

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expository Journey Through **1Peter** **1Peter 2:11-25**

27- How to Live as Aliens and Strangers- Part 9 Displaying the Excellencies of God by Patiently Enduring Unjust Suffering

July 22, 2018

1 Peter 2:11-25

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,

14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

16 *Act* as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God.

17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

19 For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

22 *WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;*

23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

24 and 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.

25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

To the Glory of God

Now we are *continuing* to examine how the Apostle Peter taught that we are supposed to live as "Aliens and Strangers" in the earth. And today, we are going to examine what Peter was "moved along" by God the Holy Spirit to write down concerning us patiently enduring unjust suffering. So, let's read verses 18-23 again that says:

1 Peter 2:18-23

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

19 For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

22 *WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;*

23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

Now if human existence, apart from Christ and Salvation, was *neutral*, if it possessed *zero* Happiness, no Happiness, at all, and God's Goal was to bring His elect from that position of zero Happiness into the *fullness* of Joy in God, then using Hardship and Trial and Suffering in our lives in order to bring us to the experience of supreme Happiness in Him would absolutely be *counter-productive*. Let me say this another way: Allowing His Own people to suffer in order to change them, so they could delight themselves fully in Him, would be the wrong thing to do if God's people didn't *already have* Happiness in *other* things *besides* God. But we must understand that's not the real world.

Human existence, apart from Christ and Salvation, does *not* consist of "zero Happiness". It consists of a *thousand* experiences of *great* happiness that is patently godless. When the Apostle Peter describes the "pre-Christian life" among the Gentiles of his day, he says it consists in:

1Peter 4:3b

... a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

... which he says is a "course" of life, rather than individual acts of sin. But we must understand that *nobody* engages in this course out of "duty" or "obligation". We sin because we perceive that engaging in that which displeases God will bring us *more* Happiness than if we obeyed God. And that means that the world "outside of Christ" literally *abounds* with what **Hebrews 11:25** calls:

"the passing pleasures of sin."

... and they are, indeed, "passing", in that they will not last and they are not eternal. But they are also "pleasures", in that they do bring us some degree of happiness. So, it isn't that the lost world doesn't have any joy *at all*, it is that they *enjoy* that which *dishonors* God. So, they delight in the *wrong things*, things that make much of *themselves*, and things that promote *self and sin*, and things that ignore God.

So, when God sovereignly saves us and brings us into a Relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ, God sovereignly "declares us righteous", and He justifies us in an eternal Union with Him through

Faith. But, He's *not* doing all of that with people who have no happiness at all and need to be given some. No, God is working with people who have *already experienced* a thousand experiences of wondrous pleasure and amazing happiness that is *not* rooted in God.

The pleasures that lost people understand well do *not* flow from a "beholding" of God's Glory. These people are blind to what is truly lovely, and so, they *not* "abounding with thanksgiving" to God for His Goodness. They do *not* reflect the Character of God and His pristine Holiness. And they *do not*, because they *cannot*.

So, through Conversion, God now has in His Family, in what Peter called His "spiritual House", God has gotten Himself children who are already *deeply* contaminated. All of us are deeply contaminated with the world, out from which He is saving us, precisely because we still find so much pleasure *outside* God and His Ways and His Will.

Ephesians 4:22b-24 says:

... lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

In other words, the "Process of Sanctification", the "Process of becoming Holy", is the "Process of God bringing to an end our old sinful desires, and then, first, "giving", and then, "growing" an enjoyment of new 'Holy Desires'".

To put it another way, Holiness, then, is the newness of the human heart that no longer finds sin and self to be more desirable than God and His Glory. So, to become "holy" then, to be "sanctified", is the same thing as us becoming:

- ✓ Happy in God
- ✓ Satisfied in God
- ✓ Content in God
- ✓ Delighted in God
- ✓ Joyful in God

... so, Sanctification is actually the ongoing Divine Work by which already saved souls are "weaned off" the *inferior* pleasures of the world and onto the *infinite* Pleasures of God. So, when people say:

"In those seasons of darkness and hardship, it seems my Happiness is not as significant as God's intent to grow my Holiness."

