

Christ our Example

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now together to 1 Peter and chapter 2, the first letter of Peter, chapter 2. We finished last time at verse 17, so we'll read from verse 18 down to verse 23.

1 Peter, chapter 3, verses 18 to 23. Verse 23.

How important Christian conduct is, especially in terms of public Christian conduct, how important it is that our conduct in public, as well as in private, obviously, but in public particularly, how Christian conduct is so important.

It's connected to two things that we saw Peter actually in that passage connecting it to. Firstly, it's obviously connected to the honor of God, but it's also connected with the effectiveness of the gospel.

Because it's only as we live out the gospel message in a way that is consistent, in a way that is consistent with God's standard, it's only by that that the gospel is commended.

[2 : 14] So that if we're very obviously contrary to that, although obviously we will be to some extent at all times, none of us is perfect by any means. But as we seek to live consistently for Christ, we're assured that that is taken note of by God.

This is a gracious thing in the sight of God, it says here in verse 20. And that consistency of conduct publicly not only honors God, but commends the gospel as God's message of salvation to the world.

Now we've seen that subjection is one of the threads that runs through this passage. Be subject, he says in verse 13, for the Lord's sake to every human institution.

It begins with the emperor and then to governors and so on. We saw that last time. We're not going to repeat it, but that emphasis on subjection now runs into this passage too, verse 18, 7. Be subject, be in subjection to your own masters with all respect.

And this is not only to the good and the gentle, but also to the unjust. That's where he then comes to draw from that reference how even in these circumstances, those who are under the employment of others, and as we'll see in a minute, they were actually slaves in these households at the time, they still need to act in a way that's consistent and obedient to God and actually takes account of the fact that they are under the authority.

[3 : 44] of their masters. And therefore, they have to be in subjection to them. And that that is, in fact, something which God himself takes account of.

And then verses 19 to 20, Peter sets out what we'll call a principle of conduct, principle that applies to every Christian life, but that he's setting out here very much in terms of suffering unjustly.

We'll expand on that in a minute, but that's really what he's saying out as the principle. Suffering unjustly, or if you like, suffering in doing good, as he says in verse 20.

That, he says is commendable in the sight of God. And that's what God takes note of, and it's the consistency of conduct in that context that Peter is actually dealing with.

So let's look at the principle of conduct that's set out. Just trying to open it up a bit more. And then we'll look at the principle itself as it was practiced by Christ, as it was found and as it is seen in the life which Christ lived, the perfect life which Jesus himself lived while in this world.

[5 : 00] So the principle itself, and then how that was seen in the perfect life, or how it was performed or practiced perfectly by Jesus, because what he's saying is, this is our example, the life that Christ himself showed and has set before us now in the gospel.

Well, he says in the principle, first of all, servants be subject to your own masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.

Now, servants is really a word which translates slaves. Slavery was very common in the days of the apostles. But we mustn't actually take our idea of slavery from the 19th century abuses, which in the abuse of human beings, in transporting them from Africa to America or to this nation, wherever it was, and the horrible conditions in which slaves were then kept.

You mustn't take your idea of slavery in the New Testament from that 19th century example of slavery. Indeed, slavery in the days of the apostles meant that those who were slaves in these households were employed in a way that was involuntary.

It wasn't that they could choose or not choose that way of life. They were employed in a way that gave service involuntarily under the authority and the direction of the master of the household.

[6 : 35] But the thing is, many of these slaves were actually what you would call nowadays professional people. And yes, there was some abuse, but by and large, slaves were actually treated very well in Roman times, in the times of the Roman Empire.

And in fact, it was a principle of the Roman Empire that slaves could work towards their freedom and buying their freedom if possible. So slaves were people like teachers, for example, household managers, skilled tradesmen.

They were all regarded as slaves, but nevertheless, they would be seen nowadays as professional people and by and large were treated well. But Peter was obviously aware that some of those who were Christians, and perhaps because they had been converted and come to know Christ and were seeking to live a Christian lifestyle in a pagan household, he's aware of the fact that they would sometimes be treated dishonorably.

And that would sometimes be physically, but very often it would be financial, by withholding wages, by not giving them what they were due, various ways in which mistreatment was actually carried out.

But he's saying here, nevertheless, be subject to your own masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust. So what's the principle that Peter is extracting from that situation that then applies to our lives as Christians in every generation?

[8 : 16] Well, it's this. He says there in verse 20, What credit is it if you sin and are beaten for it? You endure. But if you do good and suffer for it, you endure.

