place of sinners, bearing the full wrath of God, and the full weight of the punishment and the penalty that sin deserves.

All men are in desperate need of a substitute, because all men are guilty of sinning against a thrice holy God. All sin deserves punishment, because all sin is personal rebellion against the LORD God himself. In the Old Testament, animal sacrifices took on the guilt of God's people, but these sacrifices could never fully atone for the sins of man. For that, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, had to come, and he had to die in the place of his people as their substitute. Jesus Christ had to take upon himself the full wrath, penalty, and punishment that we had earned in our unrighteousness.

Without the substitutionary atonement there would be no justification, and rather than standing before the LORD God and declared to be righteous, because of Jesus Christ, we would stand before the LORD God, receive justice; we would be declared guilty. Without the substitutionary atonement there would be no forgiveness, and rather than standing before the LORD God, as one whose debts had been canceled out, as one whose debts had been removed, and taken out of the way, we would stand before the LORD God as a debtor, completely unable to repay what is owed. Without the substitutionary atonement there would be no adoption, and rather than standing before the LORD God as his beloved child, and heir to a vast and eternal inheritance, we would stand before LORD God as a stranger, as one who is not known. Without the substitutionary atonement there would be no reconciliation, and rather than standing before LORD God as a friend, we would stand before the LORD God as his enemy. Without the substitutionary atonement there would be no redemption, our ransom, our deliverance by the payment of a price, would not have been paid, and we would still remain enslaved and in bondage to our sin. Without the substitutionary atonement there would be no salvation, there would be no healing, and there would be absolutely no hope. Leon Morris writes, "To put it bluntly and plainly, 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 sins, I must face their consequences. If my penalty was not borne by Him, it still hangs over me."

It is absolutely crucial for us to understand the substitutionary atonement of the LORD Jesus Christ, because it is through his substitutionary atonement that we have been delivered from death to life. It is through the substitutionary atonement that we have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's Beloved Son. It is through the substitutionary atonement that we have been delivered from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and one day soon the very presence of sin—for by his wounds, we have been healed. Understanding the substitutionary atonement will enhance your walk with the LORD God, because it will enhance your understanding of God's glorious character. It will enhance your understanding of our great and glorious salvation. Practically speaking, it will enhance your understanding of the great priority to live a righteous and holy life.

1 Peter 2:21-25, For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Here in this passage, Peter reveals to us that the example set by the LORD Jesus Christ, provides for us everything we need to know in order to endure and triumph over unjust suffering and tribulation by reminding us of four things: our calling (v21), the example set by the LORD Jesus Christ (vv22-23), the purpose of the cross (v24), and the results of cross (v25).

Let's look at each verse in detail.

1 Peter 2:24, He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

As those who have been called to suffer, we are to follow the example, the pattern, the standard that was set by our LORD Jesus Christ. In the midst of great suffering, great unjust suffering, he committed no sin. 1 Peter 2:22-23... neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. In the midst of unjust suffering, we must follow in the steps of our LORD Jesus Christ. We must commit no sin, we must speak without any deceit, we must not revile, or speak harshly when we are assaulted. In our suffering we must not threaten, we must not take matters into our own hands, but rather, we will entrust the entire situation into the hands of our heavenly Father. We will commit it all, and hand it all over, to the LORD God Almighty. The entirety of our lives must be entrusted into his hands, for the LORD God will make it right. The LORD God will judge justly. If in the most difficult of circumstances the LORD Jesus Christ did not sin and was able to entrust himself to God, then we, in far easier circumstances must strive to do the same.

However, as we strive to follow Christ's example, we must also remember that his suffering was distinct from our suffering. His suffering was unique because his suffering was without sin, and it is his suffering that serves as the basis of our salvation. The LORD Jesus Christ suffered and died as our substitute, he suffered and he died in our place. In 1 Peter 2:24, we see the supreme and ultimate illustration of unjust suffering –He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

The Greek word translated bore literally means to carry, to bring up, or to bear up. This term was often used in relation to a sacrifice or to an offering. The sacrifice or offering was brought up to the altar, it was placed up upon the altar. Also, implicit with this term is the idea of moving from a lower position to a higher position. To lift up, or to pick up, or even to carry a load. The LORD Jesus Christ, he himself, bore our sins. He lifted them up. He picked them up, and he carried them to the cross.

There are many similarities between this passage and the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53 –the Suffering Servant.

Isaiah 53:4, Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

Isaiah 53:11, Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:12, Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

The LORD Jesus Christ, He himself, voluntarily and without any coercion, offered himself up as a sacrifice for us; a perfect sacrifice, without spot and without blemish. He himself carried up to the cross our sins in his body, and he offered himself up, as a sacrifice, and atonement for sin. The term atonement means to make amends, or to repair a wrong. The term refers to removing the guilt of man, and repairing the broken relationship that exists between God and man.