... they illustrate an amazing *misunderstanding* of what Biblical Holiness is. So, we must believe what the Bible actually teaches about this issue:

"Holiness is the condition of the human heart in which God Himself becomes our greatest Happiness."

Many in the modern church treat Holiness as *one thing*, and their Happiness as *another thing*. So, they see Holiness as *one thing*, which God pursues through dark seasons of Suffering, and they treat Happiness as an entirely *separate* thing, which they *incorrectly* perceive that God is *neglecting* in those very seasons of darkness. But that's *not* the way the Bible sees Holiness or Happiness. The Bible summarizes Holiness in this one Statement:

"Holiness is the condition of human heart in which God Himself becomes our greatest Happiness."

... *that's* Biblical Holiness.

The "*unholy* heart" is the heart that finds God boring or offensive, or finds faults with Him and what He does. And so, the "*unholy* heart" asks questions like: "*Why does God do that and not this? Why won't God do what I want Him to? I don't see any purpose in all of this.*" And these people go into despair when God allows Suffering to come their way.

But the "*holy* heart" sees God as its supreme Treasure and is supremely satisfied in God. So, when we're *perfectly holy*, we will have *perfect Satisfaction, perfect Joy, and perfect Happiness*. And that will come someday, in Heaven.

Hebrews 12 describes the "Discipline of God" toward His children. And the Goal is to make us Holy by changing us so that we may "share"

in the very Holiness of God. But then, verse 11 gives us this admonition:

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Now, notice a couple things. The Bible says that the kind of Holiness that God is pursuing through the Discipline He has "allowed" or "caused" to come into our lives, is the...

Peaceful Fruit of Righteousness

... so, it is a *sweet, restful, pleasant, peaceful* Fruit that exists in the Perfect Obedience of Jesus Christ that He credits us with. And that's the Goal. So, when the writer was "moved along" by God the Holy Spirit to say that the Discipline *seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful*, he's not suggesting that the Discipline doesn't hurt. It hurts a lot. But it wouldn't be Discipline if it didn't hurt. So, *why* did he say that? The writer is pointing to the fact that the Outcome really is amazingly pleasant, and the pain is the path to get there. And that is where I get the Statement:

Sanctification is the *ongoing* Divine Work of God the Spirit by which already saved souls are "weaned off" the *inferior* pleasures of the world and onto the *infinite* Pleasures of God.

... and that's God's Purpose in our Sanctification. So, God's Goal in making us holy, or by sanctifying us, is that the supreme Pleasures in God breaks all the fleeting pleasures of sin. And those infinitely *superior* Pleasures severs the root of all those other *carnal and base* pleasures (that we are already involved in), to the degree that they *lose* their power and they *don't* control us anymore. And when that happens, we will be able to walk in sweet Obedience to Jesus, precisely because He has come to satisfy our hearts. Another way of looking at Sanctification is to say:

Holiness is the newness of the human heart that no longer finds sin and self to be more desirable than God and His Goodness.

... and since *that* is what Holiness or Sanctification is all about, Suffering is an integral part. In fact, Suffering plays the single *largest* role in our becoming holy. And *this* is why James said:

James 1:2-4

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

... and in **Romans 5:1-5**, the Apostle Paul said:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

... and I would suggest that this is something we should actually *experience*, not merely something we should agree with and trust in and believe in and hope for. Because "Hope" is *not* a "doctrine" to believe in, it is an "act of Faith" that should be obeyed.

So, the pain from all the trials in the life of God's people is *always, always* directed toward their Holiness. And that's true, because Holiness consists precisely with the human heart *forsaking* the fleeting pleasures of sin and *growing* in the enjoyment of the permanent Pleasures of God. That's what Sanctification is. And that's what God is doing in the hard seasons of our Suffering.

And the reason God put such a high premium on the Pleasures that we have in Him, even at the cost of great pain to us in the dark seasons of our life, is because no other pleasures can satisfy us eternally, and no other pleasures can glorify God forever.

Now, if you can grasp this, what Peter says in verses 18-23 of Chapter 2 makes sense. But, if you can't, then it won't. If you believe

that Salvation means that your life down here, as it already exists, will be made much better, than the dark seasons of Suffering seem to be completely out of place. And you will develop a progression of thinking that goes something like this:

- ✓ Why is God allowing all of this?
- ✓ I love God, but He is not treating me rightly.
- ✓ Where is God?
- ✓ Why does God despise me so much?

