

## Peter's Epistles #34

### A Christian Code of Conduct

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:11-25

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by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

(11) Beloved, I entreat you as fellow sojourners and temporary residents [on this earth] to refrain from the fleshly lusts which are waging war against your [very] lives. (12) Keep your manner of life among the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) [morally] good, so that although they slander you as evil-doers, yet when they look upon your good works (i.e., life and production) they may [yet] give glory to God on the day of visitation. (13) Submit yourselves to every established human authority for the Lord's sake, whether to a king, as being sovereign, (14) or to [other] executives, as being sent through Him for the purpose of reproofing evil doers but for praising those who do good. (15) For this is the will of God, namely, for you to muzzle the ignorance of foolish men by doing good, (16) as free men, yet not using your freedom as a cloak for evil but as servants of God. (17) Give respect to everyone, love the brotherhood [of believers], fear God, honor the king. (18) Servants subordinate yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and reasonable, but also to those who are unfair. (19) For this is pleasing [in God's sight], [namely] if for the sake of [maintaining a clean] conscience towards God someone bears up under afflictions when unjustly [subjected to] suffering. (20) But what sort of glory [is yours] if you endure punishment for having sinned? But if you endure suffering for doing what is good, this is pleasing to God. (21) For it is indeed to this purpose that you have been called (i.e., sharing in the sufferings of Christ); for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps: (22) "He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth" (Is.53:9b). (23) He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but He entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously. (24) He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. By His wound you were healed. (25) For you were once like sheep going astray, but you have now turned back to the Shepherd and Overseer of your lives.

1st Peter 2:11-25

**Introduction:** In the first part of chapter two, Peter gave us three analogies to exemplify the Christian life after salvation: drinking milk is analogous to taking in truth for spiritual growth; building a house on the Rock is analogous to the development of spiritual progress in our relationship with Jesus Christ; and the royal priesthood in which we have been enrolled bespeaks the spiritual production for the Lord to which we have all been called. Having encapsulated the essentials of the challenges and opportunities ahead for all believers following salvation, Peter now goes on to give us a host of practical information which will be needful in fighting the fight

which is the Christian way of life. Verses eleven through twenty-five are, essentially, an honor code by which all believers who would glorify Jesus Christ must live, and Peter grounds this code on the premier example of all examples, the earthly life our dear Savior:

### **Fellow Sojourners and Temporary Residents [on this earth] (v.11):**

Beloved, I entreat you as fellow sojourners and temporary residents [on this earth] to refrain from the fleshly lusts which are waging war against your [very] lives.

1st Peter 2:11

It is absolutely essential to our basic orientation as Christians to this world and to this life that both are temporary. We are only here for a very short time. We have no permanent home in this corrupt world and these corrupt bodies are not our final state. We are looking forward to eternal bodies (2Cor.5:1) and to an eternal dwelling place "whose builder and founder is God" (Heb.11:10). We have brought nothing into this world, and we shall take nothing out of it (1Tim.6:7) – except for the rewards we win through our spiritual growth, progress and production on behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ.

We are truly only sojourners here (1Pet.1:1). Just as Abraham and the patriarchs dwelt in tents, so we inhabit these "tents" of temporary flesh and blood, eagerly looking forward to our blessed hope (Tit.2:13), the appearance of our Lord, when these corrupt vessels will be transformed (1Cor.15:51-54; 2Cor.5:1-8) and we shall be with Him always (1Thes.4:17), seeing Him as He is and being likewise (1Jn.3:2). Forgetting this key principle can lead to trouble if as a result we become too friendly with the world and seek to enjoy it and make friends with it (cf. Ps.90:9-12; 1Cor.7:29-31).

You adulterously unfaithful people! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God.

James 4:4

(15) Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.

1st John 2:15-17

### **Fleshly Lusts Waging War against your [very] Lives (v.11):**

Beloved, I entreat you as fellow sojourners and temporary residents [on this earth] to refrain from the fleshly lusts which are waging war against your [very] lives.

1st Peter 2:11

These words should be of great help to all of us in our struggles against sin – by impressing upon us the absolute importance of this issue. After all, "without sanctification, no one will see the

Lord" (Heb.12:14). Sanctification, as we have seen, is separation from sin and evil, being positional in Christ at salvation, and ultimate in resurrection when we will no longer be capable of sinning. In between, "experiential sanctification" requires moment by moment decisions by the believer to reject temptation. When we are willing to resist sin, the Spirit is our ever-present help in doing so (e.g., Gal.5:16-25; Jas.4:5-6). Failure to resist results in falling out of fellowship with the Lord and requires us to turn back to Him and ask forgiveness through confession (Ps.32:5; 1Jn.1:9). Failure to turn back and confess will, over time, seriously degrade our spiritual momentum and can even lead – in the most extreme cases – to apostasy (for those who eventually turn back entirely to the world, abandoning the Lord) or to the sin unto death (for those who refuse to let go of the Lord, but who also refuse to relinquish their life of sin).<sup>1</sup>

That is why "without sanctification", even our salvation may be put at risk. Peter's words here about "fleshly lusts waging war against our lives" are thus to be taken with utmost earnestness, for whether we are "only" talking about our physical lives (in the case of believers taken home via the sin unto death – with loss of any further potential reward) or the loss of salvation itself (for those who eventually choose sin and this world over their prior faith in the Lord which is abandoned), in either case nothing could be more serious. Then too it should be considered that significant spiritual advance will have a serious ceiling placed upon it by those who are ever vacillating between carnality and spirituality. Everyone sins (e.g., Rom.3:23), but growing believers and mature believers do less and less of it and with less seriousness (not that all sin is not serious, of course, but an act of *porneia* is clearly worse than an arrogant thought). And until we do get to the point of managing to keep our bodies first and foremost, our tongues next, and our thoughts at last under some semblance of reasonable control, serious spiritual advance will at best be a hit and miss process. In his introduction to this section on Christian conduct, therefore, Peter begins with a very obvious and essential principle: basic defense is the necessary foundation of all successful offense.

We may compare this to that principle of war entitled "security" which demands that proper attention be paid to prudent preparation against potential enemy attack even as we are focusing mainly on the offense ourselves. For if our supply lines are cut or we are otherwise seriously compromised by enemy actions for which we find ourselves imprudently unprepared, then all of our efforts to push forward and advance ourselves will of necessity come to naught, and at best we will suffer serious setbacks and loss of time because we failed to give proper attention to the matter of warding off sin. After all, as long as we are in these "bodies of sin and death" (Rom.7:24), sin will ever be "crouching at the door" (Gen.4:7). And just as in warfare, we may plan all we wish, but the enemy too always "gets a vote", so also in our prosecution of the Christian walk the devil and his forces are sure to oppose us at every turn, and they are sure to tempt us in ways and at times we might not fully anticipate ahead of time. That being the case, any dalliance or compromise with the "fleshly lusts" which are "waging war against us" will obviously make us all the more vulnerable to those satanic attacks – exactly the opposite of what would be expected of any competent military commander. No military leader worth his salt would ever deliberately leave key terrain completely undefended – but that is what Christians do, in effect, whenever we ignore the divine guidance Peter gives us here.

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<sup>1</sup> See in BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

Just as key terrain can never be "taken off the board" so as to obviate the need to defend it, so also we will have to take into account the vulnerabilities of our sin natures as long as we are in this world and "make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts" (Rom.13:14; cf. Rom.6:11; 6:13; 6:19; 8:12; 12:1-2). But we also cannot allow preoccupation with these vulnerabilities to cause us to shrink from an aggressive approach to spiritual growth – which would be analogous to placing all one's forces on key terrain for defensive purposes but never getting around to attacking the actual objective. So Peter's admonition to refrain is not an end in itself but rather an important prerequisite for the spiritual growth, progress and production that constitutes our true objective while here in this world. If we do want to earn the three crowns of victory which brings honor to our Lord and blessing to us for all eternity, getting involved in the things of this world – and most especially sinful things – is extremely counterproductive to that objective (to say the least).

(3) Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (4) No one on military campaign becomes involved in the affairs of normal life. [He avoids such things] that he may please the one who enlisted him.

2nd Timothy 2:3-4

### **Your Manner of Life among the Gentiles (v.12):**

Keep your manner of life among the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) [morally] good, so that although they slander you as evil-doers, yet when they look upon your good works (i.e., life and production) they may [yet] give glory to God on the day of visitation.

1st Peter 2:12

Having established in the previous verse the fact that leading a sanctified life is a good and necessary thing to do from the standpoint of our personal salvation, spiritual growth and reward, Peter next expands the principle by reminding us that what we do – how we think, speak and act – also has a considerable influence upon everyone in our circle, whether intimately or only remotely in contact with us. We are in the midst of a great, unseen conflict, after all, so that we are not free agents in this world by any manner of means. Not only does bad behavior affect us personally but it also has the potential of adversely impacting everyone with whom we come into contact (Rom.2:24). Instead of being bad examples with whom the Lord is displeased, therefore, we should strive to set a good example, not just because our self-interest is involved (and it certainly is, not only in avoiding discipline on the negative side but for all the positive things here and now and also in eternity that fall to the lot of those who "please God": Heb.11:5-6) but also because of the potential benefit we may have towards all those around us, first to believers (Gal.6:10), but also to the unbelievers who may be observing us (1Cor.9:22). After all, if we really do desire for our neighbors and co-workers to be saved so as to be able to rejoice with them "on the day of visitation" (i.e., when they are judged for reward rather than for condemnation if they respond to our example), then things which impair our Christian witness should be dispensed with, and instead we should strive to let our light shine before them in a godly way.

