

Gospel & True Citizenship: How to act right when our _____ acts wrong
1 Peter 2:18-25

"For this you have been called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps."

Introduction: So many things change, but so many stay the same. One is how children view conflict and punishment. Whether it is kids in your home, kids that run around church or the playground, there are consistent statements made: *"That's not fair!" "He started it, why am I getting punished?" "I didn't do anything!" "Where is the system of justice where righteousness and punishment can be meted out properly in light of universal truth and the internal structure of moral absolutes?!"* (Alright, I've never heard the last one, but you get the idea)

From a young age we have an idea of justice and fairness. This typically means we think we deserve MORE than we deserve, and absolutely DO NOT deserve to be treated negatively for something we DID NOT DO. In fact, as we get older, that sense grows. I believe this is one of main reasons people have a hard time **trusting God**, either for the prospect of salvation or in dependence as a believer. There are so many aspects and circumstances in life that seem, on the surface, to be validations that God is **unfair and unjust**:

Abuse of all kinds, of all ages	Early death that is out of order
Loveless marriages	Terminal disease right before retirement
Pain - both bodily and emotional	Cancer
Desiring marriage while embracing singleness	Sting of Divorce
Kids that walk away from faith or family	Infertility
Taking care of loved ones, taking us out of 'normal'	Joblessness

When you've experienced one or multiple of these, it is difficult to look at the Source with love, affection, and admiration. The call to follow Christ is full of paradox:

- We give our entire life now to gain something far greater, yet unseen, later
- Live by faith now in the only world we know as strangers to secure what is **real eternally**
- We endure suffering and injustice now to enjoy perfect justice later
- We believe God is the giver of every gift (James 1:17; Luke 11:11), even the hard ones

All of this helps us frame this thought: **How do we act and think right when our _____** (boss, spouse, government) **acts wrong?** What happens to us when some of the proposals of our governing officials actually comes to pass, and as a result our church or even Christians individually are treated differently or unfairly. What is our response? We have not been called to **fear or flight**, but to live out the reality of our life in Christ passionately, purposefully, and intentionally wherever God has placed us. Peter knew that, and that is why he directed the lives of scattered and sorrowful believers to **look to Jesus in the midst of unfair treatment**. We **endure, expect, and embrace** sadness, suffering, and sorrow because that is exactly what Jesus did and what God graciously affirms.

- 1. We ENDURE unfair treatment of all kind, knowing that God is aware, sees, and rewards** (18-20)
"Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect; not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust."

*For this is a **gracious thing**, when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while **suffering unjustly**. For what credit is it, it, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you **do good** and suffer for it **you endure**, this is a **gracious thing** in the sight of God."*

- **Universal principle for all servants and beyond**

Peter addresses three critical structures of everyday life for not only Christians, but all people. He addressed **interaction with government, workers/slaves/masters, and marriage**. The principles taught in each are universal and consistent. Here is a universal principle of how believers deal with **injustice and unfair treatment broadly**, not simply in a Roman system of slavery.

It's also important to note that in Roman culture, slaves made up the majority of the working, middle class. People became slaves by *being captured in wars, kidnapping, children sold, or being born into a slave household*. Many lived miserable lives, but most served as doctors, teachers, managers, musicians, artisans, and could even own other slaves. However, the **rights of slaves were few**. Slaves had no legal rights, and masters were free to **beat them, brand them, and abuse them physically or sexually**.¹

When the message of the gospel began to sweep through the Roman rule and the church began to take root, the issue became clear: **what do slaves do now?** Though the Scripture never condones slavery, Peter and other NT writers do not call for an overthrow or rebellion against this kind of unfair treatment or unjust system. The practice of slavery was so ingrained in the culture that apart from God radically undoing it, the system was going to perpetuate. *So Christians who had a new Master and Lord in Jesus Christ were called to do something else that was radical in the culture: **submit**.*

Servants, without freedom to choose or move, could express ultimate **freedom in Christ** when they showed *respect* to the good and unjust alike. The word 'respect' here is the word '**fear**' I'm not sure why translators don't use the word FEAR, but it is clear that FEARING God is the motivation here. The word for "**unjust**" is the word "**skoliois**", where we get the idea of *scoliosis*, the curvature of the spine. The idea was of *crooked, curves, perverse, unreasonable, and dishonest*. *The ones who **were morally bankrupt***. Notice there was not **opt out** clause for servants, but clear action steps forward. In the context, **why is this so important for servants to ACT this way?**

