

# The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXXIX : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4: 1-16)

For these last several lessons we have looked at what Paul meant when he spoke of Christ ‘descending into the lower parts of the earth’ (or, ‘descending into the lower parts, the earth’). We saw at the beginning of these lessons there were three major theories:

- **Christ’s descent happened on the Day of Pentecost in the Person of the Holy Spirit** — on the whole we as a class rejected that theory at least partially because of Paul’s statement in Eph 4:10, ‘*He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.*’ This theory however is held by some prominent Bible students / teachers and while it is a minority view, it does offer some positive answers to the context of Eph 4:1~16.
- **Christ descended to hell between His crucifixion and resurrection** — the reasons for this varies greatly dependent upon who we read; most in our circles that hold to this theory believes Christ proclaimed victory over the powers of hell and freed the OT saints who were being held until the death of Christ.
- **Christ’s descent speaks of His incarnation** — after quoting from the Psalms about Christ’s ascension and His authority to give gifts to His churches, Paul breaks to clarify that in the case of the Son of God, His ascension implies a previous descension since He is the eternal Second Person of the Godhead.

While I have my leanings, I tried to present the material in as objective manner as possible. But how one understands these difficult verses both influences and is influenced by other passages in the Scriptures. To fully understand our verses therefore requires us to look at these other verses.

**CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE** — references used in this study:

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## 1 PET 3:19 – ‘PREACHING TO THE SPIRITS IN PRISON’

Probably the passage used as a first reference to our Eph 4:9,10 verses is Peter’s comments in his first epistle. As we will see, this connection with our Ephesians passage is not as demanding as one would think. “Many of the issues raised over the centuries have resulted from a widespread tendency to read certain NT passages simultaneously instead of one at a time. In particular, vv 18-22 are frequently read in the light of 4:6, so that the ‘spirits’ to whom Jesus made a proclamation are understood as the spirits of the dead – usually as the evil generation that perished in the flood. At the same time, these verses are read in the light of Eph 4:8-10 so that Jesus’ proclamation is set in the context of a descent to ‘the lower parts of the earth,’ thus a ‘descent into hell.’ Because it was inconceivable that Jesus would have descended into hell after ascending to heaven (v 22), the descent into hell to preach to the dead – either to assure the salvation of OT believers or to give the wicked a second chance for salvation – was assigned to the three days Christ is said to have spent in the tomb between his death and resurrection. **When vv 18-22 are read by themselves, however, they speak neither of a ‘descent’ nor of ‘hell.’ Their relationship to 4:6 can be assessed only after interpreting that verse in its proper sequence, and their relationship to other NT passages can be assessed only in connection with particular words and phrases.**” [Michaels, 196] **Therefore while we are admonished to ‘compare Scripture with Scripture,’ we must be careful what passages we bring together and when.**

**DIFFICULT PASSAGE** — “This passage [3:18-22] is one most debated and written about; from the earliest days of the

church, it has been understood in very different ways. Even the usually dogmatic Martin Luther commented as he struggled with this passage, ‘This is a strange text and certainly a more obscure passage than any other passage in the New Testament. I sill do not know for sure what the apostle meant.’” [Jobes, 236]

**THE FORMAT OF THE PASSAGE** — “The opening words [‘For Christ too’] (cf. 2:21), signal the fact that vv 18-22 have a function similar to that of 2:21-25. The purpose of both passages is to set forth Jesus Christ, first as the supreme example of the behavior required of the epistle’s readers, and second as the One who, by his redemptive work, made such behavior possible. After a momentary overlapping in subject matter (i.e., between v 18 and 2:24-25), the present passage moves on from where 2:21-25 left off. The thought of 2:21-25 proceeded from Jesus’ behavior during his Passion (2:21-23), to his redemptive death on a cross (2:24a), to the present experience of Gentile Christians now reconciled to ‘the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls’ (2:24b-25). The resurrection of Jesus and his elevation to divine glory were ‘missing links’ in that illustration, implied perhaps but never made implicit. Here, on the contrary, Jesus’ behavior during his Passion goes unmentioned and his ‘example’ — in the usual ethical sense of the word — is only a minor note (v 18a; cf., however, 4:1-2). *Although there is significant further reflection on Jesus’ death and its redemptive effects (v 18), the weight of emphasis falls on the ‘missing links’ in the previous illustration — i.e., the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, with their accompanying consequences both for the readers of the epistle and for the whole visible and invisible universe. This makes of Jesus an ‘example’ in a broader sense than in 2:21-25 — an example not merely of suffering for doing good, but of suffering followed by vindication, the single dominant theme of the last half of 1 Peter.*” [Michaels, 196f] The structure of this portion of Scripture seems to be focused on three rhyming participles, two of which are not found elsewhere in 1 Peter and which form a plausible series summarizing Christ’s redemptive work (from Michaels, 197f):

