

The Sufferings of Christ

Studies in 1 Peter

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[An Example for Believers who Suffer](#)

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (1 Pet 2:19–24)

These verses are a magnificent description of our Lord's non-retaliation in spite of the tremendous suffering that was inflicted on him. We pause to let our hearts admire him and for our admiration to deepen into worship. 'When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten . . . He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.'

In our modern world this has been confused with the matter of forgiveness. It is not the same thing, of course; but many folks imagine that our Lord's non-retaliation implies that, even while they were persecuting him, he forgave them. And he forgave them while they still were not repentant. They say, 'Because he is our example, we too should forgive those who have injured us in any way, even before they repent.' And some add, 'God himself has forgiven everybody and will not hold their trespasses against them.'

It is not only in religious circles that this idea has taken root in our modern world. It is held among the philosophers, where a large discussion is going on about what is called unapologetic forgiveness, which means that we have a duty to forgive people even before they have repented; and if they never repent it is our duty to forgive them. The BBC will often quote the example of that brave, good man whose daughter was killed by an IRA bomb. He lay on the ground beside his dying daughter and said, 'I forgive the terrorists for killing my daughter.' We should all do likewise says the BBC. But of course it is not true. There is a very big distinction between our Lord's non-retaliation and the question of forgiveness.

'Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:3). And our Lord is on record as telling his disciples, 'If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, "I repent", you must forgive him' (Luke 17:3–4). Forgiveness is dependent upon repentance.

In this passage we have read about our Lord's sufferings at the hands of men—'When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten.' You will notice that our Lord did not take the view that it didn't matter how much they persecuted

him because he already had forgiven them. No! As they were torturing him he didn't retaliate but he, 'continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.' He had implicit faith in his Father.

But isn't it on record that, when eventually they put him on the cross, he prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34)? In other words, our Lord himself prayed for all those that had crucified him that God would forgive them there and then. Let's face that very Scripture and see what happened when he was on his way to the cross, and then what happened when he was on the cross.

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us", and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?' (Luke 23:26–31)

Let us pause to take in the significance of this particular happening. Our blessed Lord was being led out to the place of crucifixion by the soldiers who had mocked him and scourged him. A great company of people followed him and in particular women who bewailed and lamented him. It struck a feeling of sympathy and grief in their hearts to see such a young man so horribly treated. Already mangled with the scourge of the Roman soldiers, observing his weakness they transferred the cross to Simon, a Cyrenian. The women followed, mourning and lamenting—wonderful feminine sympathy for the blessed Lord Jesus in his moment of suffering—so perhaps what he said is surprising. 'Don't weep for me, weep for yourselves, because the days are coming when people shall say, "Blessed are those who never became mothers." They shall call on the mountains to fall on them and for the hills to cover them.' Does that sound to you as if he had already forgiven them?

The very words he used remind us of those similar words at the end of Revelation 6 where the Lamb opens the sixth seal and the judgments descend upon this world.

Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?' (Rev 6:15–17)

You might have supposed that our Lord would have referred such strong language to the evil men that had decided to crucify him, but he warns the mothers of the inevitable consequence of what the nation was doing. 'For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?' Even in those days there was a well-established government under the Romans (tyrants though they were). There was a priesthood in the

temple that called upon the name of God and offered him sacrifices and preached the law of God. If, in such a well governed and religiously represented society, people are prepared to subvert justice and condemn an innocent man to death in this vile fashion, what shall be done when those foundations of moral behaviour are destroyed and the world becomes a moral desolation?

We remember the words of 1 Peter 2:23, 'When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.' On his way to the cross he warned those women of the judgment that must descend on their nation and society for this terrible deed that it was in process of committing.

'But he did pray to God to forgive them!' someone will say. Well, forgive whom? Let's read on and make sure we understand his prayer in its context.

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. (Luke 23:32-33)

Who actually crucified him? It was the Roman soldiers who led him out, made the cross and compelled Simon to carry it. When they got to Calvary the Roman soldiers forced him down on to the cross and put the nails through his wrists and his feet (or his ankles). They lifted the cross up and jolted it into its position. It was the Roman soldiers that actually crucified him, as you see from the context. It was then that our Lord said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' (v. 34).

Notice the word 'for'. They were but Roman soldiers; they had to obey the governor, their captains and the centurion. They had no choice. They hadn't the faintest idea who Jesus was. They didn't understand Jewish religion, nor even what the term 'the Christ' meant. They were just doing their duty. They had done it thousands of times, for the Romans constantly crucified people they didn't like. They didn't know what they were doing or who they were crucifying; and because they didn't know, Christ prayed his father to forgive them.

Strictly speaking, this is what Luke is telling us as we notice the order of events. First, as they led him away, the soldiers took the cross and put it on Simon. Then came the women, lamenting him, and our Lord responded to them by his solemn word of judgment that would fall on the nation for what they were now doing. Then the soldiers arrived with him at Calvary and they crucified him, not beginning to understand what they were doing. It was for them that our Lord prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

A similar phrase is used in the Acts of the Apostles, not of Roman soldiers but of the nation itself: 'And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers' (1 Pet 3:17). Peter is addressing the crowd and, referring also to their rulers, he says that they did what they did in ignorance. That meant there was a possibility of forgiveness for them.'

