

*“Called to Follow the Suffering Servant”*

I Peter 2:21-25

November 10, 2019

As we return to our study of 1 Peter, let me remind you that one of the major themes in the book of 1 Peter is that **God’s will for us, as we walk through suffering, is to relate to all people in the spirit of Christ.** But are there any exceptions to this rule? When people treat us harshly or unjustly, are we off the hook from relating to people in a Christlike way? The answer of course is no. In fact, we are told to expect this kind of treatment as Christians. 2 Tim 3:12 says that *“all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*

In other words, when you do right as Christian, you will suffer; you will be criticized, marginalized, and people will say hurtful things about you. At other times you will go to great sacrifice to honor God but people will not notice or if they do, will not appreciate it. And when this happens, our natural human response is to feel wronged or violated. It seems intolerable to us that anyone should malign us so unjustly. And there arises in us an overwhelming emotional force that we have the right and duty to set this thing straight, to point out their flaws and be vindicated for being in the right.<sup>1</sup>

But is this the right response for a Christian? Before we take personal offense, we would do well to recall what we discovered last week, that our response to all people should be determined not so much by their actions toward us, but rather by our response to God’s character and will. Today we will see that **as our Suffering Servant, Christ has given us both the pattern and the power to maintain a good conscience toward God when we suffer unjustly.**

The more I studied chapter 2 this week, the more weight I have come to see in vs. 19 in the phrase, *“for the sake of conscience toward God.”*<sup>2</sup> This is the motivating, determining factor in how we are to respond to the most

difficult relationships. We are to respond in such a way that we can have a clear conscience toward God, having represented Christ well in the situation.

Last week we left off with vs. 18-20 where Peter was addressing servants’ relationships to their masters, instructing them to be submissive with all respect, *“not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable”* (harsh). And then Peter laid down this principle in vs. 19: *“For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.”* Then he goes on in vs. 20 to say, *“when you do what is right and suffer for it [yet] patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.”* In other words, *God’s favor is given to those who patiently endure unjust suffering for doing what is right in God’s eyes.* Clarification: God does not delight in our suffering. He delights in our persistent righteousness under the pressure of suffering, which proves our Christlikeness. He favors those who are more concerned about pleasing God (having a good conscience toward God) than being vindicated for all the injustices being waged against them.

The question which we did not answer last week, which is answered in the following verses, is *why does God look with favor on those who patiently endure the unjust cost of doing what’s right in God’s eyes?*

The answer in vs. 21-25 is two-fold. *God favors those who patiently endure unjust suffering because 1) it follows the pattern of Christ’s life as our example, and 2) it serves the very purpose of our salvation to die to sin and live a righteous, God-pleasing life in all circumstances.*

1. **God favors those who patiently endure unjust suffering because it follows the pattern of Christ’s life as our example** (vs. 20-23).

20b-21: *“If when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For [because] you have been called for this*

*of God”* (16), *“fear God”* (vs. 17), *“for the sake of conscience toward God”* (19), *“this finds favor with God”* (20).

<sup>1</sup> John Piper, August 25, 1991 sermon on I Peter 2:18-25. [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org).

<sup>2</sup> This is one of six phrases that emphasize our need for a God-ward response to people: *“for the Lord’s sake”* (13), *“for such is the will of God”* (15), *“as bondslaves*

*purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps."*

One way to speak of your purpose as a Christian, is that you are to pattern your life after Christ. This is what it means to be a follower of Christ. And Peter wants to remind us that the One we follow and therefore the one we are to imitate is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, and He does this by repeated references to Isaiah 53 which is a prophetic portrait of Christ who would suffer and die on behalf of sinners.

As the Suffering Servant, Christ would suffer at the hands of men, yet that suffering was purposed by God to serve sinners with mercy, while at the same time, He would be a servant of God by doing what is right in God's eyes without wavering. So He is a Suffering *Servant* because He not only serves sinners through His suffering but also because His suffering is the result of serving God—He lived for the sake of conscience toward God.

The point is that our lives should exemplify the same manner in which He suffered for us so that our lives can become a portrait of Jesus even to those who mistreat us. Now we don't suffer *on behalf of others* in exactly the same way Christ did for us (our suffering doesn't save anyone), but there is a sense in which we become a suffering servant to others when our suffering serves to portray Christ to them by responding to God with our conscience rather than a typical human response to their mistreatment.

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Nothing delights the heart of God more than His own righteous Son. So the question is, how can we share in God's favor by exemplifying the same manner in which He suffered? The word *example* in vs. 21 literally refers to a pattern that is to be traced, as when learning to write. So, what is the pattern of His life that we are to trace when we suffer unjustly?

- **Vs. 22: He "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth" (cf. Isaiah 53:9).** How are we to pattern our lives after One who never sinned, who never spoke a word that wasn't purely true. I think the key is found in vs. 19: "*for the sake of conscience toward God.*" Just as Jesus was always conscious of His Father. Just as His

supreme care and passion in life was to please His Father, so we must discipline our hearts and minds to not only be aware of God's presence but devoting ourselves to pleasing Him over pleasing ourselves when someone has provoked us.

If we are going to pattern our lives after the Suffering Servant in vs. 22, our mindset toward others must be, *because I am in Christ and because Christ is in me, I will relate to you in the spirit of Christ.* It's saying, "For the sake of my conscience before God, to not displease my Father, I will not sin against you and I will speak only the truth to you."

- **Vs. 23: "and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats..." (cf. Isaiah 53:7).** To *revile* means to heap abusive speech on someone. The point here is that Jesus never retaliated abusive speech or threats to His persecutors. He was remarkably silent during the worst hours of His life. Why? Because His mission was not to overcome His enemies, but rather to submit to His Father's will.