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may *see your good deeds* and glorify your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:16 NKJV

The phrase used by our Lord highlighted above is the same one Peter employs in the verse we are considering here: "good works / good deeds" (Greek: *kala erga* / καλὰ ἔργα). Given the widespread misunderstanding of this phrase, it seems appropriate here to explain that "works" are everything we think, say and do. At the last judgment, unbelievers will be evaluated "each one according to his works" (Rev.20:12-13) – which clearly entails a thorough assessment of their entire lives. Contrary to much popular and theological speculation, this judgment is not about demonstrating that their sins are keeping them from life eternal: Christ died for all sins and so that judgment is not about sin at all. Unbelievers will be shown in exquisite detail that nothing they "did" was sufficient to warrant salvation. That is to say, it will be made crystal clear that none of their "works" was in any way "good" – because nothing they ever "did" was done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

John 6:29 NKJV

Only after we "do" the foundational "work" that God has called us to do, that is, putting our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, do we become believers, and only thereafter do we have the ability to do "good works". All works done by unbelievers are of necessity "filthy rags" (Is.64:6), because by definition they have not been done by God's Spirit for God's glory in the Name of Jesus Christ. Nothing an unbeliever does can "please God" (e.g., 1Cor.12:3). Only believers are capable of doing works that are "good" in God's eyes. Therefore nothing an unbeliever does could, no matter how sacrificial or impressive to us, ever bring about salvation absent faith in Christ.

(30) What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; (31) but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. (32) Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

Romans 9:30-32 NIV

(8) For you have been saved by [God's] grace through faith [in Christ]; and this did not come from you – it is God's gift. (9) Nor did it come from what you have done (lit., "from works"), lest anyone should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Much confusion on this issue stems from misreading James' famous statement to the effect that "faith without works is dead" (Jas.2:22; 2:26). But it should go without saying that James is referring to genuinely "**good** works", the sort of "works" that only believers who are responding to God and to His truth can produce, as the examples in context of Abraham and Rahab show clearly enough (Jas.2:21-25): all genuine believers think and say and do things with which God is pleased, and this godly behavior, these godly "works", prove their faith or "justify" them. This is the precise frame in which Peter employs the term here: when we behave as Christians should

behave, thinking godly thoughts which result in godly works and deeds, we refute by those actions and godly conversation the slander of unbelievers who may oppose us. Whatever unbelievers may say about us, therefore, if we truly are walking as Jesus Christ would have us to walk, then all such slander is completely unjustified. If we suffer for it, that suffering will be undeserved and thus a glory to Christ rather than a reproach to Him. And if we persist in genuine good works, we can be sure that nothing we have truly done for Jesus Christ will fail to receive its eternal reward (Matt.6:19-21; 10:42; Gal.6:9-10; Eph.2:10).

**Give Glory to God on the Day of Visitation (v.12):**

Keep your manner of life among the gentiles (i.e., unbelievers) [morally] good, so that although they slander you as evil-doers, yet when they look upon your good works (i.e., life and production) they may [yet] give glory to God on the day of visitation.

1st Peter 2:12

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter clearly thought it was important to emphasize the potential results of our good witness of the life. It is true that it is good and proper for us to be motivated by the eternal rewards the Lord has in store for those who fight this fight in the correct, godly way.<sup>2</sup> In addition to why a good witness is beneficial for us personally, however, Peter also reminds us that this – our legitimate and godly self interest – is only part of the picture. We also need to be motivated to live a solid Christian life for the benefit of those who observe us and for the glory of God. Jesus Christ died for everyone, including all of the unbelievers who are considering us and our Christian walk. If we truly do allow God's light to shine through what we say and do in the world of unbelievers, and if that contributes to a single one being saved in the end, then the purpose Peter expresses here is accomplished, namely, that those who know us may be saved and end up, along with us, "glorifying God" when the day of Christ's evaluation of His Church takes place – because they have come to believe themselves, and that is a glory to Christ as well as life from the dead for them. Having then this triple mandate of seeking our Lord's glory, seeking the salvation of all, and seeking eternal reward for ourselves, how should we not all the more strive to walk through this world as good Christians without any reproach during our very brief "sojourn and pilgrimage" here on earth (1Pet.2:11)? We have an important mission to fulfill – truly there is none more important – and we can only fully and successfully carry it out if we obey Peter's instructions here to abstain from all that may bring reproach to our witness and instead set ourselves to be careful to reflect the love and mercy of Jesus Christ in all we say and do.

**Submit yourselves to every established human authority *for the Lord's sake* (v.13):**

Submit yourselves to every established human authority for the Lord's sake, whether to a king, as being sovereign . . .

1st Peter 2:13

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<sup>2</sup> See "The Judgment and Reward of the Church", section I.7 in part 6 of *Coming Tribulation*.

The thing to notice of prime importance here is the italicized part of this sentence: "for the Lord's sake". As representatives of Jesus Christ, it is important for the sake of the witness we bear *to Him* to be obedient to "established human authority".<sup>3</sup> That is to say, we are obedient to authority because of Jesus Christ. That is His will for His Church. Secondly, it must also be noted that only *legitimate* authority needs to be respected and obeyed, namely, the constituted government under which the individual believer lives. As to what that may mean, it is safe to say that in the vast majority of historical cases, the government in power wherever believers may reside is indeed the "established human authority". And where such constituted authority exists, it has been established . . . by God.

(1) Let every person be subject to [all] superior authorities. For no authority exists which has not [been established] by God. And those that exist are [in turn] subject to God. (2) Therefore whoever opposes [established] authority has taken a stand against God's [ordered] arrangement, and those who have done so will receive judgment upon themselves. (3) For rulers do not exist to discourage good deeds through the fear they inspire, but rather evil ones. So do you wish to have no fear of the authorities? Then do what is good, and you will have praise from them. (4) For they are ministering to God on your behalf for your [own] good. But if you do evil, beware, for they have not been invested with the power of punishment (lit., "the sword") for nothing. For they are ministering to God in the severe vengeance [they bring down] upon those who do evil. (5) Therefore it is necessary to be subject [to authority] not only because of this severity, but also for conscience' sake.

Romans 13:1-5

Given that the "established human authority" to which Paul was subject at time of writing had wrongly imprisoned and abused him multiple times – and would do so to an even greater degree in time shortly to come, eventually executing him wrongly – this passage could not be more clear. Even governments which fall far short of the standard of justice we would prefer are not for that reason alone to be considered as *not* the authority which God has established.

How evil must a government become before believers are allowed by God to disobey it? The Church era of Smyrna lived under the shadow of persecution for its entirety, with ten prolonged periods of "tribulation" (Rev.2:10). Moreover, these believers were not just victims of a dysfunctional or tyrannical government – they were actually persecuted merely for being Christians. And what does our Lord tell them? "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." They are told to persevere through the suffering, enduring what comes – not to be resisting it or even fleeing from it. Clearly, these believers did not stop believing nor did they cease prayer and Bible teaching and Christian ministry – the very things which identified them *as* Christians and led to their persecution. Nor did they recant their faith in Christ and worship the

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<sup>3</sup> There is no question about what is meant by the text here as the Greek verb *hypotasso* is same word used for obedience to God at Heb.12:9; Jas.4:7; and to the Lord Jesus Christ as His Bride at Eph.5:24. Moreover, the verb's etymology is military in origin, a context where tolerance for disobedience is slight; it has to do with getting into ranks and following orders for impending operations (Rom.13:1, 13:5; Tit.3:1 have the same verb).

emperor when haled in front of Roman courts, and this cost many of them their earthly lives – but it vouchsafed for them their *eternal* lives, along with the rewards that genuine martyrdom entails. From this and from other biblical examples we can say that this command to obedience (repeated elsewhere in scripture as well, e.g., Tit.3:1) does not require us either to cease doing things which we are commanded to do (as Daniel did not stop praying and as the apostles did not stop evangelizing: Dan.6:1ff.; Acts 4:18-20), nor to do things we are forbidden from doing (such as Daniel's three friends would not: Dan.3:1ff.). But it does prevent us from taking up arms against a government which is clearly "divinely established".

**Sent through Him for the purpose of reproofing evil doers but for praising those who do good (v.14):**

. . . or to [other] executives, as being sent through Him for the purpose of reproofing evil doers but for praising those who do good.

1st Peter 2:14

It may seem hard to accept that governments and even more problematically government officials have all been "sent by God" – at least to anyone who has read any history or has had any significant life-experience. But that the straightforward meaning of this statement is meant to be taken at face value is clear from Paul's similar comment in Romans previously quoted (Rom.13:1-5; cf. Tit.3:1). As he says in the first verse of that passage, "no authority exists which has not [been established] by God", and immediately thereafter "those that exist are [in turn] subject to God" – meaning that any malfeasance is not for us to decide or adjudicate since that prerogative lies in the lap of the ultimate Judge. This is a fearful prospect for any government or government official to consider – or at least it should be. It is also meant to be a comfort to believers whenever we are abused or maltreated or even persecuted by established authority: God is the One who is really in charge and He will vindicate us – just as long as we do not foolishly take it upon ourselves to attempt to vindicate ourselves.

