

SOTERIOLOGY (21)

The ascension of Jesus Christ relates to soteriology in several ways:

- 1) It encourages believers, knowing Christ is presently preparing eternal dwelling places for every believer (John 14:2-3).
- 2) It encourages believers, knowing Christ is presently making intercession for them (Rom. 8:34).
- 3) It encourages believers, knowing that the Living Christ will literally return for them (I Thess. 4:15-17; John 14:3).
- 4) It prompts a believer to live a godly life, knowing Christ will return (I John 2:28).
- 5) It should intimidate every unbeliever, knowing they will face the living Christ (Rev. 6:15-17).

Phase #6 - The returning phase focuses on the final deliverance and reward for those classified as being saved.

By the very fact that Jesus Christ will return to claim those who are believers immediately means that the main emphasis of this part of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is for His people. The return of Jesus Christ is the blessed hope of the believer. It is one of the key or should be one of the key motivations for living a godly life (i.e. I Thess. 5:1-10).

Phase #7 - The reigning phase focuses on Jesus Christ visibly reigning forever.

Both the nation Israel and the individual Christian will enjoy and share in the reigning phase of Jesus Christ. As it relates to soteriology, the potential of reigning with Christ should cause us to remain faithful and endure whatever comes our way, having this great future hope.

QUESTION #10 – Why did Jesus Christ have to suffer?

When one carefully examines the Word of God on this matter, one soon realizes there is no simplistic answer to this question. In fact, Chafer said the sufferings of Christ “transcend the range of human understanding” (*Ibid.*, p. 35).

Although the central focus of Christ’s sufferings must be the cross, it is clear from direct statements of God’s Word that this is not the only focus:

- 1) Jesus Christ was perfected through suffering. Heb. 2:10

The sufferings of Jesus Christ actually made Him a complete author or leader. As a leader, Jesus Christ became a complete human leader through His sufferings. Suffering enables us to be a complete minister—we understand hurt, pain, difficulties and setbacks.

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2) Jesus Christ became the perfect minister through suffering. Heb. 2:18

The word “tempted” is one that refers to afflictions and trials which are designed to prove something in a positive sense (G. Abbot-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 351). God allows afflictions and trials to come to the life of a believer to establish and prove their character. Jesus Christ, through His own suffering, understands completely the difficulties a believer experiences and is able to perfectly aid the believer during the process.

3) Jesus Christ learned ultimate obedience through suffering. Heb. 5:8

We may understand obedience to God in at least two ways: obedience as opposed to disobedience in accordance to God’s Word, or obedience at the ultimate level in accordance with God’s will.

Jesus Christ was always obedient to God’s Word. He never disobeyed any command of God and was always holy. He did not have to learn to obey versus disobey for His holy nature guaranteed He would always obey. He could, however, learn obedience to the will of God at the ultimate level by having to face suffering (Luke 22:42).

Jesus Christ, being God, had enough power to get out of any difficult situation or assignment. By virtue of the fact that He did not opt out of suffering, He learned obedience at a whole new level, obeying even when facing great personal suffering and hardship. It was this type of obedience that Christ learned through suffering.

QUESTION #11 – What are two critical divisions of study that must be considered when thinking through Christ’s sufferings?

When thinking through the sufferings of Jesus Christ, it must be analyzed under two main divisions:

Division #1 - Christ’s sufferings in His life .

Division #2 - Christ’s sufferings in His death .

QUESTION #12 – Why did Jesus Christ suffer in His life?

In the angelic announcement of Luke 2:11, which says, “for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord,” we are immediately faced with the fact that Jesus Christ had to leave His heavenly throne and glory to be born in this sinful and rebellious world. This very fact constitutes a form of suffering.

The sufferings of Jesus Christ, in His life, form the background for His sacrificial death. However, it needs to be clearly understood that it is Christ’s sufferings in His death on the cross that makes the salvation of the soul possible.

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Dr. Chafer writes: "...it should be noted that in none of them (life sufferings), nor in any other feature of Christ's life, did He undertake any aspect of that work upon which the salvation of a soul depends. Only dire confusion of doctrine results when it is not conceded that, whatever His life-ministry under divine appointment may have been, the finished work did not begin until He came to the cross and that work was consummated when He died. The distinctive, efficacious character of the doctrinal aspect of the sufferings of Christ in death cannot be preserved from confusion unless this division of truth is observed" (*Ibid.*, p. 37).