As a result of sin, the relationship between the LORD God and man has been estranged. The relationship between the LORD God and man has been severed; communion with the LORD God has been severed. Because of sin, all men are born spiritually dead and alienated from the life of God. Because of sin, all men are born without hope, and without God, in the world. Because of sin, all men will walk in the futility of their darkened minds, and die in their trespasses, and immensely suffer for all eternity. This is the miserable path that all men will follow to their destruction.

But God. But God, because of his great love for sinners, sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world, so that sinners might be saved; so that sinners might be reconciled to God, so that our relationship to the LORD God might be fully restored, fully amended, and fully repaired.

Romans 5:1-2, Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Our peace with God is made possible only by the life, death, and resurrection of LORD Jesus Christ. Our peace with God is made possible only by what the LORD Jesus Christ accomplished on our behalf. In his life, Jesus Christ accomplished what none of us could ever accomplish for ourselves. He perfectly obeyed the Law of God. He perfectly obeyed God the Father, he perfectly surrendered his will, to the will of the Father. Jesus Christ lived an absolutely perfect life; it was without spot, without stain, and without blemish. As John the Baptist proclaimed, he was, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” In his death, Jesus Christ died as a divinely appointed substitute, and his death provided atonement between God and man, between God and sinners. The death of the LORD Jesus Christ upon the cross established lasting peace.

Romans 5:8, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2:16, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

1 Peter 3:18, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

At the cross of Christ, an amazing transaction took place, an amazing exchange took place. The righteous life that the LORD Jesus Christ lived was exchanged for the unrighteous lives that we have lived. The wages of our sin, the record of our debt that stood against us, our transgressions, our sins, and our unrighteousness, was transferred to the account of the LORD Jesus Christ; it became his. Our sin was imputed to the LORD Jesus Christ, and he picked it up, he carried it, he placed the full weight of our sin upon himself, and he took it to the cross. He bore our sins in his body.

2 Corinthians 5:21, For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is an amazing truth, it is almost incomprehensible. The thrice holy God takes our sin and he places it upon his perfect Son, the LORD Jesus Christ, who willingly bears our burdens. But this is only the half of the transaction, what is the other half of the transaction? Not only was our sin imputed, or credited to him, but his perfect life, his blamelessness, his sinlessness, was imputed, and credited, to us. The righteousness of the LORD Jesus Christ was transferred to our accounts; it became ours. Our sin was placed upon him, and his perfect life became our perfect life. Double imputation! John Bunyan writes, "Our sins, when laid upon Christ, were yet personally ours, not his; so his righteousness, when put upon us, is yet personally his, not ours." The only reason we are able to be reconciled to the LORD God is because of Jesus Christ's righteousness, we have been covered in his righteous robes. Our Great High Priest, the LORD Jesus Christ, bore our sins, as our substitutionary sacrifice, dying in our place, in order to bring atonement. In order to fully repair our relationship with the LORD God.

I came across an interesting story that helps illustrate this marvelous truth. In the early 1800's, during the French Revolution, men were conscripted into the French army by a lottery system. If your name was drawn, you had to go off to battle. But in the rare case that you could get someone else to take your place, you were exempt. On one occasion the authorities came to a certain man and told him that his name had been drawn. But he refused to go, saying, "I was killed two years ago." At first they questioned his sanity, but he insisted that this was in fact the case. He claimed that the records would show that he had been conscripted two years previously and that he had been killed in action. He explained that when his name came up, a close friend said to him, "You have a large family, but I am not married and nobody is dependent on me. I'll take your name and address and go in your place." The records upheld the man's claim. The case was referred to Napoleon himself, who decided that the country had no legal claim on that man. The reason he was free was because another man had died in his place.

The reason why there is no condemnation, the reason why we are free, is because another man died in our place. The LORD Jesus Christ endured the punishment of sin. The LORD Jesus Christ endured the penalty of sin. The LORD Jesus Christ satisfied the demands of the law, and satisfied the demands of a thrice holy and just God. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

Why does Peter use the word tree rather than the word cross? I remember the first time this verse was brought to my attention. I was at a Bible camp and one the counselors was teaching that the church, and church historians had it all wrong. Christ was not crucified on a cross, but on an actual tree.

At the time, I didn't give much credence to his argument. It didn't matter much to me whether it was a cross or a tree, the important thing was his actual death. But I wasn't sure how to respond to him. I didn't have a good answer for him, and I did wonder why certain passages of Scripture referred to Jesus dying on a cross and others referred to him as dying on a tree.