But notice what Peter said next:

Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. (vv. 19-21)

He calls on the nation to repent that their sins might be blotted out. Peter does not say, 'When our Lord was on the cross and you crucified him, he prayed the Father to forgive you and so you are forgiven.' No, he tells them quite distinctly, 'If you want forgiveness you must repent.' This is the gospel message. As Paul told the elders at Ephesus, he was 'testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance towards God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20:21).

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. . . . One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.' (Luke 23:32, 39-43)

This is the magnificent story of how the dying thief (as he came to be known) was converted. Uncountable gospel messages have been preached about him, to the salvation of many people. Now we are to hear of Christ's mercy and how he actually got converted. What passed through his heart that led him to repentance? First of all he railed on Christ like the other thief,¹ but presently he starts to rebuke his fellow: 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?' What does he mean? He urges upon his fellow terrorist that here was a situation that should cause them to fear God. And what was that situation? '[We] are under the same sentence of condemnation.' He can't mean 'You and I are under the same sentence of condemnation'—how would that be a cause for fearing God? What he means is, 'We [the two of us] are in the same condemnation as the man on the centre cross.' How is that a cause for fearing God? He says, 'We indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' The innocent being punished along with the guilty, is that a cause for fearing God? Indeed it is!

It raises the question, is there a God in heaven who cares about justice? If there is, this situation on earth, where the innocent suffer along with the unjust, will demand that God intervenes one day and deals with the perpetrators. In countries that have long been given over to Marxist communism and are now free from that restraint, there are many who take the view that there is no God. In the end it means that justice is a mere rope of sand. If there is no God that cares for justice and no final judgment, then multitudes who have suffered in the past will never get justice, nor those who suffer it at present.

Where does this sense of fairness come from in the human heart? The Bible tells us that God our Creator has put it there. Is morality all that important? It is indeed! Because there is a God in heaven who cares for justice and there will be a final judgment. Imagine listening to a sermon like that from a terrorist on a cross! But this is where the fear of God begins in his heart—that the innocent should suffer along with the guilty. For years this 'dying thief' had not cared too much about justice. He had perhaps murdered many people, defied the government and prided himself on his accomplishments. But now he begins to care. That was

¹ They weren't just common thieves, they were at the least bandits and perhaps terrorists like Barabbas.

most unusual. He wants to see justice done, admitting to the other fellow, 'We both deserve what we are getting.' If there is a God who cares for justice, whatever would happen to him? Maybe he heard what our Lord had said to the women; he surely heard him praying for those that actually drove the nails through his hands and feet. In that moment God's Holy Spirit convicted him that this wasn't the end of Jesus; he would come again in his kingdom.

It was that very solemn thought that moved him to say what he said next. From a hardened terrorist who rejoiced in the fact that he didn't obey any government whatsoever, he said to the Lord Jesus, 'Remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He asks to be allowed to come under the government of Jesus, God's Son and Messiah. That is conversion—repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether he knew little or much about what was happening, in his heart he bowed to the sovereign king. And when he repented our Lord replied, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.' This bandit-terrorist is an indisputable example of a person repenting and being forgiven. Luke then goes on to tell how the centurion, Joseph of Arimathea and the Christian women responded.

But time forbids that we should follow Luke's account any further, for we must come back to how the Lord is described in 1 Peter 2. 'Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps' (v. 21). It is in the context of Peter's exhortation to household servants.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called. (vv. 18–21a)

Household servants were not much better than slaves. I can imagine one of them saying, 'It's all right for you Peter; you've never known what it is to be a slave or a servant. When you saw what was going to happen to Christ you denied him and ran off to avoid suffering. You don't know what it is, when you've done the best you can, to have some slave owner lash you across the back with his whip.' Peter could have said that he had been 'a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed' (5:1), but here he stands aside and says nothing about himself.

Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (vv. 21b-23)

Because he trusted in the righteousness of God, that one day God would see justice done, it set our Lord free—'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree' (v. 24). No archangel or some angel amongst the millions of them was ordered to take our place. He did it himself—he bore our sins in his body on the tree. They made a wreck of that body, didn't

they? It wasn't simply the impertinence of the men who blindfolded him and then struck him and mockingly said, 'Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?' (Luke 22:64). Such sheer ignorance is beyond pity. It wasn't the pain of the lash; it was the envy of the high priests that smarted most. It wasn't just the sins of the unconverted that he bore, it was the sins of the cowards amongst his own disciples that hurt. Why did he not retaliate? Because this gave us an opportunity to reflect on what we have done and for God's Spirit to bring us to repentance.

Christ deliberately did not 'revile in return' (1 Pet 2:23). Why not? So 'that we might die to sin and live to righteousness' (v. 24)—turn away from unrighteousness, reflect on what our sins have done to Christ and live for God. He found the strength to do it and get for us a possibility of repenting and new life from the conviction that there is a God who cares for justice.