θανατωθε̐ς σαρκι̐	thanatōtheis sarki	‘put to death in the flesh’ (v 18b)
ζωοποιηθε̐ς πνεύματι	zōopoiētheis pneumatī	‘made alive in the Spirit’ (v 18b)
πορευθε̐ς εἰς οὐρανόν	poreuthēis eis ouranon	‘gone to heaven’ (v22)

“The identical aorist passive participle [‘-theis’] endings, each followed by an additional word or short phrase, produce a striking resemblance to the ‘mystery of godliness’ summarized in almost creedal fashion in 1 Tim 3:16:

Θεός (or, ὁς)	theos (or, hos)	God (or, ‘He’)
ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί	ephanerōthē en sarki	manifest in the flesh
ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι	edikaiōthē en pneumatī	justified in the Spirit
ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις	ōphthē angelois	seen of angels
ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν	ekēruchthē en ethnesin	proclaimed in the nations
ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ	episteuthē en kosmō	accepted in the world
ἀνελήφθη ἐν δόξῃ	anelēphthē en dozē	taken up in glory

We can therefore lay this passage out as follows:

## **CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE: LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING**

### **THE PASSION (2:21-23)**

‘For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;’

### **THE CRUCIFIXION (2:24a)**

‘who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree,’

### **THE PRESENT EXPERIENCE OF BELIEVERS (2:24b-25)**

‘that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.’

~~~~~ (3:1-17) ~~~~~

### **CONNECTING THOUGHT, TYING THIS EXAMPLE WITH THE PREVIOUS**

‘For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,

## **CHRIST OUR EXAMPLE: ALTHOUGH HE SUFFERED, HE OBTAINED THE VICTORY OVER THE POWERS**

### **THE CRUCIFIXION (3:18a)**

being put to death in the flesh’

### **THE RESURRECTION (3:18b)**

‘but made alive by the Spirit,’

## SIDE PANEL: THE VICTORY OBTAINED BY CHRIST (3:19-21)

*'by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 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. 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.'*

## THE ASCENSION (3:22)

*'who has gone into heaven*

*and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.'*

## THE CONTEXT

“We have now reached the main section of the letter, which continues right up to the paragraph of farewell greetings. The trials and dangers of the young Asian churches, which have so far been the ever-present background but have only been occasionally (i. 6f.; ii. 12; 15; 19ff.; iii. 9) brought into the open, now move onto the centre stage. To encourage his readers to stand firm, the writer develops a number of interwoven strands of thought: *the idea that the innocent man can face suffering with confidence; the basis of this confidence is Christ's victory and the privilege of sharing His passion; the imminence of the End, when righteous suffering will receive its reward.*” [Kelly, 139] *“Our verse ... is a transition from the idea of minimizing suffering through virtue to a renewed teaching of how to behave when one suffers anyway.”* [Davids, 130] “Although Peter mentions future heavenly reward (1:4-7, 13; 4:13; 5:4), it would not be foreign to his thought to emphasize present blessings resulting from right actions. In fact, 1 Peter contains several examples of blessings in this life which are promised as a result of righteous conduct:

| VERSE   | RIGHT CONDUCT                                | RESULTING BLESSINGS IN THIS LIFE             |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 1:8     | loving Christ                                | unutterable joy                              |
| 1:9     | continuing faith                             | more benefits of salvation                   |
| 1:17    | holy life with fear                          | avoiding God's fatherly discipline           |
| 2:2     | partaking of spiritual milk                  | growing up toward salvation                  |
| 2:19-20 | trusting God and doing right while suffering | God's approval                               |
| 3:1-2   | submitting to husbands                       | husbands won for Christ                      |
| 3:7     | living considerately with wives              | prayers not hindered                         |
| 4:14    | enduring reproach for Christ                 | spirit of glory and of God rests upon you    |
| 5:7     | casting cares on God                         | (implied) he will care for your needs        |
| 5:9-10  | resist the devil                             | God will restore, establish, strengthen you” |

[Grudem, 156f]

