

1 PETER 2:12-25

OUR PERFECT EXAMPLE

In our Sunday evening Bible studies we've been talking about growth in Christlikeness. Today's passage in 1 Peter relates directly to that theme as we look at the example Christ set us for how to respond to suffering and other difficult situations.

If we are going to become like Christ, who is our Perfect Example, we have to start with a cleansing from sin and an eager desire to "*grow up in your salvation*" (1 Peter 2:1-3). We are "*living stones*" in a spiritual temple God is building on the foundation of Jesus (1 Peter 2:4-8). As God's chosen people, called out of darkness to glorify Him, we are to live as foreigners in this world, such clear examples of Heaven's citizens that even those who are hostile to the Gospel will see our good deeds, and when Jesus returns be forced to admit our deeds were good (1 Peter 2:9-12).

We will see today that one way we exhibit our heavenly citizenship is to obey earthly laws, submitting to rulers and doing good (1 Peter 2:13-17). Similarly employees are to submit even to harsh bosses, for Jesus subjected Himself to injustice and we are to follow His example (verses 18-23). Having been redeemed by Jesus we renounce sin and commit ourselves to live for righteousness (verses 24-25). Peter had prefaced this section with a call to remember where our citizenship really is, so we'll include verse 11 with verse 12 as we resume looking at chapter 2:

1 Peter 2:11, 12, NAS:

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 on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

As Christians, we must constantly remind ourselves *who we are* and Peter did this in 1 Peter 2:11. To begin with, we're God's dearly beloved children. Eight times in his two epistles, Peter reminded his readers of God's love for them. There is nothing we can do on our own to earn God's love. He loves us because of Jesus Christ. Peter remembers in 2 Peter 1:17 being at the Transfiguration and hearing God's words about Jesus: "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" It's because of a person's faith in Jesus that God lavishes His love upon us (Ephesians 1:6).

And when God loves us what should we give in return? Because God loves us and

because Jesus loves us so much that He suffered and died for us, that should be reason enough for us to live obedient lives. In John 14:15 Jesus said: *“If you love me, obey my commandments.”* And in John 14:23 Jesus said: *“All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them.”*

Not only are we God's beloved children, but we are also *“strangers [sojourners] and pilgrims”* in this world. We're *“resident aliens”* who have our citizenship in another country, Heaven. If you've ever lived in a foreign country, you know that the people there tend to be critical of your behavior because you just don't *“fit in.”* We have a tendency to do the same thing to foreigners in our country who follow their own traditions and keep to their own culture because they don't *“fit in”* with us and our society.

We wake up each morning on a spiritual battlefield. You don't dare get out of bed without putting on the armor of God because there are sinful desires that attack us when we least expect it. Listen to Paul's advice concerning this in Ephesians 6:10-17 NLT:

10 A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

11 Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.

12 For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.

14 Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.

15 For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.

16 In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.

17 Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Satan is out to get us whenever and wherever he can (Galatians 5:16–26). The real battle is with the passions within us. D.L. Moody said, *“I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know.”* If we give in to these earthly temptations we'll start living like the unsaved people around us and we'll lose the ability to influence them for Christ. We must constantly be on our guard. Unsaved people are watching us, speaking against us (1 Peter 3:16; 4:4), and looking for excuses to reject the Gospel.

If we're going to have a positive impact on the unsaved people around us, we need to live righteous lives. This involves more than just telling the truth and doing the right thing. Our behavior should be admirable and honorable. We need to back up our *“talk”* with our *“walk.”* There should be nothing in our behavior that will give the unsaved any opportunity to attack Christ and the Gospel. Rather the behavior of a Christ follower

should reveal the purest, highest, and most excellent kind of goodness. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said: *“let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”* This is what the Bible is all about.

Unfortunately, there aren't too many Christians and churches that practice living such lives today. I know many unbelievers who don't want anything to do with the Church because of bad experiences they've had either with Christians or with a church, or both.

Peter encouraged his readers to witness to the unsaved by word and deed, so that one day when God visits them, which is the meaning of the *“day of visitation”* in verse 12, they would gladly receive Him. In the Old Testament this phrase advised that God would be drawing near to people either for judgment or blessing. Here, Peter is saying that when the grace of God visits the heart of an unbeliever, he/she will respond with saving faith and glorify God because he/she remembers the testimony of believers they had known and observed. When unbelievers come to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, it is very likely that they do so because of believers whose behavior was consistently honorable, even when those unbelievers made life difficult for the Christians.

As we learned last week the early Christians were falsely accused of rebellion against the government. They were falsely accused of burning Rome to the ground; being atheists because they didn't worship the emperor and other Roman idols; cannibalism because of their observance of the Lord's Supper which was interpreted to mean actually eating Christ's body and drinking His blood; immorality because of the love they professed for one another; damaging trade and social progress; and leading slaves into rebellion.

