

“What to Do When Taken Advantage Of”

1 Peter 2:18-25

One of the most painful experiences in life is the feeling of being taken advantage of by someone else. Being wronged by someone you trusted. Being ripped off by someone who used you for their own ends. Being mistreated by someone in a position of authority. I'm sure all of us have been there at some point or another.

- Friend taken advantage of by another friend
- Child taken advantage of by a parent or guardian
- Wife taken advantage of by an overbearing husband
- Employee taken advantage of by an insecure boss

A common reaction to such mistreatment at the hands of others is to seek revenge. Sometimes when we've been hurt, when we feel like we've been taken advantage of, we're tempted to retaliate.

Well, the believers to whom Peter's letter is addressed had known that kind of hurt. They knew what it meant to be taken to the cleaners, to be exploited and used, and totally taken advantage of by their persecutors. How were they to respond? Peter gets to that in verse 18. Here, we are going to find that he takes up the issue of their submission to authority figures, in their case as servants, to 'masters,' even to those who were treating them unfairly.

1. An EXPERIENCE of unfair treatment (2:18-20)

“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, 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.”

Instruction

When Peter addresses those who are ‘servants,’ he is referring to those Christian who were domestic slaves. He has a word of instruction for these household servants who were to be submissive to their masters for the gospel’s sake. It is very likely that some of these servants were newly converted, and perhaps thought that their spiritual freedom also guaranteed their political freedom. Peter’s instruction here is a call for servants to live in submission to their masters with all respect.

“Masters” — *translates a word that means ‘despot’; those who had total and absolute ownership of and control over*

Don’t interpret this text to mean that the New Testament is justification for slavery. Peter isn’t affirming or endorsing this societal mechanism. When the Scriptures refer to slavery and servanthood, it merely regulates an existing societal structure. I think we sometimes forget that the New Testament is a first century book, one that was not written in a democratic society.

Peter is writing from a first century context to those who were living under a first century context. Rome’s workforce was made up of slaves. Now, this may be something that we find very hard to relate to living in the 21st century. But if we were to go back in time to life in the first century, we would find that it was a common practice.

William Barclay—*“In the time of the early church, there were as many as 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. It was by no means only menial tasks which were performed by slaves. Doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards were slaves. In fact, all the work of Rome was done by slaves. Roman attitude was that there was no point in being master of the world and doing one’s own work. Let the slaves do that and let the citizens live in pampered idleness. The supply of slaves would never run out...It would be wrong to think that the lot of slaves was always wretched and unhappy, and that they were always treated with cruelty. Many slaves were loved and trusted members of the family; but one inescapable fact dominated the whole situation. In Roman law, a slave was not a person but a thing; and he had absolutely no legal rights whatsoever. For that reason there could be no such thing as justice where a slave was concerned.”*

Peter’s concern is not in upholding slavery as a legitimate societal mechanism, but the importance of maintaining a faithful gospel witness within the already existing structures of that society. For the most part, Christianity spread throughout the world as a movement among the world’s lowest classes. Most of those who made up the early church throughout the Greco-Roman world were slaves who were converted to faith in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:26-28—**“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen.”**

The fact that Peter is writing to ‘servants’ rather than their masters reflects this.

Juan Sanchez — *“First century household codes addressed masters, not slaves. By including slaves in his household code, Peter elevated slaves to a place of dignity.”*

Paul does the same thing in his epistles:

Galatians 3:28— **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

It would take centuries, but the gospel would eventually lead to a transformation in society. Christianity would pervade the culture overcome slavery as an institution. It would only happen as individual hearts were changed. The gospel transforms individuals before it transforms society.

Which is why Peter is concerned that these servants be subject to their masters with all respect.

He says, “And not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.” It wasn’t difficult to submit to a gentle master, one who reciprocated respect. The issue was submitting to those who took advantage of them, those who were unfair and unjust.

“Unjust” — *word in Greek is ‘skoliois’ and is the same word we get ‘skoliosis’ from; means crooked and dishonest*

The instruction is for them to be submissive with all fear and respect, even to those who were crooked, who maybe cheated them out of their wages, or mistreated them for their Christian faith.

Even though things are different now as far as societal constructs, human nature is still the same. There is an application here for those of you who work for someone else. Tomorrow when you go to work, you have someone to whom you

report, to whom you are accountable. What kind of employee will you be, regardless of what type of boss you might have? Maybe you work for an overbearing, insecure manager who is always breathing down your neck. Or maybe you've been targeted for your faith, and taken advantage of.

Peter has a word of instruction for you—“Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect.”

Incentive

Notice what he says in verse 19:

“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is 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.”