Therefore whoever opposes [established] authority has taken a stand against God's [ordered] arrangement, and those who have done so will receive judgment upon themselves.

Romans 13:2

This principle does not mean that we do not have the right of self-defense against criminal elements (Jesus told the disciples to carry swords for that purpose: Lk.22:36). It also does not mean that we are not allowed to make use of lawful means to defend ourselves against unjust prosecution (Paul certainly did: e.g., Acts 25:11). But it does mean that the principle of doing what the established authority tells us to do (such as paying taxes: Matt.22:17-21; Rom.13:6-7) and refraining from doing things it tells us not to do (Matt.26:52; Tit.3:1; 1Pet.4:15-16) is absolute.

(1) A Psalm of Asaph.

God stands in the congregation of the mighty;

He judges among the gods (lit. "mighty ones"; i.e., human judges).

(2) How long will you judge unjustly,

And show partiality to the wicked? Selah  
(3) Defend the poor and fatherless;  
Do justice to the afflicted and needy.  
(4) Deliver the poor and needy;  
Free them from the hand of the wicked.  
(5) They do not know, nor do they understand;  
They walk about in darkness;  
All the[se] foundations of the earth are unstable (i.e., instability from lack of justice).  
(6) I said, "You are gods,  
And all of you are children of the Most High.  
(7) But you shall die like men,  
And fall like one of the princes."  
(8) Arise, O God, judge the earth;  
For You shall inherit all nations.  
Psalm 82:1-8 NKJV

A large measure of the emotional armor believers should have in accepting this mandate to obey authority – even if it is far less than perfect – is the sure and certain knowledge that God is actually in control of all things, including these intermediate means He directs, and that they are responsible to Him, whether they know it or not. We have to remember that God's allowance of free will inevitably results in flawed human actors producing flawed systems which work in highly flawed ways – but that He always has our best interests at heart and has provided for us through His foreknowledge and perfect providence. Moreover, we can also be sure that He will protect us when the systems to which we are subject "malfunction", and vindicate us when we are unjustly treated.

(32) The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, intent on putting them to death; (33) but the LORD will not leave them in the power of the wicked or let them be condemned when brought to trial.  
Psalm 37:32-33 NIV

"No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.  
Isaiah 54:17 NIV

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written,  
"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.  
Romans 12:19 NKJV

Believers also need to keep firmly in mind that perfect justice *is* coming. During the Millennium, after our Lord returns, His kingdom will be one of perfect righteousness, with justice perfectly dispensed in a timely manner, and we will be blessed to have a key role in its administration (Is.32:1-2; Rev.2:27; 3:21).

Arise, LORD, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God;

decree justice.  
Psalm 7:6 NIV

"Your throne, O God (i.e., the Messiah: cf. Heb.1:8) will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom".  
Psalm 45:6 NIV (cf. Ps.71:1-2; 89:14; 97:2)

Of the greatness of his (i.e., the Messiah's) government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.  
Isaiah 9:7 NIV

But with righteousness he (i.e., the Messiah) will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.  
Isaiah 11:4 NIV

In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it (i.e., the Messiah) – one from the house of David – one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness.  
Isaiah 16:5 NIV

He (i.e., the Messiah) will be a spirit of justice to the one who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.  
Isaiah 28:6 NIV

See, a king (i.e., the Messiah) will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice.  
Isaiah 32:1 NIV

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with his justice and righteousness.  
Isaiah 33:5 NIV

"Here is my servant (i.e., the Messiah), whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations".  
Isaiah 42:1 NIV

"My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm (i.e., the Messiah) will bring justice to the nations."  
Isaiah 55:1a NIV

In the millennial kingdom of our Lord, there will be absolutely no doubt about the fact that the authority holding sway is legitimate and divinely established. For the Son of God will rule with perfect righteousness, dispensing perfect justice, and the blessedness of that perfect government will stand in stark contrast to all human governments which have gone before – most especially that of antichrist immediately preceding (which will be the absolute worst).

It is true, however, that things are not always as crystal clear in terms of bad (antichrist's worldwide tribulational rule) and good (the Millennium where Christ will reign and we with Him for a thousand years). There are times in human history, moreover, where believers may find themselves under competing systems of government. The Revolution and Civil War in this country provide two such examples, and we may also observe that the same is often true in any country where one government is in the process of being replaced by another or under the threat of such replacement by internal or external forces. In such circumstances – by no means uncommon in human history and yet also not "the norm" and thus not addressed directly by scripture – it may fall to individual believers to have to determine which is legitimate and which is not. In many such instances, the change comes relatively swiftly and will require nothing more than adaptation to the new regime. Sometimes, however, it may be a case of a somewhat lengthy process of struggle between the group presently exercising power and the one aspiring to replace it.

Just exactly what believers are to do at such times, invited by circumstances, as they will inevitably be, to attach themselves to one cause or the other, is a matter of conscience. And in many such instances (i.e., such as in the two examples adduced above) it would be wrong to censure either outright and without knowledge of their personal circumstances those who choose for the status quo or those who opt for its putative replacement. What we can say for certain, however, is that believers need to be absolutely clear-eyed about the possible outcomes of actively supporting any political movement beyond the lawful obedience scripture requires. Such choices may very well be courageous and honorable, and they may even avoid being ethically and morally wrong, but they will seldom be without serious consequences for oneself, one's family, and one's country. And while "not choosing" is also a choice, and one which may run the risk of suffering the charge of cowardice, believers need to remember *why* we are here on this earth and just *who* it is whose cause we serve first and foremost *before* committing ourselves to any such cause, no matter how unavoidable and necessary the decision may seem at the time.

### **Muzzle the Ignorance of Foolish Men by Doing Good (v.15):**

For this is the will of God, namely, for you to muzzle the ignorance of foolish men by doing good . . .

1st Peter 2:15

We have said from the beginning of this series that a main objective Peter had in writing this epistle was to comfort, encourage and equip the believers he was writing to in regard to the suffering they were enduring. To abstain from all that may bring reproach to our witness and instead reflect the love and mercy of Jesus Christ in all we say and do can be difficult under normal circumstances but especially so if one is being subjected to unjust treatment by those in authority, whether government agencies, employers, or family members (such as parents or husbands), and for that reason, no doubt, Peter began the discussion of this important issue by addressing our need to be properly subordinate to all legitimate authority. But it is also true that acting in a Christian way towards all is a critical part of our Christian witness, even in the case of all those under whose authority we do not fall. Peter therefore now returns to his general theme of proper Christian behavior in all spheres of life, not just in our relations with legitimate

authority.

Putting a stop to negative speculation about our faith on the part of unbelievers is "the will of God" in every area of life, and can only be accomplished "by doing good". This "doing good" is first and foremost the avoidance of "doing bad", namely, doing or saying (and helpfully also for the accomplishment of both of these other two, "thinking") anything that does not comport with being a follower of Jesus Christ. That is to say, avoidance of anything and everything that might sully our Christian witness is the best way to "muzzle" those who would slander us and thereby slander our Lord. We are His ambassadors in this world, after all (2Cor.5:20; Eph.6:20; 1Pet.2:21), and the evil one and his agents are always on the lookout for any malfeasance on our part with which to accuse us before Him (Rev.12:10; cf. Zech.3:1; 1Pet.5:8), but also through which they may sour the name "Christian" in the hearts and minds of those who are observing us. When we do reflect our Lord in our behavior, our witness of the life is a powerful force, illuminating the truth (Matt.5:14-16; Eph.5:8; Phil.2:15), and in many ways it is the most effective evangelism of all – when it is carried out in a consistent and godly way. But if our behavior is not much different – or much better – than the average unbeliever's, then that witness will fall short. And we may be sure that anyone with doubts about the truth – or hostility towards it – will put a higher value on our deficient actions than upon our words, however filled with grace and truth they may be.

"Doing good" in a positive vein is all about promoting the plan of God in the way in which it has been given us individually to do. This entails certain basics that apply to all Christians at all times, namely, growing spiritually, putting Christ first in our walk, and producing for our Lord according to the gifts we have been given by the Holy Spirit. Whether it is through prayer, or encouragement, or spiritual guidance through the Word (according to the gifts and opportunities we are given), or through material support in tending to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ (necessary for their own spiritual growth, progress and production), through all such godly response we exemplify Christ's love, and that witness "of good works" is also hard for the world of unbelievers to ignore and discount. We do need to keep in mind, however, that because of arrogance, jealousy, and satanic influence, such acts of genuine Christian "good" may even be the cause of additional opposition from the unbelieving world. If such be the case, we can take heart in the fact that this "sharing the sufferings of Christ" on our part will all the more redound to our Lord's good pleasure with us and to our eternal reward (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24; 2Tim.2:12; 1Pet.4:12-13; cf. Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; 10:21; 10:38-39; Lk.9:23; 14:27; Acts 5:41; 2Cor.4:10-11; Gal.6:17; 1Thes.1:6; 2Thes.1:4-5; 2Tim.3:12). If we do what is good, we have every right to have confidence that, in the end, vindication will come from the Lord, that it will come forth for us (Ps.112:1-10).

