

1Pe 3:18 (NKJV) For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

This morning we begin a new section - [1 Peter 3:18-22](#). This passage is simply the continuation of the larger passage that starts in [1 Peter 3:13](#) and finishes at [1 Peter 4:19](#). It deals with the suffering of Christ and the subsequent suffering of believers because of their relationship to Christ. What needs to be appreciated about this passage is that it is not easy to understand. No matter which commentary someone may read, they all are fairly consistent in stating that these five verses are some of the most difficult verses to interpret in the entire New Testament. Martin Luther, who may have written the best commentaries ever published, said that this is perhaps the most obscure passage in the New Testament and admits that he does not know exactly or for certain what Peter meant in these verses.¹ The real difficulty begins with v19 and ends with v21.

Now, the little preposition “**For**” connects us back to what was previously studied where Peter talked about the unjust suffering and defaming of believers ([1 Peter 3:13-17](#)). However, his point in v18 is that we should not be surprised when we do suffer for righteousness sake unjustly simply because that is exactly what Christ happened to Christ. Some of the translations (NASB, AMP, NIV, RSV) use the word “**died**” rather than “**suffered**” in v18. The word for “**suffered**” is “*pascho*” and it literally means to experience suffering and to undergo punishment, and is used in relation to excruciating pain and anxiety.² It is generally the primary word that speaks of the suffering that Christ endured, so I am not exactly sure why some of the translations use the word “**died**”. Dr. Wuest says that the word “suffered” is not used in the best Greek texts, but it is the word used in the two Greek texts that I use.

It has to be noted that the topic of suffering is one of the major themes of Peter’s writings and especially this section. Proportionally, he writes about suffering more than any other New Testament author and never uses any form of the word “**die**” or “**dies**” or “**death**” in either of his two epistles. It seems somewhat clear to me personally that the obvious theme of suffering links those believers who are suffering with the suffering of Christ. The obvious difference is that those believers who are suffering are not doing so in order to die “**for sins**”. So, clearly this entire section through [1 Peter 4](#) is related to suffering more so than dying, and because of that it seems that the probable reason that the word “**died**” was used is because of its connection in the first phrase to “**once for sins**”. So, the connection would be Jesus dying for sins – which is certainly a very legitimate and accurate understanding of what He did. So, hermeneutically I am not completely uncomfortable with the word “**dying**” and what it signifies, but I simply do not see it in the actual definition of the word, or in Peter’s usage of this word in either of his two epistles.

¹ Cole, ep.

² Harris, *pascho*, ep.

The word “**once**” is the Greek word “*hapax*” and it simply means “one time”. It means that its purpose was completely accomplished and it will never again require being repeated. This was such an incredible truth for the Jews to embrace because they had offered literally millions of animals as a sacrifice for sins they had committed. It has been determined that on the Day of Passover that over 250,000 lambs were slaughtered in two different segments of time totaling four hours. That is over 60,000 lambs per hour, or 1000 lambs every minute, or over 16 lambs every second. So, this idea of “**once**” was mind boggling to the Jewish mind, something that was so contrary to everything that they had believed. It was something that some found impossible to accept or embrace. For them as a nation, this was the greatest paradigm shift that had ever occurred in their history.

Peter declared that Christ suffered as “**the just (sing.) for the unjust (plural)**”. The Greek Interlinear reads “**a righteous man on behalf of unrighteous men**”. I think that [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) says it the best when it declares,

2Co 5:21 (NKJV) For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

What is important to appreciate in this verse is that the greatest aberration of justice and suffering ever served on an individual – killing the perfect Son of God, became the greatest triumph in all of eternity. Nothing compares to what God did with the death of His Son. Nothing like it can ever be duplicated or even mimicked. It was a once for all time event never to be repeated, and it should serve as a constant reminder that when we may suffer for the sake of righteousness that God will use it mightily for His purposes and for His glory. We see it as unnecessary, uncomfortable, undeserved, and unjustified, but God sees it as a doorway into His glory.

The word “**unjust**” here is very important because of the way that we see ourselves. In all likelihood, we all think that we are really pretty good people, but that is certainly not the way that God saw us. He saw us as ungodly, destitute, immoral, unrighteous, unholy, and those who were “**dead in trespasses and sins**” ([Ephesians 2:1](#)). He called us in [Ephesians 2:3](#) as those who were “**by nature children of wrath**”. Our problem is always the same in that we never compare ourselves to the correct standard. We compare ourselves to other people, but the correct standard of comparison is not someone else, but Christ and Him alone. We have broken every one of the 10 commandments in some form or another, and so many other types of sins that we could not count them. If you do not believe that then just go back and read the Sermon on the Mount to gain clarification. Paul understood what he was really like and declared in [1 Timothy 1:15](#),

1Ti 1:15 (NKJV) This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

We have done everything we should never have done. We have made idols for ourselves, we have taken His name in vain and treated His name lightly – “the man upstairs”, “big daddy in the sky”, or just our speaking of Him lightly and with little regard for His person. I hear people say all the time “oh my God” or make jokes about God. We have all dishonored our parents and committed adultery and coveted what other people had and hated other people. Once again, if you do not believe that, then just reread the Sermon on the Mount and let Christ convince you that you have. We are the “**unjust**” spoken of in this verse. What is not apparent in our translations is that the words “**just**” and “**unjust**” are not preceded

by the definite article “**the**” in the Greek text. They have been added by the translators to make it easier for us to read in English. However, what that indicates is that the writer is emphasizing the quality, the characteristics, the attributes, or the nature of someone or something. The idea is this – “a just Person in character suffered on behalf of unjust persons in character”.³ We might say today that “*a godly Person suffered on behalf of an ungodly person*”.

The great news of this amazing verse is that the Father planned and allowed His Son to suffer and to die so that He “**might bring us to God**”. This verb means exactly what it says here – to bring someone to someone else. It means to lead to someone. I.e., Christ is the One who brings us to God, who leads us to God. Without the work of Christ on our behalf, we could never come to God the Father. How foolish and how utterly stupid and ignorant of us to think that we have anything, anything whatsoever that would bring us to God. We have nothing to offer God except our sins.

This particular Greek word for “**bring**” is only used four times in the New Testament, but how it is used here in [1 Peter 3](#) is the only one of the four usages that has any spiritual overtones. In the Greek text, the word “**God**” is preceded by the article “**the**” – “**the God**”, which is simply a specific reference to God the Father when used with the article. Before we were saved, we were barred from the presence of God. We were not allowed into His presence. I remember very vividly the day my wife and I went to court with my daughter to purchase my daughter’s home at an auction, but when we got there, the officer at the door into the courtroom would not let me and my daughter in because we were wearing shorts and sandals. Only my wife could go into the courtroom for the auction. We had been barred from the presence of the judge. However, when we were saved, Christ literally led us into the very presence of God, into the presence of the Judge. We were no longer barred, banned, forbidden or even disqualified from being with Him. The veil in the temple had been torn in two, and we could now have fellowship with our Father. [Hebrews 4:16](#) states it this way,

Heb 4:16 (NKJV) Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We can now come boldly into God’s presence. It is not arrogantly, but with confidence. My children and my grandchildren can come to me anytime, anywhere, and for any reason. They are my children and I welcome them to come. The same is true of our relationship with the Father. Even when my children may have failed in their life, it was at that time that I wanted them to come to me even more. Is not that the exact way that you feel as parents. For some strange reason, we seem to have it backwards with God the Father, and rather than coming to Him in our failures, we only want to come to Him in our victories. The former is probably much better than the latter.

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³ Wuest, 92.

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