We are told that we must forgive others as God through Christ has forgiven us. Tell me, on what terms did God through Christ forgive you? Did he say, 'You are already forgiven, you needn't trouble too much'? No, he did not! When you came to Christ you had to repent. 'Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing' (1 Pet 3:9). 'Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you' (Luke 6:28). We must not avenge ourselves; we must behave like Christ behaved. He did not retaliate; he left it to God to judge, which gave us an opportunity of repentance before the coming of the final judgment. We are not asked to forgive those that refuse to repent, but to not retaliate, to treat them kindly and pray for God's mercy on them. We should be willing to forgive those who do repent.

The Church will Share in His Eternal Glory

1 Peter 1:3–7, 10–20; 2:10; 4:2–4, 17

We shall be thinking in this talk of the sufferings of Christ from two particular aspects that are both found in First Peter chapter 1. Firstly the predictions of the ancient prophets that spelled out the sufferings of the Messiah and then the glories that should follow. In the second place the sufferings of our Lord as our great Passover Lamb, by whose blood we have been redeemed from our empty way of life and brought into the purposes of God. By God's grace our meditation will do two things for us. It shall purify our faith and leave it smaller maybe, but more solid and therefore more valuable. And it shall help us to perfect our hope by asking us to think vigorously about the implications of our Christian hope.

It seems to me to be quite obvious from the verses we are considering that Peter himself was especially interested in time. If we probe more deeply we shall find he regarded himself as living in an exceedingly momentous period—the centrepiece of all the ages of earth's history. And not to put too fine a point on it, it is the centre point to which past eternity (as we name it, in our frailty of thought) looked forward and to which all the eternity to come shall look backward. The key to this interest in Peter's concern for time and its relation to eternity is to be found in the early verses, where he speaks almost at once of the resurrection of our blessed Lord Jesus.

When Peter first heard our Lord saying that he must go down to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the authorities and be crucified, he objected most explicitly: 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you' (Matt 16:22). Peter was not for seeing Christ suffer. That was not merely because of his love for the Saviour himself, but Peter felt that if our Lord was rejected by the religious authorities in Jerusalem and crucified, all that he had ever invested in Christ would go down the drain. He had invested a lot, as he counted it. In response to our Lord's invitation he had left his boat and the nets and very frequently followed Christ around Galilee and then Judaea. He had been sent by Christ on the missionary journey around the cities of Israel. He had learned to love our Lord, of course, but he had invested much time and energy in our blessed Lord and his kingdom.

Peter seems to have forgotten that our Lord had said he was to go to Jerusalem and be crucified, but then the third day he would rise from the dead. When that resurrection took place Peter says that it was like being born all over again. 'He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet 1:3). We can feel the pulse of Peter's heart as he expresses the wonderful excitement, the sheer amazement of the resurrection from the dead. That opened up a whole new world, the way to 'to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you' (1:4).

It was like Israel when they had marched foot-sore through the desert and at last came to the brink of Jordan. In front of them was Jordan in flood, filling the surrounding valley with water to nearly a mile across. They couldn't even see where the brink of the river was because of the forest of thickets and thorny, tangled bushes. It was almost suicide to walk through them to the other side. Then the miracle happened! By the power of God the waters of Jordan split in two, and the inheritance was staring them in the face. The thing they had walked towards for forty years was now open to be enjoyed and entered into.

A pale picture indeed of how Peter felt. He had looked for a kingdom based in Jerusalem, with Christ sitting on the throne of his father, David. Now before him stretched an unimaginably vast inheritance. Oh, the joy of it! He was 'born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.' Let's take just a second or two so that God may make this inheritance real to us because it is ours as well as Peter's.

Now he says to his audience, 'In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials' (v. 6). I can imagine some of the early Christians who got this letter saying, 'Peter talks of a salvation ready to be revealed, but when you study the fine print it's all in the future. Why can't it be now? It all sounds like pie in the sky tomorrow. We trusted you, we believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the coming prince, God's king, and we put our faith in him. Were we not right to expect a glorious experience? But since we put our faith in Christ life has been worse than it was before. We never had persecutions like this! Why has it got to be "revealed in the last time"? Why not now?'

Have you never felt like that? I've often met people who have. How will Peter explain it? He says, 'My dear brothers and sisters, there is an "if necessary" behind this waiting period.' 'In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials' (v. 6). Why is that a necessity? I shall have to trouble you with a more exact translation of the verses: 'That the approved part of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, [but in spite of it] is tried with fire—so that the approved part of your faith might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 7).

It is necessary for the purifying of our personal faith. You say, 'But wait a minute, Mr Preacher, when we get home to glory, into this glorious inheritance, we shan't need faith!'

I find a lot of Christians believe that. Faith, they think, is what we walk by now.

'We walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor 5:7); but when we get home to glory we shall no longer need faith because we shall see the Lord.

Perhaps they have forgotten that the apostles did see the Lord here on earth, but very often their faith let them down and they doubted him.

'But when we get home to heaven we shall see Christ in his glory and it will be real. We shall walk not by faith then, but by actual sight because we shall see the Lord.'

So we shall, and how wonderful it will be. I am authorised to tell you, 'When he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2). So then you don't need faith? Really! Will you be omniscient like God, or will there be things that you don't know, and when God tells you about them you will have to take them on trust?