He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.  
Psalm 37:6 NKJV

The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths.  
Psalm 107:42 NIV

**Not Using Freedom as a Cloak for Evil (v.16):**

. . . as free men, yet not using your freedom as a cloak for evil but as servants of God.  
1st Peter 2:16

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been liberated from the Law of Moses by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ which satisfied the demands of the Law through His blood, His death on the cross for us all (Rom.4:14; 6:14; 7:4; 8:2; 10:4; Gal.2:19; 3:13; 4:3-7; 5:4; 5:18; Heb.7:12; 10:1).

It is for this freedom that Christ has set us free. So stand fast [in that freedom], and do not again encumber yourselves with the yolk of slavery (i.e., the Law).  
Galatians 5:1

This freedom is a most wonderful blessing, allowing us believers today to serve Jesus Christ as the Spirit moves us to do so without the restrictions and regulations of the Law to hinder us. But freedom, while it provides opportunity, has to be carefully employed in a godly, sanctified and righteous manner, as Paul also made clear:

For you were called unto freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but be slaves to one another through love.  
Galatians 5:13

We are called to glorify Christ, not to pursue our own pleasures (Matt.16:24); not to indulge our sinful natures, but to follow the Spirit instead of the flesh (Gal.5:16-25). Our Christian freedom is thus an asset meant to be employed in our service to Jesus Christ rather than for pointless self-indulgence. As Peter makes clear in this verse, being a "servant of Christ" and "using freedom as a cloak" are mutually exclusive activities – and they point in precisely opposite directions. Instead, therefore, of following our own desires, taking advantage of our freedom to please ourselves, if we would please our Master Jesus Christ, we will need to be genuinely good servants to Him and for Him (Matt.16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23). That is the way to receive the "Well done!" we all long for (Matt.25:21-23; Lk.19:17); that is the way to receive a bountiful eternal reward.

And [so] let us not grow weary of doing the good [work of God], for at [the appointed] time we will reap [our reward], *provided that we do not give up*.  
Galatians 6:9

### **Give Respect to Everyone, Love the Brotherhood (v.17):**

Give respect to everyone, love the brotherhood [of believers], fear God, honor the king.  
1st Peter 2:17a

In the eyes of God, according to this verse, every human being is deserving of basic respect. We are all made in God's image (Gen.1:26-27; cf. 1Cor.11:7), and Jesus Christ died for the sins of every single human being who has ever lived (e.g., Jn.1:29; 12:47; 2Cor.5:14-15; 5:19; 1Tim.2:4-6; Heb.2:9; 7:27; 1Jn.2:2; 3:5). Since God wants all to be saved (Ezek.18:23; Matt.18:14; Jn.12:47; Acts 17:27; 1Tim.2:4; 2Tim.2:24-26; 2Pet.3:9; cf. Lam.3:33), the very least believers can do is to tender due honor and respect to everyone as being dear to God as

those whom Christ created and for whom Jesus died.

"Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind."

Genesis 9:6 NKJV

Basic respect, as evidenced above, is to be found in *not* infringing on the essential rights of others, the right to life being first and foremost, and thereafter the basic rights to freedom and property necessary to maintain that *physical* life (which is the purpose of the tenth commandment) – so that all may have a full opportunity to respond to God in Jesus Christ and have the *eternal* life which our Lord died to provide for us all.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Genesis 4:9 NKJV

As any more than a mere peripheral look at the verse above reveals, basic respect for others is shown *not* by intervening in their affairs – so as to be their "keeper" – but in *not* depriving them of the essential things they need to live the life God has granted them as long as He has given them to be on this earth – in the hope that they might turn to Him and be saved (Acts 17:26-27). Therefore this verse requiring us to honor all others is not about charity or being "do-gooders"; rather it is all about respecting the privacy and basic rights of others for the preservation of their freedom of action and ability to choose – just as we would have them do in our own cases (i.e., the true meaning of the so-called "golden rule": Matt.7:12).

In addition to the avoidance of wrongly interfering in the lives of others, one other aspect of this command to treat all with respect is the need also to avoid any and all favoritism in how we comport ourselves to those with whom we interact, and especially regarding believers (Acts 10:34; Rom.2:11; Eph.6:9; Col.3:25).

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

James 2:1 NKJV

In his example of the poor man being despised and the rich man being catered to (Jas.2:1-13), James is talking about giving undue respect and/or benefits to some people merely because of their worldly status to the disadvantage of others, other believers in particular, merely because they lack the same sort of status. Similarly, Paul says in Romans 12:16: "Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble" (NKJV). As in the case of honoring all, so in the case of believers in particular the point is not in seeking out active socializing with them but in being accepting of others who may not be of one's own rank or social status or who may be poorer, less cultured, or of a different ethnicity, etc., and not depriving them of the godly ministrations with which we have been individually entrusted by the Spirit simply because they are "less worthy" by worldly canons.

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as

yourself."

Galatians 5:14 NIV

"Neighbors" are other believers first and foremost (Gal.5:13-14), and herein lies the distinction between the commands to "honor" and "love" in the verse we are considering (1Pet.2:17). All human beings deserve our *respect*: we want them to be saved just as our Lord does (and are eager to share the gospel with any and all willing to receive it); but all believers deserve our *love*: we want them to grow, progress and produce spiritually for their personal benefit, the edification of the Church of Jesus Christ, and the eternal glory of the Lord who died for us. For this reason, no doubt, Peter places "honor" in the aorist aspect (indicating a general, once and for all status quo), while he puts "love" in the progressive aspect (indicating something we are to be doing continually). Honoring all has to do with preserving their free will choices (witnessing the truth of the gospel by our deeds and also by our words for those who desire them: Matt.7:6); loving the brethren has everything to do with maximizing their chances for spiritual growth, progress and production through exercising the gifts the Spirit has given us through the ministries to which our Lord has called us.

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep".

John 21:17 NKJV

### **Fear God, Honor the King (v.17):**

. . . fear God, honor the king.

1st Peter 2:17b

This pair of commands directly parallels the previous two, but here the order is reversed (so-called "chiastic" order), putting the secular second and the spiritual first. This sequencing has the advantage of placing our spiritual responsibilities to our brothers and sisters in Christ and our duty to God side by side, while bracketing them or encapsulating them with commands that address our duties to the things of this world, the unbelievers we encounter and the authority structures which rule this present world. Most people see only the admittedly much more numerous and visible outer pair; but we who belong to Jesus Christ understand very well that it is the more precious and less visible inner, spiritual pair of responsibilities wherein all glory resides: loving our brethren and reverencing our Lord constitute our true spiritual focus on this earth and our essential reason for being here, regardless of worldly opinions to the contrary.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

Psalms 111:10 NKJV

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

Proverbs 9:10 NKJV

Love is a positive motivator: we are encouraged to do what is right out of a heart-felt desire to help our brethren; but fear/reverence motivates us too: we desire anything other than displeasing our Lord (and running afoul of His loving discipline: Heb.12:5-13). God graciously gives us both to keep us walking straight up the path so as not to turn to the left or to the right but to keep carrying our crosses directly ahead and forward up the high road that leads to Zion (Ps.84:5-7). And if we are properly motivating ourselves through having the correct, loving attitude towards our fellow Christians on the one hand (manifest in ministering to their spiritual needs), and properly reverencing our Lord on the other (walking in a holy way and doing what He would have us do in this world in spiritual growth, progress and production), then fulfilling the two outward facing commands to honor all (unbelievers included) and honor the king (representing all authority) will be fulfilled as a matter of course, even as we keep our focus on what is most important to our dear Savior.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Galatians 5:14 NKJV (cf. Matt.22:36-40; Rom.13:8-10)

Taken together, these four commands in our context of 1st Peter 2:17 sum up our entire responsibility as Christians in this world and to this world . . . and to our Lord and to His Body, the Church.

(9) Our ambition [as Christians], therefore, whether in this body or out of it, is be pleasing to our Lord. (10) For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless. (11) *Therefore since we know the fear of the Lord*, while we attempt to persuade men, God sees us entirely for what we [truly] are – and I trust that what we [truly] are is equally clear to your consciences.

2nd Corinthians 5:10-11

### **Servants Subordinate yourselves to your Masters with all Respect (v.18):**

Servants subordinate yourselves to your masters with all respect . . .

1st Peter 2:18a

The word "servant here", the Greek *oiketes*, means "member of the household" and is essentially a synonym for slave, since in the Greco-Roman world of the first century, large (and sometimes very large) households containing not only extended families but also slaves were the rule.

(30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (31) So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." (32) Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

Acts 16:30-32 NKJV

This description of Paul and Silas' evangelizing of the Philippian jailer and his household may seem strange to modern ears, but it is very much in keeping with contemporary and ancient practice generally: the household was the essential social unit, and it tended to operate as a

corporate whole, following the lead of its head (cf. Jer.35:2-19). So it is not surprising that the jailer's entire household would turn to the Lord at the preaching of these apostles, and we can thus expect that many Greek and Roman households of that day were converted in their entirety or nearly so. In any case, many of the new believers were slaves, and the coming to Christ of themselves (and even of their masters) did not result in their emancipation. Slavery is a terrible thing, but until only relatively recently in world history it was a ubiquitous institution. The gospel promises liberation from death to all, but not liberation from other worldly troubles. When we are saved, we are not healed of our diseases, nor are we freed from whatever monetary debts we may have. When we are saved, we are not freed thereby from our marriage obligations (cf. 1Cor.7:12-16), nor are we liberated from slavery, should we be slaves before that so great salvation is granted to us. This being the case, it was important for Peter in the Spirit to affirm the continuing obligation of new believers who were under the yoke of bondage to persevere in their status with, if anything, greater respect and willing subordination than before. For believers, the truly important changes in status we receive at salvation are, after all, heavenly and not earthly.

