

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Nicene Creed		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	27		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Mark 14:33-34; Luke 22:44; Hebrews 5:7		
Date:	October 27, 2024 (a.m.)		

. . . AND SUFFERED (Part 2)

Charles Finney (1792-1875), the highly influential 19th century evangelist, has, in many ways, shaped the character of much that passes for Evangelicalism today. Finney contended that salvation is primarily a matter of moral improvement, individually and socially. In doing so, he categorically rejected such important biblical doctrines as original sin and total depravity. He spoke with contempt of such doctrines as penal substitution¹ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the grounds for justification by faith alone.² Noted Sociologist Alan Wolfe wrote a stinging indictment of modern day evangelicalism, which he refers to as "toothless evangelicalism," because it has ignored its theological heritage, turned the Bible into a self-help manual for psychological well-being, redefined morality and adopted a privatized spirituality that lacks substance and courage.³ John Piper, reacting to the massive popularity of this type of evangelicalism, notes, "The older I get, the less impressed I am with flashy successes and enthusiasms that are not truth-based. Everybody knows that with the right personality, the right music, the right location, and the right schedule you can grow a church without anybody really knowing what doctrinal commitments sustain it, if any. Church-planting specialists generally downplay biblical doctrine in the core values of what makes a church *successful*. The long-term effect of this ethos is a weakening of the church that is concealed as long as the crowds are large, the band is loud, the tragedies are few, and persecution is still at the level of preferences."⁴ The doctrinal ignorance that runs rampant throughout much that passes for evangelical is rooted in the final analysis, in apathy. "What's the big deal here," you hear many complain, "why all the fuss over the details of something like justification? Why all the nitpicking, harping on this theological issue? As long as people have asked Jesus into their hearts, what does it matter if there are differing opinions over the finer points of Theology?" Michael Horton has observed this growing mentality among professing evangelicals. "Much of the preaching one encounters in evangelical churches, even Lutheran and Reformed, is a steady diet of *practical* moralism. Instead of energizing believers with the triumphant indicative – that God in Christ has reconciled us to himself – many pastors weigh them down with bare imperatives. Their preaching is chiefly exhortation and uplift rather than a startling announcement of God's work. Some preaching has adopted the therapeutic paradigm, where one would never think of sin and grace in exclusively vertical terms; being reconciled with a holy God who is clad in righteous vengeance. Rather, salvation is practically reduced to Jesus picking up the broken pieces of our lives and making us better. Whether in its harsher or milder forms, therapeutic moralism shares with all synergistic efforts an emphasis on self-improvement to the practical neglect of being right with a holy God."⁵ Both the Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed emphasize the centrality of Christ suffering. The Gospel accounts of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane stress the fact that Jesus experienced great torment at this particular time. He was *distressed* and *agitated* and *deeply grieved* even unto death (Mark 14:33-34).⁶ John Flavel, one of the great Puritan preachers, pointed out that Christ's sufferings were such that they cannot be experienced by any, nor could be to the end of the world, "All his other sufferings were but small to this; they bore upon his body, this upon his soul; they came from the hands of vile men, this from the hands of a dear Father. He suffered both in body and soul; but the sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings."⁷