I don't know what job the Lord has for us when we get home to heaven. I sometimes try to think about it and my imagination perhaps runs away with itself. But we shan't be seated on armchairs and singing choruses for eternity. I hope not! We shall join the choirs of heaven, surely we shall. But then our Lord talked of us being his body—executive powers in his administration of the universes yet to be. And when I think of that I get all excited, for God is not hard up for ideas. God is so big that he is always doing something new. There was a time when he wasn't the Creator; then he created the universe and our world within it and us upon it. The variety was beyond description, but he was not content with that. There was a time when no member of the Godhead was human—have I absorbed yet the wonder of this? God is so big that he carried out the plan to enter his own creation and become human without ceasing to be God.

Then through Christ he has created 'the body of Christ'. 'Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking' (Heb 2:5). This present period is under the administration of angels, but not the coming one.

It has been testified somewhere, 'What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honour, putting everything in subjection under his feet. (Heb 2:6-8)

It was God's glorious plan that man should be ahead of all the principalities and powers and that day is fast on its way to being achieved through the incarnation of our Lord. Not ceasing to be God, he became truly human. And now, miracle of miracles, by his Spirit we are formed with him into one body; in God's good plan we are seated already with him in heavenly places above all rule and authority and power and dominion. For what purpose? To be the executive body of God's Son for all eternity. Doesn't your heart thrill with that? Powers that we can only now dream of, God's executives in the running of all the universes and everything that ever shall be.

And I come back to my point! When the Lord asks you to administer some galaxy or other, will you do it? 'Well, Lord, I can't do that; it should require a lot of faith.' Won't you have the faith to do it? That's why there's this time of testing.

Now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:6-7)

We are well aware of the metaphor. Gold is valuable, but gold can be intermixed with dross. An experienced goldsmith, therefore, will take the gold and extract the dross from it, knowing that when he does so the gold he gets out will be a little bit less than what he put in; but what is left is solid gold. And because we shall always have to trust God, God is working on our faith now so that when we get home to glory it might be pure gold without any dross.

What do I mean by dross? Why do you believe in Christ and why do you believe in his deity? 'My mum told me, and my Sunday School teacher told me too!' That is a very good

reason for believing in the deity of Christ. Is it by your personal experience? What if you grew up and had to go to a factory or a university where all sorts of arguments are brought forward to undermine your faith in the deity of Christ; could you stand it? The goldsmith takes the gold, puts a Bunsen burner under it and melts the gold. As the dross rises to the surface he skims it off and then lets it solidify once more. In our personal experience, that can be a painful thing. Many a believer has had to see a loved one suffer and die. Prayer becomes difficult and the faith that they thought was solid gold seems to melt. It's a common experience, but the Lord is supervising it and, as with his saints all down the ages, he will provide you with strength for your faith.

Peter is now referring to the Old Testament prophets, 'enquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories' (v. 11). When God's programme for the Messiah was revealed to them they understood perfectly well what the Spirit was saying. What concerned them was what time it referred to and what particular circumstances would be involved. We should prick up both our ears here! 'It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you' (v. 12). It has to be taken literally. God spent centuries inspiring the Old Testament prophets to provide us with clear indications, patterns and prototypes of what his programme was to be when he sent his dear Son into our world. In history, prophecy and in poetry we see not only a record of things that are past, but the principles that God was going to follow when his dear Son should come into our world—in his sufferings and the subsequent glories.

My dear fellow Christians, for your faith's sake please read all those delightful things in the Old Testament that God has written. Passover was a festival in Israel. It was to remind his people how God brought them out of the land of Egypt and sheltered them from the avenging angel by the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. According to our Lord, Passover was not only a memorial of the past; it was a prototype of the future. When he kept the Last Supper with his disciples in the upper room, he said, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer' (Luke 22:15). There are hundreds of these prototypes. They were written to strengthen your faith, so please read about them and ask God to show you what they mean.

I tried to learn a little Hebrew in my student days, but the professor of Hebrew cast doubt on the validity, accuracy and inspiration of Old Testament. I said, 'Lord, I can't answer his problems, but I am going to gather together everything in the New Testament that you said about the Old Testament.' I was astonished to see how much he had talked about it, and I had to choose: would I trust the Old Testament professor or the Lord Jesus? I decided to trust the Lord Jesus and read the Old Testament in the light of it. Oh what wonderful things I found—I wish I had the time to tell you!

So this little period until the Lord comes is deliberately designed by God to purify our faith in readiness for the glorious tasks that lie ahead when we are called upon to reign with Christ and be his executives in the ages to come.

So far Peter has been telling us the order of events and the purpose of the interval in between. In the second half of the first chapter he turns to what he calls 'the time of your exile' (1 Pet 1:17). He means the time that we exist as resident aliens in this present world. This world is

not our home, it is 'the time of your sojourning' (KJV). 'Spend it well,' says Peter, 'because God is the judge and he is critical of the way we spend it.' 'I didn't know God was critical,' someone says. 'I thought the Lord was very loving.' So he is! If you gave your seventeen year old son a new car and he didn't look after it, drove it carelessly and bashed it into a wall, wouldn't you be a little critical? Especially if you'd bought it!