(21) Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. (22) For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave.  
1st Corinthians 7:21-22 NKJV

In the modern world, slavery is not absent (though it is mostly illegal and therefore not generally visible). But there is a sense in which all of us who have to work for a living are "slaves" to the wages we must bring in to maintain our health, homes and families. As one ancient Greek proverb has it, being poor is having to work for a living; being dirt poor is having to work for someone else. And that is where most of us find ourselves. For that reason, the guidance given in the New Testament about the proper behavior of slaves who are believers is applicable to the majority of us who have employers: they are, biblically speaking, effectively our masters.

(5) Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; (6) not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, (7) with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, (8) knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.  
Ephesians 6:5-8

(22) Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. (23) And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, (24) knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (25) But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.  
Colossians 3:22-25 NKJV

(1) Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. (2) And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but

rather serve them because those who are benefitted are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

1st Timothy 6:1-2 NKJV

There are, of course, important differences. We are free to leave one job for another, if we have the opportunity, but as most of us have experienced at one point or another in our lives, finding a good job and keeping it – or switching to a better one – is not always so easy to do. In any case, while we are employed, we owe the organization and/or individual employing us our honorable service, service that befits those whose real Master is Jesus Christ, serving in a way which glorifies Him (and brings no reproach to the glorious Name by which we are blessed to be called).

**Not only to those who are Good and Reasonable, but also to those who are Unfair (v.18):**

. . . not only to those who are good and reasonable, but also to those who are unfair.

1st Peter 2:18a

This is an important caveat. It is all too tempting to assume that ill treatment exempts us from the need to "do a good job" – because of whatever abuse we are suffering at the hands of our employers. The Bible tells us that such is not the case. We are responsible, responsible to Jesus Christ, to perform the honorable and effective service we are being paid to perform even if we are not appreciated for all we do – and even if we are being very poorly treated in the process. In the Greek, the adjective translated "unfair" above is *skolios*, literally, "twisted" (cf. "scoliosis"), and represents the opposite of "good", with that Greek word here (*agathos*) meaning not just morally good but "good at what they do", and also the opposite of "reasonable", with the adjective *epieikes* often meaning "merciful": even if our bosses are inept at what they do and arbitrary in how they treat us, being unfair to us as a result, this still does not give us an excuse to do a bad job – because we are working for the Lord in fact (Col.3:24; cf. Eph.6:7). That being true, we need always to try to do our jobs "as unto the Lord", even when that is difficult on account of the poor treatment we may be receiving. In a free (or somewhat free) modern country where slavery is non-existent (or at least illegal), we do have the right to seek other employment if we are unable or unwilling to bear up under abuse that may come our way. What we do *not* have the right to do is to sink to the level of the person or persons who are maltreating us, or to forget that our conduct is a witness to our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Most people in this country with any life-experience have had "horrible bosses". What we need to keep in mind at all times and especially if we are laboring under one of those taskmasters is that Jesus Christ is our true "boss", and it is Him we are striving to please first and foremost.

(9) And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Ephesians 6:5-9

It is important to point out at this juncture that employers and indeed anyone with supervisory authority is, as the verse above demonstrates, likewise under obligation to the Lord to treat everyone who reports to them with the same decency and professionalism expected of all Christians under authority in the workplace. Unbelievers may or may not adhere to this standard,

but we know from experience that many do not. Peter's discussion in the verses that follow gives us guidance on that score, but we also need to make it clear that in speaking of bad treatment we do *not* mean anything which crosses the line of what is legally and morally acceptable. Believers are within their rights to do what the administrative structure of the company or organization allows them to do in response to treatment which violates law or policy. And if the conduct does cross the line into illegality or even criminality, nothing in what Peter tells us here in the Spirit constrains a believer from seeking legal counsel in the first instance or contacting law enforcement in the second. Even the Mosaic Law addresses this type of eventuality:

(26) "If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. (27) And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth."

Exodus 21:26-27 NKJV

### **Bear up under Unjust Afflictions (v.19-20):**

(19) For this is pleasing [in God's sight], [namely] if for the sake of [maintaining a clean] conscience towards God someone bears up under afflictions when unjustly [subjected to] suffering. (20) But what sort of glory [is yours] if you endure punishment for having sinned? But if you endure suffering for doing what is good, this is pleasing to God.

1st Peter 2:19-20

Knowing that endurance of unjust treatment pleases our Lord Jesus Christ should be wonderful motivation for us to do what is right in the workplace regardless of circumstances. Indeed, if we find ourselves in a situation where we are being maltreated, whether a little or a lot, it is all the more important at such times to keep this verse of scripture – this truth given us from the Holy Spirit – firmly in mind. For it is at just such times, when we feel abused or, more to the point, actually are being abused, that we, weak human beings that we are, are apt either to become angry with those abusing us (and hence overreact in ungodly ways), or to become overly depressed about the situation (and hence fail to do the type of job we should be doing), or even to become angry at God (as if it were His fault in any way), common mistakes even advanced believers have a tendency to make when blind-sided by such satanic surprise attacks.

The first mistake above may be termed "the Moses mistake". Exasperated by the failure of the next generation of Israelites in a manner all too reminiscent of their fathers, Moses overreacted in anger and disobeyed the Lord's very precise instructions (Num.20:1-3). If a great man like Moses could do such a thing even though he worked for the perfect "Boss", we can certainly be forgiven for being tempted to lose our tempers when our bosses are not only not perfect but are actually subjecting us to unarguably unfair treatment. At such times, we must remember who it is we are really working for, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we are His emissaries unto all to whom He sends us, often most particularly everyone around us in the workplace. How we respond to trouble of this sort will be noticed by all and sundry. If we maintain a godly posture in spite of such pressures, not reacting in anger but continuing to do our job "as unto the Lord", it will not be lost on our co-workers or, in the end, on our bosses. And Jesus Christ will be pleased with us.

The second mistake above may be termed "the Elijah mistake". After one of the greatest spiritual victories in biblical record, Elijah allowed himself to be surprised and terrified by Jezebel's threats on his life and ran away, abandoning the charge he had been given as the Lord's prophet (1Ki.19:1-18). If a great man like Elijah could do such a thing even though he should have known that his true "Boss" would never have let anything untoward happen to him (as indeed He later proved: 2Ki.1:10-12), we can be forgiven for feeling depressed and tempted to give up when and if we find ourselves the objects of serious abuse in the workplace. At such times, we need to remember that the One we truly work for holds absolutely everything in His hands – including our lives and the lives of those who are persecuting us. If it is His will for us to suffer, there are unquestionably good reasons for it, even if we can't (and probably don't) see that at the time (as in the case of Job). Therefore instead of despairing when such trouble comes upon us, we need to take pains to encourage ourselves in the Lord, remembering that He is with us, and that He will bring us through this sea of trouble dry-shod, if only we wait for His deliverance in a godly way, continuing to conduct ourselves in a manner honoring to Him in spite of all mistreatment.

The third mistake above may be termed "the Jonah mistake". We know from his later expressions of anger that Jonah's motive in fleeing to Tarshish was that he found fault with the Lord for intervening on the side of Israel's worst enemy (Jon.4:1-4). It is not uncommon for people in general and sometimes even believers to blame God instead of trusting Him when trouble comes upon them. When adverse events one fears or loathes occur, a common negative response is to be found in the most foul question, "how could God let this happen?" In fact, taking this improper reaction of lack of trust in God and lack of respect for His perfect character to extremes is a major cause of apostasy, the complete abandonment of faith in Christ (Matt.13:21; Mk.4:17; Lk.8:13). While the first two mistakes are somewhat understandable however regrettable, there is *no* excuse *ever* for blaming God. That is a fundamental misreading of everything that has or ever will happen in this world, a diabolical perspective that is the farthest thing from godly, a failure to understand the most basic principles of truth: that God loves us and has done and is doing everything for the benefit of us believers who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, working it *all* out together for our good (Rom.8:28). For as Peter will remind us in the verses that follow, God the Father sacrificed His own dear Son to save us from the lake of fire, and Jesus our Lord died in the darkness on Calvary's cross to pay the fiery price for every single one of our sins. *That* is love – and blaming the One who has only our good at heart is to forget our so-great salvation . . . and throw it back in His face.

Failure in all three historical cases above was not without consequence. But in all three cases these great men of God were given a chance to redeem themselves, Jonah at the time in being brought back from the sea in a miraculous way and then leading many Assyrians to salvation, and Moses and Elijah during the Tribulation in being brought back from the dead to Israel where they will supervise the great revival of many of the Jewish people. Still, who cannot see that it would have been better not to make such mistakes in the first place? So while we rejoice in the Lord's great mercy and forgiveness, and have confidence that He will forgive us and deliver us if we are determined to remain His, He is "pleased" when instead of getting angry, getting depressed, or blaming Him, we instead stand fast under the pressure and do what He wants us to do: to continue to do a good job that is honoring to Him because we represent Him. If we suffer for

"doing right" and not because we react improperly on account of being "treated wrong", we glorify our dear Savior in so doing and please Him as a result.

