

Text: 1 Pt 3.18

We have come to a passage where there might be more questions than answers. It is one that will take us a few weeks to work through, I think.

Read 1 Pt 3.18-25, text 18

From my notes at the beginning of v. 18

The first half of v. 18 and the last bit of v. 21 with v. 22 are unambiguous and clear. The rest of the paragraph is “hard to be understood” and has much discussion attached in the commentaries.

One thing with passages like this is the question, “What benefit is it to work through all the alternative interpretations?”

- Some discussions are merely academic curiosities
- Others make a difference as to meaning
- But... what we are really after is application: when we have unclear interpretation, what does that mean for us to do in response to this revelation?

Consequently, I think we should work our way through this passage carefully, but try to step back from it and think about what it means for our lives.

Before we get into the text, let’s try to connect it with the context:

1. “For” – a connecting word — theme of vv. 14-17, look at suffering as a blessed opportunity to serve the Lord, not fearing, only setting Christ first, speaking for him, keeping pure
 - a. “For” connects with that idea
 - b. The theme that follows: Christ suffered and conquered death
 - c. Thus, “for” means, “be encouraged, suffering can’t defeat you”
2. “For Christ also” — Peter used Jesus as an example in 2.21-25 (there we were to imitate his example, the “school-lesson”). Now the example is the example of victory
 - a. Christ suffered unjustly also
 - b. Christ won our victory through his suffering
 - c. We can suffer victoriously because of him

One commentator calls 2.21-25 “Christus patiens” and this “Christus victor.”

Proposition: Christ’s victory overcomes our fears.

Four facts about Christ's death help us value our suffering for him.

I. Christ suffered as the end of all suffering

A. A little note on terminology

1. NAU has "died," KJV has "suffered"
2. In this case, "suffered" is in the minority of manuscripts
3. However, most think "suffered" is right (for various reasons)

Either way, "The thought is not materially affected by either reading since the reference is clearly to Christ's Passion."¹

B. The Lord's suffering is "once for all"

1. No repetition – no need for further suffering of any kind
2. Christ's suffering sufficient for all, final for all

C. The old system required repeated sacrifice

1. Daily sacrifices
2. High feast day sacrifices
3. Annual propitiatory sacrifice of Day of Atonement

D. This sacrifice is "once for all concerning sins"

1. "Concerning sins" is a term connected to the OT system
2. No need for any other ongoing system of sacrifice "concerning sins" – all sins taken care of "once for all"

Note: this is a point of objection with the "sacrifice of the mass" in the RC system

Christ is the victor after suffering once for sins.

¹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1997), 236.

II. Christ suffered vicariously

A. Theological term: vicarious atonement

Vicariously: “performed or suffered by one person as a substitute for another or to the benefit or advantage of another”²

1. The penalty of sin is death
2. Jesus died as a substitute for others “the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him” (Isa 53.6)

B. The positive for the negative

1. Notice the italics in “*the* just for *the* unjust”
2. So lit. “just for unjust” — describes moral quality

When you had film developed “in the old days,” you had a positive print along with a strip of negatives — the exact image, but reversed.

3. Just: completely, wholly righteous FOR unjust: the completely, wholly unrighteous

Christ is the victor over our unrighteousness.

III. Christ suffered to bring us to God

- A. The goal of Christ’s suffering: to bring us to God
- B. Bringing us to God restores the relationship we lost in Adam
- C. The verb tense indicates “a crisis occasion”³

Christ is the victor by winning access to God for us

² Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

³ Robert E. Picirilli, “Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Peter,” in *James, 1, 2 Peter, & Jude*, ed. Robert E. Picirilli, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 1992), 178.

IV. Christ suffered temporarily, and suffers no more

This is the first challenging passage: the problem, “alive in the spirit” – what does this mean? (“put to death in the flesh” seems plain, somehow related to the cross.)

A. The two terms are parallels

1. Greek has two particles that mean “on the one hand ... on the other hand”
2. Thus, the terms must be parallels somehow
3. The construction of each is identical, also pointing to correspondence with one another

B. The various views

1. Flesh and spirit refer to material and immaterial parts of Christ’s being
2. “in” should be “by” — instrumental use — put to death by the flesh (*i.e.* wicked men); raised by the spirit (*i.e.* Holy Spirit)
3. Combo view: “put to death in the flesh, made alive BY the Spirit”
4. Sphere or realm view: “flesh” is “fleshy” as all people in this age, a natural body, “spirit” is “spiritual” as one with a resurrection body

¹ Cor 15.⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual *body*.

“Both *flesh* and *spirit*, used without an article, emphasize quality and denote two contrasted modes of our Lord’s existence, before and after the resurrection. As the incarnate Christ, both involve His body. In the words of Kelly: ‘By *flesh* is meant Christ in His human sphere of existence, considered as a man among men. By *spirit* is meant Christ in His heavenly, spiritual sphere of existence, considered as divine spirit; and this does not exclude His bodily nature, since as risen from the dead it is glorified.’ [Kelly, p. 151.]”⁴

⁴ Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 240.

- C. The suffering of Christ ended in completely overcoming suffering with the resurrection
1. The frailties of the flesh set aside
 2. The future of the spirit embraced

Conclusion:

Proposition: Christ's victory overcomes our fears.

When faced with suffering for righteousness, we are naturally afraid, and might shrink back.

The Lord Jesus overcame all of that suffering with his once for all sacrifice, and lives now in the presence of God, our Saviour and our hope.