

LORD'S DAY 15

37. Q. What do you confess when you say that He *suffered*?

A. During all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end, Christ bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.¹ Thus, by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice,² He has redeemed our body and soul from everlasting damnation,³ and obtained for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.⁴

1. Isaiah 53

1 Timothy 2:6 ...who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

1 Peter 2:24 ...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

2. Romans 3:25

...whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.

1 Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.

Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

Hebrews 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

1 John 2:2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

3. Romans 8:1-4

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Hebrews 9:12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

1 Peter 1:18,19 ...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

4. John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Romans 3:24-26 ...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

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

Hebrews 9:15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

38. Q. Why did He suffer *under Pontius Pilate* as judge?

A. Though innocent, Christ was condemned by an earthly judge,¹ and so He freed us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us.²

1. **Luke 23:13-24**

John 19:4, 12-16 Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him." ...¹² From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."¹³ When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.¹⁴ Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"¹⁵ But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"¹⁶ Then he delivered Him

to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away.

2. **Isaiah 53:4,5** Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

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

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")

39. Q.	Does it have a special meaning that Christ was crucified and did not die in a different way?
A.	Yes. Thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay on me, for a crucified one was cursed by God. ¹

1 **Deuteronomy 21:23** "...his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.")



In this Lord's Day we deal with the second "step" of Christ's humiliation, namely, His suffering. We must answer some questions such as "**Why** did He suffer? **When** did He suffer? **How** did He suffer?"

Let us begin with the first. **Why did Christ suffer?** We know from the Scriptures that suffering is the result of sin. Suffering is God's punishment upon sinful men. Yet in the previous Lord's Day we learned that Christ was without sin. He Himself did no wrong to merit such suffering. Why then did He suffer? You probably know the answer. It was because Christ assumed a special role. He became our Representative, our Mediator. God sent His Son into the world so that He might bear our punishment for us. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read, "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God*

in Him." Thus Christ did not suffer for His own sins, but He suffered for your sins and mine.

It is good to remember this suffering of Christ. Some "Christians" think that God simply forgives and forgets about our sins without demanding payment. They put the emphasis on the love of God, and they deny the justice of God. They do not believe that God's justice requires full satisfaction for sin. Yet God swore to Adam and Eve that the punishment for disobedience was death. God cannot revoke His word. God is faithful, both to His promises and to His threats. Thus there was the need for payment. Furthermore, God's justice demanded it. In His love, however, God also sought for the redemption of man. Thus He sent a Mediator, a righteous Man Who would make this payment on our behalf. Christ

bore the wrath of God against the sin of us all.

The next question that must be asked is, **when did Christ suffer?** We immediately think of the cross. However, we must not restrict Christ's sufferings just to the cross. Yes, that is where His suffering was greatest, but Christ's suffering began at the beginning of His life. We mentioned that already in Lord's Day 14 when we drew the descending stairs of Christ's humiliation. Christ's sufferings began right at the beginning of His life. He was born to poor parents. At His birth, there was no room for Him in the inn, which symbolised what Christ said later: "*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*" (Matthew 8:20). The rejection of Christ began already at His birth. Herod threatened his life so that He had to flee. And His suffering continued throughout His life. During His earthly ministry He was misunderstood, misquoted. He had to endure weakness of faith in those who loved Him, and open hostility from those who hated Him. Yet the suffering of Christ reached its horrible climax on the cross. Thus the Catechism correctly says that Christ suffered from the beginning of His life on earth to the end thereof.

The Catechism also speaks about **how Christ suffered**, that is, He suffered in body and soul. Christ's affliction was not limited to the whipping He received from the hands of Pilate's men prior to His crucifixion. It was not limited to the pain that came from the crown of thorns put on His head. It was not limited to the agony of nails piercing His hands and feet. It was not limited to the horrible pain of slow suffocation that came through crucifixion. There was also the spiritual suffering of Christ in His soul. Since man had sinned in body and soul, our Mediator was to be punished in body and soul. Christ suffered in both that He might deliver both from destruction.

Christ's spiritual sufferings were also life-long. He endured the shortcomings of His parents as a child in Nazareth. He bore the abuses of His brothers and His peers. He

suffered the taunts of the Jews and even more, He had to endure the rejection of God. For three hours the sun ceased to shine. In Scripture, light is a symbol of God's favour; darkness is a symbol of God's disfavour, of being forsaken by God. After the three hours of darkness, Christ cried out, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" That was the greatest suffering of Christ! Men on earth have experienced greater physical suffering than Christ, but none on earth have experienced any spiritual suffering comparable to that which Christ endured.