... which will eventually lead you into these thoughts:

Either God is not Good, or God is not Sovereign

... and satan will constantly beat you down, until final, you will come to the place where you will say:

Maybe God is not ...

... which is *exactly* what satan told God that Job would do, if God allowed him to touch Job's flesh:

Job 1:9-11

Then Satan answered the Lord, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face.

... and then the writer said:

Job 1:12

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.

... and in the very next Chapter, we see the strangest, the most off the wall things happen to Job. Suddenly, in one day, the Sabeans raided his livestock, killed his slaves, and stole his animals. And while that

was going on, the Fire of God burned up all Job's sheep. And while that was going on, the Chaldeans killed Job's slaves and stole his camels. And while that was going on, a tornado appeared that didn't do any damage, at all, except that it destroyed the only house where Job's children were throwing a party.

So, how did all this happen in one day to one man? What are the odds of all this happening on one day, let alone to one man? Who does this but God? Who could possibly be behind all this sorrow and tragedy and pain and agony? The Sabeans? The Chaldeans? Satan? No, it was God. God did all this. But why? Was it because Job was a wicked sinner, whom God was judging? Well, let's look at how the Bible describes Job:

Job 1:1

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

Blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil. This doesn't describe a lost man. So, Job was saved. Job loved God. Job served God. Job hated evil. And yet, all this calamity came upon him. Why? Was it because Job didn't have enough faith? Was it because he had unforgiveness in his heart, or because he had unconfessed sin? No, that isn't what the Bible teaches here.

The Bible teaches that Job was saved, and God was *sanctifying* him. So, in reality-, God was burning out all the hay, wood, and stubble in Job's life through the fires of Suffering, so that Job could be holy and, so he could share in the very Holiness of God! God was sovereignly *changing* Job so that Job would no longer delight himself in all that God had blessed him with, but that Job could delight himself in God!

So, rather than Job's Suffering being a sign of God's *Displeasure*, it was a sign of God's great Love. It was that God loved Job so much, He wasn't about to leave him like he already was. So, God was *allowing* Job to suffer so that He could root out all of the *inferior* pleasures of sin and self, so Job could enjoy the *infinite* Pleasures of God. And based on this, Peter asks a Question:

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?

Peter says here that there is no Purpose, at all, in someone enduring Suffering when they don't even belong to God in the first place. And that is true because God is not interested in *sanctifying* lost people. God is not *purifying* lost people. He is only interested in *saving* lost people, but God never seeks to purify lost people to cause them to become "better people". God's Goal with the lost is that they repent and believe and be saved.

But with the saved, God's Goal is to change you, to alter the way you think and speak and love, and to alter *what* you love and *Who* you love, so that your love becomes pure and your motives become godly. And that is Holiness, which is God's Goal for every believer. And that is why Peter then said:

... But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

... and "**doing right**" here has more to do with being saved and obeying Jesus, as a normal course of your daily life, than it does with individual acts.

Now this may not sit well with you. This explanation about why the godly suffer may not fit in with your own "designer theology". I will be quick to tell you that this answer as to why the godly suffer categorically does *not* fit with what many of the most famous Preachers and Teachers on TV say, or what the majority of people in the modern church believe.

But this answer is *absolutely* what the Bible teaches, and what the Bible has *always* taught. Which is *why* the overwhelming majority of the Leaders of the Christian Church taught this, until about 150 years ago. So, what changed? The Bible didn't change, but people did. And as it became less and less important to even try to be "biblical" in most people's minds, they simply stopped teaching why the godly suffer, or they made up doctrines that aren't true.

And nobody cared, until Suffering came to them. Everybody was fine with the Church abandoning Sound Doctrine concerning Suffering until that Suffering visited them. Because whether you are ready for it or not, and whether you believe what the Bible teaches about Suffering or not, Suffering is coming to every Blood-bought saint, precisely

because every genuinely saved person will be a part of the process of Sanctification, and God uses Suffering the most as it pertains to us becoming holy.