This is a gracious thing in the sight of God. In other words, Peter is not saying, if you do something wrong and you suffer for it, well, you deserve that. There's nothing commendable in that.

That's not what he's talking about. That's not what he's addressing. What he's addressing is that people who are actually suffering under unjust employers, who are actually enduring sorrows while suffering unjustly, in verse 19 or in verse 20, who are doing good and suffering for it, that's what he's addressing.

What do you then do if you've done good, if you're trying to do your very best, if what you're doing is right in the sight of God and you're still suffering for it because you're persecuted or you're treated wrongfully, what do you do as a Christian?

How do you respond to that? What is Peter saying to these people in that very context? What he's saying, you do what Jesus did. You follow the example that Jesus himself set.

[9 : 29] You actually be subject to your own masters with all respect, and you accept the fact that this is what God actually sees as a gracious thing in his sight, a commendable thing in his sight, that if you do good and suffer for it.

Now that happens to many Christians today, and you don't have to go out with our own locality to find Christians doing good and yet suffering for it, being treated spitefully, being treated by whatever mechanism or means is open to people today to do that, and there are far more means available, many more means available than were available in Peter's day to denigrate people, to misrepresent people, to tell lies about people, and sometimes without even them having a recourse to correct that.

What do you do in that context? Do you retaliate? Because that's our basic human inclination, isn't it? That you get your own back.

That you actually respond in kind to those who are actually doing this to you. If you're here tonight and you're seeking to live your life faithfully for Jesus, and you know that despite doing good for some people or to some people, you're still treated in a way that's not right, what do you do about it?

Do you retaliate? Do you turn your back on that and just say, well, that's it. I'm not going to deal anymore with that sort of thing. I'm going to give up trying to do good. No. Peter says, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

[11 : 08] This is the principle that God is looking at if you actually suffer while doing good. But you see, he's not just saying you just put up with it stoically.

You just go on living your life as a Christian and you just steal yourself against it and you just say, well, I've got to do what I'm doing and I just have to go on with it.

That's just stealing yourself against it and trying stoically, as usually the word is, to actually just get on with living the Christian life as you want to. You notice a phrase here that's very important.

And it's this. In verse 19, this is a gracious thing. When mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

Now that phrase makes all the difference. Mindful of God. In other words, he's saying to these people who are suffering in their employment, who are being treated wrongfully, who are doing good and suffering for it as Christians, that they go on in their Christian life mindful of God.

[12 : 18] He's not asking them to do something detached from their knowledge of God. Mindful of God means, among other things, conscious of God's presence and care and promises.

That is the key, Peter is saying, to suffering wrongfully even while doing good. The key to it and the key to the kind of behavior as we'll see in the example of Jesus is in fact being mindful of God.

What did Jesus do? He committed himself to the one who judges justly. That was God his Father. And what Peter is saying here to us, if we're suffering as Christians, suffering wrongfully, suffering while doing good, suffering unjustly, be mindful of God.

And being mindful of God, live the life that God would have you to live. In other words, remember that God's care and God's presence is sometimes very much more real during your times of suffering than other times.

And God's presence is more precious at times of pressure and testing and persecution and denigration than at any other time in your Christian experience.

[13 : 42] And of course, there's something else too in being mindful of God. Being mindful of God if you endure sorrows while suffering justly means that you're conscious of this fact that God is ultimately going to right all wrongs.

God is ultimately going to right all wrongs. That's what the world forgets. That's what the world dismisses. That's why the world wants to dismiss God from their thoughts. Because the thought of judgment, the thought of God putting every wrong right, the thought of God actually dealing with every human being in a way that will be just, in a way that corresponds to the life we've lived, to how we've treated others, that doesn't sit easily with our human conscience.

And that's why we find many people choose really to dismiss the idea of God from their reckoning and from their plans and from their future and from what they envisage.

But Peter is saying, you Christians, he's saying, in these circumstances, mindful of God, mindful that God will indeed put everything right ultimately and correct all wrongs and make everything clear.

And you know, that's how we actually, in the church, and particularly those who are office bearers in the church, I'm not saying this just because new office bearers have been elected by the congregation, though that's relevant.

[15 : 15] What do you do when you actually come across a decision that you disagree with and that you disagree with deeply? A decision by the church which you reckon to have been untrue to the word of God.

Well, you take it through the courts of the church, you take it through, if it starts at cook session, you take it through, if you need to, to the next level of the presbytery, and then you take it up to the level of the general assembly.

What if the general assembly disagrees with you? What do you do? You dissent and appeal to the head of the church. What does that mean?