- I. **THE PENAL NATURE OF HIS SUFFERINGS.** Warfield highlights this aspect of Christ's suffering by noting how the Gospels, both Matthew and Mark, add our Lord's own pathetic declaration: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," the central term in which expresses a sorrow, or perhaps we would better say, a mental pain, a distress, which hems in on every side, from which there is therefore no escape; or rather (for the qualification imports that this hemming-in distress is mortally acute, is an anguish of a sort that no issue but death can be thought of) which presses in and besets from every side and therefore leaves no place for defence. The extremity of this agony may have been revealed, as the interpolator of Luke tells us, by sweat dropping like clots of blood on the ground, as our Lord ever more importunately urged that wonderful prayer, in which as Bengel strikingly says, the horror of death and the ardor of obedience met (Lk. 22:44). This interpolator tells us (Lk. 22:43) also that he was strengthened for the conflict by an angelic visitor, and we may well suppose that had it not been for some supernatural strengthening mercifully vouchsafed (cf. Jno. 12:27f), the end would then have come. But the cup must needs be drained to its dregs, and the final drop was not drunk until that cry of desertion and desolation was uttered, *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?* (Mt. 28:46; Mk. 15:34). This culminating sorrow was actually unto death. In these supreme moments our Lord sounded the ultimate depths of human anguish, and vindicated on the score of the intensity of his mental sufferings the right to the title of Man of Sorrows. The scope of these sufferings was also very broad, embracing that whole series of painful emotions which runs from a consternation that is appalled dismay, through a despondency which is almost despair, to a sense of well-nigh complete desolation. In the presence of this mental anguish the physical tortures of the crucifixion retire into the background, and we may well believe that our Lord, though he died on the cross, yet died not of the cross, but, as we commonly say, of a broken heart, that is to say, of the strain of his mental suffering. The sensitiveness of his soul to affectional movements, and the depths of the currents of feeling which flowed through his being, are thus thrown up into a very clear light. And yet it is noticeable that while they tore his heart and perhaps, in the end, broke the bonds which bound his fluttering spirit to its tenement of clay, they never took the helm of life or overthrew either the judgment of his calm understanding or the completeness of his perfect trust in his Father. If he cried out in his agony for deliverance, it was always the cry of a child to a Father whom he trusts with all and always, and with the explicit condition, *Howbeit, not what I will but what Thou wilt.* If the sense of desolation invades his soul, he yet confidently commits his departing spirit into his Father's hands (Lk. 23:46)."⁸
- II. **SUFFERING DAMNATION.** According to Richard Muller, damnation (from the Latin *damnatio*) is, "the consignment of individuals to eternal punishment that takes place at the final judgment (*iudicium extremum*) and which occurs because of the unforgiven sins and unremitted punishment of the individual; thus, the end of all who, at the judgment, are found to be outside of Christ."⁹ Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), in his masterful work on *Christ The Mediator*, says that two things were due unto fallen mankind because of their sins; and Christ had to undergo these as mediator.
- A. **PAENA DAMNI; The loss of God's favor and separation from Him.** Christ had to endure this, for all comforts fail him. "If he desires but a drop of water, it is denied him; if a beam of light, the sun affords none; his disciples had all forsaken him; and whereas heretofore an angel came to him and comforted him, now not an angel dares look out of heaven. His heart had before this melted out of fear, and failed him; ay, but (says David) *though my flesh fails, yet God fails me not*, Ps. lxxiii.26. But behold, God himself forsakes Christ. So at the end of this conflict he complains, or rather vehemently affirms it (as the Hebrew phrase bears it). He is said to be forsaken, not only in regard of his being kept in the hands of his enemies, as some would have it only meant. For, (1) This then would have been uttered by him at the first, when he fell into their hands, and not now at last only. And, (2) Though enemies persecute us and have their wills of us, yet we are said not to be forsaken, as 2 Cor. iv. 9, *Persecuted, but not forsaken*; that is, though left in the

hands of men, yet not forsaken by God; so that *forsaken* is put in opposition to being left to the persecutions and power of our enemies. But Christ is not only said to be left to the power of enemies, but to be forsaken by God himself, which how it could be, I shall afterwards explain. And this was the extremity of his emptying, emptying to nothing, as Dan. ix. 26, *Messiah shall have nothing*, that is, nothing left to comfort him; so his cutting off is expressed.”¹⁰

- B. *PAENA SENSUS, Experience the curse and wrath of God.* Christ had to also undergo this. “He was made a curse, and encountered his Father’s wrath, which, *first*, the darkness that was then about him may inform us of. If ever the face of hell were upon the earth, it was at that day. All which while we read not of any word which Christ spake, till at last. So that as darkness covered, so silence hushed all about him, that so he might without interruption or intermission encounter with his Father’s wrath. And the place was the air, the very kingdom of the prince of darkness. *Secondly*, the tree he hangs on declares it, which God before had cursed; and therefore now especially it is that Christ is made a curse, as the apostle intimates, Gal. 3:13; where he speaks as if Christ had never been a curse until now; and therefore it is that Christ is said to *bear our sins in his body* (that is, his human nature) *on the tree*. And he had no type of his being crucified but the brazen serpent, which of all worms else God had only cursed. And therefore now it is that the treasures of wrath are broke up, the cataracts of curses set open, and the sluices pulled up, so to let in all our sins upon him, God now *afflicting him with all his waves*. And when this eclipse by reason of God’s wrath went off his spirit, and it received light again, then he cried out (as was said), *It is finished*; which was spoken just before his giving up the ghost, as declaring that the great brunt was over.”¹¹

