

The Shepherd of our Souls

1 Peter 2:18-25

Preface: A Quick Review

The theme of the entire epistle is one of trust and obedience. It seems to be Peter's methodology that before there can be any mature sense of trust and obedience there must be a mature understanding of God and the things of God. Therefore, Peter's first twelve verses are a doctrinal treatise which contains the subjects of election, sanctification, law, gospel, regeneration, the resurrection, eschatology, perseverance of the saints, faith, prophecy, and the new covenant.

In verses thirteen through seventeen Peter gives us what, by the grace of God, our response should be to this knowledge which is to seek to live a life of holiness.

In verse 18 of chapter one he quickly moves back to his theology lesson focusing in on redemption, the sacrificial blood of Christ and, once again, the resurrection which is the source of our faith and hope.

In verse twenty-two Peter, once again, calls Christians to holiness, specifically the love of each other. As those who have been born again, Peter tells us, this should be the fruit of our new lives.

The glory of man, Peter indicates in verse twenty-four, is like the flowers and grass that wither away. But the word of God which was preached to Christians endures forever.

The very deep teaching of chapter one brings Peter, in chapter two, to once again call his readers to holiness. By virtue of the high price paid and their high calling, Christians are to lay aside malice, deception, hypocrisy, envy, evil speaking, etc.

Verse two tells us we are to desire the pure milk of the word for growth.

In verses four and five of chapter two Peter tells us how we are to view ourselves – as living stones coming to the living stone who is Christ. Christians are to view themselves as a living temple whose cornerstone is Christ.

Peter teaches in verse six that those who believe in Jesus will by no means be put to shame.

In verse seven Peter teaches that the nation of Israel rejected the stone, which is Christ, then rapidly goes on to assign to those who believe in Jesus (Jew and gentile alike), all the most holy designations of the old covenant, i.e. chosen, priesthood, holy nation, special people.

In fact verse eight indicates that it was by God's ordination that the disobedience of the nation of Israel would take place whereby which the gospel would go out into the entire world thus fulfilling God's covenant with Abraham.

In verse eleven of chapter two Peter again calls his readers to holiness. He tells us to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against our soul. He tells us to have good conduct among the unbelievers that we might evangelize them to Christ. We should therefore submit and give honor to governing authorities and be law-abiding. The job of the government is to punish evil doers and praise those who do good.

Finally Peter tells us that we are genuinely free but that we shouldn't use our freedom in Christ as a license of sin and selfishness. This brings us up to date. Moving from our responsibilities as citizens Peter now addresses more personal relationships.

I. Submitting to the Harsh

“Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh” (1 Peter 2:18).

All Authority is from God

Peter now brings before us the relationship between the master of a house and the domestic servant. The historical context found many Christians in this situation but I think that it is safe to assume that Peter is calling for a specific disposition of all Christians who find themselves under an authority figure. We have already established that all authority comes from God and everybody in an authority position, whether good or evil, is in that position by the ordination of God. We must also recognize that God uses even the evil choices and actions of sinful men to accomplish His holy and divine purpose. It is in the context of this thinking that Peter is able to continue his challenge.

Question Authority

A well-known bumper sticker reads, “Question Authority”. A friend of mine who is a police officer has a tee-shirt which counters this bumper sticker. It has a picture of two policeman behind the open doors of their squad car holding weapons fixed on their suspect. Underneath is reads “Never Question Authority”. I suspect both of these slogans can and are miss-used. But because God has established all authority men should have a sense of godly fear the face of that authority.

Paul and David

Even the apostle Paul (Acts 23), when he was unlawfully struck at the command of Ananias and blurted out “God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall!” started back-pedaling when he found out it was the high priest he was criticizing. David's disposition toward Saul, even though Saul had become an apostate, ungodly king, was one of reverence and respect since Saul was God's anointed.

There is no doubt times when the authority of God's word overrules the authorities he has placed over us and we must then submit to the higher authority. But if all authority comes from God (Romans 13), we should, as Peter says, conduct ourselves in submission and reverent fear. The people in authority over us must sense at the get-go that we acknowledge their position of authority and respect it as coming from God Himself.

Skolios

And it is not merely to the authorities who have won our affection, or who we like, but to those who are harsh or crooked (the Greek is skolios – like a crooked spine). Frankly it is easy to submit to a good and gentle leader. Of course leaders should seek to be good and gentle but it is not a prerequisite for submission. Peter goes on to explain God's disposition toward or behavior in this matter.

II. Commendable Behavior

“For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully” (1 Peter 2:19).

Exhibiting the Grace of Christ

This word ‘commendable’ is really the word ‘charis’ or grace. Perhaps it is a sign of grace in your life. Or perhaps it is a behavior approved by God (most likely both). If, because of your desire to do right in the eyes of God, you patiently endure grief and suffering by those in authority over you, it shows that you are beginning to grasp what it means to exhibit the grace of Christ in your life. It also shows that you, with a mind toward God, are trusting that this, or anything else, won't escape His attention and eventual reckoning. You may be asking yourself, “How much do I have to allow myself to be abused? Am I to be a victim and a doormat?”

What Do You Put Up With?