Now Suffering can take on many forms:

- ✓ Disease
- ✓ Injury
- ✓ Financial hardships
- ✓ Wayward children
- ✓ Persecution
- ✓ Acts of God

... and *some* Suffering involves other people, and *some* God does all by Himself. But, as we have discovered before, God can and He does choose to heal and deliver and rescue us from *some* or *many* or *all* of these types of Suffering. *Sometimes*. And we praise Him for that. But *most* of the time, God chooses to passively *allow* the fires of Suffering to burn us, *not* because we have been particularly bad, and *not* because we don't have enough faith, but so that *through* the burning and *through* God sovereignly "keeping us" as we burn, we are changed.

So, since it is true that all believers will suffer, it just seems wise and productive that we develop a biblical understanding of why God allows His Own people to periodically hurt, so that when it comes, we will either be prepared to endure it, to God's Glory, ourselves, or we will be ready to help somebody else endure it.

Now it is true, that in this context, Peter was speaking to the slaves, who were saved. And he begins this section by saying:

1 Peter 2:18&19

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

So, the Apostle was "moved along" by God the Holy Spirit to speak to believers, who happened to be slaves, and who were being *mistreated unfairly* by their earthly masters. And Peter was *re-enforcing* the Biblical Principle of God's Sovereignty by telling these slaves:

“Your mistreatment at the hands of the people who bought you has not escaped God’s Eye. And God is so in control of all things that even the mistreatment of a lowly slave is working toward the Glory of God and their eternal Happiness, when that slave is a genuine believer.”

... and so, by default Peter is also saying:

1. The *worst* thing about being a slave is *not* Slavery itself or being mistreated, it is not being saved.
2. The *best* thing about being a slave is *not* being set free from Slavery, but being made holy.

... now that certainly doesn’t justify Slavery. Slavery was an evil Institution that *deserved* to be abolished. But what Peter teaches here causes our eyes to focus on what is *infinitely* more important, God’s Glory and our everlasting Happiness.

Now that is a “hard sell” in our day. We will convince very few people of our day that God is *infinitely* more interested in a believing slave magnifying the Glory of God’s Grace through his mistreatment than He is in abolishing Slavery and setting that man free. But to prove to you that it is so, I ask that you examine the experience of the Moravians back in the 18th Century.

Nikolaus von Zinzendorf was a leader of a group of believers in Germany called “Moravians”. And these were emigrants, from a region of the modern Czech Republic, who settled in a region of Germany called “Saxony”. The Teachings of the early Reformer, Jan Hus¹, had resulted in one of the earliest independent Christian groups who had separated from Rome (after Hus was martyred) and endured much persecution. The Moravian Church came out from this group.

Now at some point during von Zinzendorf’s ministry, as he was leading a large group in prayer, they experienced a great outpouring of God’s Spirit. And, from that Prayer Meeting, God granted an Awakening that resulted in powerful preaching and many converts, and a Prayer Meeting that went on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, for over 100 years!²

¹ 1369-1415; Anglicized as “John Hus”; taught Justification by Faith Alone and not through the Sacraments; Condemned by Rome as a heretic; burned at the stake in 1415

²<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-1/prayer-meeting-that lasted-100-years.html>

It was during this Awakening that over 300 missionaries were sent out to the world, and von Zinzendorf and others sold themselves into Slavery so they could preach the Gospel to both the slaves and the slave owners.³ So, rather than use this time of God visiting His people as the catalyst for abolishing the evil Institution of Slavery, the Moravians saw it as an opportunity for Evangelism!

Now I'm not sure that the Moravians had it all together doctrinally. But whatever they knew, or didn't know, they were moved to work *within* an evil Institution to see the Gospel triumph in the Salvation of both the slaves and slave masters, even though the Institution itself would be abolished within just a few decades.

So, the Moravians *willfully* subjected themselves to Suffering at the hands of other people. And history tells us that they were, in fact, mistreated, just like all the other slaves were. And history also teaches us that, to a man, they *endured* that mistreatment, just like Peter says to do. So, Peter was simply *re-enforcing* to these "scattered aliens" what Jesus taught when He said:

Matthew 5:38-48

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'

39 "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

40 "If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

41 "Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

42 "Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'

44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.

