

## PETER

Suffered in the flesh – Ceased from sin

June 16, 2013

- I. I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
  - A. I Peter 4:1-3 . . . Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. [3] For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.
  - B. Pray
- II. Suffering in the flesh – Ceasing from sin (I Peter 4:1)
  - A. I Peter 4:1a . . . Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose . . .
    1. If we read these words as if they are separate from the context, that is, as if they are expressing a theological or doctrinal truth regardless of the context, then they are easily understood to speak of Christ's suffering as God's perfect Lamb in paying the penalty for our sin in order to reconcile us to God.
    2. And yet, we just completed two weeks of looking at what Peter meant when he said, "Baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."
      - a. In that study, I urged you to examine Peter's words within the larger and the smaller context in which they appear.
      - b. Then I affirmed Peter's meaning of those words by taking us to Paul's words in Romans 6.
        - (1) And just to remind you, in Romans 3-5, Paul deals with our being justified by faith through grace, and in those chapters he speaks of Christ dying FOR us, that is, FOR our sin.
        - (2) But in Romans 6, Paul transitions from speaking of Christ dying FOR our sin to speaking of Christ TO sin, and our dying with Him TO sin through baptism.
      - c. In other words, Peter and Paul are telling us that, when we are baptized, we are joining Christ in dying TO sin, that is, to the power and practice of sin. And when we rise from the water, we are rising with Christ to live a new and holy life UNTO God.

3. My point here is that if we keep the words of I Peter 4:1 within the context of what Peter has been saying and is moving forward to say, the sufferings of Christ referenced here are the sufferings of dying to sin so that He could rise to live solely unto God.
  - a. Paul put this same truth this way in Romans 6:4 . . . “Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death in order that as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”
  - b. Therefore, the sufferings Peter is exhorting us to embrace and willingly endure are the sufferings of dying to self, denying our flesh, killing off selfishness, throwing away ungodly fears, saying no to the influences and ways of the world – or to say it in the most simplest of words, these are the sufferings of dying to those sins that we cherish and those sinful habits we hold on to.
4. Now in using Christ as our example, Peter calls us to arm ourselves with the same purpose Christ had in His suffering. In other words, we are to equip ourselves with the same mindset, we are to nurture and fortify the same purpose, we are to cling to the same goal of dying to sin so that we can freely and whole-heartedly move forward in living holy lives unto God.
  - a. And why do we need to arm or equip ourselves with the same purpose Christ had? Let me give you two reasons.
    - (1) First, we are not naturally inclined to give up what we love, even when what we love is self-destructive, or when it is relationship destructive, or when it hurts those we love, or when it is obviously selfish – even to us, or when we know it is just plain wrong!
      - (a) The point here is that you have to want to die to sin more than you want to cling to your favorite sins. In other words, you have to want to die to the sins that you cherish, that you deem too personally profitable to let go of, that make you feel better when life is hard, that enrich you financially or make you feel important or keep you in a position of superiority.
      - (b) Arming yourself with the same purpose Christ had is one powerful tool in motivating you to want to die to sin.
    - (2) Second, we are not naturally inclined to willingly suffer, let alone value suffering, even when it means bringing an end to what is self-destructive or spiritually damaging or displeasing to God.

- (a) The reality is, you have to want God, you have to want His glory in the world, and you have to want His happiness more than you want your unholy loves and ease of life in order to endure and even treasure the sufferings required to die to sin and move forward in putting on godliness so you can live unto God.
      - (b) Here is where the fourth beatitude is so meaningful, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6).
    - b. To help you see in a practical way the suffering I am talking about, consider these three examples.
      - (1) Dying to sin and putting on Christ-likeness requires pushing yourself forward so as to persevere when discouraged.
      - (2) It requires making yourself get back up and back on track when you are disgusted with yourself for giving in to old temptations and falling back into old ways.
      - (3) And it requires continuing on when you are just plain tired of the vigilance required to fight this worthy fight, day after day.
  - 5. Therefore, Peter’s words are important words, for they call us to face reality as it is, to follow Christ’s example, and to nurture and pray for and cling to the same grand purpose Christ had in dying TO sin so that we can rise from the water’s of baptism and move forward to willingly, deliberately, and zealously pursue holiness in all our behavior, just as God is holy.
- B. I Peter 4:1b . . . because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin . . .
- 1. As with the first half of this verse, so with this second half, it is vital to keep these words in their context in order to get their intended meaning.
    - a. I am saying this because if we read these words and try to understand them apart from their context, we could easily conclude that anyone who suffers in the flesh, in some way or another, would from that time on, never sin again.
    - b. And we could defend our conclusion on the basis that the word “cease” means to stop doing something.
  - 2. However, many Christians have suffered in the flesh, and yet who of us has perfectly and absolutely ceased from sin?