That is precisely what God has done. He has bought us out of our futile way of life that had no ultimate purpose—not with silver and gold but with the invaluable blood of Christ. Should he not be critical of how I spend it? The Lamb was 'foreknown before the foundation of the world' (v. 20). God had that great sacrifice of his Son in mind long before the world was created, 'but [he] was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.'

When we read of Christ redeeming us by his blood, Peter adds, 'like that of a lamb' (v. 19). The simile evokes in our minds the memory of the original Passover. Israel was delivered and redeemed out of bondage to Pharaoh and saved from the destroying angel by the blood sprinkled on the lintel and doorposts of their houses in which they sheltered. 'And when I see the blood,' says God, 'I will pass over it, that the destroying angel might not penetrate to come at you.' But there were conditions in the Passover. It was a feast that you ate. The central thing in that ceremony was eating the Passover lamb. Its blood was on the lintel and doorposts, and the lamb itself was sacrificed and eaten. You couldn't eat it in just any way. 'And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's Passover' (Exod 12:11 KJV).² We can understand the staff for the journey and the shoes on our feet, but what on earth is this about loins! It's your middle bit and when the ancient Israelite was about to travel he would tuck up his long robe under his belt so that he would be free to stretch his legs as he walked. On the farm where I worked in my youth, if men were going to lift a heavy load they first girded up their loins with a very thick belt, to help take the strain of lifting the load. If you were going to eat the Passover lamb you had to eat it with your staff in your hand, shoes on your feet, loins girded, ready to move out and start the journey to the promised inheritance. If you were not prepared for the journey you couldn't eat the Passover.

Our dear Lord became our Passover lamb, he delivered us from the avenging angel and brought us forgiveness. But that's not all. His redemption will not be complete until he has 'transformed our lowly body to be like his glorious body' (Phil 3:21). Our hope is the entering into the final inheritance which is reserved in heaven for us. 'Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ' (1 Pet 1:13). What it means is, prepare yourselves to do some very hard thinking. You have this Christian hope, but Scripture tells us to consider what it implies and what progress we are supposed to be making. We should not be waylaid by this or that desire or lust that we used to have before we got converted, but we must be logically thinking it through and following the line of hope towards that great inheritance.

Suppose you had a magic carpet and could have landed in Egypt a month or two after the Israelites had left. Walking round the pyramids, you come across an Israelite.

² 'In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover' (ESV).

'I notice you are still here, Zechariah! Why aren't you out with the rest of your people journeying across the wilderness? Don't you believe in your inheritance?'

'Oh yes,' he would say, 'I do believe in it. But they are extremists, walking across a wilderness day after day towards an inheritance they've never seen. I don't criticize them, but I find it rather pleasant here.'

'How are you proposing to get to the inheritance?'

'I don't bother to think about that,' he says. 'It will happen somehow!'

You would say, 'Hadn't you better start working out its implications and the progress that you are supposed to be making?'

Peter exhorts us to remember that God has waited centuries for our little time of sojourning. He has bought us with the incalculable wealth of the blood of his dear Son and he is watching what we do. This 'little while' will soon be past and then the great inheritance.

When I was a farm labourer we got one week's holiday a year. When it came to that one week I wasn't having anybody interfering with it and wasting the time. God has waited a long time for this. Says Peter, 'And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile' (v. 17).

God grant us grace that we may listen to these stirring things and allow him to purify our faith, so that, by our deliberate effort to think through the implications of our hope and living accordingly, we may be found to his praise and glory.

The Significance of Baptism

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. . . . For it is time for judgement to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:1-7, 17)

In our last meditation we noticed the emphasis Peter himself lays on the question of time, which for him was radically enlarged by the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. In our reading we have come across two more instances of this and perhaps we should re-read verse 2 to bring out the force of it: 'So as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.' 'Time in the flesh' is referring to our existence here on earth in this present stage all the way through.

Peter's interest in time, therefore, comes from his observation that what Christ has done for us has divided our lives into two very distinct parts—'time that is past,' and 'the rest of the time'. If we ask Peter what has marked that division in the time of our lives, then I suppose the answer of the immediate context is that it is our Christian baptism. That raises the question of what baptism means exactly. It's no harm for us, who have long since been baptized, to reconsider the significance of our Christian baptism; and, for any who are believers in Christ and not yet baptized, it might prove a very good stimulus to consider the significance of baptism and why all believers ought to be baptized. If anyone should think that baptism is a mystical thing that somehow cleanses us, then again we shall find profit from reading Peter's own description of what Christian baptism signifies.

Baptism, which corresponds to this³, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but . . . (1 Pet 3:21)

³ He is talking about Noah's flood and its significance.

Here we shall have to pause because our translators are not all quite sure how the rest of this verse should be translated. The newer versions like the ESV, for instance, put '[baptism is] an appeal to God *for* a good conscience' – but that cannot be true. Then the Revised Version puts 'the interrogation of a good conscience toward God' – I am not even sure what that means. The older King James Version comes nearer the mark: 'Baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God.' Good as that is, it doesn't quite get across the meaning of the terms that Peter uses which go back to the ancient law practised among the Greeks and then particularly among the Romans.