46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moravian_slaves

47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

*"Okay, I got it, Brother Blair. Jesus wants us all to be Pacifists, right? So, when somebody hits me, I'm just supposed to let it go and not respond. And when a slave master mistreats his slave, the Christian ones are supposed to just take it, right? Well, the Bible teaches that the Answer to that Question is: If these Statements by Jesus and the Apostle Peter were all that was in the Bible about this subject, then, "Yes", we should all be Pacifists. But that *isn't* all that the Bible says about this subject.*

Jesus' Teaching that we should "turn the other cheek" and "love our enemies" does *not* mean that it is always wrong to respond or to fight back or to stand up for yourself, or to even to go to war. Jesus allows a place for both "loving our enemies", and, in certain situations, "using force to restrain life-threatening wickedness".

First of all, we need to understand that "Pacifism", in and of itself, is *harmful*. For example, to stand by and allow someone to murder, when it is in your power to stop them, is completely contrary to the Biblical Morality to "Love your neighbor as yourself". So, if a Hitler is on the move and seeking to bind the world in tyranny, and destroy entire ethnic groups, it would be wrong *not* to oppose him with reason and with prayer, and even with force, which sometimes is the only *effective* method.

Now it is true that war itself is harmful and tragic. But Pacifism would result in even *more* harm to the world (and more wars), because it would give wicked people virtual "free reign". And to be consistent, Pacifism would also require that we not only abandon our Military, but the Police as well.

It is significant that John the Baptist did *not* tell the soldiers to leave the Military when they asked him what it meant to repent:

Luke 3:14

Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And what about us, what shall we do? [to be saved]" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

... and that tells us that it is possible to live a godly life, and yet be in the Military. And that tells us that the Military itself is *not* displeasing to God, which in turn tells us that engaging in war (which is the primary function of the Military) is *not* always sinful, even for believers.

So, as I ponder paragraph after paragraph in **1 Peter**, I begin to see that it makes a radical difference to be a Christian. But then, I also see how so many today just get it wrong. For example, it is common today for people to just *assume* that Christianity is a "belief-system" that can simply be added onto their present lives with little change. So, they can just "accept Jesus into their hearts", and add Jesus to their "already mapped out lives" with little or no change in the way they live their daily lives. Try to square that with what Peter says here.

And this is *why* I am so against the "Health, Wealth and Prosperity Doctrine" that seems so prevalent in our day. *Nobody*, who buys into that false Teaching would ever even *try* to obey what Peter teaches here. How would you ever square the false image of the "super-Christian", who walks in "total victory" and "divine health", and who never even has a bad day, with enduring unjust suffering like Peter describes here?

So, one of the reasons I use the word "radical" as often as I do to describe the kind of Christianity that I am pursuing (and that I think Peter teaches) is that I need some kind of language to *differentiate* the real thing from this "add on" kind of Christianity, that is *not* real, and that confuses people about what the real thing is. Radical Christianity, *real* Christianity, *Biblical* Christianity, makes a difference.

So, when we read something so absurd that slaves are to submit to masters, who treat them unjustly, we must remember the context of what Peter has been talking about. He is talking to "scattered aliens", and he is telling these people how they can live in this fallen world, and:

1 Peter 2:9b

... proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

... and the way that Peter tells us to do this is:

1 Peter 2:11b

... I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

... so, verses 9 and 11 give the same Goal for Christians: we are to live in such a way that displays how excellent God in Christ is. But a Christianity that makes no visible difference in the way we think, or the way we live our lives, simply cannot do that. And *that* is why it is *not* "true Christianity".

So, then, Peter starts to give some examples of what "true Christianity" looks like in the hostile world of his day. How we are to relate to the Government, and now how slaves are to behave toward unruly and cruel masters. So, just what does radical, genuine, Biblical Christianity look like in that situation? Well, Peter tells us:

- Verse 18: Christian servants are submissive with all respect to their masters.
- Verse 19: Christian servants bear up under sorrows when they suffer unjustly.
- Verse 20: Christian servants do good and when they suffer for it, they bear the suffering patiently.
- Verse 23: Christian servants do not return evil for evil; when reviled, they do not revile back or threaten.

In other words, Christians are not defiant or rebellious or insolent. They have a spirit of meekness and submission and compliance, even when their masters are unreasonable and abusive.