What happens if you see somebody at the assembly saying, I can't agree with that, I believe that that is contrary to the word of God, so I'm actually saying I dissent from the decision, I'm protecting myself from any consequences, and I'm appealing to the head of the church.

What does it mean? It means you're saying, Christ Jesus knows the truth, and if I'm wrong, he'll make that clear on the day of judgment, and if I'm right, he'll make that clear too, but I leave it with him.

[16 : 21] That's the logic of dissent, that's the logic of an appeal to Jesus as the head of the church. Well, he's saying, in a lesser sense, he's saying here to these Christians, Peter is saying to them, this is the principle, if you're suffering unjustly, you're mindful of God in doing so.

You're mindful that God has given promises to look after his people, and they are particularly appropriate in times of persecution and distress. And the key to how to endure that suffering, to go on living the Christian life consistently, is being mindful of God and realizing that God will ultimately right all wrongs.

you see, nobody, and I mean nobody, escapes justice ultimately. The people who have committed the most atrocious crimes in this world may think that during the course of their life or through something they've done to end their life, that that's them beyond justice.

they've escaped retribution. But that's only if you don't believe in the last judgment, if you dismiss God from the picture, if you don't believe in a final arbitration, where we must all, as Paul says to the Corinthian church, where we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that we may all receive the things done in this body, whether it be good or bad or evil.

That's what he's saying. We must all appear. Every Christian, every person who's not a Christian, every pagan, every person who's lived consistently for Christ, they must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, but the outcome of the judgment will be vastly different.

[18 : 20] In the one case, it'll be a verdict and a pronouncement of righteousness before God, and on the other hand, a pronouncement of condemnation forever, away from the presence of the judge.

And that's something too awful for any of us to contemplate would be true of ourselves. There's the principle of conduct then.

If you do good and suffer for it, and being mindful of God, that is the key to how to approach it. But then you see, he opens up further on that point by giving us the principle as practiced by Christ.

What he says in verse 20, for to this, verse 21, for to this you have been called. And this means exactly what he said in the previous verse.

If when you do good and suffer for it, you endure. This is a gracious thing. For to this, to this situation, to this lifestyle, you have been called.

[19 : 27] Because Christ has suffered leaving you an example. Now just be mindful too of the way that Peter has changed his view so drastically, so comprehensively, because you remember when we studied the life of Peter, one of the episodes we looked at is in Matthew chapter 16, where Jesus came to Peter and the disciples there, and he said to them, it was necessary for him to go up to Jerusalem, and there he would be mistreated by the scribes, by the Pharisees, and the elders, and he would put to death, and he would rise again on the third day.

And you remember it was Peter, the man who wrote this letter, who said very, very, to Peter, he said to the Lord in a very strong and uncompromising way, said, Lord, this is not going to happen to you.

Put it away from you. Let this depart from you. Put this out of your mind. This is not going to happen to you. Really as if he was saying, which is really what was in his mind, that kind of suffering does not belong in your life, Lord.

This shall not happen to you. What is he saying now? He's saying that Christ suffered for us, leaving an example that we might follow in his steps.

I love the way that Peter has learned so much subsequently from his Lord, but especially since his Lord rose from the dead, met with him and others, and then ascended to glory.

[21 : 16] And the way that through the Holy Spirit, coming on the day of Pentecost, as you read in Acts chapter 2, Peter took up the leadership of the church and the preaching of the gospel to the multitudes that were there.

There is Peter, a very changed man. Not that he wasn't a believer before. Not that he wasn't a converted man before. But now he sees things so differently. And not only has he learned from that, he's learned from his own mistakes.

And that's such a telling lesson for you and for me too. When you read this kind of passage in 1 Peter and then go back to some of the things you read about as we saw in his life, when he was wrestling with these things and couldn't understand them and kept blurting out things which really weren't at all suitable to the occasion, well, here's a man who learned from his mistakes, from his lapses, and from all of these things that were out of place in his life.

May that be true of me. May it be true of you. May the mistakes we make be brought to God. And may this Jesus deal with them and with us through them in the way that you read about this man.

This is now what he's saying. For to this you've been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example. Now we're going to see, God willing, in the next study, in the final verses of the chapter, that Christ's death is far more than just an example and Christ's life, indeed, is more than just a mere example.

[22 : 46] It's also an atonement. It's an offering for sin and that's what the chapter ends by. He bore our sins in his body on the tree and that's more than just being an example.

And it's important that we keep the two things connected, but side by side. He is an example, but he's more than an example. He's an atonement. He's an offering. He's a sacrifice for our sins.