If, for instance, two farmers had a row over a particular cow and it came to the Law Courts to decide it, then in those far-off days the courts would appoint an official to collect the facts of the case – what the dispute was about and what each side claimed. He would get the two farmers in front of him and put formal questions to them and when each farmer was questioned he had to reply.

'Farmer 1, is this your cow?'

'Yes, of course it's my cow!'

The same question to Farmer 2: 'Is this your cow?'

'Of course it's my cow!'

And then he would ask, 'Where did you get it?'

'I bought it at the sale; and he stole it.'

And Farmer 2 would say, 'That's nonsense, I was given it by my father, and I've had it ever since I was a boy.'

And so they would collect the facts of the case. The process in Latin is called a *stipulatio*. It is this formal putting of a question that the person involved then has to answer. We find examples in the ancient papyri of people who, 'being questioned', confessed to something.

Baptism is the formal reply to a question. You say, 'Who puts the question?' God, of course! Through his servants God is challenging the person concerned.

'Do you admit that you are a sinner before God? Do you admit that you never could clear your own guilt? Do you admit before God that you deserve his divine indignation?'

To which the person is meant to reply, 'Yes, I do confess it.'

'And do you further receive and accept and trust the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son; that he died for you at Calvary, bore your sin in his body, suffered the penalty that you deserve and died for you?'

And the person would reply, 'I do.'

Baptism is the God-appointed formal answer to God's question. The individual standing before God says 'I do' by being baptized. It is formally witnessed and acknowledged by the believers present, and also by the angels who long to look into these things (1 Pet 1:12). That is one of the things that baptism signifies.

That raises another big question. If baptism is the answer to God of a good conscience, how do you get a good conscience? Now this is exceedingly and fundamentally important. You don't get a good conscience by being baptized, for Peter is at pains to point out what baptism is not. It is 'not as a removal of dirt from the body.' Christian baptism stands in contrast to the practices of ancient Judaism where they had innumerable ceremonies of washing in water for cleansing the person from defilement of one kind and another. Our

Lord Jesus himself commented upon those ceremonies on one occasion. He pointed out that, well intentioned as they were and good as symbols, they didn't actually get to the root of the problem.

There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him . . . For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. (Mark 7:15, 21–23)

Mere ceremonial washing in water, however ritualistic and religious, cannot remove that defilement or produce within us a good conscience. How, then, does one get a good conscience? The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us explicitly:

For if the blood of goats and bulls . . . sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Heb 9:13–14).

O what a magnificent gospel it is! Notice the emphasis, 'how much *more*'—grasp it with both hands if you are seeking to have a conscience cleansed. We ought to notice in passing what those last words are saying. It's not merely that the blood of Christ cleanses my conscience and makes me feel comfortable; my life is supposed to serve God. But how can I serve him acceptably with a conscience burdened with the guilt of sin? We listen gratefully to Scripture and, on the ground of the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, we come into God's presence and go out into the world to serve him.

Someone will ask, 'How does the blood of Christ purify your conscience? Is it like cleaning fluid or something?' No, it's a metaphor. When we sin and fall short of God's holy law our consciences register the fact and create a sense of guilt within us. Not all consciences work. They are like my alarm clock. It goes off in the morning at the prescribed hour and sometimes, if I am not willing to get up, I just bash it! If you do that with alarm clocks sooner or later they stop ringing. Some people do that with their consciences until they scarcely work any more. So it's a marvellous thing when conscience still works.

How does the blood of Christ remove that stain? It removes it because of what the blood of Christ signifies. 'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses' (Eph 1:7). The wonderful fact is that Christ shed his blood at Calvary and paid the penalty in full. I can repent and put my faith in him and have my conscience purified. It will never cease to fill us with praise and wonder, even when we get home to glory. It's worth saying a personal Hallelujah over it, you know!

When God asks, 'Do you admit you are a sinner and have broken my law, you cannot save yourself and you deserve the penalty?'

We say, 'Yes'.

Then, 'Do you accept and put your faith solely in God's Son as the Saviour who died for you personally as the grounds of forgiveness?'

And we say, 'Yes'.

'Then,' says God, 'you will make your public response to me by being baptized.'

You say to me, 'I don't see the need for that! In my bedroom last year I got down on my knees, repented of my sin and received the Saviour. He forgave me, so why should I go through the rigmarole of public baptism?'

Let me take an analogy—not that I am an expert in the matters that I shall now mention. We have the same procedure in marriage. 'Do you take this woman to be your wife?' And he says, 'I do.' The woman gives a similar response. But I have to tell you that that isn't the first time they decided to get married. Who knows when it was—probably by some five-bar gate out in the country in the light of the moon! He plucked up courage to put the question and the woman plucked up courage to say yes. Isn't that enough, why have a public ceremony? It's not enough because marriage is a social thing with all sorts of social implications. And therefore there is a public ceremony where both the man and the woman will give their formal answer, 'I do.'

So it is with baptism. But then, to help us grasp the significance of baptism, Peter reminds us that baptism is a 'figure' (1 Pet 3:21 KJV). It is not a figure of death. When Christians are baptized they are immersed in water and then raised up. You don't put them in water to make them die; that would be against the law. You put them in water to signify that they have already died and had better be buried. When did they die? As Paul would say, 'It was when I accepted Christ and came to see that he died for me, then I died with Christ. When Christ died I died and God's law is satisfied' (see Rom 6:8).