When you and I live in obedience to the teachings of Jesus, our lifestyle becomes a most effective way of allowing the unbeliever to become aware of their sin (Matthew 5:16). An honorable (or, good) life is one in which a person does good things as a result of the Holy Spirit within them,¹ and thus glorifies God.² Such a life can be used by the Holy Spirit to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ.

1 Peter 2:13-17 NLT:

13 For the Lord's sake, respect all human authority—whether the king as head of state,

14 or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.

15 It is God's will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you.

16 For you are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil.

17 Respect everyone, and love your Christian brothers and sisters. Fear God, and respect the king.

¹ Matt. 5:16; Eph. 2:10; Titus 3:8; James 2:18.

² Matt. 5:16; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 6:20.

Now here's where the rubber meets the road. Peter gets very specific about how Christians are to live. When we look around at many of our leaders and see that they include governors who are sent to prison, legislators accused of taking bribes, and judges who re-write the laws from the bench, we may feel they do not deserve our respect. But what is God saying though Peter in verses 13 and 14? Respect your leaders anyway. Now that doesn't make sense to us on one level. But let's look more closely at what God is saying because it really boils down to, "*can we trust God?*" Verse 13 puts this in context when it says, "*for the Lord's sake.*" Note also that whether or not we can approve of the lifestyles and actions of our kings, presidents, governors, legislators, etc., we are to respect the offices they hold because, as we are told in Romans 13:1, all such offices are held because God ordained it.

Romans 13:1, NIV

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Christians are expected to obey the laws of the country in which they live.³ Peter urged those who read this letter to obey such laws. The reason for doing this is to honor God.

Christians are to obey the laws as long as those laws do not conflict with the teaching of Scripture (Acts 4:19).

According to what Peter says in verse 14, the purpose of legal authority is "*to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.*" A believer's best defense against slanderous, unjustified criticism is good behavior.⁴

Christians are to **respect everyone** (Romans 12:10; 13:7). Believers should be aware that God has uniquely created each human being in His image. Christians also are to **love** their brothers and sisters in Christ, their fellow believers. Christians are also to **fear God**. The verb "*fear*" (*phobeisthe*) here doesn't mean to be in terror, but awe and reverence that leads to obedience.⁵ A person first needs to respect God before he/she is capable of respecting other people. Finally, believers are to **honor the king**. The respect due to all is especially to be given to those God has placed in authority.⁶

As Christians, we should submit to the authority of government. Verses 15-17 give us directions on how to "fight back" against injustice, not in our human ways but according to God's way.⁷ Note there is no reference here to suggest we are to submit to every

³ Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-2.

⁴ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:846

⁵ 1 Peter 1:17, *phobou* in 3:16, and *phobon* in 2 Cor. 7:11.

⁶ 1 Peter 2:13, 14; Rom. 13:1.

⁷ Isaiah 55:8-9.

individual law. It suggests submission to the institutions that make and enforce the laws. It's possible to submit to the institutions and still disobey the laws if, and only if, those laws are directly contradictory to an explicit command of God.

For example, when Daniel and his three friends refused to obey the king's dietary regulations, they disobeyed the law. But the *way* that they did it proved that they honored the king and respected the authorities (Daniel 1). They weren't rebels and they were careful not to embarrass the official in charge or get him into trouble; and yet they stood their ground. They glorified God and, at the same time, honored the authority of the king.

Peter and the other Apostles faced a similar challenge shortly after Pentecost (Acts 4–5). The Jewish council commanded them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, but Peter and his associates refused to obey (Acts 4:19; 5:29). They didn't cause a rebellion or in any way question or deny the authority of the council. They submitted to the institution but they refused to stop preaching. They showed respect to their leaders even though these men were opposed to the Gospel.

It's important that we respect the office even though we cannot respect the man or woman in the office. As much as possible, we should seek to cooperate with the government and obey the law; but we must never allow the law to make us violate our conscience or disobey God's Word.

Peter named the offices we are to respect. "*The king*" meant "*the emperor*." In democratic nations, we have a president or prime minister. Peter didn't criticize the Roman government or suggest that it be overthrown. God's church has been able to live and grow in all kinds of political systems. The "*governors*," as referred to in some translations, are those under the supreme authority who administer the laws and execute justice. Ideally, they should punish those who do evil and praise those who do good. This ideal was not always reached in Peter's day (Acts 24:24–27), nor is it reached today. Again, we must remind ourselves to respect the office even if we cannot respect the officer.