1) The world is evil & morally bankrupt people will always be in positions of authority

2) Slaves with no rights & freedoms could **shine brightly in their good works** to display Jesus

Christ as better by **consistently submitting to their masters, because they submitted to their Master**. *But there is another reason as well:*

- **Living for the pleasure of the Lord is pivotal**

The next 2 verses give explanation to verse 18. Notice what is called an *inclusio*, a bookend of thoughts. The words '**for this is a gracious thing**' inform us that this is the purpose of the phrases in the middle. This is what **finds favor with God, what He is pleased by, what is gracious to Him**. We often say "God's favor" when good things happen to us or we accomplish something, but here it references when we are treated **unfairly and unjustly, enduring suffering**.

What is the point? It does us no good to suffer as a consequence of our sin, since we simply get what we deserve. But when we **suffer injustice** for doing NOTHING WRONG, nothing to deserve it, and instead operated out of the fear of the Lord and doing good, THIS finds favor with God.

¹ Thomas Shreiner, "New American Commentary: 1 Peter." p. 135.

WHAT??!!?!? This is hard to wrap our minds around, isn't it? This goes against our innate, since we were young fight for fairness and proper treatment of the most important person we can think of: us! But this also reminds us that **how we go about life, how we act, how we interact with integrity, is more important than our accomplishments.** *Why is it this way? Who can sustain this?* That is what Peter goes onto explain.

2. **We EXPECT to be treated consistently with our CALLING** (21a)

"For to this you have been called..."

- **Called to be SLAVES of Christ**

Expectations are so critical. They make or break our attitude toward something or someone. When our expectations are too high or unrealistic, we set ourselves up for disappointment, frustration, and anger. When we expect our job to satisfy, or more money to fix, or our spouse to make us happy, or a change of venue to solve everything, we open ourselves up for the crushing weight of disenchantment.

As followers of Christ, we are called to be slaves, bondservants of God (Eph. 6:5). This means that we **willingly, volitionally, and voluntarily give up our rights and yield them to Christ!** We are no longer our own, but we've been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20), slaves of righteousness. When we understand WHO we are, we are able to embrace WHAT happens as a consequence.

We all like or are ok with the idea of being a
slave/servant, until people actually start treating us
like one.

- **Cultivating a Godward life in all things**

Ephesians 6:5-8 gives us several principles of dealing with life as a slave in an unfair world:

- 1) **Sincerity of heart** - We obey any earthly master/boss/authority AS WE WOULD Christ. Sincerity is not only needed, but obedience in the midst of unfair is a **revealer or test of sincerity**, whether we are serving ourselves or Christ.
- 2) **Seek to Please God, not man** - This is so difficult. Everyone is a **people pleaser** at some level, doing things so that people will see, affirm, and reward. It is **faith alone** that allows us to work for the pleasure of One, knowing that He sees all, even our motives and intentions.
- 3) **Serve with a future reward in mind** - Again, we are so prone to doing things so others will see, or finding loopholes, work-arounds, or circumventing the system to get what we want. When we believe **temporal reward is of highest value**, we are willing to do anything to get it, even if it means flexing our integrity or functioning below the board of righteousness. But if we believe God sees all and **rewards in the future** for everything done according to His will, we will walk away from the subtle cheating on a tax, stop finding the path of least resistance at work (my boss won't ever know), or trying to get away with something for temporal gain. The life of a slave of Christ knows that He has been called to serve the Lord at any cost, whether its loss of possession in the present or suffering sorrow for doing right.

3. **We EMBRACE the EXAMPLE & WORK of Jesus** (21b-25)

*"...because Christ also suffered **for you**, leaving you an example to follow, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed not sin, neither was their deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did*

*not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but **continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.***

***He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.** By His wounds we are healed. For **you were** straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

- **EXAMPLE to be followed (21b-23) -**

It's always been fascinating to remind ourselves of the horror and injustice of Jesus going to the cross. The cross was reserved for thieves, murderers, and insurrectionists. Rome would hang those that they wanted to make an example of on crosses, not only for punishment, but as a deterrent for any other person thinking about rebelling. What did Jesus do to deserve the cross? He fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, calmed the storms, and taught the masses the truth. He spent time with the lowly, loved the unlovely, and affirmed the marginalized. He submitted Himself to a corrupt Jewish leadership while following protocol in the Temple, plugging His nose at the sight of His Father's house being used a den of thieves. He called out injustice when He overturned the money changers, yet told the people to pay taxes to Caesar. He reminded the people of Israel who God truly was, that they needed restoration with that God, and He was the One to do it.