This does not mean that we should not speak out on behalf of injustice, especially on behalf of others. But it does mean that we should leave vindication and vengeance in the hands of God. The key is found in the end of vs. 23: "*but [He] kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.*" So when evil men were heaping abusive speech and slander on Jesus, He could say, "I don't have to take this up with you right now. My Father will set things straight."

By the way, when it says "He kept entrusting Himself" the word *Himself* is not actually in the original. It is supplied in our English translations for the sake of grammar—the sentence needed an object. Certainly Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father, but perhaps the translation is too limiting. Did Jesus not also entrust His enemies to God? Did He not entrust His circumstances, His future, His life into God's hands? Remember how Jesus prayed from the cross: "*Father, into your hands I commit My spirit....Father, forgive them*

*for they do not know what they are doing.*"<sup>3</sup> I think its safe to say that there is nothing that Jesus didn't entrust to the Father. This is what it means to walk by faith! You do what is right and keep trusting God to do what is right regardless of how things may look in the moment.

Peter makes it very clear that this is the way in which we are to pattern our lives after Christ when he reiterates the point in 4:19: *"Therefore, those who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."* In other words, God will take care of meeting out justice. Your only real concern in the moment is to do what is right in God's eyes. Just keep doing what's right, just keep doing what's right and trust that your soul and your circumstances are in the faithful, just hands of God.

2. **God favors those who patiently endure unjust suffering because it serves the very purpose of our salvation to die to sin and live a righteous, God-pleasing life in all circumstances (vs. 24-25).**

Remember, we have been asking ourselves, *why does God look with favor on those who patiently endure unjust suffering for doing what's right?*

The first reason we saw is that God is pleased when He sees us following the example of Christ. But its one thing to have Christ as our pattern. Yet what good does it do for us to have the pattern if we don't have the power to follow it?

In vs. 24 Peter points us to both the purpose of our salvation and Christ as the power by which we can pattern our lives after Him.

**Vs. 24: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (cf. Isaiah 53:12, 5).**

The first thing I want you to see is that while Christ is the example after which we are to pattern our lives, His life and death served as much more than just an example. When vs. 24 says that *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross"* it is pointing to Jesus' death as a substitutionary sacrifice on our behalf. That is, Jesus took upon Himself the punitive, legal judgment that we deserved from God for our sin. Christ stood in our place. He was punished on our behalf. He satisfied the justice of God for us.

Why did Jesus do this? Vs. 24: *"So that we might die to sin and live to righteousness."* This is the purpose of your salvation! If I were to ask you why Christ died for you, most of you would probably say, "so that I could be forgiven." That's true. Christ died so that we could be forgiven and we should never minimize the amazing, undeserved forgiveness Jesus purchased for us. Yet, when it comes to fighting and overcoming sin in our daily lives, I think its more helpful for us to answer the question with vs. 24. Christ died for me so that I could die to sin and live to righteousness. In other words, Christ died so that sin would be put to death in me and replaced with righteous living. The purpose of your salvation is to be free of sin and reconciled to God.

What is God's purpose for you today? To die to sin and to do what is right as unto the Lord. What is God's purpose when you are in the midst of conflict or difficult conversation that causes your blood pressure to rise with indignation? To die to sin and do what is right as unto the Lord.

So do you see what the death of Christ for us has to do with patiently enduring unjust suffering? It is the very power by which we can maintain a good conscience toward God by not sinning against those who persecutes us. Christ died to break the power of sin over us. And if sin's power has been broken, we are no longer obligated to respond sinfully to those who sin against us. You may be tempted to. You may want to. But you don't have to.

This is why vs. 24 ends saying, *"for by His wounds you were healed."* Peter is speaking of a spiritual healing—a healing of our relationship with God. No longer are you under sin's dominion which disables you and prevents you from doing what is right in God's eyes. Romans 8 says that those who are in the flesh with their minds set on the flesh are *not able* to submit themselves

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 23:46; 23:34

to God (Rom 8:7). Yet it goes on to say that those who are in Christ, those who have the Spirit's infinite, resurrection power dwelling within them, are no longer under obligation to the flesh (Rom 8:12).

This means that you are free to say and do that which pleases your Father in the face of those who seek to harm you. Their threats lose their power because your soul is in the hands of God. Your relationship with God has been healed. No longer are you straying from God like a wayward sheep because you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your soul (vs. 25). When your soul is in the care of God, you are free to incur whatever cost is necessary on this earth to do what is right, to please your Father.

But what if you are still wandering from God, continually living in sin like a stray sheep? What if your relationship with the Father has not been healed? What if sin has not been put to death in your life and you don't have the power to do what is right in God's eyes? Then God is not your shepherd and you have no rights to His provision, protection and care. Stray sheep are on their own. They are vulnerable prey to the wolves of the world and have no protection against the raging storm of God's wrath toward sin.

Is there any good news for you? Only this—and it is the greatest news! There is a Suffering Servant who has sought you out. He has been mauled by the wolves of the world and He has been crushed by the storm of God's holy wrath for your sin. And if you will only relinquish your sin and independence from God to come under His loving authority, He will be a Shepherd for you who provides and protects and He will be a Guardian who keeps your soul eternally safe. This is the Suffering Servant you are called to follow.

In the words of Isaiah 53:

*Surely He has born our griefs  
And carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But He was pierced for our transgressions;  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
And with His wounds we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;*

*We have turned—every one—to his own way;  
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

*“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Pet 2:24)*