When we do something in the will of God and as the servants of God, then we're doing it "*for the Lord's sake*." God has taught us to silence our critics by doing good, not by opposing the authority. The word "*silence*" in verse 15 literally means "*to muzzle*," suggesting that these critics were like a pack of vicious dogs.

A true Christian submits himself to authority because he is first of all submitted to Christ. He/she uses this freedom as a tool to build with and not as a weapon to fight with. A good example of this attitude is Nehemiah, who willingly gave up his own rights that he might help his people and restore the walls of Jerusalem.

1 Peter 2:18-20 NLT:

18 You who are slaves must accept the authority of your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel.

19 For God is pleased with you when you do what you know is right and patiently endure unfair treatment.

20 Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.

The Greek word for **slaves** here is not the common word for slaves, but rather the Greek word that means household or domestic servants.⁸ Servants and slaves made up a high percentage of the membership in the first century Church, and undeserved punishment and suffering was common for these slaves. Peter told them to submit to and respect those masters even if they were cruel.

In verses 18-25 Peter is speaking to the Christian slaves in the congregations, and again he stressed the importance of submission. Some newly converted slaves thought that their spiritual freedom also guaranteed personal and political freedom, and they created problems for themselves and the churches. Paul dealt with this problem in 1 Corinthians 7:20–24, and also touched on it in his letter to his friend Philemon.

There are no Christian slaves today but what Peter wrote applies to employees. We are to be submissive to those who are over us, whether they are kind or unkind to us. God is honored when an employee, treated unjustly, accepts their poor treatment with faith in God's sovereign care, rather than responding in anger or rebellion.

Sometimes a Christian employee may be wronged by an unbelieving coworker or supervisor. For conscience sake, he/she must "*take it*" even though he/she is not in the wrong. A Christian's relationship to God is far more important than his relationship to men or women (Matthew 5:10–12). Anybody, including an unbeliever, can accept criticism when they're wrong, but it takes a dedicated Christian to "*take it*" when they're in the right. God can give us the grace to submit and "*take it*" and in this way glorify God.

Of course, the human tendency is to fight back and to demand our rights. But that's the natural response of the unsaved person, and we must do much more than they do (Luke 6:32–34). Anybody can fight back; it takes a Spirit-filled Christian to submit and let God fight his/her battles. Let's read what Paul wrote in Romans 12:16–21 NLT:

16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.

20 Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty,

⁸ Luke 16:13; Rom. 14:4.

give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.”

21 Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

At first, Peter had opposed Christ's suffering on the cross (Matthew 16:21ff); but then he learned the important lesson that we lead by serving and serve by suffering. He also learned that this kind of suffering always leads to glory.⁹

Wherever and whenever a Christian is made to suffer without cause, the right thing to do is to accept it knowing that Christ is right there with you giving you the strength to endure. If you do something wrong and are punished, you deserve the punishment. But to put up with undeserved punishment results in God's approval because it reflects His grace and mercy and love. Let me give you a for instance. Suppose the company you work for suspends you for three days without pay for being late three days in a row. You know for certain that you weren't late but can't prove it. You could rant and rave, pound your fist on the desk, and storm out of the building muttering under your breath what a rotten company it is. You certainly could do any or all of those things. But what kind of a message do you think that would send to those who punished you unjustly? It would probably confirm to them that you're the kind of discontent who most likely was guilty in spite of all your protestations. In fact they might even hope that you might quit over the incident rather than having to put up with your sophomoric behavior in the future. And if they know you're a Christian they can say without reservation: *“Those Christians are all alike. If that's the way a Christian behaves, I don't want any part of it.”*

But suppose you said something like this: *“I don't believe I was late. Perhaps there's some misunderstanding here. However, if that's the company policy and I have no way of proving I wasn't late, I'll see you on time Thursday morning.”* How do you think that would play out for your accusers. They might say something like: *“What a surprising way for Ron to react to our decision. He's really a pretty decent guy. When he gets back on Thursday let's give him some encouragement and suggest we put the incident behind us. By the way, you know how he's always talking about that faith of his? Based on the way he handled this, maybe there's something to this Jesus thing.”* What do you think? I believe it's something we might want to consider very carefully.

1 Peter 2:21-23 NLT:

21 For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

22 He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone.

23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.

Admit it. If you are human, your first instinct when someone insults, criticizes, or slanders you is to defend yourself, to *“set the record straight.”* So it gets really tough

⁹ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 2:18

when we are in a situation such as Peter is describing and the Christ-like action is to keep quiet and not get defensive.

Peter backed up his statement to slaves by reminding them of Christ's example in His own unjust suffering. Christians are **called to follow** Christ, to follow His example regarding character and conduct. In verse 22 Peter quotes from Isaiah 53:9: *"He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal."*

All that Jesus did on earth, as recorded in the four Gospels, is a perfect example for us to follow. But He's especially our example in the way He responded to suffering. In spite of the fact that He was sinless in both word and deed, He suffered at the hands of the authorities. This connects, of course, to Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:19–20.