The best answer to that is the example of Christ Himself, which Peter will get to shortly. In a certain sense Jesus was the ultimate victim and became our doormat into heaven. Jesus willingly became a servant to the point of death. But there was something Jesus wouldn't put up with and it didn't really have anything to do with His own sense of being a victim or a doormat. When Jesus discerned that His Father in heaven was being dishonored, as in the temple and generally and usually among the Pharisees, He had no tolerance for that.

Ultimately it gets down to a type lawlessness on the part of the person in authority. If my authority figure desires that I engage in and give approval to unlawful, ungodly and disgraceful behavior my Father in heaven is impugned. It has very little to do with the intensity of the abuse versus the object of the abuse. Ultimately we must evaluate whether or not the grief I am not enduring is an example of the kind of grief Jesus endured. It is not right to always be complacent. When Paul was about to be scourged (Acts 22) he sought to avoid it by appealing to his rights as a Roman citizen. I must also note that not less than eight times Paul was beaten and regarded his beatings as his ministry for Christ (2 Corinthians 11).

III. Just & Unjust Suffering

“For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God” (1 Peter 2:20).

Second Infraction

It is only unjust suffering that is commendable before God. Herein lies the difficulty. If you find yourself under someone who is harsh and crooked it will likely bring out the worst in you. Your faults will come to the surface and then you will suffer, not as one innocent (though you might have been innocent in the beginning) but as one who is now at fault. In sporting events it is very natural for the athlete who commits the second infraction to be penalized. A basketball player (say Dennis Rodman) can really get under somebody’s skin and finally push that person to react. It is the reaction that the referee normally sees hence the whistle blows and the penalty assessed.

Do Not React

It is a greater sign of grace before God for us never to allow ourselves to commit that second infraction. We are not to react. We are not to allow people or events to determine or undermine our behavior. We are to be steady. We are to be gracious to all.

IV. The Example of Christ

“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:” (1 Peter 2:21).

Enduring Sinners

It is to this situation and behavior that we are called – the example of Christ. Paul said that he desired to know the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings (Philippians 3:10). Jesus patiently suffered for sinful man (which included us.) We are to imitate that as we patiently endure the sufferings of sinful men as well. Peter calls us to exam the resolve of Christ, the righteous one Himself, when He came face to face with the depravity of man.

“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; ²³ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten” (1 Peter 22,23).

No Retaliation

Though Jesus was sinned against, He committed no sin; though He was lied to and lied about, He did not deceive; though He was railed at and abuse was heaped upon Him

He did not revile in return; though He suffered He did not threaten or in any way seek to menace His detractors. Being the only truly innocent man who ever lived Jesus was the victim of the epitome of injustice. If anyone had the right to feel violated it was Jesus. But He simply would not allow the behavior of sinful humanity to modify His conduct. But Jesus did not do this with the sense that there would be no justice or reckoning. Peter reveals the resolve of Jesus, which should be ours as well.

The Resolve of Jesus

“...but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 22b)

I think the comment of Wayne Grudem here is worth repeating.

“It is important to note that Peter here commends neither the supposed therapeutic value of expressing one’s anger when wronged, nor merely holding the anger in and trying to suppress it (both are self-dependent solutions), but rather repeatedly and continually committing the situation into God’s hands.”¹

Jesus committed Himself (or put Himself in the hands of) His Father who will bring every action to justice. Man cannot sin with impunity. There will be a reckoning. God may do this in history through His minister of vengeance, i.e., the governing authorities (Romans 13). But we most assuredly know that He will hold His holy tribunal in heaven where every knee will bow and tongue confess.

With the Gospel in Mind

“...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:24-25).

And lest we view ourselves as innocent victims Peter reminds us, as we should be often reminded, that being crooked ourselves Jesus bore our sins in His own body. In verse twenty-four we see the gospel. Jesus bore our sins on the cross. As we wrestle through life and consider whatever status we may have as victims and the recipients of suffering, let us never stray too far from this reality. That there is one who judges righteously and that Jesus took that judgment in our stead. And having been baptized into Christ and His death and being delivered from the dominion of sin we are to walk in newness of life.

¹ Grudem’s Commentary on 1 Peter, pp. 130-131.

But for the Grace of God

In order for us to properly respond to hardships let us remember that we, like sheep were going astray, but now, by the grace of God have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. He leads us and watches over us. And not only our outward circumstances but our very souls. Let us never forget that the only reason the evil is done to us and we are not the doer of the evil is the grace of God Himself. Let us never forget from where all our righteousness comes. Before the piercing eyes of God on judgment day my righteousness is the clothing of the blood of my Savior. But also in my life today my righteousness, or any good found in me, is by grace as well. If I might finish the words of Augustine:

What shall I render unto the Lord, that, whilst my memory recalls these things, my soul is not affrighted at them? I will love Thee, O Lord, and thank Thee, and confess unto Thy name; because Thou hast forgiven me these so great and heinous deeds of mine. To Thy grace I ascribe it, and to Thy mercy, that Thou hast melted away my sins as it were ice. To Thy grace I ascribe also whatsoever I have not done of evil; for what might I not have done, who even loved a sin for its own sake? Yea, all I confess to have been forgiven me; both what evils I committed by my own wilfulness, and what by Thy guidance I committed not. What man is he, who, weighing his own infirmity, dares to ascribe his purity and innocency to his own strength; that so he should love Thee the less, as if he had less needed Thy mercy, whereby Thou remittest sins to those that turn to Thee?²

² The Confessions of St. Augustine, Chapter 7.