



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 19 Issue 20

May 24, 2020

Living as a Sacrifice, Part 4

1 Peter 3:13-22

There is no question that Christianity involves sacrifice and suffering. In Luke Christ told His disciples this:

Luke 9:23b, "...If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

In Christ's day the expression of "taking up ones cross" would have evoked the vivid thought of a condemned criminal walking to the place of execution bearing on his shoulders the cross

beam on which he soon would be nailed. It truly was a death march!

And thus, for Christ to utilize this imagery in His description of the Christian life would have conveyed the idea that Christianity ultimately is not about being fulfilled, being happy, and the like. We need to realize that as sinners this is a large part of our makeup! Isn't it? In our humanness we constantly morph life so that it is about us and our happiness! No doubt that is why Christ called us to think of our Christian lives as a spiritual death march to self! As servants of Christ, it is not our will that we are after, BUT truly, "Thy will be done!" (Matthew 6:10; 26:42)

This is a major theme of the Christian life! And yet, as unpleasant as this may sound, the charge comes with such glorious promises as it relates to the believer.

Matthew 5:10-12a, "Blessed [to be envied] are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, [why?] for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. // Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, [why?] for your reward in heaven is great..."

That no doubt is why Christ said, speaking to the persecuted church:

Revelation 2:10, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

it was in light of this that Paul said this:

2 Corinthians 4:17, "...momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

Now I can imagine the worldling or atheist, listening to this, thinking: "That's religion for you! It manipulates its adherents by holding out grandiose promises!" *That may even be your thinking today!*

Peter penned the section to address this. Knowing that compromise in our service/witness for Christ typically follows on the heel of fear, Peter began this passage with two incredible promises: The Flames of Affliction

- (1) Can neither hurt nor rob us, vv. 13-14a! And so,
- (2) We need not fear nor ought we to be troubled, v. 14b!

Now the question is this: Is this just "pie in the sky" religion? Or do these promises have substance? Peter answered these questions in the closing verses of this passage!

We can have confidence as Christians that all righteous suffering will result in blessing on

account of:

- (1) The Example of Christ, v. 18.
- (2) The Example of the Redeemed in Noah's Day, vv. 19-20.

1 Peter 3:21a, "And corresponding to that [having just referenced the water from which Noah was saved], baptism now saves you..."

On the surface, this is a confusing statement. You mean to tell me if I get baptized, I'll be saved? Absolutely not! In this regard, don't forget the infallible rule for interpreting Scripture: it is "Scripture interprets scripture, the less clear in light of the more clear." As the passage before is not very clear, let's allow the clearer passages of Scripture help us understand Peter's statement here.

First, there is no question in Scripture that salvation is not by anything we as sinners could do, BUT only by the work of Christ and so the grace of God alone! We see this from the very beginning of redemptive history, When God created man and placed him in the garden, the Lord entered into a relationship with man whose maintenance WAS based on the activity of man (Adam) and so his work...

Genesis 2:16-17, "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.'"

Most in Christ today think that they relate to God on an emotive basis... *God loves me and I love God!* Now while there is nothing wrong with love or loving God (in fact, it is something we ought to do, Matthew 22:34-37). Yet we must understand that we do not relate to God on the basis of love. RATHER, we/mankind relates to God on a legal basis!

You say, "That sounds strange! What possibly could that mean?" Yet it ought not to be strange to you. For if you have a car or house loan... if you rent an apartment, you yourself have a legal relationship either with a person or an entity! And so, it is with mankind and their relationship with God! That is how Adam (and we as he is our representative) related to God. If he obeyed God perfectly, he and mankind would continue to enjoy a love-relationship with God. But if he disobeyed, he and mankind would die! What happened? Adam failed!

In this regard, don't miss the context: we are talking here about a perfect man (not a man fraught with weakness or inability) and a perfect environment (unlike the wilderness where Christ was tempted)! And yet in spite of this, Adam rebelled against God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and all of mankind died! From the opening chapters of Genesis we learn this important truth: Even perfect man — man at his best — falls short of the glory, standard, and perfection of God! We see it in Isaiah.