Jesus proved that a person could be in the will of God, be greatly loved by God, and still suffer unjustly. There is a misguided brand of popular theology today that claims that Christians will *not* suffer if they are in the will of God. Those who promote such ideas mustn't have a very good understanding of the cross or of the theology of suffering.

Jesus' humility and submission didn't suggest weakness, but power. Jesus could have summoned the armies of Heaven to rescue Him. His words to Pilate in John 18 are proof that He was in complete command of the situation. It was Pilate who was on trial, not Jesus. Jesus had committed Himself to the Father, and the Father always judges righteously. Listen to what Jesus said in John 18:33-38 NLT:

33 Then Pilate went back into his headquarters and called for Jesus to be brought to him. "Are you the king of the Jews?" he asked him.

34 Jesus replied, "Is this your own question, or did others tell you about me?"

35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate retorted. "Your own people and their leading priests brought you to me for trial. Why? What have you done?"

36 Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world."

37 Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true."

38 "What is truth?" Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people and told them, "He is not guilty of any crime."

We are not saved by following Christ's example, because each of us would stumble over 1 Peter 2:22: *"He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone."* Sinners need a Savior, not an Example. But after a person is saved, he/she will want to follow closely in Jesus' steps and imitate the example of Christ.¹⁰

¹⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 2:18

1 Peter 2: 24-25 NLT:

24 He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.

25 Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.

Jesus died as the sinner's Substitute. All of these verses we've been studying today reflect that great "Servant Chapter," Isaiah 53: 5-7, 9, 12 NAS:

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth

9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

Jesus did not die as a martyr; He died as a Savior, a sinless Substitute. The Jewish people did not crucify criminals; they stoned them to death. But if the victim was especially evil, his dead body was hung on a tree until evening, as a mark of shame (Deuteronomy 21:23). Jesus died on a tree, a cross, and bore the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13).

Christ was wounded that we might be healed. He died that we might live. We died with Him, and thus we are "dead to sin" (Romans 6) so that we might "live unto righteousness." The healing Peter mentions in 1 Peter 2:24 is not physical healing, but rather the spiritual healing of the soul (Psalm 103:3). One day, when we have glorified bodies, all sicknesses will be gone; but meanwhile, even some of God's choicest servants may have physical afflictions.¹¹

It's not Jesus the Example or the Teacher who saves us, but Jesus the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

In the Old Testament, the sheep died for the shepherd; but at Calvary, the Shepherd died for the sheep (John 10). Every lost sinner is like a sheep gone astray: ignorant, lost, wandering, in danger, away from the place of safety, and unable to help himself/herself. The Shepherd went out to search for the lost sheep in Luke 15:1-7 and eventually He died for the lost human sheep.

¹¹ Phil. 2:25-30; 2 Cor. 12:1ff.

Now that we who have believed have been returned to the fold and are safely in His care, He watches over us lest we stray and get into sin. The word *bishop* simply means “*one who watches over, who oversees.*” Just as the elder-bishop oversees the flock of God, the local church (1 Peter 5:2), so the Savior in glory watches over His sheep to protect them and perfect them (Hebrews 13:20–21).

Here then is the wonderful truth Peter wanted to share: as we live godly lives and submit in times of suffering, we are following Christ’s example and becoming more like Him. We submit and obey, not only for the sake of lost souls and for Jesus’ sake, but also for our own sake, that we might grow spiritually and become more like Christ.

Christ was the perfect example of how one can put up with unjust suffering. He didn’t argue, threaten, or fight back. During Christ’s trial and crucifixion He suffered in silence, committing Himself to God. Peter explains in verse 24 why Jesus tolerated the pain and humiliation of the Cross. It was because God was judging our sins which Jesus bore (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus’ death made it possible for believers to be free from sin and to live for righteousness in service to Him (Rom. 6:2, 13). Christ suffered in order to provide Christians an example to follow. Jesus showed us how to suffer and at the same time live righteously. In verse 24 Peter makes a reference to our salvation: “*by His wounds you have been healed,*” which comes from Isaiah 53:5. Christ’s suffering, His wounds, refer to Jesus’ scourging and death, which provided for our healing, the salvation of every individual who trusts Jesus as his Savior.

The unsaved world is watching us, but the Shepherd in Heaven is also watching over us; so we have nothing to fear. We can submit to Him and know that He will work everything together for our good and His glory.¹² Keep those thoughts in your heart the next time you are treated unfairly by someone else.

¹² Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 2:18