For this, He was unjustly arrested, tried, and convicted. He was spat on, beaten, mocked, and made to be a public spectacle. False witnesses were allowed to come in to cast false narratives against Him, and pagan men were allowed (by Him) to order His death. He carried His own cross to Golgotha, until His body gave out, and submitted to ignorant soldiers driving nails into His hands and feet. In all of this, He **did not open His mouth, revile those who were perpetrating such wickedness, nor did He call down the thunder from on high!** If anyone COULD have and been justified in doing it, it would have been Jesus. The creator and sustainer of the entire universe allowed His body to be beaten to a pulp and willingly yielded Himself up to death. In a word it could have ended. With a whisper He could have wiped out His enemies or reversed positions, immediately having hundreds put on crosses and Him watching. But this **was not the way.**

The word Peter used for "*example*" carried the idea of *tracing over letters*, like we used to do in Kindergarten. To learn how to draw your letters, you'd trace over ones already written down to produce muscle memory and visual confirmation. That is what we do with Christ. We study His **life**. We understand His **commands**. We are assured of His **promises**. We cannot emulate Jesus' perfect nature or righteousness, but we can follow His model: Loved His enemies, left nothing for them to hold onto, they had to be UNrighteous in their dealing with Him, and He never fought back but was always willing to forgive, even while hanging on the cross ("*Father forgive them, they know not what they do.*")

In His humanity, how was it that Jesus was able to do this? He **continually entrusted Himself to His Father**. Even though He was perfect and sinless, He still showed that He was dependent on the grace and strength of His dad. Often we'll cry out in crisis, but this was Jesus' regular habit. Not only was this the power source, but Jesus knew that vindication would come from God alone. "*But if I don't fight back, justice will not get done and they will get away with it! Where's the justice!?*" Remember, **no one gets away with nothin' with God**. Justice will always get done, in this life or into eternity.

- **Substitutionary Work to be EMBRACED (24-25)**

Finally, Peter gives the **source of our ability to withstand the UNFAIR.**

1) **Jesus suffered for us, died for our sins, and was wounded so we could be healed** - Jesus became a curse on a tree so that we could escape the curse of the Law. Jesus died to satisfy God, and accomplished the predetermined plan that the Father had for Him. But He had you and I in mind. On the cross God treated Christ the way He should have treated us, so that God could look at us through the lens of Christ's righteousness.

2) **We were saved to die so we could live** - If we are to embrace the work of Christ, we must embrace the reality that we are **now dead to sin, which means we can and should say NO to sin, with a free choice to kill the sin that so easily besets us**. Sometimes we think that ridding ourselves of sin is a slow weaning process, doing a little less each day/week. However, that is not how sin works. We must die to it, turning from it, abstaining, running away, and fleeing from it. We do that so we can **live to righteousness**. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot live righteously, pleasing God, living for His pleasure and grace and enjoy our sin. Jesus took our sin, forgave it, and freed us from it.

3) **We remember who we were** - Peter concludes this section reminding the church who they used to be before Christ: **wandering, straying, aimless sheep** who have returned and been restored to the Shepherd. Before Christ we were stuck in our sin, loving ourselves and our sin, without the ability to live or experience joy.

If you are struggling with the inequity and fairness of life, remember that if God were fair, He'd send everyone to eternal hell.
*If you want God to save you this morning, ask God to be **unfair to you and save you**, knowing that we all truly deserve judgment.*

So coming full circle, how do we deal with the reality of unfairness? How to face the future where even our government may not fight for our rights to worship or will seek to limit the work of Christ? Do we run? Do we respond in anger or fear? Do we air our grievances on social media or gripe about them at work? Do we cry foul when we are treated wrongly, when we had done nothing wrong? My appeal based on what Peter wrote here is to consider **who we are: we are slaves, and if we are treated unfairly, that is consistent with the life of a slave**. **We entrust ourselves to our glorious, just, and all-knowing God**, who judges righteously, and we **follow the example of Jesus Himself**, who suffered for doing nothing but love, and died so that we could live. When we sacrifice ourselves this way, we let the world know that **Jesus is better and saves us from our sin**.