Isaiah 64:6a, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds

are like a filthy garment...”

Did you get what Isaiah just said? It is not man in his weakness and wickedness that is “a filthy garment” BUT man at his best, “...all our righteous needs are like a filthy garment!” (Cf. also Romans 3:10-18) Accordingly, the only way a man can be saved is by God doing the work for him! It is this truth that is proclaimed on every page of Scripture.

Romans 6:23, “...the wages of sin is death...”

We could go on and on citing verse after verse all of which would say the same thing: it only takes one sin to condemn us before God! As such, there is no work that we can do to appease God’s wrath and so earn salvation. Christ must do it, as Paul continues, “...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that [faith, grace, and even salvation is] not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

Romans 5:18-19, “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.”

There is no question! Salvation is by God’s grace alone through the work of Christ alone!

So, how is it that the text says, “baptism now saves us”? The answer is found in our understanding of the word “save.” It can and often times does reference the salvation that is granted in Christ from “the wages of our sin.” Luke, speaking of the Philippian jailer wrote this:

Acts 16:30-31, “And after he brought them out [Paul and Silas], he said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.’”

This is speaking of the forgiveness of sin that comes at a point in time! If we trust/rely not upon our own merit, BUT the offering of Christ, we will be saved! Now, most often, this is what we think of when we think of “salvation.” Yet the Bible uses the term much more broadly. To a group of people who had been saved already, Paul exhorted this:

Philippians 2:12, “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”

Here “salvation” is spoken not as something we received at a moment in time in the past, BUT something that is worked out in the present.

You say, “That’s confusing! How can a person both be saved and yet called to ‘work out salvation’ as if it were a present, emerging reality?” The same way a President does in the United States. On January 20 after an election, they take vows by which they become President, but the next four to eight years they work out their presidency. So, it is with salvation. It is both a past and present reality. And yet, still it doesn’t end here, Speaking of the Christian, Peter wrote this:

1 Peter 1:5, “Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

This is talking about a salvation that pertains to the future that is waiting all of God’s children. What is this? Our glorification!

Recall the theological expression used to describe “Salvation” in its fulness, *The Ordo Salutis* which contains no less than ten elements, one of which is the forgiveness of sin!

So, when we come to a passage which speaks of “salvation” or “being saved,” we have to ask ourselves, “What facet of salvation is being addressed here?” In answer to that we know from the context that Peter is Not talking here about the forgiveness of sin, BUT the maintenance of our faith in the midst of trial!

With this we now can understand Peter’s point. He links our “baptism” NOT with the forgiveness of our sin, BUT the maintenance of our faith, courage, and joy in the midst of trial! Did you get that? God intended baptism to be far more than just a religious rite occurring one time in your life. Rather, it is to be something that continues to encourage us throughout our lives. How does it do that?

1 Peter 3:21b, “And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you- not the removal of dirt from the flesh [Peter says here, ‘I’m not talking about the actual rite and so our being sprinkled or dunked in water’], but an appeal to God for a good conscience...”

Now the picture is coming into focus! Again, we must see that baptism carries with it a glorious assurance, and it is this assurance that Peter is appealing to here! What’s the assurance? Paul, speaking of the Old Testament rite of circumcision which in the New Testament was replaced by baptism.¹

Romans 4:11a, “And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised...”

From this we learn that as a seal, circumcision was to assure the recipient that “righteousness” is attained not by their effort/work, BUT by trusting the work of another, whom we know is Christ! Righteousness comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

THAT'S THE ASSURANCE OF BAPTISM! When the child of God fails again for the zillionth time, they need NOT shrink back in despair thinking that God most certainly now must be angry with them! RATHER, they have — what God intended to be — a constant reminder and assurance that their right-standing before Him, and so the fact that His love and approval are based NOT upon what they do BUT what He has given them in Christ!