In the Greek language, there are two separate words used for cross and for tree. The Greek word translated cross is *stairs* and it refers to a crucifixion stake. The Greek word translated tree is *xylon* and it refers to an actual tree, or that which is made from wood. In 1 Peter 2:24, Peter uses the word *xylon*, the word for tree. Why? Why was this term used? Why not eliminate any confusion and use the term for cross? By using the word tree rather than cross, I think Peter was actually alluding to the Old Testament passage in Deuteronomy which prescribed the penalty for a condemned criminal.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23, And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.

The apostle Paul also refers to the same passage in the book of Galatians.

Galatians 3:13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us –for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

Peter intentionally uses this terminology to place emphasis on the fact that the LORD Jesus Christ became a curse for sinners. The LORD Jesus Christ had to take upon himself the curse of the law, the punishment demanded by God for sin and for unrighteousness. So not only did he take upon himself our sin, but Jesus Christ actually became a curse for us. In his own body, on the tree, on the cross, through crucifixion, he had to die, he had to be lifted up, he had to be crucified. He was the propitiation of our sins. In other words, he absorbed and experienced the full judgment and the full wrath of God. He experienced the full judgment and full wrath of God on our behalf. The holiness of God, the justice of God demanded that this penalty be paid for sin. So Jesus Christ willingly took this penalty –he became a curse, and he bore our sins in his body.

Why did Jesus Christ take our sin upon himself? What was his purpose in him bearing our sin? How does Peter answer this question?

1 Peter 2:24, He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

The reason why the LORD Jesus Christ took our sin upon himself was so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. He himself bore our sins, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. The Greek word translated die is a unique word. In fact, this is the only place that it shows up in all of the Scriptures. It means to depart, to be removed from, or to cease existing. The term was used in classical Greek to refer to the dead, to those who had departed from this world, to those who would never be seen again.

The purpose of the substitutionary atonement was that we might depart from our sin, and that we might turn away from our sin, that we might cease from sinning, and that our sins would cease to

exist in our lives. For those of you who have placed your faith in the LORD Jesus Christ, you must die to sin, and you must live to righteousness.

How? Practically speaking, how do we accomplish this command? Yes, the LORD Jesus Christ frees us from the penalty of sin, and from the power of sin, but how do we fight against the continual presence of sin in our lives? How do we actually die to our sins and live to righteousness? This isn't something that we can accomplish in our own strength. Fighting against sin, putting our sin to death, and living to righteousness, can only be carried out through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was given for this purpose, to help us. He helps us in our weaknesses, he convicts us, he teaches us, he guides us into all truth. Everything we need, to fight against sin, and live to righteousness, has been clearly laid out for us in the Scriptures. Everything has been abundantly provided for us, by our Father God, for righteous living. Every spiritual blessing, and all things pertaining to life and godliness have been given to us in Christ Jesus. But how do we actually do it?

Paul provides for us a formula for putting sin to death.

Ephesians 4:22-24, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

I've shared this passage many times, because this passage has probably been the most helpful for me in my fight against sin, and my walk in righteousness. It is a formula; it is God's formula for dying to sin and living to righteousness. This is a passage that you need to be very familiar with, so star it, underline it, or memorize it; don't leave here today without knowing and understanding this passage.

If you want to die to sin and live to righteousness, if you want change, if you want your life to be transformed, if you want your life to be conformed to the image of the LORD Jesus Christ, if your desire is to please the LORD God and live an obedient life, a life that will glorify and honor the him, here is the formula: Ephesians 4:22-24: Put off the old. Put on the new, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. That is it, simple and to the point. Put off the old. Put on the new, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

First off, we are told to put off the old self. Christians must lay aside the old self. How do we lay aside the old self? This means that we are to remove, we are to strip off, we are to take off the old self, just as we would remove clothes that were filthy and soiled. The old self is our old man, it is the old way of our thinking, prior to receiving the LORD Jesus Christ. The old self is concerned with one thing, and that one thing is pleasing self. The old self is fighting for the right to regain its rule and authority in your life. According to Paul in the book of 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. As a new creation, the old has passed away, and thus, we must put him off; we must put off our old self. And we put off our old self, by putting on our new self. In other words, we put off, by putting on. The old is removed, and the new is put on, just as you would put on a new set of clothes. Christians are to put on the thinking and the behaviors that are exemplified by the LORD Jesus Christ. Just as the old self is concerned with one thing, so is the new self. The new self is solely concerned with pleasing the LORD God, and the LORD God alone. The old self is conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but the new self is being conformed to the image of the LORD Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 4:23, we put off, by putting on, by being renewed in the spirit of our minds. What does that mean? It means that as we behold the Scriptures, as we hear them, as we read them, as we study them, as we memorize them, as we meditate on them, the Holy Spirit illuminates God's Word to us, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds, so that we can receive it, we can understand it, and we can apply these truth to our lives. In the strength of the LORD, we put off the old man, with its evil practices, and with its evil passions, and we replace it with the new man, with new practices, and with new passions, practices and passions that please and honor the LORD God.