What role did Pontius Pilate play in this divine drama of salvation? Sometimes it is said that the mention of Pilate in the creed is simply for the sake of knowing when Christ died. It used to be the custom to date events by mentioning the rulers of that time (cf. Luke 1:5; 2:2) rather than by the year to which we are accustomed.

However, Pilate's name has a much more important purpose than just giving the date of Christ's death. We have to ask ourselves just who and what Pontius Pilate was. He was the Roman governor of Judea. He was the highest Roman official in the land. Pilate represented Caesar. Yet both Pilate and Caesar represented God. For there is no authority except that which is given by God (cf. Romans 13:1). Thus government rulers, even when they act sinfully, act on God's behalf.

Thus the judgment which Pilate gave was spoken on behalf of God (cf. 2 Chronicles 19:6, John 19:11, Romans 13:4). It was God who judged Christ through Pontius Pilate, His representative. A short while after Christ died, the Jews stoned Stephen to death, and they thought they had stoned Paul to death as well. (cf. Acts 14:19) Although the Jews had tried at times to kill Christ (cf. Luke 4:29; Matthew 26:4), God would not permit Him to be killed by a street gang or an angry mob. His death would follow an official, though hasty trial, and a man acting on God's behalf would order His execution.

In order to appreciate this more, we must also realise who Christ represented. He

represented you and me. What really happened on the day when Pontius Pilate judged Christ? God judged you and me. The sentence Christ bore was the judgment of God for our sins. Christ bore God's severe judgment that should have fallen upon us. Since we have been judged in Christ, we do not have to fear the Day of Judgment that is to come. Payment has already been made for our sins.

We must also deal about *the manner in which Christ died*. It was not just any manner of execution. No, Christ died on the cross, which seems to portray complete rejection by man and God. He who was crucified hung suspended between earth and heaven. Men would not allow him life on earth, and God refused him entrance into heaven. Perhaps we read more into the cross than is warranted. One thing is certain; that God's curse was laid upon the one who was crucified (cf. Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). Thus we are assured that Christ, by dying on the cross, bore the curse that lay upon us.

Now in all this we have been stressing the fact that Christ suffered in order to deliver us from suffering. Nevertheless, believers suffer in this world just as the unbelievers do. Why is this? If Christ suffered the wrath of God for us, why

do we still suffer? First of all, we should never consider the sufferings of Christians as a judgment of God. If we become seriously ill, we should not immediately think that God is punishing us. It is true that some actions bring with it their own punishment. For example, those who practice homosexuality are subject to the disease called AIDS (cf. Romans 1:27). Yet each time we become ill, or something terrible happens to us, we should not immediately seek the cause in something we did. As Christians we are no longer subject to the wrath of God. Christ has paid for our sins in full.

Nevertheless, we are still subject to the consequence of our sins as long as we live. Sometimes God uses suffering as a means to humble us if we become arrogant. Sometimes God uses suffering to test faith or to build character (cf. Psalm 119:71; Ecclesiastes. 7:2-4; James 1:3; Romans 5:3-4). Whatever the purpose God has in mind, we must never think that God is angry with us, or that we have to pay for sins. Christ has done this once for all. Full payment has been made. We may be assured that whatever evil God sends us in this life is for our good and for our salvation.



Questions:

1. What is the second "step" of Christ's humiliation?
2. Why is there suffering on earth? Is this also the cause of Christ's suffering?
3. Does God forgive sin without demanding payment or satisfaction? Why (not)?
4. When did Christ's sufferings begin? (Illustrate your answer with examples).
5. Was Christ's suffering only physical? Has anyone suffered greater physical pain than Christ?
6. Why was it necessary for Christ to suffer spiritually? Describe the spiritual suffering of Christ? Has anyone on earth suffered greater spiritual anguish?
7. What does light and darkness symbolise in Scripture?
8. Both Christ and Pontius Pilate were more than just individuals acting on their own behalf. They were both representatives. Of whom? What really happened, then, on the day that Pontius Pilate condemned Christ? What comfort does this afford us?
9. The normal means whereby the Jews executed criminals was by stoning. Is it significant that Christ was crucified? What assurance do we receive from this fact?
10. If Christ suffered in order to take away sins, why then do believers still suffer? What must the children of God never think if they experience difficulties in life?