We see this in the text before us! Look at the text again. The word for “appeal” [ἐπερώτημα² (*eperōtēma*)] speaks of “an urgent request/a request with great import.”³ Its root is used in Scripture for a judicial examination (Mark 14:60–61) or investigation (Mark 15:44). Accordingly, Peter understood baptism to be an urgent appeal to God for the purpose of “a good conscience.” Now, what does that mean?

Recall, “the conscience” is akin to a referee whose job is to ensure that the game is played according to the rules. He does not create the rules NOR interpret them. RATHER, his job simply is to pass judgment- he blows his whistle- when any facet of the game violates the rule book. Now when such a violation occurs in our lives such that our conscience condemns us, what only can bring relief? The knowledge that the sin we just committed has been forgiven on account of Christ! The Hebrew writer looking at the Old Testament sacrificial system, the text turned its focus to Christ’s sacrifice:

Hebrews 9:14, “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Truly, it is only the shed blood of Christ — and so the knowledge of forgiven sin — that can restore a guilty conscience! Accordingly, “to make an appeal to God for a good conscience” is to be mindful of the assurance that God gives us that in Christ at all times we are forgiven and well-pleasing to God! Now, on what basis can we have this assurance? What does the testimony of baptism rest upon?

1 Peter 3:21b-22, “And corresponding to that, 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, who is at the right hand of God...”

We are back to the “resurrection” (cf. 1 Peter 1:3; 3:18-19). Not only is Christ’s resurrection the foundation of Christianity, BUT it also provides the basis for any and all assurance that we might have as a Christian! For in His resurrection, Christ was exalted to “the right hand of God”- which denotes at least two things:

1. In the ancient world, the “right hand of a king” was the most honorable place in the kingdom. From this we conclude that in His life, death, and resurrection, Christ was well-pleasing to the Father — *which means that forevermore so shall we be!*

Ephesians 2:6-7, “[God] raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly

places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

2. Yet the “right hand” also was a position of power and authority (cf. Ps. 110:1; Ephesians 1:20–21)! In this regard, Christ’s session at the “right hand of God” guarantees that every promise given to us in salvation is a certainty!

That is the force of the remainder of the v. 22, “...having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.” This is referencing not just unfallen angels, BUT ALL angels, ALL authorities, and ALL powers in ALL of creation. Christ truly is “the King of kings and Lord of lords”! Because of this — and this is the point — all that is promised in Christ is a guarantee! As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 1:20, “For as many as may be the promises of God, in [Christ] they are yes; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”

Notice the only response to Christ’s proclamation of “YES!” to the promises of God is not fear, doubts, or worry, BUT a life which ushers forth in word and deed a loud, “AMEN!”

That is the ongoing witness which God gives to each and everyone of us in baptism! The “appeal” is not, “Because I was baptized, Lord, forgive my sin!” BUT “Through the message which You give in baptism — that righteousness comes only through Christ alone — assure my quaking heart on the basis of the authority that Christ exercises as Sovereign Lord to forgive my sin!”

This is the message God gives us in Baptism (an ordinance that HE invented, not man)! One cannot minister in this world as a Christian without daily being faced with your own sin and failings. And this can dramatically impede your ability to minister in God’s Kingdom — as in the case of our text and the call to be a witness for Christ in trial (vv. 15-17)!

In this regard, I personally can testify to two things.

- On numerous occasions, I have been “persecuted for righteousness sake”-meaning I have been attacked for doing what is right (the very thing Peter is talking about in v. 17)!
- And yet, I further will testify that at these times never have I recognized it as being “persecuted for righteousness sake”! Rather, I looked upon the suffering/persecution as a sign from God that He was not well-pleased with me and so punishing me on account of my sin!

Do you know what happens when you do this as a Christian? Rather than rejoicing that you have been chosen by God to bear in your body wounds intended for the Savior (cf. Matthew 5:10-12), you respond first with shock, then an affirmation that as a sinner you deserve no better, and then eventually anger (for as you think of it, your fellow Christians likewise are sinful and yet they are not suffering like you)!