**V. 13 — And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? — Καὶ τίς ὁ κακῶσων ὑμᾶς ἐὰν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μιμηταὶ γένησθε — [kai tis ho kakōsōn humas ean tou agathou mimētai genēsthe] —** “After instructing his readers to live rightly in response to the animosities of Greco-Roman society, the apostle Peter now gives encouragement and exhortations that address the unjust suffering of his Christian readers, which is probably the primary reason he is writing the letter. *Christ is again the example, but in this section his final victory and authority over all powers provide an example for conduct and the basis for encouragement.*” [Jobes, 225]

**harm, treat badly** = κακόω [kakoō] as used in the NT most frequently refers to persecution and ill treatment in this life. “[T]his word is the verbal form (in Greek) of ‘evil’ in verse 12 making the transition to the new theme of persecution more natural than appears in English: ‘The face of the Lord is against those that do evil, but in fact is there anyone who can really do evil to you?’” [Best, 131] “‘Is there really anyone who will harm those who are eager to do good?’ It implies that harm is not the normal expectation, for usually those who do what is right are rewarded, not punished. (This is a witness to the restraining influences of God's ‘common grace’ given to all people, as it finds expression in conscience and human government.)” [Grudem, 159]

**devoted to what is good** = lit. ‘zealous of good’; cf. Titus 2:14; Acts 21:20; 22:3; Gal 1:14; 1 Cor 14:12. “[T]his word has an interesting background. Phinehas slew an Israelite who had married a Midianite woman (Num. 25:6-9) and his zeal is emphasised (25:11-13); thereafter he was held up as an ideal of behaviour, especially from the time of the Maccabean revolt onwards; one Jewish party which opposed the Romans by force in the first century A.D. was known as the Zealots. The word is an odd choice here since excessive zeal is associated with a tendency to annoy and irritate others rather than with the gentleness and reverence desired in verse 15. It must be taken to stress the active nature of right behaviour and we find it associated with goodness elsewhere in the NT (Tit. 2:14; 1 Cor. 14:12; cf. 1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1; Ac. 21:20; Gal. 1:14).” [Best, 132] “*Some* Jews were zealots, boasting their zeal for the Lord or His Law, like Phinehas and the Hasmonaeans (1 Macc. ii. *passim*): all Christians should be zealots for that which is good.” [Hart, 66]

**EVEN RIGHT LIVING MAY NOT PREVENT PERSECUTION** — “The thought of the verses finds a close parallel, with exactly the same key-verb in the question, in LXX Is. 1. 9 (‘Behold, the Lord will help me: who will harm me?’), a text which may have been in the writer’s mind. He is, of course, using harm in a rather special sense. *He is not deluding his correspondents with the idea that, if their conduct is beyond reproach, they will escape abuse, maltreatment, physical injury; he has already conceded the possibility in ii. 20. His point is that, whatever disaster strike the man of faith, they cannot touch the integrity of his personality or injure him in the ultimate sense.* The confidence is thoroughly Jewish and runs through the OT (e.g., Ps. lvi. 4; cxviii. 6) and NT (e.g., Mt. x. 28; Rom. viii. 31).” [Kelly, 140; see also Biggs, 157; Jobes, 226] “At first sight it would appear to imply that those who do what is right will not have to suffer persecution. But the possibility of unjust suffering is recognized at 1:6; 2:19; 4:12-19 and probably in 3:14; the church had already sufficient opposition to realise that sheer goodness will not quell persecution. *We must therefore understand ‘harm’ in the sense of damage to the true life of the Christian; he will neither be corrupted to hate his persecutors nor will he lose his inheritance* (1:4; 3:9; cf. Rom. 8:31; Mat. 10:28; Lk. 12:4).” [Best, 131f]

**V. 14** — **But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’** — ἀλλ εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε διὰ δικαιοσύνην μακάριοι τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ ταραχθῆτε [all ei kai paschoite dia dikaiousynēn makarioi ton de phobon autōn mē phobēthēte mēde tarachthēte] — Not only can maltreatment do them no ultimate harm, but if indeed they should suffer because of their upright behaviour, they are blessed and should reckon themselves highly privileged. Luke 1:48; Mt 5:10.

**even if** = generally introduces a supposition which is more or less improbable [Biggs, 157]

**should suffer** = optative mood in the Greek, a mood which is virtually obsolete in the NT and popular speech of the time according to Kelly (p. 140) but which may have been used for style. It may point to what Peter conceives as a ‘remote contingency’ (‘if you were to suffer, you would be blessed’). “[T]he suffering, a favorite term of Peter’s (12 of 42 times in the NT) is not illness (the verb is never used in the NT to describe illness), nor state persecution, ... but abuse from non-Christian masters, husbands, and neighbors. If this should happen, one is ‘blessed.’” [Davids, 130]

**‘YOU ARE BLESSED’** — “*If we follow that which is good, namely, do not reward evil with evil, but be heartily kind and courteous, then there is none that can injure us. For though our honor, life and property be taken away, we are still uninjured, since we have a blessing incomparable, one that none can take from us. Those who persecute us have nothing but prosperity on earth, but afterwards, eternal condemnation, while we have an eternal, incorruptible treasure, although we lose a small temporal blessing.