And in that, the way he approached it, he is our example. But that's the example that Peter deals with first. Leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps.

And that's such an example, isn't it, really, for us? It's a challenging example, of course, but it's also a true example. And what we want to really come to is the kind of approach and the kind of attitude that the disciples themselves had, the apostles had, in Acts chapter 5 and at verse 41.

They were there before the council. They were being threatened by the council not to teach anymore in the name of this Jesus and being threatened with dire consequences if they did.

[24 : 00] They resisted that. They said, we have to do that. That's what God has given us to do. So when they saw that they weren't going to, when the council saw they weren't going to manage to keep them silent, they beat them.

That wouldn't have been a light beating. And then you read this, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.

They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Can I say that about myself tonight? If I were to suffer real shame for the name of Jesus, if I were to be something like these people that Peter is writing to, would I say that I'm going to rejoice in that?

Something similar to what we saw in the first study, I think it was, of James in a Wednesday Bible study, counted all joy when you suffer, when you enter into various testings or temptations.

And here Peter is saying something similar, Christ left us an example that we should follow in his steps. Well it says he suffered, he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth first of all.

[25 : 17] You can see that that's how he actually was in his own character. And when it says here he left us an example. The word that he's using is a word that was used for a template or something you could trace out.

And what God has given us in the Bible, and maybe some of the young folks will understand it somewhat better with this, you probably have done, maybe adults we've done this as well, we've come to draw by numbers.

You know, the children's drawing books you get and all the numbers are there, you just have to connect up the numbers starting at one and right through to the final number and when you've connected them up with the lines you've then got your drawing of whatever it is.

You can do the same with painting, you have the numbers and the bits of the painting, you just follow the key to whichever colour of paint you put in that section, there it is, the template is given to you, you have the blueprint there, you have the pattern that you can trace out or paint.

Well that's what he's saying the Bible has given us in the example of Jesus. You trace it out, you can see it for yourself, you can actually detect or see in it or read in that the kind of life that you and I have to aim at as Christians.

[26 : 35] And he's talking especially of Jesus in unjust suffering, when he suffered unjustly. What is he saying about that unjust suffering?

Well he's saying when he was reviled he did not revile in return. When he suffered he did not threaten. He was reviled, horribly reviled.

And the nearer he got to the cross the more intense it became. You've only got to read the gospel accounts of the crucifixion and the immediate hours before the crucifixion through his trial and so on.

Right through to the crucifixion itself to see how he was reviled, how he was mocked physically with a crown of thorns on his head and a purple robe put upon him mocking the claim to be a king.

And then people throwing at him all kinds of accusations. Ah, you saved others. He can't save himself. If he came down from the cross just now we would believe in him. And that's what he was.

[27 : 49] He committed no sin. Neither was deceit in his mouth. When he was reviled he did not revile in return. When he suffered he didn't threaten. He didn't say to them when I get over this I'll make sure that you pay for this.

He didn't respond in kind. And you know it does say that all came from his own character as well. He committed no sin. Neither was deceit found in his mouth.

You often wonder don't you reading through the Gospels and the references elsewhere in the Bible to Jesus the perfect human being the perfect person. You often wonder at Mary his mother or Joseph or others in the family with him in the home.

He never uttered a wrong word. He never said something out of place. He never showed anything but respect for Mary and for Joseph as his parents.

They must have just wondered and marveled at this boy who from the youngest days committed no sin. Just imagine what kind of life that was.

[29 : 07] And all the testings that came upon him as he developed in his human life. Underneath all of these testings through these testings he never committed sin.

Never spoke a sinful word. Never thought a sinful thought. Never committed a sinful action. What an amazing person.

What a fantastic truth. He committed no sin. Neither was deceit found in his mouth yet he was reviled.

And when he was reviled he did not revile in return. When he suffered he did not threaten. He didn't revile back or threaten to get even. Now Jesus in one sense could have called on all his own superior power.

He said to Pilate in fact when he was under trial he could have called upon a whole legion of angels to come to his aid and they would have done so instantly. But he knew why he was there.

[30 : 12] He knew that he was there mindful of God. There's the connection. And that he had to suffer what he suffered for his people in their place in their stead.

And instead of retaliating instead of getting his own back instead of threatening that instead of calling upon his own superior power or the power of the angels what did he do?

He committed he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly or righteously. And that's interesting the tense there is very important.

He continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He didn't do it just now and again. He did it constantly.

He was constantly giving himself over to the judgment to the approval to the verdict of God the Father. He was leaving it in the Father's hands.