The phrase ‘this is a gracious thing’ is used two times in these verses. The idea is that an attitude of submission when treated unfairly is something that finds favor with God. When you endure such mistreatment through an attitude of submission, God’s ‘grace’ is on display.

Obviously, this goes against basic human nature. When we are mistreated, our first inclination is one of revenge. We want to lash out in self-defense and self-preservation and we look for an opportunity to get even.

I can’t control how other people respond to me, but I can control how I respond to other people.

When we endure mistreatment in a way that showcases God’s grace in our lives, it provides a unique platform for the gospel to be on display.

Revenge-seeking on our part reveals a lack of trust and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We act as our own self-appointed lords who take matters into our own hands because we're not confident that God is doing a good enough job on His own.

Romans 12:14-21 — “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

The followers of Jesus are to stand out in contrast to the culture we live in. Whenever we're mistreated, both our attitude and our focus ought to be different. Peter says that our attitude is to be one of 'submission,' while our focus is one that is 'mindful of God.' He says that this is a gracious thing in God's sight, something that finds favor with Him.

Our lives are always in the sight of God—He sees and He knows! Nothing that happens to us ever catches Him by surprise.

illus. of David running from Saul (1 Samuel 23-24; Ps. 142)

When you truly understand your position in Christ, when you are truly grateful for the undeserved grace that you've been given in Him, you're then free to show grace to those who are undeserving. Our reward is in heaven.

2. An EXAMPLE of undeserved suffering (2:21-23)

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was 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.”

Peter says, “For to this you have been called.” We don’t often think of suffering mistreatment as something we've been called to. Instead, we like to think that Jesus has called us to a life of comfort and ease.

To be a follower of Jesus is to be at odds with the world around you. The very moment you were born again, you passed from darkness to light, and you became marked.

2 Timothy 3:12—“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that His followers would be the targets of unfair persecution. This present world system will launch a smear campaign against us. When it happens, it shouldn't take us by surprise. Rather, we should realize that it is something we've been called to.

There is no greater example of unfair treatment than what Jesus faced in His suffering at the hands of sinners. He was the only perfect Man who ever walked

the face of this earth, and yet He faced continuous mistreatment. Isaiah said that the Messiah would be a 'Man of Sorrows' who was well acquainted with suffering.

In His earthly ministry, Jesus was viewed with constant suspicion by the religious authorities. He was slandered and misunderstood. The crowds followed Him as long as they got their stomachs satisfied, but they soon abandoned Him. The same ones who welcomed Him into Jerusalem with shouts of 'Hosanna' were the same ones who shouted 'Crucify Him' less than a week later. Even His disciples ran out Him at the hour of His most intense agony.

How did Jesus respond to it all? Look at verses 22-23:

"He committed no sin, neither was 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."

Peter affirms the sinless nature of Jesus. When He was mistreated, He didn't make threats. He didn't curse those who cursed Him. He didn't return insult for insult. He didn't revile those who reviled Him. No deceit was found in His mouth. The only One in history who had every right to lodge a complaint remained silent.

Let me tell you something—my sinful heart shows itself most easily and most often through my mouth! It is all too easy for me to say something when I feel like I'm being taken advantage of. It is easy to lash out.

Jesus didn't do any of that. Instead, He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.

"Entrusting" —*means to commit or hand over; in the imperfect tense which speaks of repeated action*

The idea that Peter is expressing here is that Jesus kept handing Himself over to the Father in submission to the Father's perfect will. He did this all the way up to His dying breath.

Luke 23:46—“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

Interestingly enough, Peter uses this same word in relation to the way we respond to suffering:

1 Peter 4:19—“Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

And so think about how powerful Peter's words are here when he says that we've been called to unfair suffering as part of the Christian life. The reason? Verse 21 says:

“Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

Jesus is the perfect standard of what we are to do when we are mistreated. He is our supreme example.

“Example” —word is ‘hupogrammon’ and literally means to write under; refers to a pattern placed under a sheet of tracing paper so the original image could be duplicated

Do you remember what you did when you were teaching your children to read and write? You'd begin by making them trace the letters of the alphabet so that they could become familiar with their shape. (illus. of Allie's picture)

The idea that Peter is getting at here is that Jesus is the ‘hupogrammon,’ the pattern on which we trace our lives. We follow in His steps.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that we are to live our lives whereby we are constantly 'looking unto Jesus,' the author and finisher of our faith. When we encounter suffering and pain, we need to remember Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest we become weary and discouraged in our souls.

I don't know why we think we ought to have it easy, as if it we had the right to an easy, comfortable life. In reality, the Christian life is a life of warfare. It is a walk of faith in which we are following in our Lord's footsteps.