So Christian, what is needed as you participate in ministry? (In the case before us, to present a bold witness of Christ in the midst of suffering?) The knowledge that no matter how great you might fail, nevertheless God loves you and is always pleased with you in Christ! According to the text before us, that is the message of Baptism!

So how can we know that God's promise of future blessing is not just "pie in the sky"? We know because of the example of Christ which brings with it the glorious promise that as Christ went, so will His people go! And we know from the example of Noah whom God preserved from a rebellious world the likes of which we won't see again until the Second Coming. If God could preserve Noah and his family of eight over the course of 120 years, He can and will preserve you! And on account of the witness of baptism which tells every recipient, "A right standing before God is based on the righteousness of Christ which is given to us by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!" With our right standing before God now settled, we are free to be bold in our witness! For truly, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

References

Schreiner, T. R. (2003). *1 & 2 Peter & Jude: New American Commentary [NAC]*. Nashville: B & H Books.

Note(s)

¹ "Some commentators see a connection between the Old Testament rite of circumcision and the New Testament sacrament of baptism. They are of the opinion that in the wording 'removal of dirt from the body,' Peter may imply that he is thinking about the rite of circumcision. If this is so, then this passage indicates a link between circumcision and baptism (compare Col. 2:11–12)." (Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, NTC, p. 148).

² This word is a *hapax legomenon* which makes its meaning difficult to discern as there are no other examples of this word in the Bible. In secular Greek, the word is used of a pledge. Many commentators therefore insist that the word here is best understood as a pledge. In explaining therefore what Peter means here, they speculate that Peter must here be alluding to a Baptismal practice of the Apostolic age in which the participant, prior to being baptized, made a vow/pledge to God not to allow his conscience to be defiled. The problem with this view is that it is not substantiated from history. There is no proof that such a practice existed. Furthermore, such a view would amount to relating to God on the basis of one's conduct (cf. Wayne Grudem's treatment of this in his TNTC on 1 Peter). Lastly, such a view doesn't fit the context and so intent of Peter who in this passage is endeavoring to encourage the persecuted believer that God's promises are trustworthy.

The other possibility with this compound word is to appeal to its parts (root and its prefix). Both words are well-attested by Scripture. The nuance of the root is to "ask" or to "make an appeal." This fits much better with the context referenced above. For support for this use, see Schreiner's comments in the next footnotes.

³ "The meaning of the noun, however, can be derived from the verb (*eperōtaō*), which often has the meaning of 'ask' or 'request' in the New Testament, occurring fifty-six times in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 12:10; 16:1; 17:10; 22:23, 35, 41, 46; 27:11; Mark 7:5; 9:21; Luke 2:46; 3:10; John 18:7; 1 Cor 14:35). If the meaning is derived from the verb, the translation 'ask,' 'request,' or 'appeal' would fit. We see this interpretation in the NRSV, 'an appeal to God for a good conscience' (cf. also RSV). The interpretation reflected in the NIV can be supported by the usage of the word in the papyri. In these

instances the term can be used of stipulations found in contracts. One pledges or promises to abide by the terms of the contract and the stipulations found therein. Similarly, one can understand the text to refer to the promise or pledge made at baptism. If one adopts this view, the genitive word 'conscience' could be understood as subjective or objective. If subjective, the phrase says that the promise or pledge to abide by baptismal vows flows from a good conscience. Most scholars who adopt this view, however, understand the word 'conscience' to be an objective genitive. If this is the case, the person being baptized promises to maintain a good conscience at baptism.³³⁹ The one baptized pledges to live for the glory of God. This interpretation is certainly possible and does not necessarily contradict Petrine theology. I think it is more likely, however, that the meaning of the noun is derived from the verb. I reach this decision on contextual grounds." (Schreiner, 2003, pp. 195-196)