Baptism is not only a symbolic burial, it is followed at once (thank the Lord) by a symbolic resurrection. The soul that is united to Christ through faith cannot only say, 'I died with Christ, he died for me and as far as God's law is concerned the penalty is paid,' but 'Christ rose again.' So the person being baptized is brought up out of the water to walk, as the Bible puts it, 'in newness of life' (Rom 6:4). That's not just an empty wish; it is an illustration of the sheer fact. The person that has trusted Christ not only gets forgiveness but Christ imparts to that person his own very life, the life of the Holy Spirit, if you will. The believer has a new life. You have to spend a lot of time practising how to live with this new life, but you receive it when you first trust Christ.

So baptism is a figure, and Peter uses another figure to illustrate it. It's taken from the Old Testament story of the flood and the way God saved Noah and his family from drowning. At that hideous time in human history the world was so corrupt and distorted by spirit manipulation, by evil spirits, that to save the very human race itself God had to destroy the whole lot except Noah by bringing a flood upon the world. It was nothing less than the judgment of God, for the fountains of the deep were opened up and the skies let down the rain. But God provided an ark for the salvation for Noah and his family—there were eight of them. When it was built and the door still open God invited Noah to come into the ark; and when they were in, plus all the necessary animals and birds, God shut the door. So Noah was saved and his family. But mark just how he was saved. You perhaps say, 'I can see that he was saved from the judgment.' You are partly right, but it would be more exact to say he was saved *through* the flood. Noah and his family went through the flood, because the ark was so built that it could do what Noah couldn't do. Noah could not have survived the flood

himself, so God provided him an ark that could go through the flood. The waters lifted it up and the storms thundered down on the top of it, but the ark bore it and brought Noah and his family through the waters of judgment.

What a magnificent picture that is of Jesus Christ our Lord. You say, 'He saved me from the wrath of God.' And so he did, but he saved you from the wrath of God by going through it as your representative, your Saviour. He bore the wrath that would have destroyed you and brings you through to the other side.

It is an interesting thing to observe that, when the floodwaters began to subside, Noah wanted to know whether the land was dry enough and firm enough for him to get out and walk on it, so he did what ancient mariners used to do. They had no compasses, and if the clouds were bad they couldn't see the stars, nor the sun or the moon; and if they got driven out to sea they couldn't any longer see the land. What they did was to carry birds on the ships and, in that situation, the captain would release a land bird; it would instinctively head for the shore, and the mariner would try to follow where the bird was going. It was an ancient device and Noah used it. He sent out two birds. One was a raven that fed on the corpses and didn't come back. Then he sent out a dove and eventually the dove came back with an olive leaf in its mouth, and Noah knew that he could get safely out of the ark.

When our Lord was baptized John first said to him, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' (Matt 3:14). Christ had no sins to confess, but he said to John, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness' (v. 15). The magnificent grace of Christ; that he went down into the Jordan along with evil and proud sinners and stood in the mud with them as a symbol of what he was to do at Calvary for us. When he came up out of the water God saw to it that there would be no misunderstanding at what had happened.

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.' (vv. 16-17)

We are then told that the Spirit guided him into the desert where he was tempted by the devil and came through gloriously and sinlessly.

I wish I could say the same about Noah. He was given the ark; it went through the flood, and he was saved. Guided by the bird he came out on dry land and God made a covenant with him. He should have known enough through his unholy behaviour in the past to practise self-control, but it turned out he didn't.

For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. (1 Pet 4:3)

Noah planted a vineyard, got drunk and lost control (Gen 9). It is an ugly story, but we read it with an active conscience, I hope. We received Christ as our Saviour and have been baptized. Therefore, we too ought to have had enough of wasting our time on selfish and sinful living. Says Peter, 'Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live

for the rest of the time in the flesh⁴ no longer for human passions but for the will of God' (1 Pet 4:1-2). The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin, but it doesn't give us permission to carry on sinning. Peter reminds his fellow believers of the style of life that is expected of those who have professed Christ, who have had their consciences cleansed and have made a formal reply to God in baptism.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins (4:7-8)

That doesn't mean that love will excuse sinning. It does mean that if we really love a sister or brother and see they are falling short we don't spread it around. We pray for them, and elders should shepherd and counsel them. Then he says, 'Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace' (4:9-10). We notice the term *steward*. Christ has put the riches of the grace of God into our hands. We are stewards of it, not merely to hoard it for ourselves but to share it with others.

Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (4:11)

That is our duty and we do all come short. Thank God for the verse that says, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). But now Peter talks to us very gravely about time and we ought to prick up our ears.

For it is time for judgement to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And 'If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?' (1 Pet 4:17-18)

We might be inclined to question Peter. 'Aren't you being a little bit severe—are you denying the eternal security of the believer? Doesn't Paul, your fellow-apostle, tell us "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1)?' He does indeed, so what does Peter mean, 'judgment must begin at the household of God'?

