

Affliction In Light of the Ascension

1 Peter 3:22 – 4:6

Introduction – This next passage on suffering and sin must be understood in light of the sustained argument, verses 13-22 of Chapter 3, and in particular, the climax of that passage, the ascension of Christ. So let's go back to the last verse in Chapter 3 and begin there.

The Ascension of Christ – The doctrine of the Ascension does more than answer the question “Where has Jesus gone?” Rightly understood, we actually rejoice that Christ is not physically present here with us. Note these three clauses in verse 22 -

Jesus Has Gone Into Heaven – He was carried up into heaven (Luke 22:51). This is what was central on Christ's mind as He set His face to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), it is the climax of the mystery of godliness (1 Tim 3:16), and commences our new High Priest higher than the heavens, to reign in His new covenant ministry (Heb 7:27).

Jesus Sits at the Right Hand of God – This places Jesus at the highest position of executive authority. This place indicates the completion of His work of atonement (Heb 1:3), and the beginning of His kingdom reign upon the earth (Psalm 110:1-2). In that place of authority, He also lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25).

Jesus Sits Over All Authorities – Christ sits there, not in the hope that one day all angels, authorities and powers will be made subject to Him, but because they have been made subject. Christ is not absent because He lost. He is absent because He is at the place of victory. This is why Paul is so confident of our victory in Christ (Rom 8:37-39).

“Therefore” (4:1) - Keep these clauses in mind as we look at the next several verses –

Sanctification in Suffering (vv 1-2) – Sufferings are means by which God makes us more into the image of Christ (James 1:2-4). But, these afflictions are not an automatic means of sanctification. We must receive them by faith, which we can have when He grants us the ability to apprehend the previous verse.

Military Concentration – “*arm yourselves also with the same mind...*” How concentrated does a nation become when attacked?

Afflictions cause us to concentrate on His sovereignty and providence. We must remember His victory (Col 2:15), and set our mind on this (Col 3:1-2). We must set our eyes upon Jesus (Heb 12:1-2), the author and finisher of our faith. In the affliction, you must answer the question, “does God love you” in the affirmative. It is a sin to think otherwise. But you can only do these things by faith.

Suffering and Sin – We are ‘waging war against our fleshly lusts’ (1 Pet 2:11). When we are united to Christ in His sufferings and in His resurrection/ascension, we find that we are not only freed from the guilt of sin, but from its power as well. When we see the end, we are willing to suffer gladly, even to take up the cross and follow Jesus (Matt 16:24-26).

The World In Which We Live (vv3-5) – Peter points out the antithesis. The seed of the serpent will never understand the seed of the woman. Unbelief (Gentiles) will never understand why we Christians do what we do, and why we abstain from what we abstain. This is because they must deny the truth of 3:22, and we must live in its light.

ENOUGH! – Did you come to faith early or late in life? Have you struggled with that temptation for just a bit or forever.

Nevertheless, it is enough. If you have or are living in unbelief and rebellion, “now” is enough. We must see our sin not only as sinful, but stupid, fruitless, shortsighted, and declaring a lie about 3:22. Licentiousness is a lie.

You Are Strange – If you avoid the world's latest sins, you will be mocked, you will be called unnatural, prudish, and abnormal.

Today's Media-culture is the perfect example. They hate your obedience, because it reminds them of their condemnation. They will look for justification in their numbers (Rom 1:32) and find their delight in getting you to stumble with them.

They Will Give an Account – Remember 3:22. God will not be mocked. Jesus reigns. You stand firm.

Christians Die (v6) – Notice carefully ‘was preached’ and ‘are dead’. This is not a verse that says anything about men who die in their sins having the gospel preached to them.

Mocking Even in Your Death – Because we die, we are judged by those who live in the flesh – “see, what difference does it make?” But what has Jesus promised (John 11:25) and where is the One who made that promise (1 Peter 3:22)?

Applications –

Die to Sin – When confronted with your sin, right then war is declared. There must be no compromise. You must repent, confess, make restitution, and you must consider the sufferings of Christ and our victory in the cross.

Let Suffering Take Its Course – Is God exhaustively sovereign? Then He has brought this affliction, this trial, this hard providence. Run to the One who endured tremendous suffering for You, for if God has given you Christ, will He not also give you all things? Will He not bring you through this trial? Does He not love you? Look to Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of God, and see the answer.

Where Are You Looking? – Too often, because we stumble in this in many ways, we start doubting our sincerity, or even our salvation. Then we start looking inward, trying to peer into our own hearts. Stop that. Set your eyes on Jesus – He's up there.

Dave Hatcher, February 24, 2002