A great example of this formula for change is found in Ephesians 4:25-31.

Ephesians 4:25, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another."

What's the put off? Falsehood. What's the put on? Truth. In the strength of the LORD, we put off falsehood, and we put on truth, by renewing our minds with the truth of the Scriptures.

Ephesians 4:28, Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

What's the put off? Theft. What's the put on? Hard work. In the strength of the LORD, we put off theft, and we put on hard work, by renewing our minds with the truth of the Scriptures.

Ephesians 4:29, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

What's the put off? Corrupting talk. What's the put on? Edifying talk. In the strength of the LORD, we put off corrupting talk, and we put on edifying talk, by renewing our minds with the Scriptures.

Ephesians 4:31, Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

This entire verse is the put off. But what is the put on?

Ephesians 4:32, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Change is that simple. Put off the old man, put on the new man, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Living to righteousness becomes a reality by departing from our sins. Living to righteousness becomes a reality by dying to our sin. In other words, as you live to righteousness, as you put on the new man, you will die to sin, and you will put off the old man. You put off by putting on.

Romans 6:11-13, So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your member to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for

righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Do not let sin have any dominion over you. Do not let sin have any control over you. Sin is dead to you. You must deprive your evil desires of their strength and their power. You must mortify them. You must kill them off entirely. With all of your might, with all of your strength, with all of your being, do everything that is possible to rob your evil desires of their influence and power in your life. Fight. Wrestle. Strive. Put off your sinful desires and bury them in the grave. Remember what Christ Jesus accomplished on your behalf. Remember who you are in Christ Jesus. You have been crucified with Christ. Galatians 2:20, It is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you. And the life that you now live in the flesh, you live by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself up for you. The LORD Jesus Christ died for you, in order that you might depart from your sin and live to righteousness. He bore your sins in his body, so that the pattern of your life would be conformed to the pattern of his life. The LORD God has made you into a new person. The LORD God has made you into a new creation. God has transformed you from a sinner to a saint. You are a new man; for by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 2:24, He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

In the Greek, the word translated wounds literally means to trickle with blood. It can refer to a violent blow to the body, or to scars received from an injury or beating. By his wounds, by his scars, by his pain, by his brutal affliction, you are healed.

Isaiah 53:4-5, Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

The suffering of the LORD Jesus Christ is the means of our spiritual healing. It is the means of our transformation from death to life. It is the means of our deliverance from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. It is the means of our deliverance from enslavement to sin to righteousness. The LORD Jesus Christ took our place to make this healing a reality –he took our place.

Peter, not only describes the LORD Jesus Christ as our example, and as our substitute, but also as the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

1 Peter 2:25, For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

As Peter concludes this chapter, he once again refers back to the prophecy of Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53:6, All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Like sheep who have strayed from their shepherd, so have all men strayed from the LORD God. All men have gone their own way. All men follow their own path, and this path that leads them to

destruction, far away from the LORD God. Even though we were straying like sheep, we have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. Here Peter is referring to man's unsaved condition prior to salvation, we were like sheep, prone to wander, and unable to find our way back to God. But the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. It is through the provision of the LORD Jesus Christ that we have returned to him. The Greek word translated returned carries with it the idea of repentance, a turning from sin toward God, placing our in faith the LORD God.

Acts 3:19-20, Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Acts 11:21, And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Acts 14:15, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the haven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

To return is to repent and to believe. And to repent and believe, is to return to the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul. These two titles, Shepherd and Overseer, convey the role of the LORD Jesus Christ in our lives. The LORD Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep. He promised to gather, and to care for his scattered flock. He is our leader, our shelter, our feeder, our cleanser, and our restorer. The LORD Jesus Christ is also the Overseer of our souls. All who belong to the LORD Jesus Christ come under his perfect care, provision, and protection. He watches over all the sheep in his flock; he watches over every member of his church; he knows his sheep, and his sheep know him. What tremendous blessings are found in Christ Jesus, in his person and his work.

If you do not know the LORD Jesus Christ, if you are lost, or wandering, or without hope, return to him. Repent of your sins, and believe in him. Jesus Christ, God the Son, became sin. He became a curse. He was smitten by God and afflicted. Jesus Christ died to save sinners. Believe in his perfect sacrifice. Believe in his perfect atonement. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Put off, put on, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Consider yourself to be dead to sin and alive to God. Live to righteousness. He was wounded for our transgressions, and by his wounds we have been healed, so let us live a life that is worthy of his great sacrifice to his praise, glory, and honor