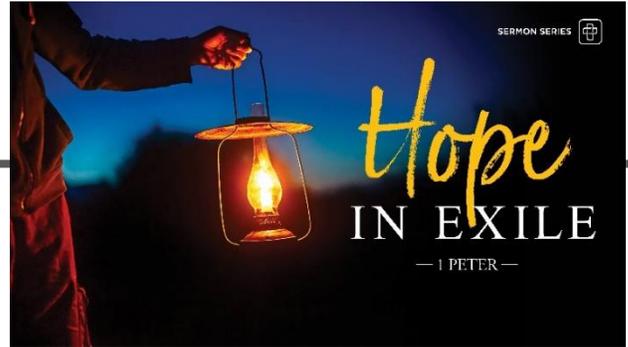


## Responding Rightly When You've Been Wronged

### 1 Peter 2:18-25

David Sunday June 14, 2020



Good morning, New Covenant Bible Church. It's a joy to be back in this sanctuary where God has met us so often in the past, and to be here with a few people. More than two or three are gathered in this place. I look forward to what's going to start next week in the slow reopening of our church when more of you will start to gather here on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. We're going to continue to worship online as well, as some of you will be worshipping in your homes. God is on the move, and we're looking forward to what He has in store for us in the days ahead.

Let's continue to worship Him as we open His Word to 1 Peter and hear the Word of God. Let's read 1 Peter 2:18-25:

*<sup>18</sup> Household slaves, submit to your masters with all reverence not only to the good and gentle ones but also to the cruel. <sup>19</sup> For it brings favor if, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> For what credit is there if when you do wrong and are beaten, you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.*

*<sup>21</sup> For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth; <sup>23</sup> when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

*“The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of our God abides forever”*

(Isaiah 40:8).

I told you the story before of a man named Ted who was an attorney who lost his job, not because he was doing anything wrong, but because of his good behavior and witness for Christ. One day Ted's supervisor called a private meeting and told Ted, “If you want to keep your job, you're going to have to twist the truth about one of our client's assets, because if the truth were known, we would lose a significant income stream to our firm.” Because he was a believer in Jesus, Ted respectfully declined to follow his supervisor's orders, so was summarily dismissed from the firm.

That wasn't the end of it. For the next two years, his supervisor went around to other firms in the region, slandering and blackballing Ted, so he and his wife and three children endured three excruciating years of unemployment and the inability to find a job. It was during this time, when Ted was at church, that his pastor came up to him and kind of jokingly said, “Ted, would you like me to get a jug of gasoline and some matches, then go with you over to the firm and light it on fire, starting with your supervisor's office?” (I'll be the first to admit that pastors do say foolish things sometimes.) Ted looked his pastor straight in the eye and answered with two unforgettable words: “No retribution.” No retribution. That's the principle of this passage.

The principle that the Holy Spirit through Peter wants us to really grasp is that if you are a Christian, God is calling you to respond to unjust suffering—suffering you do not deserve—without retaliation, without retribution, without resentment, without bitterness, without a desire to return hurt for hurt or to say words that would be harmful.

That's the principle of this passage. Just think what a difference it would make in our marriages if, when our spouse treats us unjustly, we did not retaliate with harsh words or unloving actions. Think what a difference it would make, what a bright witness our church would be in our community, if every time someone mistreated another person in this body, instead of retaliating, criticizing or slandering, we all said, “I'm not going to return evil for evil, but I'm going to overcome evil with good.”

Think about your workplace when the boss never recognizes the good you're doing, but instead criticizes every little mistake. Or someone else slanders you so they can get ahead and you suffer for it, so rising up within your heart is this desire for justice, this desire to strike back. What would it be like if every Christian, instead of feeding that desire, said, “I'm not going to hurt back. I'm not even going to wish in my heart that I could hurt back and I'm not going to

seethe with bitterness because I can't hurt back"? What if "no retribution" were the policy of our lives?

## The Principle

Well, that is the principle of this passage and Peter is applying it first and foremost to employees in their relationship with their employers. In verse 18, he is speaking to household slaves. Now, we need to understand that slavery in the Roman Empire was not equivalent to the evil slavery that is a part of our nation's history—or even to the human trafficking that's going on in the world today.

In the Roman world, about three-fourths of the workplace fell into the category of slave. This included a vast array of workers, from medical helpers to cooks to cleaners. But what they all had in common was they were completely under the authority of their masters. There were no workers' rights. There were no labor unions standing up for good workplace habits. And many Christians—in fact, a disproportionate number of Christians—found themselves in this kind of employment, because Christians were often ostracized in society, so it was very difficult for them to start their own businesses or work for themselves.