CONCLUSION: Hebrews 5:7 sheds light on the theological significance of the event in the garden of Gethsemane. Thomas Hewitt, in his commentary on Hebrews, makes the following observation: “The Greek preposition *ek* translated *from* in the phrase *to save him from death* can also mean *out of*. If *out of* is adopted, the meaning of the phrase would be to bring Him safe through death to a new life, a clear reference to Christ’s resurrection. If *from* is adopted, then it would appear that Jesus prayed to be preserved from death, either in the Garden as some suggest, or on the cross. This last interpretation should be ruled out for two reasons: Christ did suffer the death of the cross; and His prayer in the Garden was answered. We are left, then, with the following alternatives: Did Christ pray to be saved *out of* the death of the cross? Or did He pray to be saved *from* dying in the Garden? If the prayer which Christ offered *with strong crying and tears* was a prayer to be saved *out of* death, it cannot easily be reconciled with another request made in the Garden – *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me* (Lk. 22:42). In the first place, our Lord knew that man’s only hope of salvation lay in His death on the cross, and this was the way ordained by God. He was willing to go this way, and prayed, according to this interpretation, that He might safely be brought through it to the resurrection. It seems strange, then, that He should pray almost in the same breath that *this cup*, which can only mean the cup of death, should pass from Him. It is true that He was willing to submit to the Father’s will, but why should He pray that the cup of death should pass from Him, when shortly before He had not only prayed a different prayer but had rejected the idea that He should be saved from *this hour* (cf. Jn. 12:27)? The *hour* can mean only the great crisis of His life, and from this He says He will not shrink; yet apparently He does shrink from it shortly afterwards. Moreover, Christ in the upper room shortly before He went into the Garden spoke of His death and resurrection, yet in an incredibly short space of time He is found, if this interpretation is correct, not only praying to be saved from the *cup of death* but also to be saved *out of* death. In support of the second interpretation, the everyday meaning of the phrase is *to save from dying*, i.e., to deliver from physical death so that it is escaped. In Matthew 26:38 our Lord said, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*. R. A. Knox translates this, *My soul is ready to die with sorrow . . .* We have already seen that *prayers and supplications* means *the vehement cry of one in desperate need, and the supplication of one in need of protection or help in some overwhelming calamity*. If Christ had died in the Garden, no greater calamity could possibly have fallen on mankind. Immediately after our Lord had spoken about this condition of His soul, He prayed for the cup to pass from Him and *was heard*. Luke records: *there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him* (22:43). The great agony of the Saviour of the world will ever remain a mystery

to us in this life, and so will various other aspects of His suffering.”¹² Finally, pay close attention to what Shedd says, “This language teaches that the incarnate second person of the Trinity received upon himself a stroke inflicted by the positive act of another divine person. The Son of God was bruised, wounded, and smitten by God the Father, as the officer and agent of divine justice; and the effects of it appear in that extraordinary mental distress which the mediator exhibited, particularly during the last hours of his earthly life: *While he was buffeted, scourged, and nailed to the cross, we hear nothing from him; but like a lamb before the shearers, he was mute. But when God reached forth his hand and darted his immediate rebukes into his very soul and spirit, then he cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!* The nature of this suffering is inexplicable, because it has no parallel in human consciousness. The other forms of Christ’s suffering are intelligible, because they were like those of men. Thirst, hunger, weariness, grief at the death of a friend, were the same in Christ that they are in us. But that strange and unique experience which uttered itself in the cry *My God, why have you forsaken me?* belongs to the consciousness of the God-man. Only he who occupied the actual position of the sinner’s substitute can experience such a judicial stroke from eternal justice, and only he can know the peculiarity of the suffering which it produces. Suffering is a form of consciousness, and consciousness can be known only by the possessor of it.”¹³

ENDNOTES

¹ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. has written “Recent theological history indicates that the denial of penal substitution has led to a modification or perversion of several orthodox doctrines. The divine attributes are brought under direct attack when we eliminate penal substitution. Among those doctrines directly affected are (1) retributive justice based on God’s perfections, (2) God’s immutability, and (3) the proper biblical emphasis on the infiniteness of sin’s evil.” *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. J. H. Armstrong (Moody, 1996), p. 120. Clark Pinnock, one of the foremost critics of traditional Reformational Christianity, follows in Finney’s line by likewise questioning the validity of the doctrines of original sin and substitutionary atonement and makes this gleeful announcement: “It is my strong impression, conformed to me by those not pleased by it, that Augustinian [read here Reformational] thinking is losing its hold on present-day Christians.” *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Zondervan, 1989), p. 26.

² C. Finney, *Lectures On Systematic Theology*, ed. J. H. Fairchild (Doran, 1878), p. 384. He refers to the Reformation’s doctrine of justification alone on the basis of Christ’s imputed righteousness as “impossible and absurd.” B. B. Warfield accurately said of Finney’s theology, “God might be eliminated from it entirely without essentially changing its character.” *Perfectionism: Part Two* (rpt. Baker, 1981), p. 193.

³ Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (The University of Chicago Press), 2005.

