

1 Peter

Week 5: Following Christ in Suffering -- 1 Peter 2:18–25

Almost everyone knows what it is to be treated unfairly. A boss takes credit for your work. A person in authority misuses it. You do the right thing and get punished for it anyway. Something rises up in us at moments like these, a hot sense that this is not how it should be, and a host of instincts about what to do: defend yourself, even the score, walk away, let them have a piece of your mind. We are wired to resist injustice, and much of the time that instinct is good.

Peter writes into exactly this raw nerve, and he writes to people whose unfair treatment was far more serious than ours usually is. Many of his first readers were household servants, slaves with little legal protection, sometimes serving masters who were harsh and cruel. Peter does not pretend their suffering is small, and he does not bless the injustice itself. But he says something that cuts against every natural instinct: when you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, “this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.” There is a way of bearing unjust suffering that is actually beautiful to God.

And then Peter lifts our eyes to the only place such a calling could possibly come from. He points us to Jesus. “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.” Here is the heart of the passage. When Jesus was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” The Lord of glory, treated as a criminal, absorbed the injustice and handed Himself over to the Father.

But Peter will not let us reduce the cross to a mere example of patience, as if Jesus only showed us how to suffer well. He says far more: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.” The very suffering we are called to imitate was, at its center, a suffering we could never imitate, because on that tree Jesus was doing for us what only He could do, carrying our sins, healing us by His wounds, bringing us back like wandering sheep to the Shepherd of our souls. So read this passage carefully. It will ask hard things of you about how you bear unfair treatment. But it will first take you to a hill where the only truly innocent Sufferer in history bled for you.

Group Discussion: Peter says that patiently enduring unjust suffering for doing good “is a gracious thing in the sight of God” (vv. 19–20). This runs against every instinct to defend ourselves and even the score. Why is this so hard, and what would change in our homes, workplaces, and church if more of us actually lived this way?

Personal Reflection: Peter says that when Christ “was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (v. 23). Think of a specific situation where you have been treated unfairly. How did you respond, and what would it look like to entrust that situation to God rather than retaliate or stew over it?

Study Questions

1. Peter says that to endure unjust suffering for doing good “is a gracious thing in the sight of God,” and that “to this you have been called” (vv. 19–21). What does it teach us about God and the Christian life that bearing unjust suffering patiently is something He calls us to and finds gracious?
2. Peter distinguishes between suffering for doing wrong and suffering for doing good (v. 20). When you face hardship or criticism, how good are you at telling the difference between deserved consequences and unjust suffering? Where might you be calling something “persecution” when it is really the result of your own fault?
3. Peter says that Christ “left you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (v. 21), and describes how Jesus responded to suffering (vv. 22–23). In what sense is the suffering of Christ an example for us, and what are the specific steps Peter calls us to follow?
4. Peter says that when Jesus was reviled, “he did not revile in return” (v. 23). Reviling, returning insult for insult, is one of the easiest sins to excuse. Where are you most tempted to fire back with sharp words, sarcasm, or retaliation? What would following in Jesus’ steps look like there?
5. Peter says Jesus “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (v. 23). What does it mean to entrust ourselves to God as the just Judge, and how does confidence in God’s perfect justice free us from the need to avenge ourselves?
6. Jesus did not threaten or retaliate but handed His cause over to the Father (v. 23). When you are wronged, do you tend to nurse the grievance, plot how to even the score, or replay it endlessly? What would it actually look like, this week, to entrust a specific wrong to the God who judges justly?
7. At the center of the passage Peter declares, “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” (v. 24). What does this teach about what Jesus actually accomplished on the cross, and why is it essential that His suffering was far more than an example for us to copy?
8. Peter says Christ bore our sins “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (v. 24). The cross was not only to forgive us but to change us. Where in your life are you still living to sin rather than to righteousness, treating the cross as a pardon but not as a power for new life?
9. Peter ends, “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (v. 25). What does this image of straying sheep returning to their Shepherd teach about our condition apart from Christ and about who Jesus is to His people now?
10. Look back across the whole passage. Peter calls us to endure unjust suffering as Christ did, points us to the cross where Jesus bore our sins, and names Him the Shepherd of our souls. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Peter 2:18–25 you most need to carry into this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 53:4–9, the suffering Servant who bore our griefs and was wounded for our transgressions; Romans 12:17–21, never repaying evil for evil but leaving room for God's justice; Luke 23:34, Jesus praying for those who crucified Him; 2 Corinthians 5:21, Christ made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness; Hebrews 12:3, considering Christ who endured hostility so we do not grow weary