God is telling them here, "This is a great opportunity for you. It's a great opportunity to witness to the gospel." How would they do that? Verse 18 says, "You submit. You recognize the authority of your master and yield to their authority. You do this with all reverence, showing honor to them by the way you do your work." Here's the real challenge. They were to do this, not only to the good and gentle masters, but also to the cruel. That's hard.

Why is God calling us to this? Look at verse 19: "*For it brings favor...*" That's the way the CSV translates it. Literally, it reads, "It is grace..." So what does that mean? The ESV renders it, "For this is a gracious thing..." The NIV reads, "For it is commendable..." Peter is either saying, "God will reward His people when they endure unjust suffering in the workplace because of their faith in Him" (as the CSV and NIV translate it), or "God will give grace to His people in order to enable them to endure unjust suffering." That seems to be the way the ESV goes.

Either way you look at it, it takes grace from God to endure unjust suffering. God is pleased when His people do this, because it witnesses to our trust and confidence in God's justice and mercy. God is not pretending this is going to be easy. In verse 19, we read about enduring grief and sorrows from suffering unjustly. This word includes all kinds of mental and emotional anguish that goes on when we're being wrongly treated by someone else—feelings,

hurt, betrayal, confusion and loss of trust. Peter is telling us, "God is sympathetic to the pain that accompanies these kinds of relationships in a world of unjust suffering. God knows."

Verse 20 brings an important clarification for this principle. If you do wrong and suffer, there's no reward for that. Sometimes Christians get in trouble in this world because we're lazy, arrogant we're dishonest at work. We're going to hear more about this in 1 Peter 4. "*But*," verse 20 continues, "*when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.*" Or again, "*this is a gracious thing.*" This is God at work in you and it brings pleasure to Him to see it.

In fact, Peter even goes so far as to say in verse 21, "*For you were called to this...*" This is your calling as Christians. You are called to endure unjust suffering, to do good and suffer, to respond rightly when you're treated wrongly. Please let this sink in. When you do good, you will suffer. When you do good, people will criticize you and hate you. When you do good, people will accuse you of doing evil and say mean things about you. When you do good, people will ignore what you've done not appreciating it and not thanking you for it. You were called to this.

John Piper probes into our hearts with verse 21 when he asks, "How many of us live in the liberating knowledge that it is our calling, our vocation, to be misunderstood, criticized, ignored and hurt for doing what is right, and not to return hurt for hurt?"

This principle applies not only to our lives in the workplace. In 1 Peter 3:9, Peter makes it clear this applies to all our relationships. This principle of not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult, but on the contrary, giving a blessing—since we are called to this so we may inherit a blessing—this is to be characteristic of all the relationships of those who have been called to this, because we've been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

This is to characterize our relationships, because we've been called to this by being ransomed, not with perishable things like gold or silver, but with the blood of a precious and unblemished Lamb Who is God's dear Son. We are called to this every time we come to Christ in worship and drink from the pure milk of His Word, as God causes us to grow up into our salvation. He's calling us to this.

He's calling us to something very specific, something not of this world, something that's going to make us stand out as people who've been called out of the kingdom of darkness and brought under the rule of a gracious Master—our Lord Jesus Christ—to show that the marvelous light of His Kingdom is unlike anything this world has. It also shows His excellencies. We've been called to a radically different way of life, to a life of responding rightly when we're treated

wrongly. You've probably heard it said, "If it were illegal to be a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Peter is helping us in this portion of his letter to see that very tangible difference the gospel makes in our lives. One of the evidences that should shine forth in our lives—a powerful evidence—is the way people watch how we respond when we've been done wrong.

I've needed this message this week. I've been very thankful for the clarity and conviction of God's Word, for the life and path it leads us on, showing me a path out of the self-justifying resentments of my own heart into the freedom of entrusting myself to God.

If I don't take this teaching to heart. If God leaves me to myself and doesn't work in me by His Spirit to create a right response in me when I'm treated wrongly, here's what will happen. The fleshly lusts—those sinful desires we read about back in verse 11 that wage war against our souls—will start to rise up and will choke out the beautiful conduct of verse 12 that is to be a testimony to a watching world. I will try to strike back and retaliate, either actively by getting even, or sullenly by withdrawing love and giving the silent treatment.

Then if the problem lingers, I can start seething with self-pity and become puffed up with self-righteousness. And if things continue to stay unresolved, I can fondle resentment in my heart, then bitterness, perpetual unrest and turmoil will start to brew in my soul. That's what happens if the Holy Spirit does not help me respond rightly when I'm treated wrongly.