Now we should ask at this point, *"Exactly what does this have to do with displaying how excellent God is? How is this the kind of life that will cause people 'to glorify God on the day of visitation'?"*

And the first part of the answer is that this heart and this demeanor are utterly contrary to fallen human nature. In fact, I would venture that in many hearts in this Church right now, there are very strong feelings of resistance that are rising against this Divine Call for meekness and submission and compliance, even to unreasonable and abusive masters.

By nature, we hate to give the impression of weakness. We hate to look like someone got an advantage over us. We hate to let false accusations against us stand. We hate it when unreasonable and abusive people seem to have the last say. Tremendous powers within us recoil and push us toward retaliation.

So, what Peter calls for here is utterly *contrary* to our fallen human nature. That's the first thing to say when we ask: "*What does this submissiveness have to do with displaying how excellent God is?*" Because if we triumph over our own fallen nature and live at this amazing level, it is strong evidence that something more than human discipline is at work in our lives.

And that is *exactly* what Peter says. He tells us five different times that this amazing kind of life, that is so contrary to human nature, is the result of our relationship with God. And so, for these people, Christianity actually DID make a difference, a radical difference. The root of their fallen nature was severed by the Axe of God. And they lived radically different lives, based on radically different premises, different values, different priorities, and a different focus altogether. Notice the *five times* that Peter connects to God this radical Freedom from our old, natural spirit of retaliation.⁴

1. Conscience Toward God

⁴ It may be that there are actually six instances if the phrase, "**with all respect**" in verse 18, is a reference to a "respect for God". And I lean toward that- because the preceding verse says we are to "**fear God**". So, verse 18 may well mean, "Submit to your earthly master out of the fear of God". This would parallel verse 13: "**Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution**".

Part of the difficulty lies in us trying to understand the hyperbolic nature of much of the Sermon on the Mount. I don't think that Jesus is telling us to *never* to respond to evil with force (such as in self-defense) or to *always* literally "turn the other cheek" when we are slapped any more than His Command later in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 6:6**) means that we should *only* pray when we are completely alone; or that His Command in **Matthew 5:29** means that some should *literally* gouge out our eyes. Jesus Himself drove the thieves away from the Temple with a whip (**John 2:15**) and Paul, at times, insisted on his "rights" as a Roman citizen (**The Acts 25:11**). There is also the interesting instance of **The Acts 16:35-40**. Jesus is using hyperbole to illustrate what our *primary disposition* and attitude should be- not that we should *literally* "give in" to every attempt of evil against us. So, I simply cannot see that Jesus was promoting what we know today as "Pacifism". That is *part* of the answer. But the main part lies in remembering that Jesus is speaking primarily to individual believers. He is *not* mainly addressing Governments or Nations here, but is primarily speaking at the personal level. This text, then, shows that an *individual's* primary response to evil should be to "turn the other cheek," while the other texts we have seen (e.g., **Romans 13:3-4**) show that *Government's* God-given Responsibility is to punish those who commit civil crimes (murder, terrorism, acts of war, etc.). While it is sometimes appropriate even for individuals to use self-defense- it is *never* appropriate for individuals to seek to punish others. But it is right, however, for Governments both to take measures of self-defense and to punish evil doers. There are, in other words, various "spheres" of life. God has willed that *some* spheres include Responsibilities that are *not* necessarily included in other spheres. Personally, it would be wrong for us to engage in Retribution against people who harm us. But passages like **Romans 13:3&4** and **John 18:36** teach that Jesus is not denying Governments the Right to execute Retribution on evildoers. Therefore, when a Christian is under the limited authority of the Government and authorized to fight in a "Just War" on the nation's behalf, it is appropriate for him to fight. For he is not fighting as a private individual, but as a *representative* of the Government to which God has given the "Power of the Sword". Yet, even in doing so- the Christian soldier should strive to love one's opponents in war *as people*, remembering that he opposes them *as agents* of the opposing Government/system, *not* as private individuals. When at war, we need to look at people in the opposing army/terrorist group at two levels--the private, and Governmental/Public. Because of the "private level", the soldier should pray for and love the opposing soldiers. But because of the "public level", the soldier fights against them--not as private individuals, but as "public representatives" of the System- in opposition to Evil. That distinction, I am sure, would be hard (or even impossible) to maintain in battle. And it will not remove the pain and difficulty of being involved in fighting against other human beings. But it is perhaps a faint reflection of how the Personal and Governmental spheres overlap and involve one another while still remaining distinct.