That we follow in His steps means that He has already gone on before us, and He has promised His presence with us. What, then, can we not face?

Sometimes, we complain because our circumstances are not fair. We sulk, we groan when the way gets tough.

Illus. of "Footprints in the Sand"

Well, I came across a different version that I think I like even better:

*One night I had a wondrous dream,
One set of footprints there was seen,
The footprints of my precious Lord,
But mine were not along the shore.
But then some stranger prints appeared,
And I asked the Lord, "What have we here?"
Those prints are large and round and neat,
"But Lord they are too big for feet."
"My child," He said in somber tones,
"For miles I carried you alone.
I challenged you to walk in faith,
But you refused and made me wait."*

*"You disobeyed, you would not grow,
The walk of faith, you would not know.
So I got tired, I got fed up,
and there I dropped you on your butt."
"Because in life, there comes a time,
when one must fight, and one must climb.
When one must rise and take a stand,
or leave their butt prints in the sand."*

What's it going to be? When the way gets tough, will we complain, or will we live submitted to God? Rather than sitting around, we are to follow in Jesus' steps.

Whenever we are taken advantage of, whenever we're wounded by others and tempted to retaliate, we look away from ourselves and look to Him. We follow in His steps.

3. An EXPRESSION of unusual grace (2:24-25)

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

Think of the grace that is being expressed here!

The sufferings of Jesus were not inconsequential; there was a sovereign purpose behind them. He suffered for us. He bore our sins in His own body as our substitute.

"Bore" — *to carry the full weight of something heavy*

He carried the massive weight of our sins in His own body on the cross, something so heavy that all of creation groans and suffers from sin's

consequences. And Jesus carried the full weight of that! And all of this was so that I could be dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Grace!

Peter says by His wounds, you have been healed.

Therefore, when someone wounds me, when someone takes advantage of me, when someone mistreats me, I don't have to repay wound for wound. Jesus heals me no matter what others do to me.

He was wounded for me, and there will come a time in my life as His disciple when I'm wounded for Him. To live righteously as a Christian is to be attacked by the world.

Mark 13:13—“You will be hated by all for my sake.”

He suffered and was in full submission. He suffered for us, and His followers in the world, the time will come when we suffer for Him.

The point of this passage is unmistakably clear. The fact of our submission, whether it be to the government or to unjust employers, is predicated upon the submission of Christ to do the Father's will. In fact, submission is going to continue to be the theme through the next chapter.

I think that if we would all be honest, we would admit that we have a submission problem. We don't want to subject ourselves to anyone, much less to those who mistreat and take advantage of us. Self-lordship is the option we are often tempted to choose.

Add to this the fact that we live in a culture that demands its rights. It seems like our postmodern society appeals to this as the one and only moral obligation—equal rights. If people don't get what they feel they deserve, they express their wrath through walkouts, protests, and hashtags.

And so Peter's words in this passage aren't welcomed and celebrated in a culture like ours. In fact, they are counter-cultural. They are radical. They go against the flow.

What do I do when I feel taken advantage of? Here is some closing application:

- *Endure your situation by being mindful of God's purpose*

You need to understand that whenever you are faced with unjust circumstances, whether it be mistreatment by someone who was supposed to be a friend, or whether you're targeted for your faith by an unbelieving supervisor, God has a purpose behind it. On the job, our attitude is to be one of submission, and our focus is one that is mindful of God.

- *Entrust yourself to God by following in Christ's footsteps*

We are often quick to defend ourselves, quick to lash out, quick to criticize. Instead of clamoring for our rights and taking matters into our own hands, why not take the same route that Jesus took? Keep entrusting yourself to God, keep handing yourself over in submission to Him.

- *Enrich your soul by trusting in the Shepherd's care*

While you may not be able to control what others say and do, their unjust treatment of you can't touch your soul. As one who has come to trust in Jesus Christ, your soul is safe and sound in the Shepherd's care.

Chuck Swindoll — *"We might enjoy a rush of personal gratification when we stand up for ourselves or exact revenge against those in authority over us, but Christ calls us to a better way. Instead of meeting the world's slap in the face with a counter punch in the gut, Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek. We must never let the world's sense of right and wrong dictate our own."*

You and I submit to the Lordship of a perfect Savior who set the ultimate example of surrendering His own personal rights for a much greater glory.

“Father, we thank You for being a God who is in perfect control of our lives. No matter what we face in this life, we can entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator. We don’t have to take matters into our own hands. Jesus died for our sins, rose again from the grave, and we now live in His victory and follow in His steps. Amen.”