Then if someone comes to me and suggests they're starting to see unresolved anger or bitterness or resentment,, apart from the Holy Spirit working in my heart, my response will be, "Well, do you know what they said to me? Do you realize what they did to me? Do you realize how wrong they are? I've been hurt. I've been treated unjustly. I have the right to speak this way, to act this way." It's self-justification. So I'm thankful for the warning and correction of this passage.

The Chinese war strategist Sun Tzu said, "Before you embark on a journey of revenge, you should first dig two graves." You're going to destroy yourself in the process.

The Holy Spirit is saying through Peter, "Yes, I know you've been hurt. I know you've been mistreated. I know that wrongs have been done here. I know justice is lacking and justice is needed. But I'm calling you to a better path than the one you're heading down. The path you're on is taking you into a prison of self-justification. The path I want to lead you down will bring you freedom and rest, enabling you to be a refreshing witness of My peace and reconciliation before a watching world."

## The Power

So how do we live this out? The principle is clear, but the power is not in me. We should be very grateful for how the Holy Spirit inspires Peter to write this. He's showing us this is not merely a rule we need to keep; it's a gift of grace we need to receive. It's a miracle of mercy we need to experience and there's a way to position ourselves so we're staying close to the streams of mercy so that we can receive the power we need to live this way, which is found in verse 19—a phrase I have left out.

To endure unjust suffering, we must cultivate a constant consciousness of God. The power to not only endure, but to triumph when we are suffering from the unjust actions of others comes from being mindful of God. We see that in verse 19: *“If, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly.”* Or, *“For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows from suffering unjustly”* (ESV).

This is where the streams of mercy flow—they're in God. And when we are conscious of Him, mindful of Him, we are positioning ourselves, humbling ourselves, to drink from those streams of mercy. Being conscious of God enables us to respond graciously to unjust suffering—not with retaliation, not with slander, not with bitterness, but with endurance, respect and blessing.

So what does it mean to be “conscious of God”? Well, it means not to forget Him. It means you're not dealing with the situation as if it's just about you and the person who sinned against you, or that it's just about you against the system, or you against the world. No, you include God in your thoughts. You're just as aware of God and His presence, promises and power to help you as you are aware of the problem and pain you're going through.

In fact, you're more aware of God than you are of the problem and your grief. You look to Him in your grief and sorrow, inviting Him to work on your heart. You seek His strength, wisdom and intervention, asking His blessing on the person who's treating you wrongly and praying for His grace to be poured out in their life.

This call to endure unjust suffering is not just a call to stoic self-sufficiency. “I'm just going to grit my teeth and get through this.” Nor is it saying to be a doormat. In some relationships, when you're treated unjustly—and there's no repentance on the part of the person who's doing the unjust treatment—there does need to be consequences. Peter is not suggesting that an abuser can keep on abusing you or your children, so you just need to put up with it. He is saying that how we respond in these situations of unjust suffering will be radically shaped by what's going on in our minds and our hearts in relationship to God.

What are your thoughts like toward God? How are you being mindful of Him? Are you thinking about God as much as you're thinking about the person who's mistreating you? Are you including Him as the invisible but all-powerful Mediator Who is with you in this fiery furnace, upholding you through this flood of grief? Are you running to Him as your refuge and strength, a helper Who can be found right now in this time of trouble? Are you standing on those very great and precious promises of His Word, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires (2 Peter 1:4)?

You see, you will be enabled and empowered to endure unjust suffering when you've got God in the picture. When you're gazing at God, it's easier to just glance at your circumstances and not get too distracted by them. You'll be seeing things in God that will enable you to patiently endure without getting bitter, without wanting to strike back.

Kate and I are no different from you. We carry burdens. We experience hurts. This year we've been helped by a song we started hearing back in January. It goes like this:

You are here moving in our midst  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here working in this place  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are here  
Touching every heart  
Healing every heart  
Mending every heart  
Turning lives around  
I worship You, I worship You  
You are way-maker  
Miracle worker  
Promise keeper  
Light in the darkness  
My God, that is Who you are

[From "Way Maker" by Sinach]

Kate told me she when goes out on walks, she keeps singing this song to the Lord. If we hold on to these truths, we will not dwell on how we're being treated wrong, but instead we'll look at how God is at work to sanctify our souls, comfort us and get things done through this unjust suffering that will bring glory to Him and good to us.