We would be remiss not to mention here that bearing up under mistreatment in the work place is not the same as enduring punishment, reprimands or demotions or docking of pay, etc., ladled out for *actual* malfeasance. Hence Peter's rhetorical questions, "what sort of glory [is yours] if you endure punishment *for having sinned?*" If we have been lazy or lax or otherwise failed to fulfill the reasonable expectations of our employer, the natural consequences of such poor performance are not the "undeserved suffering" Peter is explaining in this section. Rather, they are the just desserts of a lackadaisical attitude towards our responsibilities – to the Lord as much as to our human employers.

But if we are not guilty of being slack, and if we come in for abuse even so (a very real possibility as described here and a common enough occurrence in the experience of many if not most of us), then we may take heart in the knowledge that we are indeed acting "for the sake of [maintaining a clean] conscience towards God" (v.19), and that this response to the unjust suffering we are enduring is "pleasing [in God's sight]" as a result. After all, the only reason we remain here in this world after salvation is precisely this one, namely, to please our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by doing what He would have us to do.

We have already allowed as to how it is legitimate to take legitimate measures when unacceptable treatment crosses over the line into violation of organizational policy of even illegality. But when such is not the case, it is not cowardice to endure for the sake of Christ. In fact, it often takes rather more courage to do so than to retaliate in one fashion or another.

Finally, one particular form of abuse, a passive one, is the failure of management to give due credit to those who are actually doing wonderfully good work, benefitting the organization mightily and even saving the day in times of trouble, while rewarding and honoring others whose contributions (if any) are not nearly so great (and possibly even problematic). Whether that circumstance is a result of favoritism, incompetence or honest oversight, we Christians need always to remember that the *only* glory that matters is that of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and that His good pleasure with us is worth more than all earthly glory put together.

But what sort of *glory* [is yours] if you endure punishment for having sinned? But if you endure suffering for doing what is good, this is pleasing to God.

1st Peter 2:19-20

### **Called to this (v.21):**

(21) For it is indeed to this purpose that you have been called (i.e., sharing in the sufferings of Christ); for Christ also died on your behalf, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps: (22) "He committed no sin, nor was any guile found in His mouth" (Is.53:9b). (23) He did not return slander when He was slandered, did not threaten when He suffered, but He entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously.

1st Peter 2:21-23

Suffering on behalf of Jesus Christ is not an accident but, as the verse above proclaims, an essential part of what it means to be a Christian: "to this purpose you have been called".

(10) "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (12) Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."  
Matthew 5:11-12 NKJV

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

Philippians 1:29 NKJV

Indeed, all who are willing to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2nd Timothy 3:12

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

1st Peter 4:14 NKJV

This "call to suffering" is given to us because of the witness our stalwart endurance provides to others, demonstrating to them 1) the power of the truth that sustains us through that suffering, 2) the faithfulness of God in seeing us through it, and 3) our preference for the Lord's approval over any sort of short respite or brief benefit in this life. We are anticipating a kingdom which is "not of this world" (Jn.18:36), we are looking for "a city whose architect and builder is God" (Heb.11:10), a reward which is greater than all "the treasures of Egypt" (Heb.11:26), and a resurrection which is "better" than any temporal blessing or relief in this life (Heb.11:36). When we endure in a godly fashion suffering of any sort, of which unfair and unjust treatment on the job is certainly one type, we show that Jesus Christ and His opinion of us is far more important to us than anything in this life, and that we are by no means willing to trade our heavenly reward for an earthly "mess of pottage" the way godless Esau did. This sort of attitude in defiance of all fleshly and worldly calculation demonstrates much more clearly than mere words the resilience and the genuineness of our faith, and becomes, for all who observe our example, a powerful, visible witness to the invisible but ever faithful God whom we serve.

(27) Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, (28) and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

Philippians 1:27-28 NKJV

The ultimate example of how we should comport ourselves under unjust treatment is none other than our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and the suffering He endured in order to reach the cross. Since He died for us – and bought us with His blood (His sacrifice for our sins) – the least we can do is to follow the example He left us as He desires us to do. And since we now belong

to Him, it does also stand to reason that the evil one and his evil world system are naturally disposed to hate us and to oppose us.

(18) "Though the world hates you, know that it came to hate Me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own. (19) Now because you are not [a part] of the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. (20) Remember this principle I taught you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

John 15:18-20

We hasten to add that nothing we could ever be called upon to endure could ever be on a par with the least thing our Lord suffered on our behalf, not to mention that His sacrifice on the cross in dying for our sins is ineffable and beyond compare, greater in its smallest part than all else which is or ever will be. Yet scripture does speak of our "sharing the sufferings of Christ", emulating His courageous endurance of all He faced before that darkness fell, and it is that principle to which Peter is referring here (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:12-13; Rev.1:9; cf. Mk.10:38-39; Acts 5:41; 2Cor.4:10-11; Gal.6:17; 1Thes.1:6; 2Thes.1:4-5; 2Tim.3:12), namely, demonstrating our faith and faithfulness to the world of men and angels both by bearing up under suffering in a godly way. "To this you have been called" (1Pet.2:21) . . .

[They were] strengthening the hearts of the disciples, and encouraging them to remain in the faith, and saying "We must pass through many tribulations to reach the Kingdom of God".

Acts 14:22

Indeed, when we were with you I was warning you that we [all Christians] were destined to be subjected to tribulation.

1st Thessalonians 3:4

. . . as representatives of the Lord who bought us.

(3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He, [our Lord Jesus Christ], endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:3

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere [in suffering and trials], we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

Following the example of the Lord who died on our behalf in all things and most especially in the matter of endurance of unjust treatment is fundamental to the Christian life. A popular saying in recent times, "What would Jesus do?", is off the mark. We are not Jesus and we are not facing what He faced, not in the least (especially in regard to dying for the sins of the world). Rather, we

should always be asking ourselves, "What does Jesus want *me* to do?", and then do it. As the One who redeemed us, the One who has purchased our freedom from sin and death at the cost of His blood, His spiritual death on the cross for all of our sins, our Lord certainly has the right to ask this of us, namely, the endurance of mistreatment in a way that glorifies Him. We owe Him absolutely everything, and nothing in this life is as valuable as His good pleasure towards us.

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

Matthew 25:21 NIV

Successful navigation of the undeserved suffering test is not the stuff of spiritual immaturity. It takes knowing our Lord intimately to be able to persevere under particularly difficult circumstances. It takes a maximum amount of truth in the heart, believed and held fast, ready and waiting for the Spirit to make use of when the storms of life arise. The Bible is "the mind of Christ" (1Cor.2:16), and so in order to know what our Lord wants of us requires that we first give attention to everything He has given us in His Word of truth. Only then do we have a chance of effectively carrying out the commands, both explicit and implicit, contained in this passage of scripture. Therefore, spiritual maturity is an essential prerequisite to fulfilling the mandates given here. Our Lord perfectly exemplifies this principle, having successfully learned and applied the entirety of the truth of scripture throughout His earthly life (cf., for example, His use of scripture to refute the devil: Matt.4:1-11; Lk.4:1-13). While we will never reach that pinnacle of success in our Christian walk, that is at least the objective we have been given, for His is the example we are explicitly told to follow here.

Therefore since Christ died in His flesh, we also should arm ourselves with the same mind-set, [considering] that whoever has suffered in his flesh [as Jesus did] is finished with sin.

1st Peter 4:1

As our Lord "committed no sin", in an analogous way we must turn away from all that is sinful, doing so more and more as we grow – taking pains to immediately repent of our mistakes, willful or otherwise, and as soon as possible confess all our sins and get back on the right road. That is especially so regarding sins of the heart and tongue in the context here of enduring maltreatment, where the temptation to retaliate verbally is obviously very strong. The particular example that Peter uses in presenting the example of Christ is our Lord's refraining from retaliating to the slander thrown at Him and also from offering up threats to those who were abusing Him. In the context of slavery – and in the context of working for an employer – this is a very pertinent issue for the apostle to bring up. We know from, e.g., James (Jas.3:2-12; cf. Jas.1:19) – and personal experience – that verbal sinning is among the hardest sort of error to avoid.

(1b) I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked." (2) So I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good. But my anguish increased; (3) my heart grew hot within me. While I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue.

Psalm 39:1b-3 NIV

The temptation to "even the score" with those whom we feel have wronged us is subtle and often intense. So that even if we are able to resist calling out superiors to their faces, it is often quite tempting to "share" our grievances with our coworkers, presenting our bosses in a very much less than flattering light. This sort of slander is the quintessential way in which underlings "get back" or "protect themselves" from overweening conduct from above. It is also very deceptive in that it may not seem sinful, depending upon what we say, exactly. But even if what we say is not an outright lie, depending upon our motives and our particular words, we always run the risk of committing slander when we say anything negative about anyone else – and most especially about those in direct authority over us. Absolute silence is a difficult personal standard to adhere to (as the passage from Psalms quoted directly above demonstrates), but believers do need to keep in mind the principle of avoiding slander and the example of our Lord in refraining from it (though if anyone had cause, surely He did) in any and all workplace situations where we are being badly treated by our lights.

And there is another problem with this self-vindicating approach as well: Christians are supposed to trust the Lord, to wait on Him for solutions, to put our deliverance in His hands, and not to take it into our own hands. But if we engage in slander, and if we are tempted to take things a step further and engage in any sort of guile or machinations or office politics designed to undermine the ones we feel are oppressing us, we have removed the matter from out of the Lord's hands and taken it back into our own. The end result of such behavior will never be as blessed as if we had patiently waited on Him instead.