[31 : 12] And that's really where he is our example supremely. And that's where we so often fail don't we? I certainly do. when I try to follow the example of Christ and realize before I've gone very far that I'm actually taking things back into my own hands.

And the thought of retaliation the thought of getting even the thought of doing something to answer back doesn't mean that you don't respond in any way at all to when you're threatened or when you're despised or when you're persecuted.

But what we're saying is you have to do it in the way he did. You have to do it mindful of God. You have to do it in a way that commends Christ to others as well as being your own Savior.

He continued entrusting himself. In other words that's really saying to us Jesus repeatedly did this. He came up against again and again he came up against this temptation to retaliate this temptation to threaten this temptation to get even to get his own back.

he always instead committed himself to him to the Father who judges justly. And he was quite prepared even though he was the Son of God to let the Father determine who was right and who was wrong.

[32 : 35] What was right and what was not. What was just and what was unjust. What the outcome would be ultimately as well as approximately. He continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

And of course that's what you find back in verse 20 as well. What credit is it if when you endure when you sin and are beaten for it you endure but if you do good and suffer you endure.

This is gracious in the sight of God because the idea there is that you continue to do it as well. You do it repeatedly which corresponds to what he's saying here about Jesus.

He kept entrusting himself to the Father. That's a very difficult thing to do. And the whole of this passage tonight is very challenging for us all in our human lives.

But friends isn't that what the Christian life is all about? It's not meant to be an easy relaxing ride from here to heaven.

[33 : 41] what good would that be for us? It's not meant to put anyone off coming to trust in Christ. It's not meant to repel anyone from coming to trust themselves to Jesus and to live a Christian life.

It's not that at all. It's just that the Bible is always realistic and really brings before us the reality of what a Christian is and what a Christian life is like.

And if we take it at face value well that's what we come up against and that's where we look to the grace of God. That's where we're mindful of God for His constant help in living this life.

Let me just close by a quotation from one of the commentators that I consulted Wayne Grudem who has a commentary on 1 Peter in the Tyndale New Testament commentaries.

It's not a new commentary but it's a very good one although rather short. This is what he says about this passage. This knowledge that God will ultimately right all wrongs is essential to a Christian response to suffering.

[34 : 52] Committing the situation to God knowing that ultimately and he quotes from Colossians 3.25 knowing that ultimately the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done and there is no partiality.

This means that our sense of wrong suffered can be put at rest and enables us then to imitate Jesus in praying Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

Luke 23.24 and he finishes by saying we thus seek for the wrongdoers not forgiveness without cost which is impossible in any case in God's just universe no but rather forgiveness paid for by the great cost of the blood of Christ 1 Peter 1.19 Now he says when you realize the key to suffering unjustly is really what you keep putting to yourself and it means that our sense of wrong suffered can be put at rest because we wait for God to show his hand and even if it isn't until the world to come we are happy to leave it with him and we seek therefore the forgiveness God's forgiveness for those who keep on doing the wrong to those who seek to live for Christ and a consistent life for him.

Father forgive them for they know not what to do what they do is one of the most difficult prayers to pray in the whole Bible but Jesus did it and he did it when they were impaling him to the cross he did it then as our example leaving us that example that pattern that we should follow in his steps that we should follow that path which he pioneered for us and so by that that we would honor God and commend his gospel by a consistent Christian walk.

May God bless his word to us. Let's conclude now by singing in Psalm 26 from Sing Sam Psalm 26 Psalm 26 Psalm 26 Psalm 26 Psalm 26 Psalm 26 Psalm 27 Psalm 27 Psalm 27 Psalm 27 June this time is St. Minver I'll tell of all your awesome deeds proclaiming loud your praise your glory fills your dwelling place I love your house always sweep not away my soul O Lord with those who hate your way nor take away my life with those who love to wound and slay for their right hands are full of bribes they plot iniquity but I will lead a blameless knife in mercy set me free my feet will stand with confidence upon a level place and in the people's gathering I'll praise the Lord of grace these verses in conclusion to God's praise I'll tell of all your awesome deeds proclaiming loud your praise your glory fills your dwelling place

[38 : 35] I love your house always sweep not away my soul O Lord with those who hate your way nor take away my life my life with those who love to wound and slay for their right hands are full of pride they plot iniquity but I will lead a blameless life in mercy set me free my feet will stand with confidence upon a level place and in the people's gathering

I'll praise the Lord of grace I'll go to the side door to my left this evening after the benediction now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore Amen with you