So when you're being treated wrongly, you've got to bend low where the streams of mercy flow and drink deeply from the wells of God's mercy. You've got to stay mindful of God

and cultivate a constant consciousness of Him. But how do you do that practically? How do you live this out in the daily grind when it's really intense?

I could tell you stories about people like Corrie ten Boom, who stretched out her hand to extend forgiveness to the Nazi officer who killed her sister. Or Elisabeth Elliot, who went back to Ecuador to preach the gospel to the Auca tribe who killed her husband. But wouldn't it be even better if I told you what motivated these women? They would tell us they were just mere mortals like us, who would have been wrecked by the wrongs that were done to them, if they did not arrest their gaze and fix it on the One Who saved them. They tell us, "Don't look at us. Turn your eyes on Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face." That's what Peter does so beautifully in this passage. He helps us put this teaching into practice by riveting our attention on Christ. So let's look at the practice of enduring unjust suffering.

## The Practice of Enduring Unjust Suffering

Peter is going to give us three practical directions to put this radical, out-of-this-world teaching into practice here in the daily grind of this world. I want to acknowledge that I've gotten help from Mike Bullmore in the way I'm framing these directions.

1. Cultivate a consciousness of God by following the example of Christ. Look at verses 21-23 again and notice what Jesus did not do. As Peter speaks these words, he's absorbed in Isaiah 53, focusing on the humiliation of Christ, the Servant of God, and then on His subsequent exaltation. This is the pattern of Christ's life. He was humbled, then He was exalted—and that's the pattern of Christ's disciples. Humble yourself, then He will exalt you in due time (James 4:10).

Notice what He did not do. In His humility, "*He did not commit sin*" (1 Peter 2:22). Put that together with verse 21: "*You were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*" You should imitate His example. In His humility, Christ never sinned in response to the unjust suffering that was heaped on Him.

"*No deceit was found in his mouth,*" we read in verse 22. In other words, He never said anything that would betray His allegiance to God. "*When He was insulted,*" verse 23, "*he did not insult in return.*" How hard is that when you know what it feels like to be insulted. You can just feel the heat rising in your chest, into your face and on to your tongue. It's burning to say something insulting in response. Not only did Jesus not do that—He did not desire to do that. He desired to bless and forgive. "*When he suffered, he did not threaten.*"

Sometimes when we suffer and we know we can't really get back at the person for what they did, we sometimes just say, "You just wait. You're going to get yours," because we at least want them to be afraid that someday you're going to get back at them. Instead, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." It's what He did not do. He did not sin.

But notice what He did do at the end of verse 23. He "*entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.*" Here is where Jesus found the power to respond so righteously, so lovingly, to those who abused Him so mercilessly. And He didn't just do it once. He did it over and over again. He kept entrusting Himself—and not just Himself, but the whole situation, every aspect of it—into the hands of the One Who judges justly.

That's the example Peter says we're called to follow. Those are the footsteps he wants us walking in. It's not saying that justice doesn't matter; it's saying, "God, I'm putting my confidence in You because You know how to set all wrongs right and You will do so in the end. You see everything clearly, much more clearly than I do. You know the wrongs that have been done against me. You know what needs adjustment in my own heart. I'm trusting You that no one is going to get away with anything, because You are the righteous Judge of all the earth and You will make Your perfect justice known.

"God, You know this situation. You see it. I don't want to carry this burden of resentment or revenge. I don't want to try to sort out everyone's motives. I don't want to seethe in self-pity or self-righteousness. I want to entrust this all to You, knowing You will settle it in a perfectly just way."

That's the first way to practice mindfulness of God: follow the example of Christ.

2. Cultivate a consciousness of God by relying on the accomplishment of Christ. Verse 24 is pure gospel gold: "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*" Jesus trusted God that every sin in God's universe will be punished and justice will be served for all the evil that's been done. If verse 23 is saying justice will be served, then verse 24 is telling us, "Don't forget that this applies to you as well."

God has reserved two places where His justice can be satisfied, where it can be fully avenged in a satisfying way. The first is at the cross of Jesus, and the second is in an eternal hell. Peter is saying to us, "Praise God that He has provided a way for justice to be served that doesn't require you to go to hell to pay the penalty for your sins, because Jesus himself bore our sins in His body on the tree."

