

• *The Christian's response to unjust suffering*

Amidst unjust sufferings, Christians must be: ready^{□1}, conscientiousness^{□2}, making sure we suffer for good reasons^{□3}. Jesus' atonement also involved unjust suffering^{□4}. Indeed Jesus is the classic example of God's purpose going forward through unjust suffering.

□1 3:15
□2 3:16
□3 3:17
□4 3:18

• *A reminder of Jesus' sufferings*

Peter reminds us again that Jesus' sufferings also involved unjust suffering (3:18). His death was a substitutionary atonement. It leads to our death to sin, our rising to newness of life.

'For Christ also suffered for sins once for ever, the righteous one in the place of unrighteous people, in order to bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit'^{□1}.

□1 3:18

• *Jesus' death upon the cross is the outstanding proof that sufferings are purposeful*

Jesus' death upon the cross is the outstanding proof that sufferings are purposeful. When Christians suffer injustice, it is because they are following in the footsteps of Jesus. God's plan for saving the world involved sufferings in the life of Jesus. God's plans for using His people in this world involve their sufferings also. Although the sufferings of the people of God are not atoning sufferings, yet they are necessary for God to fulfil His purpose. This is a mysterious matter, yet there can be no doubt that the purpose of God goes forward as we endure trials and tribulations for the sake of Jesus, just as the purpose of God went forward when Jesus suffered. For this reason the Christian in his own suffering, gets encouragement by seeing what God achieved in Jesus' sufferings.

Jesus' death upon the cross

1. Was 'for sins'

1. **Jesus' death upon the cross was 'for sins'**. The human race had a bad problem because of sin. Sin brings guilt, punishment, and pollution. It damages our relationship with God, with others, with ourselves. But Jesus died 'for sins'. He sacrificed Himself, in order to bring forgiveness and restoration.

2. Was a completed work

2. **Jesus' death upon the cross was a completed work**. Jesus died 'once for ever'^{□1}. There will never be any need of another sacrifice for sins. All other atoning sacrifices are overshadowed and needless. Jesus never needs to die for us again, because He offered Himself for sins 'once for ever'.

□1 compare Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27; 9:22, 26 28; 10:10

3. Was a work of substitution

3. **Jesus' death upon the cross was a work of substitution**. He died 'the righteous person in the place of unrighteous people'. The sins of the entire human race were placed upon Him, and He bore the penalty and punishment for them. He was punished where we should have been punished. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

4. Was designed to restore us to fellowship with God

4. **Jesus' death upon the cross was designed to restore us to fellowship with God**. He died 'to bring us to God'. When sin was removed out of the way so as to be no longer a barrier between man and God, the possibility of reconciliation and harmony with God was opened up for us. Jesus' death brings us to God ready to praise Him, ready to serve Him.

• *The barrier of sin removed*

Again, Peter insists that Jesus' sufferings were purposeful. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross, God's people now know God. Sin was the barrier between us and God. Now – through Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross – it may be forgiven and so we have been

'brought to God'. God could only be displeased with us, at the time when sins were heavy upon us. But Jesus has died! We have believed! The sacrifice of the cross has been applied to us! So we have been brought to God. God is our Father. Jesus is our Saviour and Friend. The Holy Spirit is our Guide and Sustainer. The blood of Jesus Christ has brought us to God.

5. Was followed by vindication

5. Jesus' death upon the cross was followed up by vindication and victory. Having been 'put to death in the flesh' He was 'made alive by the Spirit'.

It must be noted that Peter does not say 'being kept alive in the spirit' or 'remaining alive in His spirit'. Peter is not referring to body-and-spirit and then referring what happens to 'the spirit'. That is not Peter's point.

Rather Peter uses the word 'made alive'. It is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit was at work in the resurrection of Jesus. The Spirit is 'the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead'¹. The thought of 1 Peter 3:18 is similar to the thought in Romans 1:3-4 and 1 Timothy 3:16, in both of which there is probably a reference to the Holy Spirit.

¹ Romans 8:13

• 'Made alive' – the resurrection of Jesus

• 'In the flesh' – weak human nature

When Jesus died, He died 'in the flesh'. They ill-treated him physically. His human weakness was very obvious. The Father did not send twelve legions of angels to rescue Him and His eleven faithful apostles. The weakness of human nature was very conspicuous.

• A transformed body

When Jesus was made alive, He was raised by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reversed the judgement of the court of Pontius Pilate. Jesus was given a transformed body and was able to say 'All power has been given unto Me'. He was crucified in weakness but raised by the power of God.

• Encouragement – sufferings do not defeat God

Peter is saying all of this – it must be remembered – to encourage Christians who are suffering. Jesus' death and resurrection is the classic proof that sufferings do not defeat God; they accomplish His purposes and they issue in triumph.

• Suffering for righteousness achieves something and is followed by vindication

If the terrible sufferings of Jesus were reversed by God, if the weakness of the flesh was followed by the power of the Spirit – then the Christians can expect the same thing to happen to them. They may be in the midst of severe trials, but God knows what He is doing. Suffering for righteousness' sake achieves something in the kingdom of God, and then is followed by vindication. This is what happened to Jesus; this is what will happen to us.



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