Christians need to keep in mind that things always go better when we trust the Lord, and always go worse when we trust in our own efforts instead. So while it is not realistic to think that we can get to the point where we never feel slighted – and never ever complain about our treatment – the more we overlook slights, and the less we complain, the better for us in every way from a spiritual point of view. This better approach, after all, is the one our Lord always took – and He is the example we are to follow.

The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.

Proverbs 15:2 NKJV

The temptation to threaten His persecutors experienced by our Lord must have been tremendous. He created them! And He was about to die for their sins! And He will be the One who judges them! But He did not succumb. No temptation to utter threats we shall ever experience could possibly be as great as what He endured. And we know that the Judge Himself is with us in whatever maltreatment we may be called upon to suffer through. Whatever retaliation in personal vindication we might possibly be able to inflict – or threaten to inflict – nothing can hold a candle to the just judgment and vindication on our behalf which the Lord can and will level on those who lay a finger on His holy ones. At such times, rather than seeking to retaliate, we need to make a point of "entrusting our lives to our faithful Creator in doing what is right" (1Pet.4:19).

"May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and

uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."  
1st Samuel 24:15 NIV

Vindicate me, O God,  
And plead my cause against an ungodly nation;  
Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and unjust man!  
Psalm 43:1 NKJV (cf. ; Ps.7:8; 26:1; 35:24; 54:1; 138:8).

After all, it is better to trust in the Lord even than trusting in princes (Ps.118:9) – and certainly better than trusting in ourselves who are powerless. For while we can often do next to nothing (especially when we are talking about abuse from superiors), there is nothing that the Lord cannot do.

"I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"  
Jeremiah 32:27 NIV

This is not to say that we believers are obliged to be doormats. When threatened by Saul, David escaped to the desert – but was always careful never to lay a hand on the Lord's anointed, trusting the Lord instead to vindicate Him in due time. Similarly, we may have to change jobs – or make use of legitimate means, internal or external, should the abuse we are suffering cross the line of what is legal and or reasonably acceptable in terms of the organization's policies. But in all cases, it is prudent for believers to leave matters in the Lord's hands as much as possible, even when we are forced into action of one sort or another. And in all cases, it is prudent to refrain from retaliating with the tongue – not because we fear those who are wronging us . . . but because we fear Him in whom we have placed our trust to deliver us.

(25) The Lord is good to those who trust in him, to the one who seeks him. (26)  
It is good to wait patiently for deliverance from the Lord.  
Lamentations 3:25-26 NET

This really is the key here – and the key to everything in the Christian life. We have to learn to trust God that He will work things out for us, even when what we are facing seems completely unfair, horrible and impossible to cope with.

And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good –  
[that is to say], for those who have been called according to His plan.  
Romans 8:28

The plan of God has taken everything into account. Whenever we face a problem impossible to deal with on our own, that is the most important time to put things into His hands and leave them there until He delivers us.

Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken.  
Psalm 55:22 NIV

We have to accept at certain times that we cannot do it ourselves (whatever "it" may be), and resolve to wait on the Lord; we must not "concern ourselves with matters greater than ourselves" (Ps.131:1); we must not set ourselves to vindicate and justify ourselves; we must instead trust Him to work it out for good for us, even when that seems unlikely or impossible – and most *especially* when that seems unlikely or impossible. For we know – or should – that our God *is* paying attention and that He only judges in a right and righteous way. Like Job, we have to understand that if we are the recipients of suffering which truly is unjust, that can only be the case because "this is the will of God" (1Pet.2:15). We must never doubt that our dear Lord Jesus Christ knows very well what He is doing and why, even though we may not. Our job as His followers is not to question why, but to trust Him and not doubt. If we take that biblical approach, we will never be disappointed in the end – even if we have to wait (and we often have to wait) for that deliverance to occur.

(9) So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? (10) Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. (11) But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

Job 1:9-11 NKJV

(4) So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. (5) But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"

Job 2:4-5 NKJV

Given the nature of the cosmic struggle in which we are intimately involved, is it any wonder that we believers are subjected to trouble and suffering at the hands of the evil one, his minions, and the world system he has set in place along with its practitioners? In fact, it is truly amazing – and a result of the inestimable grace of God – that we are not persecuted more than we are.

"Remember this principle I taught you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

John 15:18-20

The closer we draw to our Master and the better we actually do reflect the glory of Him in this world, the more we may expect the unwanted attentions of the powers of evil. That is an essential piece of the invisible conflict in which we are intimately involved. But instead of being terrified, we have a right to be "strong and courageous" (Deut.31:6-7; 31:23; Jos.1:6-9; 1:18; 10:25; 1Chron.22:13; 28:20; 2Chron.32:7), because we are relying on the One than whom no one is stronger. And for those who do put their trust, faith and complete reliance in Him . . .

1) There is *comfort and encouragement* in our trials and tribulations.

In this world you do have tribulation. But be courageous. I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of compassion and all encouragement, (4) the One who encourages us in all our tribulation so that we in turn may be able to encourage those in all types of tribulation by means of the very encouragement which we ourselves received from God. (5) Because as our sufferings for Christ multiplied in service to you, so through Christ did the encouragement we received multiply to the same degree. (6) So if we are experiencing tribulation, it is to provide you with encouragement and salvation. And if we are being encouraged, it is for the sake of the encouragement you have received, which is now at work in your successful endurance of the same sufferings which we also experienced. (7) And so our hope for you is a solid one, since we know that as you have become partakers of suffering, in the same way you will also become partakers of encouragement.

2nd Corinthians 1:3-7

If you are indeed being reproached on account of Christ's name, you are truly blessed, for the Spirit of glory, even the Spirit of God, rests upon you (i.e., to support you in the trial).

1st Peter 4:14

2) There is ***deliverance and relief*** from our trials and tribulations.

(9) The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. (10) Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Psalms 9:9-10 NIV

But God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish.

Psalms 9:18 NIV

(35) What will separate us from Christ's love? Tribulation? Or privation? Or persecution? Or hunger? Or destitution? Or danger? Or violence? (36) As it is written, "For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We were accounted as sheep for slaughter". (37) But in all such things we are decisively victorious through Him who loved us [enough to do what He did for us]. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angelic nor human authorities, neither things present nor things to come, neither heavenly powers, (39) be they the highest [of the elect] or the lowest [of the fallen], nor any other created thing [on this earth] will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35-39

You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:13

(7) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (8) We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not

destroyed.

2nd Corinthians 4:8-9

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance (i.e., resurrection and reward), your joy overflows, *though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials* (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine.

1st Peter 1:6-7a

3) So we need to be careful to maintain the proper *attitude* of peace in our trials and tribulations, focusing in on the comfort we have a right to receive now, and looking aggressively forward to the deliverance we know by faith is coming.

You will keep him in perfect peace (actually "double peace"), whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.

Isaiah 26:3 NKJV

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."

Isaiah 30:15 NIV

(9) So there does remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own. (11) Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [as the Exodus generation did].

Hebrews 4:9-11

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

1st Peter 1:6-7

Since it is "to this purpose" that we believers have been called by God, that is, to share in the sufferings of Christ, bearing witness of Him to the world through godly endurance of various trials and tribulations which in a very small way parallel what our Lord had to endure before the cross, Christians can never afford to let go of the peace which is ours by virtue of belonging to Jesus Christ – for that is the essential attitude we need to maintain regardless of the wild waves swirling around us. And as we do so, God helping us, we will rise above all such troubles in our hearts, advancing from peace to joy through the hope of all the glories soon to come.

(2) Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful.

(3) For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to

a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.  
James 1:2-4

(12) Beloved, don't be alarmed at the fiery ordeal which has befallen you and is putting you to the test – as if something out of the ordinary were happening to you. (13) But to the degree that you are [truly] participating in Christ's sufferings, be joyful about it, so that at His glorious revelation, you may also rejoice with great gladness.  
1st Peter 4:12-13

Just as our Lord was able to endure suffering beyond imagination by "entrusting Himself" to the Father's care (1Pet.1:23), so we too must learn to put everything into God's mighty hands, trusting Him to bring us through – for that faith and confidence is the foundation of our peace. Whatever trouble we face, we offer it up unto our heavenly Father in prayer, "casting all our cares on Him, because He cares for us" (Ps.55:22; 1Pet.5:7), and trusting Him to work out all things together for our absolute good, just as He has promised us (Rom.8:28). He is absolutely faithful and has never let us down, not even once, not if we are willing to wait upon His deliverance. Therefore He is worthy of all of our trust. He brought the Lord Jesus through the most difficult experiences of any human life to the victory on the other side. And therefore Jesus is our example having given us the model that we might "follow in His footsteps" (1Pet.1:21). It is our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is the One who is actually judging us, not any human being we may see or hear, even those who seem to have some apparent, temporary power over us. As long as we are right with our Judge, we have no need to fear any human being or any human court or any human attacks or evaluative process . . . because He will deliver us, just as long as we are doing things the way He wants us to (Ps.118:6-9).