Let me illustrate the point by referring to what the Apostle Paul says about the Lord's Supper. There are two ceremonies that Christ has left us—baptism and the Lord's Supper, and we should fulfil both. The body of Christ is represented by the bread at the Lord's Supper, the wine represents his blood. When our blessed Lord, so to speak, holds out the cup to us at the Lord's Supper we hear his words again, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt 26:28).

'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds' (Heb 10:16). That is distinct from

⁴ That is, the rest of our life on earth since our baptism.

the first covenant given through Moses when God wrote the Ten Commandments with his finger on tables of stone. It was excellent, written with the very finger of God, but it had a weakness. It told you what to do but it didn't necessarily give you the strength to do it; and when it told you what not to do it didn't give you the power not to do it. See the marvellous superiority of the new covenant, for the Lord has promised to write his laws not on tables of stone but on our very hearts. That is regeneration, a new power, a new life within. It is the power of God's Holy Spirit and he is writing his laws on our hearts.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more. (Heb 8:10-12)

This is not saying that we do not need teachers—we do. What it is saying is that every believer has a direct relationship with God. A two-year-old in a family may not know as much about physics as his sixteen-year-old brother does, who can talk learnedly to his father who is a physicist about physics and nanotechnology and such things. But the two-year-old knows who daddy is. He nestles in his arm and has direct relationship with Daddy. 'I write to you, children, because you know the Father' (1 John 2:13). We have a direct relationship with the Father (I mustn't use the word 'Daddy').

What a marvellous thing it is to come to the Lord's Supper and take the cup from the hand of the Lord and hear his word: 'I will be merciful towards [your] iniquities, and I will remember [your] sins no more.'

But what happens if I am living carelessly and I come to the Lord's Supper without examining myself (1 Cor 11:28)? We are meant to do that. My friends can discern that sometimes I am not all that I should be and I could do with quite a bit of change in certain directions. We are expected to cooperate with the Lord as he writes his law on our hearts and minds; then to examine ourselves and confess our sins to him, and he is faithful and just to forgive us. But suppose I have been living carelessly and I come to the Lord's Supper without examining myself, what will the Lord do? Says Paul, 'That is why many of you [in Corinth] are weak and ill, and some have died' (v. 30). We must not suppose that with every believer who passes away or gets an illness, it's because he or she has sinned. That is not ours to say. But if we come carelessly to the Lord's Supper, and live carelessly, our Lord will honour his covenant. He has pledged himself to write his laws on our hearts. He will do it the joyful way; but if can't he will do it the painful way because he has covenanted himself to do it. Why does he chastise true believers who are living carelessly? Says Paul, 'But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world' (v. 32). The world is on its way to the coming judgments of God, and our Lord deals with his people to bring us to a better frame of mind so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Then there is what has come to be called the judgment seat of Christ, where the Lord will call us to account as stewards of the riches that he has put into our hands. For this purpose

our Lord told a parable (Luke 19:11–27). Perhaps it has many applications but let me use just one of them. There were these servants and one of them had been given ten minas [pounds]. He was able to tell the Lord that he had used his pounds and had gained another ten. And the Lord said, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities’ (v. 17).

Which moves me to give you a warning. Don’t work for the Lord if you don’t like work, because the reward of work is more work! The idea that when we get home to heaven we shall put up our legs on the armchairs that they make there and just lie there for ever and sing choruses is nonsense, of course. The singing will be lovely, but as stewards of our Lord and faithful in his work here, the reward will be more work there. Anyway, in heaven everyone likes work and nobody wants to retire.

The man had only ten pounds, he was given ten more and as a reward he was given ten cities to look after. There came a man with five pounds, he gained five more and he was rewarded. Then there came a man with one pound. When he was brought before his master the master said, ‘What have you gained?’ ‘Nothing,’ he said. ‘Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow’ (vv. 20–21). The Lord said, ‘I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant!’ (v. 22). Was that man a believer? I find it difficult to think he was, don’t you? When the Lord asked him why he didn’t work for him, he said to the Lord, ‘It’s your fault!’ Can you imagine any believer standing before Christ at his judgment seat and when Christ says, ‘How did you use your gift?’ a believer would reply, ‘I didn’t use it because you’re always wanting something for nothing, Lord, always wanting to reap where you have never sowed.’ Will ever any believer talk to Christ like that; the Christ who died for us and paid our debt when we were spiritually bankrupt?

For it is time for judgement to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And ‘If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’ (1 Pet 4:17–18)

What does Peter mean? Well, Paul gives another example of it: ‘I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. . . . If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward’ (see 1 Cor 3:10–15). So he gets two things—his life’s work and then a reward for it. ‘If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.’ He himself shall be saved because salvation was never dependent on works anyway, but his whole work is burned up and he gets no reward. It will be no joke to stand before the Lord when he says, ‘What did you do for me with what I entrusted you to use?’ and to have to hang our head and say, ‘I didn’t do anything.’

The Lord use his Word and bring us deeper assurance of salvation and gratitude to him for his wonderful death at Calvary, and that his blood has purged our consciences and given us the assurance that we shall never come into condemnation but have passed from death to life (John 5:24). May the Lord encourage us, in the grace of his Holy Spirit, to work our fingers to the bone if need be, and to gratefully and gladly serve him until he returns.

About the Author

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