1 Peter 2:19

For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

Christians do not endure sorrow and unjust suffering out of the fear of Man, or even out of our own weakness. Those are irrelevant. We bear it "for the sake of conscience toward God." That is, we take God into account. We look to God and not to our circumstances. God is the unseen Factor for the world. The lost world will never understand our behavior when we live to God. And they scream at us, "*Why don't you fight back?*" And the genuine Christian servant answers, "*My conscience is bound to God.*"

2. Favor with God

1 Peter 2:20

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

God delights in behavior that reflects utter reliance on His Grace when the supports of the world are knocked out. When a Christian, out of "conscience toward God," looks to God for strength and courage and hope and peace in a time of suffering, and as a result of that he bears the suffering patiently, God sees that as a tribute to His Grace. God's infinite Excellencies are displayed in it. And when God is displayed as excellent, God is pleased.

3. Called by God to Suffer

1 Peter 2:21a

For you have been called for this purpose...

The point here is that this kind of non-retaliating, gracious, submissive behavior is the response to a Divine Call from God. "You have been called for this." And that means that suffering unjustly in this world is not a *coincidence* for Christians, it's a Calling. "To this you were called." And to make it clear, Peter says it again in **1 Peter 3:9**:

Not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

Suffering with patience displays how excellent God is, because it is an unmistakable answer to His Calling. It is obedience to our Vocation.

4. Christ as Our Example

1 Peter 2:21b

... Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

Enduring unjust Suffering *patiently* displays how excellent God is, because it makes the Suffering of Jesus very real to people. People can see that this is the way Jesus was. And if someone has seen Jesus, they have seen the Father. So, this kind of submission displays God by revealing Jesus, God's Son.

5. Entrust Yourself to God Who Judges Righteously

1 Peter 2:23

And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously;

Here is one of the most important keys to how patient endurance of unjust Suffering shows forth the Excellencies of God. When you endure unjust Suffering "**for the sake of conscience toward God,**" you are *not* saying that Justice doesn't matter. You're *not* saying it is okay for them to mistreat you unjustly. What you're saying, and you're saying it loud and clear, is that you have an *unshakeable* confidence that God is the final Judge, Who will always adjudicate every injustice, *perfectly*.

Your submission to unjust Suffering screams out, "*My abuser will not have the last say. God will have the last say. This is why I don't need to respond. I can defer to God, because God is the Judge.*" As Peter says:

"I entrust myself, and not just myself, but my cause and my accusers, and the whole situation and the Justice that needs to be done—I hand it all over to God, Who is absolutely Sovereign and absolutely Just."

So, our submission is *not* Pacifism. It is also *not* an indifference to Justice. It is *a way of testifying to the world, "That the safest place for retaliatory Justice is in God's Hands, not mine. The powerful cry of my heart that I get my 'rights' is handed over to God. And if I am to be vindicated, it will be God Who vindicates me 'after He has tried and purged me duly' through Suffering."*

Now before you just wave all this off, I remind you that this is *not* some "ecclesiastical theory". This actually happened. These people actually did this. Peter did this. The collective Testimony of the early Church is that millions of believers did this. This radical submission, this absolute Confidence that God would adjudicate all Injustice, was what allowed Christianity to grow from a small Jewish sect into the largest religion in the world in just 300 years. This is in the Bible. It is true. It is a Commandment. We have this to do. So, what should we say to all this? Three things:

1. God's Will and Suffering

Is it really true that God wills the unjust suffering of His people?
Yes, sometimes. Peter certainly taught it.

1 Peter 2:21a

For you have been called for this purpose ...

1 Peter 4:19

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

... but not only Peter. Paul said:

Romans 8:16&17

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

2 Corinthians 1:6&7

But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are *sharers* of our comfort.

2 Timothy 1:8

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,

... and Dr. Luke wrote:

The Acts 14:21&22

After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

... and James assumed that *sometimes* Christians would suffer:

James 5:13a

Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray...