*” [Luther, 155] “‘You will be blessed’ (or, ‘you are blessed’; the Gk. text does not contain a verb but a plural adjective which applies to the readers, ‘if you suffer ... (you) blessed ones’, and it most naturally indicates blessing which comes at the same time as the suffering, not after it).” [Grudem, 159]

**QUOTING FROM ISA 8:12,13** — Quoting and adapting from Isa 8:12f: *‘Have no fear of them and do not be alarmed, but sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts.’ “Peter is quoting Isa. 8:12 LXX, Isaiah’s prophetic encouragement to the southern kingdom of Judah not to fear the allied kings of Israel and Aram (Syria) or the great power of Assyria, which will sweep both neighboring adversaries away. Isaiah warns the nations opposing Jerusalem, ‘And whatever counsel you take, the Lord will scatter it; and whatever word you speak, it will not remain for you, because the Lord God is with us’ (Isa. 8:10 LXX). The Lord exhorts Isaiah and his hearers not to fear the threat, for the Lord God is with them, and so it is the Lord they are to fear (Isa. 8:13). First Peter takes the quote up in an entirely different historical context, but with the same purpose of encouraging his readers in the face of threat, applying it to Christians who are not facing hostile powers beyond their borders but adversaries from within their own society.*” [Jobe, 228f] “The LXX text on which he is drawing reads, ‘Be not terrified with the fear of him, and do not be alarmed: sanctify the Lord himself, and he himself shall be your dread.’ In the Hebrew original the prophet and his disciples are warned not to share the fears of the populace (‘fear ye not their fear’) or count holy what they count holy, but to regard the Lord of hosts as holy and fear Him alone. The Greek translator seems to have misunderstood the first part of the passage and, substituting ‘fear of him’ for ‘their fear’, to have taken it as an exhortation to the citizens of Jerusalem not to be afraid of the king of Assyria. As applied by our writer, the utterance lends itself admirably to the Asian Christians’ plight. Literally rendered, the first clause reads: ‘Do not fear with their fear’, and it might be more natural to understand ‘their’ as a subjective genitive, translating, ‘Do not share their fear’ (which in fact is the sense of the Hebrew). But in the context the genitive must be taken as objective: ‘do not be afraid of them’, i.e. your persecutors.” [Kelly, 140f] “The words are almost verbatim from Isa. viii. 12,13, ‘be not afraid with their terror’ .... *The command amounts to this, ‘be not affected in heart by the fear which they strive to inspire into you.’* [Alford, 362] *Note Isa. 8:14 was quoted in 1 Peter 2:8.*

**RIGHTEOUSNESS CONDEMNS THE WORLD** — “*He later acknowledges in 4:3-4 that by abstaining from socially acceptable practices because they are not right, the Christian indicts a society that approvingly practices them. Peter observes the result: those who feel accused and indicted by right-living Christians ‘heap abuse on you.’ Precisely in this situation — when Christians are abused simply for refusing to participate in ungodly practices of their society — Peter describes them as ‘blessed.’*” [Jobes, 228] “Even the perfect practice of virtue, however, will not always prevent suffering. In fact, some people are so twisted that they will persecute a person just because he or she is righteous, for that righteousness infuriates them.” [Davids, 130]

**V. 15** — **But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;** — κύριον δὲ τὸν Θεὸν [Χριστὸν] ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν ἔτοιμοι δὲ ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαὺν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος μετὰ πραύτητος καὶ φόβου [kurion de ton theon (christon) hagiastate en tais kardiais humōn hetoimoi de aei pros apologian panti tō aitounti humas logon peri

**tēs en humin elpidos meta prautētos kai phobou]** — Mss note: *'but sanctify the Lord God'* (Tyndale, Geneva, KJV, YLT, NKJV); *'but sanctify the Lord Christ'* (RV, ASV, RSV, NASV, NIV, ESV) “Some of the early readers of the Epistle were alarmed by this change [substituting ‘Christ’ for ‘him’ in Isaiah], hence ... we find a variant [the God] for [the Christ].” [Biggs, 158]

**DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST** — This could be understood either as *'revere Christ as Lord'* or *'revere the Lord, namely, Christ;'* but **“this is an example where a NT writer freely identifies Jesus Christ with the Lord, Yahweh of the OT.”** [Jobes, 229]

**CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO SUFFERING** — *The Christian's response, both negatively and positively: (1) do not be afraid of the opposition, and (2) remain faithful to Christ. “This implies a constant willingness to speak up for him, to confess one's allegiance to him, and to witness fearlessly to his saving grace.”