

THE CUP

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS

The physical suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ in his crucifixion was indescribable: The scourging which caused deep lacerations and appreciable blood loss; the hands nailed to the crossbar; the feet nailed to the upright post; and the raising of the cross to a vertical position – all contributed to extreme pain and gradual respiratory failure, until death. The Roman, Cicero (106-43 BC), noted that crucifixion was “a most cruel and terrible penalty”; and the Jew, Josephus (ca AD 37-100), observed that it was “the most wretched of deaths.” It is significant that none of the Gospels provide any of the gruesome details, but simply state the fact: *they crucified him*.

The focus of this study however, is not on the physical agony of our Lord, but rather on the concurrent and connected **spiritual suffering** he endured on our behalf. The starting point for our consideration is Jesus’ use of the term “the **cup**” in reference to his Cross, which is found in all four Gospels. In the Garden of Gethsemane, early on that dreadful Friday, Jesus prayed: *Father, if you are willing, take this **cup** away from me; still, not my will but yours be done* (Luke 22:42; see Matt 20:22; 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36; John 18:11; Rev 14:10; 18:6). Jesus’ references to the **cup** in these Gospel scriptures speak of the intense **physical suffering** he was about to experience; but, and more importantly, they point to the incomprehensible **spiritual suffering** he would have to endure on the Cross.

The Old Testament provides the background for our understanding of the **cup**. The following scriptures are significant in this respect:

*For judgment comes not from east or from west; not from the desert or from the mountains, but from God who decides, who brings some low and raises others high. Yes, a **cup** is in the LORD’s hand, foaming wine, fully spiced. When God pours it out, they will drain it even to the dregs; all the wicked of the earth must drink. (Ps 75:7-9). Awake, awake! Arise, O Jerusalem you who drank at the LORD’s hand the **cup** of his **wrath**; who drained to the dregs the bowl of staggering . . . (Isa 51:17-23).*

*For thus said the LORD, the God of Israel, to me: Take this **cup** of foaming wine from my hand, and have all the nations to whom I will send you drink it. They shall drink and be convulsed, and go mad, because of the sword I will send among them (Jer 25:15-16; see 49:12).*

*You are filled with shame instead of glory; drink you too, and stagger! On you shall revert the **cup** from the LORD’s right hand, and utter shame on your glory (Hab 2:16).*

The **cup** therefore, is the **cup** of God’s wrath and judgment against human sin. Here it is important to note, that **God’s wrath** is not so much an emotion or an angry frame of mind, as it is the settled opposition of his holiness to evil.

The New Testament also speaks of the wrath and judgment of God against human sin:

*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the **wrath** of God remains upon him (John 3:36).*

*The **wrath** of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness (Rom 1:18; see 1:24, 26, 28; 3:25; 5:9-11; 9:22; see also Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; 2 Thess 1:7-10; Rev 11:18; 19:15).*

The profound mystery of the Cross is that our sinless Lord Jesus Christ willingly bore our sin, and its consequences – the judgment and wrath of our holy God – unto death. For our sake, and in our place, God made his Beloved Son, *to be sin who did not know sin* (2 Cor 5:21), that we might be set free from the righteous penalty of eternal death, and receive by grace, through faith, the gift of eternal life in Christ.

On the Cross, Jesus Christ bore the full impact of God's righteous and holy wrath against our unrighteousness and impurity. In one of the most profound teachings of all Paul's epistles, we are told how Christ, in his death, turned away the divine wrath of God, so that we might have peace with God, through faith:

*These are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as an **expiation** through faith, by his blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed, through the forbearance of God – to prove his righteousness in the present time, and that he might be righteous and justify the one who has faith in Jesus* (Rom 3:25-26).

Here, the Greek word $\lambda\alpha\sigma\tau\epsilon\rho\iota\sigma\mu\omicron\nu$ is translated **expiation** (the cancellation of sin), but in view of the wrath of God in Rom 1:18 ff, may be better translated **propitiation** (the turning away of the wrath of God by an offering). Christ, the *Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29), freely offered himself as the Sacrifice of Atonement (see Heb 9:1-28; 10:19-22), to turn away the wrath of God from all who repent of their sins and believe in him.

On the Cross, Jesus the Propitiation for our sins, became sin for us, and suffered separation from and abandonment by his Father: *whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil* (Hab 1:13). During this time of agony, darkness came over the whole land for three hours; then the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom (granting Christ entrance into the Most Holy Place, and access to the Atonement Seat (*a propitiatory* Ex 25:17); then Jesus cried out: *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?* (Matt 27:46; see Ps 22:1). Finally, *Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and gave up his spirit* (Matt 27:50). - *It is finished.* (John 19:30).

All Scripture references are taken from the New American Bible, 1991.

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