It so hard for us not to retaliate against those who sin against us. Someone put it like this: “It’s hard, because as sinners, we are prejudiced to hate other people’s sins more than our own.” That’s true. You have heard it said, “Love the sinner but hate the sin.” “Far better,” says Rosaria Butterfield, “to love the sinner and to hate your own sin.” When you realize what your sin cost Jesus, it starts to melt your heart so that you’re far less inclined to strike back at those who sin against you. You’re so amazed and realize that:

My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought  
My sin, not in part, but the whole  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul

[From “It is Well With My Soul” by Horatio Spafford]

Do you realize what it means that He bore our sins? It means God considered our sin to be His sin. God took our sin and credited it to Jesus and brought the punishment our sins deserved and unleashed it without restraint on His Son, the Son of His eternal love. Because Jesus was one with the Father—completely holy and without sin—and at the same time one with us and truly human, He was able to stand in our place as our substitute and endure unjust suffering from sinful men like us, so that the just punishment of a holy God could be absorbed by Him instead of us. That’s the gospel.

So if you are a Christian, or if you’re about to become a Christian today, or if you will become a Christian at some point in the future, He was doing all that for you. When this message of salvation breaks into your heart through the power of the Spirit, something powerful happens. You die to sin. Its power to rule your life is broken, so that you might now live to righteousness. By His wounds you are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

You are healed by His wounds from the wounds of sins—both the sins you’ve done and the sins that have been done against you—and you’re liberated now to walk in a path of freedom, a path that does not require you to retaliate when other people treat you wrongly, but enables you instead to put it in the hands of God, Who has been so gracious and so merciful to you, in hopes that He will do the same for those who are hurting you. “*By his wounds you have been healed,*” because you’re relying on the accomplishment of Jesus on the cross for you.

3. Cultivate a consciousness of God by resting under the shepherding and guarding of Christ. Peter is very interesting. Every time he brings up the cross of Jesus, he never stops there. He always moves on to the life of Jesus—His resurrection life. He tells us in verse 25,

“Here’s what happened when you turned to Christ and trusted in Him.” *“For you were like sheep going astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*

In other words, you have a Shepherd Who is alive to care for you and watch over you. There’s not one square inch of your life that He is not intimately acquainted with. There is not a single split second of your existence that He has not overseen and that He is not going to account for. He is protecting you and caring for you through it all. He’s providing for you. As a good Shepherd, He notices when you’re straying and He’s not going to let you stray for long. He’ll bring you back again and again.

Not only does He shepherd you, He guards you. As Peter said back in 1 Peter 1:5, He’s guarding you *“by God’s power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”* Now here in chapter two, we see Who that Guardian is. It’s our good Shepherd Who laid down His life for us, Who bore our sins in His body on the tree, Who’s overseeing every single bit of our life, including the unjust treatment we’ve received.

He’s caring for you so well and guarding you through it all, so that instead of retaliating, instead of becoming bitter, you can entrust yourself to the One Who judges justly. You can rely on the forgiveness and freedom you received through His death on your behalf and you can now rest under His shepherding care, knowing that He’s working through the pain and injustice, not only to bring glory to Himself but everlasting good and joy to you.

It’s not easy, but it’s comforting to remember that no matter what we are facing, there is a way to live like a Christian. There is a way to lay your head on the pillow at night and say, “God, I entrust myself to You today and all that’s happened today,” then you’ll hear Him say, “Well done, My son. I’m pleased with you, My daughter.”

Our ability to live like Christians is not controlled by our circumstances. It’s empowered by the example of Christ’s life, by the accomplishment of Christ’s sufferings and through the constant care of Christ’s shepherding and guardianship of our lives. This way of life is not a tightrope that you’ve got to get just right. It’s a path. He’s leading you on a path of righteousness for His name’s sake, a path where there’s room to breathe, a path where there’s freedom and joy, where He restores our weary souls.

Let’s pray together.

Lord Jesus, we trust You with all that’s happening to us. We don’t need to inform You what’s going on in our lives; You already know. We can cast our burdens on You with the sweet knowledge that You care for us. We pray for our brothers and sisters who are going through

intense and prolonged suffering—unjust suffering—for Your persecuted church around the world.

O God, we pray for our people in New Covenant who are experiencing this in very intense ways right now. We pray for spouses who are going through this in their marriage. We pray for parents whose children do not appreciate or respect them right now; for children whose parents are not being mindful of God in the way they treat their kids. Lord, we pray for us in workplaces where we're really being treated poorly because of our integrity.

God, in all these situations, we pray that You would draw near in Your gentleness, tenderness and strength. Show us Your wounds by which we are healed. Help us to hope in that day when You will return and set all wrongs right and make all sad things come untrue. Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus, we pray in Your name. Amen.

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## New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ [www.newcbc.org](http://www.newcbc.org)

*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

Text provided by sermontranscribers.com ♦ [emily@sermontranscribers.com](mailto:emily@sermontranscribers.com)