* [McKnight, 213]

**'SANCTIFY THE LORD'** — instead of being terrified by human beings, the readers are admonished to sanctify the Lord Christ. *Sanctify does not mean, 'make holy' but 'acknowledge as holy, treat Him as holy, set Him apart above all human authority'* “To ‘sanctify Christ’ or ‘God’ was to count His Name as holy above all other names, His fear, as the only fear which men ought to cherish, and therefore as the safeguard against all undue fear of men.” [Plumptre, 129] “The word ‘reverence’ [RSV; ‘sanctify’ in NKJV] is the same as that in the Lord's Prayer, ‘Hallowed be thy name’ (Mt. 6:9; Lk. 11:2); it means ‘acknowledge as holy.’” [Best, 133] “Of this we have an example in holy Job, when all his cattle and all his sons were slain, and his property taken away, he said, Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; as it was well pleasing to God, so has it been ordered, therefore blessed by his name (Job 1:21).” [Luther, 158]

**defense** = apologia, any kind of answer or self-justification, whether before a judge or informal; often used in a formal courtroom setting. Technically ‘legal defense against a charge’ and is so used in Acts 25:16; 21:2; 2 Tim 4:16. This could often be the situation since Christians were being hauled before the courts in times of persecution, but Peter says *'always be ready to give a defense to everyone'* which speaks of more ordinary and everyday situations. Apologia therefore has the sense of *'informal explanation'* or *'a defense of one's position'* and is so used in 1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11. **“Every cultivated sensible man was expected by the Greeks to be prepared ... to discuss questions of opinion or conduct intelligently and temperately, to give and receive a reason.... It is surely not fanciful to see here an allusion to St. Peter's own experience. When the critical moment came upon him, he was not ready with his answer, and so denied his Lord. Further, it was through want of meekness and fear that he denied; of meekness, because he had fancied that he loved the Lord 'more than these'; and of fear, because though he feared man, the Lord at the moment was not his dread.”** [Biggs, 158f] **“The courage which springs from deep-seated reverence for Christ shows itself in a readiness to testify to Him when one is attacked. So the Asian Christians are enjoined: Be always ready to make your defence to everyone who asks for an account of the hope that is in you.”** [Kelly, 142] “The words imply that the disciples of Christ were not to take refuge in the silence to which fear might prompt.” [Plumptre, 129] “But look now at what Peter tells us all, that we should give answer and show reason for our faith. When you come to die, I shall not be with you, neither will the pope; and if you know but this one reason of your hope, and say: I will believe as the councils, the pope and the fathers believed, then the devil will answer: Yes! but how if they were in error? Then will he have won and will drag you down to hell. **Therefore we must know what we believed, namely, what God's Word is, not what the pope and the holy fathers believe or say. For you must not put your faith at all in persons, but in the Word of God.... For if it comes to the pinch, and you should and not know what to believe, neither I nor anyone else could help you. Therefore you must know for yourself and turn to no one else. Cling fast to the Word of God if you would escape hell.**” [Luther, 159]

**the hope that is in you** — “However, since the questioning is concerning ‘the hope that is in you,’ Peter must be assuming that the inward hope of Christians results in lives so noticeably different that unbelievers are prompted to ask why they are so distinctive (cf. 4:4). Christians therefore should always be ready (prepared) to give an answer.” [Grudem, 161]

**with gentleness and reverence** = **“The former noun defines the attitude they should adopt to their critics; it should have no trace of truculence or pride, but should be marked by that Christian meekness which is more likely to commend the gospel to the suspicious-minded. The latter reminds them of their responsibility to God; the Greek word ‘phobos’ means ‘fear’, and as at i. 17; ii. 17; iii. 2 connotes, not fear of men, but awe and reverence for God.”** [Kelly, 143f] **“On the injunction, Luther says, speaking from his own experience at Worms and elsewhere, ‘Then must ye not answer with proud words and bring out the matter with a defiance and with violence as if ye would tear up trees, but with such fear and lowliness as if ye stood before God's tribunal .... so must thou stand in fear, and not rest on thine own strength, but on the word and promise of Christ.’”