⁴ John Piper, *Counted Righteous In Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness?* (Crossway Book, 2003), p. 22. He continues, “But more and more this doctrinally-diluted brew of music, drama, life-tips, and marketing seems out of touch with real life in this world – not to mention the next. It tastes like watered-down gruel, not a nourishing meal. It simply isn’t serious enough. It’s too playful, chatty and casual. Its joy just doesn’t feel deep enough or heartbroken or well-rooted. The injustice and persecution and suffering and hellish realities in the world today are so many and so large and so close that I can’t help but think that, deep inside, people are longing for something weighty and massive and rooted and stable and eternal. So it seems to be that the trifling with silly little sketches and breezy welcome-to-the-den styles on Sunday morning are just out of touch with what matters in life. Of course, it works. Sort of. Because, in the name of felt needs, it resonates with people’s impulse to run from what is most serious and weighty and what makes them most human and what might open the depths of God to their souls. The design is noble. Silliness is a stepping-stone to substance. But it’s an odd path. And evidence is not ample that many are willing to move beyond fun and simplicity. So the price of minimizing truth-based joy and maximizing atmosphere-based comfort is high. More and more, it seems to me, the end might be in view. I doubt that a religious ethos with such a feel of entertainment can really survive as Christian for too many more decades. Crises reveal the cracks.” (p. 23)

⁵ M. S. Horton, “What’s All the Fuss About? The Status of the Justification Debate,” *Modern Reformation* (March/April 2002), p. 20.

⁶The language used is highly instructive. Shedd says, “The words *ekthameisthai* and *adēmonein* imply a species of mental distress that stuns and bewilders. This mental suffering cannot be explained upon ordinary psychological principles, but must be referred to a positive act of God. Christ was sinless and perfect. His inward distress did not result from the workings of a guilty conscience. The agony in the garden and on the cross was not of remorse; though it was equal to it. Neither was it the agony of despair, though it was equal to it.” *Dogmatic Theology* (Third edition, P&R, 2003), p. 717. The word *adēmonein* (translated *distressed*), according to Lightfoot, refers to a state of discontent. “It describes the confused, restless, half distracted state, which is produced by physical discouragement, or by mental distress, or grief, shame, disappointment,” J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to The Philippians* (rpt. Zondervan, 1972), p. 124. *Ekthambeisti* (translated *amazed*), “denotes a being in the grip of a shuddering horror in the fact of dreadful prospect before him.” C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark, The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary* (Cambridge Press, 1972). L. Goppelt points out that “Jesus sees Himself confronted, not by a cruel destiny, but by the judgment of God. The ineffable sorrow and anguish (Mk. 14:33f. par. Mt. 26:37 f. cf. Lk. 22:44) which gives rise to the request that what is approaching might pass from Him is not fear of a dark fate, nor cringing before physical suffering and death, but the horror of One who lives by God at being cast from Him, at the judgment which delivers up the Holy One to the power of sin (Mk. 14:41 par. Mt. 26:45, cf. Lk. 22:53). Hence one may suppose that there is an actual connection with the dominant concept in the OT metaphor of the cup. According to this, the cup-sayings express for Jesus more than for the Evangelists the fact that the approaching passion is not fate but judgment – for the disciples too in the sense of 1 Pt. 4:12. *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel & G. Friedrich, VI (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 153.

⁷ *The Works of John Flavel I* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 408.

⁸ B. B. Warfield, “On The Emotional Life of Our Lord” in *Biblical and Theological Studies: A Commemoration of 100 Years of Princeton Seminary* (rpt. Solid Grounds Christian Books, 2003), p. 77-78.

⁹ R. A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), p. 87.

¹⁰ *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (rpt. Tanski Publication, 1996), p. 279.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Thomas Hewitt, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle To The Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1976), p. 99.

¹³ Shedd, *op. cit.*, p. 718. In a footnote he adds, “Christ felt that he was forsaken of God, but not, like a despairing person, that he was eternally forsaken. The desertion was only temporary. The comforting presence of God returns to Christ, as is indicated in the statement of Luke 23:46, that *Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*. Again, the agony of Christ was not despair, because in this very cry he says *my God*. A despairing man or angel would say *O God*, and would not exclaim, saying, *Why have you forsaken me?* Again, Christ did not experience despair, because he knew that the union between the divine and human natures was indissoluble. He also knew that the covenant of redemption between him and the Father could not fail. His distress did not relate to either of these two particulars. It arose (a) from his view of the nature of the curse upon sin which he had vicariously come under; (b) because the comforting influences from the union of the divine with the human nature were temporarily restrained; (c) from temporary desertion of God; and (d) from positive infliction when the *sword was awakened* against him. The words *why have you forsaken me?* express wonder, not ignorance or unbelief or complaint. Christ well knew why he was deserted at this hour, had perfect faith and confidence in his Father, and was entirely submissive to his will. But he was amazed and paralyzed at the immensity of the agony. The word *why* is not interrogative, but exclamatory. The words are equivalent to *how you have forsaken me!*”