This is a critical issue that must never be confused. The saving of the soul is only possible through Christ's sufferings in His death on the cross. Any attempt to relate salvation to any other of Christ's sufferings is to disregard truth and ultimately lead others to faulty theological conclusions.

One reason why Christ suffered during His life was to prove His sinless character (Heb. 4:15). The Old Testament pictured a very important need for an unblemished sacrifice (i.e. Ex. 12:1-6). We may observe from this passage that the unblemished lamb was to be taken into confinement from the 10th day of the month (12:3), and was not to be sacrificed until the 14th of the month (12:6), indicating a time period of suffering and confinement prior to the actual sacrifice. Prior to the cross of Christ, His hardships, sufferings and trials proved He was a lamb without blemish.

There are at least three reasons why Jesus Christ suffered in His life:

Reason #1 - Christ suffered because of His character .

Many of Christ's sufferings occurred because He lived a holy life in the midst of a totally corrupt and fallen world. Dr. John Walvoord writes: "Because of Christ's holy character there was constant tension between His life and that of the world" (*Chafer's Systematic Theology*, Abridged Edition, Vol. 2, p. 44).

It was Christ's holy character that led Satan to tempt Him (Matt. 4:1-10). It was His holy character that caused this world to hate Him (John 15:18-20). To simply state the point, Jesus Christ had such a perfect holy character and lived such a pure life that He suffered for it.

By Christ's own words, this has application for the N.T. believer (John 15:18-19). The Apostle Paul also says that those who live godly are destined to suffer (II Tim. 3:12). Peter, too, was fully aware that a godly character is destined to suffer hardships (I Pet. 3:14-17).

Reason #2 - Christ suffered because of His compassion .

As we have already observed, Christ was perfected through suffering (Heb. 2:10). He became the perfect minister through suffering (Heb. 2:18), and He learned ultimate obedience through suffering (Heb. 5:8). Jesus Christ willingly put Himself through difficult trials because He desired to be the perfect minister to us. He had so much compassion for us that He was even willing to experience the same type of sufferings that we experience.

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No matter what we go through, Jesus Christ went through more. No matter how much we suffer, He willingly suffered more because of His great compassion. Psalm 103:13 says, “Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.” God’s compassion is motivated by His true perspective of us.

Reason #3 - Christ suffered because of His anticipation .

Christ suffered many things in anticipation of Calvary. For example, when He was a baby, He had to be circumcised so that He could perfectly fulfill the O.T. Law, so that He could nail the Law to His work on the cross (Luke 2:21-39; Col. 2:11-14). There were times when Christ experienced terrible anguish in anticipating Calvary (Luke 22:39-46).

There is no question that the life of Christ was a life of much turmoil, trial and tragedy. No suffering of Jesus Christ was by coincidence or chance; it was all by divine design. Every bit of Christ’s suffering was part of God’s program and plan (John 19:10-11).

QUESTION #13 – What is meant by the theological concepts of active and passive obedience in regard to Jesus Christ?

1) Active obedience.

This refers to the fact that Jesus Christ obeyed all of God’s laws and commands perfectly. He met every divine requirement and can legitimately and legally be classified from God’s classification as infinitely perfect.

This means that Jesus Christ did no wrong ever and always did what was absolutely right.

2) Passive obedience.

This refers to the fact that Jesus Christ perfectly submitted to the plan of God and willingly endured all necessary suffering in His life and death.

Christ’s entire life was one of perfect/continual obedience. He not only continually did no wrong, but He also continually endured all suffering which included His death on the cross.

There have been those who are confused on these two critical theological issues and, as a result, wind up with a faulty theology. For example, the circumcision of Jesus Christ would have shed His blood, but His blood shed at His circumcision would not save a soul. Only Christ’s shed blood on the cross saves a soul.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer explains: “Jonathan Edwards declared that the blood of Christ’s circumcision when He was eight days old was as efficacious as that which flowed from the thrust of the spear.