** [Alford, 362f] “Instead of brash defensiveness (which is frequently nothing more than an expression of insecurity), Christians ought to defend the Lord in a humble and respectful manner.” [McKnight, 214] **“[R]everence towards God (the word is the same as ‘fear’ in 1:17, 2:17 etc.) should determine the attitude of the readers to others; if before him they are genuinely humble they will not be aggressive towards others.”** [Best, 134]

**“But proceed with such fear and humility as if you stood before God's tribunal and were there to give answer.... [Y]ou must stand in fear, and not rely on your own strength, but on the word and promise of Christ. ‘But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak, for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaketh in you’ (Matt. 10:19,20). It is right, when you are to answer, that you arm yourself well with passages of Scripture; but beware you do not insist on that with a proud spirit, since God will even take the most forcible reply out of your mouth and memory, though you were previously fortified with all your replies.”** [Luther, 161f]

**v. 16 — having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in**

**Christ may be ashamed.** — συνείδησιν ἔχοντες ἀγαθὴν ἵνα ἐν ᾧ καταλαλώσιν ὑμῶν ὡς κακοποιῶν, καταισχυρθῶσιν οἱ ἐπηρεάζοντες ὑμῶν τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφῇ [suneidēsīn echontes agathēn hina en hō katalalōsin humōn hōs kakopoioīōn, kataischunthōsin hoi epēreazontes humōn tēn agathēn en Christō anastrophēn] — *“Constantly the apostle repeats his phrases with new significance and in a new light. In the former passage [1 Pet 2:12] he speaks of the righteousness of the Christian as likely to promote the conversion of the heathen, here simply as stopping the mouths of his defamers.”* [Biggs, 159]

**clear conscience** = “The expression ‘good (or clear, pure) conscience’ is also found in iii. 21; Acts xxiii. 1; 1 Tim. i. 5; 19; iii. 9; 2 Tim. ii. 3; Heb. xiii. 18, and seems to have been almost stereotyped. *Primarily it signifies the consciousness of freedom from guilt and of having nothing to hide.*” [Kelly, 144] *“It is interesting that Peter finds it necessary in 3:16 to admonish believers that they must keep a clear conscience when testifying to the reason they hope in Christ. This speaks to at least two issues: walking the talk and talking rightly. First, an effective testimony requires a clear conscience regarding one’s personal integrity before the Lord. One cannot explain the hope we have in Christ while living in ways that contradict that hope. Second, even the best-intentioned testimony must be conducted in an appropriate manner. If offense is to be taken, it should be over the content of the gospel message, not because the message was offered in a manner that invalidates Christ’s love for seekers. The Christian testimony must reflect humility and respect for the hearer.”* [Jobes, 231]

**ashamed** = “Scripture often promises that those who are faithful to God will not in the end be shamed, but their opponents will be. This does not refer to emotion but to standing.” [Jobes, 231] “Peter’s stress on the coming judgment of Christ means that his primary focus is surely on their shame when they must give an account of their behavior before a Judge who knows the full truth. Here is the ultimate security of the Christian.” [Davids, 133] “That persecutors are put to shame does not mean that they are envisaged as being converted, the time of their shame may be the day of judgment.” [Best, 134]

**v. 17 — For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.** — κρείττον γὰρ ἀγαθοποιούντας εἰ θέλει τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ πάσχειν ἢ κακοποιούντας [kreitton gar agathopoioūntas ei thelei to thelēma tou theou paschein ē kakopoioūntas] — **CONFIDENCE BASED ON CHRIST’S VICTORY OVER EVIL** — *“In iii. 13-17, while speaking more and more openly about the harsh realities of persecution, the writer has been urging the Asian Christians to face their ordeal fearlessly and indeed with cheerful confidence. Now he sketches the sure basis of their confidence: this is nothing less than the victory which Christ has won, by His death, resurrection and ascension, over the forces of evil...”* [Kelly, 146] “In suffering for evil one is receiving a just retribution, but in suffering for righteousness one has a sign of eschatological reward and identification with Christ who likewise suffered (as the following verse make clear). *It is from this heavenly perspective alone that one can attribute a more positive value to such suffering.*” [Davids, 134]

**‘IF IT IS THE WILL OF GOD’** — This repeats a principle Peter already mentioned in 2:20 referring to servants / slaves. *“Here, however, it is reinforced by the Christian idea of Providence. When wrongdoers suffer, they are in no position to complain, for in a universe ordered by divine justice their crimes merit punishment. When well-doers suffer, they have the satisfaction of knowing that their suffering is not the moral consequence of their well-doing, even if it is their good actions which have brought their enemies’ hostility down upon them.”