- a. In fact, experience tells us that some who have suffered in the flesh not only continue sinning to some measure or another, but they also become bitter toward God for failing them in some way.
    - b. And some, as a result of suffering, have even turned away from trusting God altogether.
  3. So how are we to understand these words? If we seek to understand these words within the larger context of baptism saving us from ourselves, and within the smaller context of following Christ's example of willingly suffering the pains of dying to sin and dying to our unholy loves, we can then rightly say that those who have suffered this kind of dying have brought an end to sin – at least the practice of and willful participation in those sins they have died to.
    - a. In other words, if you willingly suffer through the painful and arduous process of dying TO specific known sins, and if you put godliness in their place, you will become holy, as God is holy, in those areas where you have suffered the death of your flesh.
    - b. Now admittedly, you may not do this perfectly, but if you have armed yourself with the same purpose Christ had in His suffering, you will want to do this perfectly. And because you want to, you will push yourself to continue pressing on, just as Paul said he was pressing on in order to become what Jesus saved him to be (Philippians 3:11).
  4. Now let me bring in a truth you may think I am neglecting: we do not follow Christ's example of dying TO sin in order to rise to a new life of living UNTO God apart from God's empowerment and assistance. And we will not do it without much prayer on our part, the inner working of the Holy Spirit, the help of the Living Word, and the support and encouragement of the Church. This task of becoming holy as God is holy is a shared task where God does the lions share. Yet we must do our share if meaningful, measurable progress is to be made toward its completion.
- C. Now that I have affirmed the necessity of God's part and the necessity of doing our part, I want to take a closer look at Paul's words in Romans 6 regarding suffering in the flesh in order to cease from sin.
1. Romans 6:5-7 . . . For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, [6] knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; [7] for he who has died is freed

from sin. (*This is the legal language of Paul describing the mystical and spiritual death to sin and the rising to live unto God through baptism.*)

2. Romans 6:8-14 . . . [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, [9] knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. [10] For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. [11] Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, [13] and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as instruments of unrighteousness*; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as instruments of righteousness to God*. [14] For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (*This is the practical language of how we are to apply on a day-to-day basis the mystical and spiritual reality begun in baptism.*)
  3. My reason for pointing out Paul's words is twofold.
    - a. First, to remind you that something mystical and spiritual has taken place in baptism – and what has taken place is intended to give us a solid start in working out – from that day forward – the process of dying to sin in practical ways, and pursuing godliness in every area of life – such as our thought life, emotions, fears, desires, relationships, words, and deeds.
    - b. Second, to remind you that baptism is not a magic wand that instantly or completely transforms you. You must follow up your baptism with the daily hard work of dying to sin in the practical realities of life, and driving out the remnants of your old nature so that you can put godliness in its place. And it this process which brings about the suffering that leads to ceasing from sin, being transformed, and living unto God.
- D. A practical example of the suffering required to die to sin and live to God.
1. To look at a practical example of the suffering inherent in dying to sin and putting on godliness, we could select just about any scripture portion that exhorts us to put off the old nature and put on the new nature, such as Ephesians 4:31-32 . . . Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

2. But today, I thought it best to select Romans 12:17-21 . . . Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. [19] Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. [20] "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." [21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
  - a. I want to focus on just two short portions of these verses –
    - (1) Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.
    - (2) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
  - b. To bring an end to paying back evil for evil,
    - (1) We must rise to a level of honesty whereby we are able to see when and how we pray back evil for evil. For most of us, this is not just challenging, but painful as well, for it means seeing ourselves more nearly as we really are.
    - (2) We must want to hate the sin and love God and His righteousness – which we obviously do not do when it comes to repaying evil for evil.
    - (3) We must willingly kill off
      - (a) our longing for self-rule,
      - (b) our selfishness,
      - (c) our double standards – for example, self-protection that seeks our good without equal regard for the good of others, or our self-serving idea of fair treatment,
      - (d) our demand for fair treatment and respect from others,
      - (e) our ungodly anger at mistreatment,
      - (f) our manipulatively unkind words,
      - (g) and our belief that it is right to treat others according to the way they treat us.
  - c. But we cannot stop with bringing an end to our sin, we must put godliness in its place if we are to live unto God. Therefore, we must come alive to and nurture and firmly establish
    - (1) submission to God's rule and God's ways as stated in God's word,
    - (2) solid and unshakable trust in God's protection and provision,
    - (3) a treasuring of God above all else,
    - (4) a belief in love itself so that regardless of the circumstances, we do not compromise love or treat it hypocritically,

- (5) a willingness to endure mistreatment from others without resentment, ungodly anger, or hostility,
  - (6) and genuine meekness and humility.
3. Of course, just as dying to sin requires suffering the pangs of death, so coming alive to God and His righteousness requires suffering the pangs of birth and the challenges of living a new life. If we are unwilling to suffer the pangs of death to our old self and the pangs of birth to our new divine nature, we will continue in those sins that are more precious to us than God, and are more important to us than the good of those who are harmed in some way by our choices and behavior.
  4. Now, as many of you already know, if we take God seriously and proceed down His narrow path according to His will, we will be tested and tried. This is where James 1:2-4 both encourages us and shows us the cost or suffering involved in becoming a new creature in Christ Jesus: “ Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

### III. Conclusion

- A. Though there is no magic wand or short cut that exempts us from the suffering part as we make our way from baptism to being holy in all our behavior as God is holy, I can tell you with confidence that the willingness to suffer death to self and sin leads to a life that holds such great reward, such unbelievable joy, such unexplainable inner peace, and such intimacy with God, that once you get to this place in your Christian life, you will never regret having paid the price of suffering to get there.
- B. And though the suffering at first seems horribly painful and hardly worth the effort of gaining greater godliness, dying to self and sin gets easier and less painful the further you travel down this road.
- C. Therefore, arm yourself with the same purpose Christ had, for there is no worthy and commendable dying to self and sin, and putting on godliness without suffering.