... and the Question is always, "*Why?*" And the Answer is clear from Scripture, even though most people either reject it or simply don't like it: God sometimes wills unjust Suffering for His people because He knows *the single best way* for us to display His Excellencies is sometimes by *escaping* Suffering (by His Providence or Miracles), and sometimes (more often) by graciously *enduring* Suffering that we do not deserve from men, because we trust in God. In other words, God often wills that we suffer *unjustly* and that we *bear it*, by His Grace and for His Glory.

2. Justice for Wrongdoing

So, where is the Justice for the wrongdoing of abusive masters? There are two answers. One is:

Ultimate Justice is in God at the last day. God will, ultimately settle all accounts justly. So, no one will get away with anything. Those who hold Christ and His people in derision, and do not repent, will one day cry out for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them rather than face the Wrath of the Lamb. So, every account will be settled, either on the Cross in Salvation or in the lake of fire.

The other answer is that God has given a *measure* of His Authority for retaliation in this age to the State as His "minister for keeping order and peace in society". **1 Peter 2:14** tells us that God ordains kings and governors to:

"punish evildoers and praise those who do right."

... so, God wills that Government punishes those who cause Christians (or anyone else) to suffer unjustly. And we are permitted, in the Bible, to labor for such a Government. But the God-given rights of the State to retaliate and punish does not nullify the God-given Calling of the individual Christian to endure unjust Suffering patiently. God's Glory does shine *partly* through His dispensing of Justice through the State. But His Excellencies are displayed much *more and better*, through the patient, God-centered Suffering of His people.

3. The Excellencies That Are Shown

So, just what is it about God that is shown through our patient, non-retaliating endurance of unjust Suffering? **1 Peter 2:9** says that our lives are to:

... proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

... so exactly what are the "Excellencies of God" that are displayed through this kind of meekness and endurance and patience? It is a very long list. And I can only give a start down the list.

- ✓ When we suffer unjustly and patiently with our trust in God, we are surrendering some very precious things (health, comfort, ease), and so we are show the Excellency of God's superior "Value" (1 Peter 2:7).

- ✓ When we suffer with patient faith in God, we surrender much of our claim to be protected and cared for on earth, and so we show the Excellency of God's superior "Shepherd Care" for us (**1 Peter 2:25; 5:7**).
- ✓ When we suffer with patient faith in God, we go *without* the "glory" of fighting back and winning, and so we show the Excellency of God's superior "Glory" that He will share with us some day, and the Justice of His Throne that will one day settle all accounts (**1 Peter 2:23; 4:13; 5:1, 4**).
- ✓ When we suffer with patient faith in God, we seem to take a tremendous risk with our life, the *only* life that lost people believe we have to enjoy, and so, we show the Excellency of God's "Faithfulness and Trustworthiness" (**1 Peter 4:19**).
- ✓ We seem to throw away our one chance for human happiness by *not* fighting for more comforts here, and so, we show the Excellency of God's Power to raise us from the dead as a faithful Creator, and One Who has all Dominion in the Universe, Who has promised us the fullness of "Everlasting Happiness" (**1 Peter 4:19; 5:11**).
- ✓ Finally, when we endure unjust suffering meekly by trusting in God, we acknowledge that we are still sinners, and are not earning anything by this patience. And so, we show the Excellency of God's great "Grace" (**1 Peter 5:10**).

So, when you suffer unjustly, and God has sovereignly chosen *not* to deliver or rescue you, keep these great words in mind from **1 Peter 5:10&11**:

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Amen. Let's pray.

© 2017-2018 by The Covenant of Peace Church. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America

The Covenant of Peace Church 13600 John Clark Road Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 228.832.7729; www.covenantofpeace.net
Scripture quotations, except those noted otherwise, are from *The New American Standard Bible* © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

This is a single transcript in a larger series of teachings taken from a verse by verse "journey" through the **Epistle of 1Peter**. You are free to reproduce it and distribute it as the Lord leads you- without cost or reimbursement to us with the stipulation that

you may not add anything or take anything away from this transcript without the express written permission of The Covenant of Peace Church and that this complete copyright statement be at the end of all copies.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.