* [Kelly, 145] *“If suffering is within God’s will, it is also within God’s sovereign control. And thus Christian suffering is determined not by the will of one’s adversaries but by the will of one’s heavenly Father.... [I]t is God’s will that Christians remain faithful and obedient even if suffering results. The encounter of Christian faith with hostility therefore becomes a test that must be faced by Christians. If a Christian turns away from Christ in order to avoid suffering insult and alienation from unbelieving friends, neighbors, or colleagues, then that person’s faith is thereby shown to be lacking.”* [Jobes, 233] “A further reason for patient endurance. Not only will it silence calumny, but it is Christlike, and it has value for others.... There is a parallelism between the sufferings of Christ and those of the Christian, but it is not quite clear how far it is meant to be carried.” [Biggs, 159]

**v. 18a — For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,** — ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων ἵνα ἡμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ [hoti kai Christos hapax peri hamartiōn epathen dikaios huper adikōn hina hēmas prosagagē tō theō] — Mss variance: ‘Christ suffered for sins’ (Tyndale, Geneva, KJV, YLT, RV, ASV, NKJV, NIV, ESV), ‘Christ died for sins’ (RSV, NASV)

**PROBABLY BASED ON TRADITIONAL MATERIAL** — *“There is almost universal agreement that Peter is drawing on traditional material in vv 18-22, but little agreement as to the nature of that material: e.g., did it include an early Christian hymn or confession of faith, possibly used in connection with baptism? Did it incorporate a fragment from a Jewish or Christian midrash on Genesis, or an apocalypse about Enoch or Noah? Answers to such questions are necessarily speculative.”* [Michaels, 197] “There is wide agreement that, like i. 18-21 and ii. 21b-24, this section has, in part at any rate, been pieced together out of liturgical, hymnic or catechetical material. This is supported by (a) the tell-tale particle FOR (hoti: cf. i. 18; ii. 21b), which reads like the introduction to a quotation; (b) the concise style, heightened tone and antithetical structure; (c) the inclusion of ideas (e.g. the atoning effect of Christ’s death) which go beyond the strict requirements of the argument; and (d) the nature of the contents, which consist of basic items of the primitive kerygma [‘preaching’].” [Kelly, 146f] *“We cannot then disagree that liturgical elements, whether credal or hymnic (and it is difficult always to distinguish them precisely), are found in verses 18 and 22. However, verses 19-21 read much more like an independent construction of the writer; there is really nothing poetic about their form and nothing in their content pertaining to the fundamentals of Christian thought as we know it towards the end of the first century, or even the early second.”* [Best, 136]

**CONNECTED TO 2:21** — The same phrase ‘For Christ also...’ in 2:21 introduced Christ as an example of ‘suffering,’

specifically of ‘suffering unjustly’ or ‘suffering for doing good’ (2:19,20). [Michaels, 201] “It is important to be clear about the movement of thought. The first clause does not (as many assume) attach what follows exclusively to the preceding verse, as if the writer were referring his readers (as he did in the similarly worded sentence in ii. 21) to Christ as the pattern of innocent suffering; here there can be no question of Christ as an example, since His act was unique and redemptive. Rather the clause and the section it introduces look back to, and seek to justify, the teaching contained in the whole paragraph iii. 13-17; **when unjustly persecuted the readers can count themselves blessed (iii. 14) for ... they participate in the victory Christ has won over the evil powers whose agents their earthly adversaries are.**” [Kelly, 147] “[T]he thought is somewhat similar to that in ch. ii. 21, but the intent of it different: there, it was as an example *to us* that the sufferings of Christ were adduced: here, it is as a proof of the blessedness and advantage of suffering for well-doing, that proof being closely applied to us by the fact that that suffering was undertaken on our behalf, and that blessedness is our salvation.” [Alford, 363f] **“As in 2:21 the thought of the suffering of believers leads to that of Jesus’ redemptive suffering; he is the supreme example of one who suffered ‘for doing right’ (verse 17). But we are carried further than in 2:21-5 for we go beyond the death of Christ to his resurrection and ascension (verses 18b-22); here Christ can no longer serve as example, but what he has accomplished through his victory can assure Christians of their own eventual victory and so sustain them in their present sufferings.**” [Best, 137]

**once for all** = cf. Rom 6:10; Heb 7:27; 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10) **This highlights the absolute sufficiency, completeness and unique value of Christ’s sacrifice, distinguishing the one sacrifice of Christ from the repeated deaths of victims under the law. Christ’s suffering is over, its purpose fully accomplished.** “Christ suffered ‘once for all’ according to Heb. ix. 24-28; the Christian suffers ‘for a little’ (1 Pet. v. 10).” [Hart, 68]

**suffered for sins** = The expression occurs nowhere else in the NT. ‘For sins’ is the regular phrase for the sin-offering (Lev 5:7; 6:30; Ps 39:7; Ezek 43:21) **“It is the formula of substitutionary atonement, the death of the victim on behalf of the sins of another.”** [Davids, 135] **“The closeness of the parallelism with Heb. ix. 26-28 might almost suggest the inference that St Peter was acquainted with that Epistle, but it admits also of the more probable explanation that both writers represent the current teaching of the Apostolic Church. The precise Greek phrase ‘for sins’ (literally, ‘concerning or on account of, sins’) is used in Heb. x. 6, 8, 18, 26, and in the LXX of Ps. xl. 6, and was almost the technical phrase of the Levitical code (Lev. iv. 33).”** [Plumptre, 130]

**the just on behalf of the unjust** = emphasizing both the vicarious nature of His sacrifice as well as His innocence. **In 1 Pet 1:19 we read that the sinlessness of Christ gave His blood its value.** “The Neoplatonist admitted that *my* suffering makes *me* better, but thought it absurd to suppose that the suffering of another could do so.” [Biggs, 160]

**hina clause: that He might bring us to God** — **“In itself ‘bring us to God’ simply means ‘bring about (more accurately, restore) our right relationship with God’, a relationship which has been interrupted by sin.... It could denote bringing a person before a tribunal or presenting him at a royal court, or (both in classical Greek and the LXX) the ritual act of bringing a sacrifice to God (e.g. Ex. xxix. 10; Lev. i. 2), or again (esp. LXX) the consecration of persons to God’s service (e.g. Ex. xxix. 4; 8; xl. 12; Lev. viii. 24; Num. viii. 9f.).”** [Kelly, 149] “The meaning of προσάγειν [prosagein] has been much debated. It is used of the priests, Aaron and his sons, whom Moses ‘brings before God,’ and who may be regarded as sacrificial gifts.... Others have supposed the phrase to signify ‘that He might make us a sacrifice to God’; προσάγειν [prosagein] being frequently used of the victim, Lev 3:12; 4:4; 8:14. But this sense is inapplicable here; for in the words immediately preceding, Christ is spoken of as being Himself the Victim. If, therefore, προσάγειν [prosagein] possesses here any sacrificial sense at all, it is merely in a distant and indirect way. **We shall find the best explanation in Eph 2:18; 3:12; Heb 4:16; 7:25; 10:22; 12:22, where ... the free access of Christians to the Father corresponds to the priestly προσάγειν [prosagein] of Christ. The sin-offering opens the door and leads us through it.**” [Biggs, 160f] **“Peter is creating a new metaphor, for no other NT writer has this active picture of Jesus leading the Christian to God. But it fits with Peter’s usual conception of the Christian life as an active close following of Jesus (2:21; 4:13). Jesus died in order that, so to speak, he might reach across the gulf between God and humanity and, taking our hand, lead us across the territory of the enemy into the presence of the Father who called us.”** [Davids, 136] “The divine tearing of the temple veil from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51) symbolically demonstrated the reality that He had opened the way to God. The heavenly Holy of Holies, the ‘throne of grace’ (Heb. 4:16), was made available for immediate access by all true believers. As royal priests (2:9), all believers are welcomed into God’s presence (Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22).” [MacArthur, 207] “With the possible exception of the RSVmg addition, ‘for us’, to ‘died’, the whole passage has been in the second person plural; the unexpected change to the first person plural probably indicates the use of another piece of liturgical tradition.” [Best, 138]

**WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?** — <sup>13</sup> *Who will harm you if you live righteously?* <sup>14</sup> *But if they do persecute you, you are blessed.* <sup>15</sup> *But set Christ apart in your hearts, acknowledge Him as holy, set Him apart and above all human authority, and be ready to give a defense of what you believe with meekness and reverence, in a humble and respectful manner.* <sup>16</sup> *Having a good conscience, free from guilt and having nothing to hide. If they are to be offended, let them be offended at the Word and not how we present the Word! So that in the day of Christ when we all give an account, they will be ashamed.* <sup>17</sup> *For it is better in God’s sovereign plan that we stand and suffer for doing good than to give in and reproach Christ!! (we must decide now if we are to follow Him and be faithful!)* <sup>18</sup> *For Christ also suffered on our behalf, the sinless for the sinful, in order to bring us to God. (Jesus Christ is THE example of sinless suffering!)*