Cast your burden on the Lord,  
and He will sustain you;  
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.  
Psalm 55:22 CSB

### **He Himself Bore our Sins in His Body on the Tree (v.24):**

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. By His wound you were healed.  
1st Peter 2:24

The sentence above actually begins with a relative pronoun in Greek: "Who bore our sins in His body on the tree". This is important to mention because Peter is connecting this crucial doctrine of our Lord's spiritual death for us on the cross with His right to be our Judge in all matters, just as He Himself "entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously" (1Pet.2:23). Our Lord Jesus is our Lord by virtue of His creation of us – but also critically because He won that honor as the Son of Man through dying for us on the cross.

"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all *judgment* to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."

John 5:22-23 NKJV

Since the above commitment of all *judgment* to our Savior is the case, the result, as our Lord then immediately adds, is that "he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into *judgment*, but has passed from death into life" (Jn.5:24 NKJV). Therefore just as our Lord subordinated Himself in His humanity to the Father's will in all things, completely trusting Him as His Judge, so we believers who now belong to Him need to be careful always – and especially when the pressure is on – to be entrusting ourselves to our Judge, Jesus Christ, who has earned that position and the right to judge us through His endurance of the cross, His spiritual death wherein He atoned for the sins of the world.

"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."  
Luke 6:37 NKJV

Peter's connecting of these two ideas, namely, our need to bear up under unjust suffering and the example of our Lord in doing the same – only perfectly and under circumstances before, just prior to and during His death for us on the cross which we can now only dimly appreciate – is therefore deliberate: our essential job as Christians in sharing Christ's sufferings in an honorable way is to entrust ourselves to Him for our deliverance, waiting on the just judgment of our Judge . . . even as He entrusted Himself to the Father.

"Into Your hand I commit my spirit;  
You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth."  
Psalm 31:5 NKJV (cf. Lk.23:46)

In addition to the beating, spitting, mocking, lying, cursing, betrayal, rejection and all of the other things our Lord had to endure, besides crucifixion being a particularly painful form of execution, the very fact that our Lord was crucified (as opposed to being stoned to death or beheaded), constituted a part of His humiliation as well. For there was a certain amount of shame involved in this type of death (cf. Heb.12:2), since it proclaimed the person in question as being "under a curse" (Gal.3:13).

"If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God."  
Deuteronomy 21:23 NKJV

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree").  
Galatians 3:13 NKJV

It is no doubt for this very reason that Peter calls the cross a "tree" here, namely, to remind us also of the reproach Jesus suffered on our behalf (in addition to all of His other suffering before and during His death for the sins of all mankind).

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, ***endured the shame of the cross***, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (cf. Heb.11:26)

So let us go outside the camp to Him, bearing ***His reproach***.

Hebrews 13:13

We have discussed the spiritual death of our Lord in detail elsewhere, His atoning for the sins of the entire world in the three hours of darkness while hanging on the cross (called often in scripture "the blood of Christ").<sup>4</sup> As Peter affirms in our present verse, our Lord physically "bore in His body" all of these sins – meaning that they were poured out upon Him in the darkness and that He paid the entire price for them in enduring the fiery judgment needed to propitiate the justice of God for each and every one of them. Our Lord's sacrifice is thus the greatest thing in the history of the world to an unimaginable degree. The smallest part of what He did for us – for the entire world – is greater than all that has ever been, or is, or ever could be. It is impossible to overestimate the cross – and not really possible to fully appreciate it this side of eternity. But we believers do need to keep constantly in mind the fact that our Lord's death for us, His spiritual death, that is, in paying the entire redemption price for us by dying for each and every one of our sins, is the true coin with which we have been bought free from the common human destiny of death and damnation that would otherwise have been our lot – and that there is nothing more valuable in the entire universe.

(18) . . . knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

1st Peter 1:18-19 NKJV

This "blood" was not literal blood (for our Lord's body still retained its physical blood even after He voluntarily released His spirit following His spiritual death: Jn.19:30-35). This "blood of Christ" is a metaphor, comparing Christ to a sacrificial lamb whose physical death (seen vividly when its throat is cut) represents His spiritual death (cloaked in darkness and to be known and understood only from scripture). The former symbolizes what He would do for us in a very graphic and dramatic way – but no one here on earth can really understand the magnitude of the price our dear Lord Jesus paid for us, suffering the judgment of fire for each and every one of our sins and the sins of the entire world – otherwise none could be saved in the impartial justice of God.

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i.e., a sin offering)

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<sup>4</sup> See especially section II, "The Saving Work of Jesus Christ", in Bible Basics 4A: Christology.

for us, so that we might have God's righteousness in Him.  
2nd Corinthians 5:21

Jesus Christ did this for us. And while we cannot fully comprehend the length and breadth and depth of the sacrifice He made for us, we certainly should take to heart and never let slip from our hearts the truth that our salvation, our deliverance from the grave, from death, and from eternal condemnation, is entirely due to that sacrifice. That being so, should we not make it our foremost priority to respond to Him and do what He tells us to do, namely, "die to sin and live to righteousness"?

### **Die to Sins and Live to Righteousness (v.24):**

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. By His wound you were healed.  
1st Peter 2:24

Jesus' sacrifice saved us, but we are still here in the world after that so great salvation has become a reality. That is Peter's point in bringing the cross in here, after calling attention to the Lord as our prime exemplar just before (in verse twenty-one). Not only did our Lord give us the pattern we are to follow but He also more than earned our willing obedience in following the path He laid down by buying us free from death and damnation through His own blood, His suffering of the penalty for death for all of our sins in the darkness on the cross. And He did so, as the verse above proclaims "in order that, having died in respect to our sins" we might "live to righteousness". As born again believers in Jesus Christ, we are "in union with Christ"; that is, we are positionally "in Him" (e.g., Jn.14:20; 15:1ff.; Rom.16:7; 2Cor.5:17; Eph.2:6; 2:10; Heb.3:14; 1Pet.5:14), and thus share intimately in Him in every way. In Christ, we are "dead to the world", having been crucified with Him in principle so as to be done with all worldly and sinful things forevermore.

Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.  
Romans 6:6 NKJV

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.  
Galatians 2:20 NKJV

And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.  
Galatians 5:24 NKJV

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.  
Galatians 6:14 NKJV

(14) For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all,

then all died; (15) and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

2nd Corinthians 5:14-15 NKJV

Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:4 NKJV (cf. Rom.7:4-6; 8:10)

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:3 NKJV (cf. Col.2:20)

As the verse in our present context (1Pet.2:24) as well as all of the other verses quoted just above show clearly enough, this positional death believers share with our Lord by virtue of being in union with Him has, as one of its fundamental purposes, our sanctification, that is, our separation from all things sinful going forward in our Christian lives.

For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8:13 NKJV

Needless to say, while our positional death to sin is absolute, our actual and experiential sanctification in this world is all too often something else again. Called to be perfectly holy (1Pet.1:15-16), no one living "in the flesh" will ever achieve such absolute perfection . . . but we are expected not only to commit ourselves to that godly goal but also to make strides daily in our separation from sin and from the world in all that we think and say and do. It is a fight – there is no doubt about that. But it is a fight our dear Lord Jesus expects us to engage in wholeheartedly – and has every right by virtue of what He has done for us in redeeming us to anticipate that we will strive to do. When we fall short, as all do, He is our Advocate along with the Spirit in forgiving us when we confess all of our sins, sins for which He has already died and paid the entire price of judgment (Ps.32:5; Rom.8:26-27; 1Jn.1:9; 2:1).

For all believers, therefore, "dying to sin" is not just a platitude. It is an essential mandate, namely, to bring our behavior into complete compliance with our position: by virtue of being in Christ we are perfect; therefore we should behave in a perfect way. This is what "living to righteousness" really means. The righteousness described in our context is that which we believers are given when we put our faith in Jesus Christ (Rom.3:23-26; 4:1-5; 4:25; 5:1; 8:28-30).

Now [Abraham] trusted in the Lord, and [the Lord] considered him righteous because of it.

Genesis 15:6

Having God's righteousness, we are free from all blame, positionally, and thus, once again, expected to be making every godly effort to bring our actual behavior completely into line with that perfect righteousness that is ours by virtue of being one with Jesus Christ. "Living" thus

means just what it says: how we are conducting our Christian lives in this world. If we are "pursuing sanctification" (Heb.12:14), seeking to be holy and live righteously at all times and in every way, then we are living up to this mandate. But if not . . .

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.  
2nd Timothy 2:11-13

Finally in this regard, it can never be forgotten that living to please Jesus Christ is *not* just a matter of refraining from doing anything wrong, nor even mostly so. Pleasing our Lord, truly responding to the righteousness that is ours by faith in Him, means doing the *positive* things He wants us to do.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."  
Matthew 16:24 ESV

Living for Jesus Christ means denying ourselves in turning away from sin and also reconciling ourselves to the fact that we live for Him and are willing to die for Him at any time (and we carry that cross with us our whole lives long). But it also and fundamentally means following Him, that is, doing what He did in perfectly growing to spiritual maturity, perfectly progressing in passing all of the tests that came His way, and perfectly producing in accomplishing the ministry of ministries before suffering the gauntlet of the cross and the spiritual death that followed. We, of course, will never be perfect in this life, but we are rewarded according to our godly efforts in doing the positive things our Lord has called us to do – and that should be sufficient additional motivation for us to do so, our deep desire for His good pleasure as well as fear of His displeasure.

(10) For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless. (11) Therefore since we know the fear of the Lord, while we attempt to persuade men, God sees us entirely for what we [truly] are – and I trust that what we [truly] are is equally clear to your consciences.  
2nd Corinthians 5:10-11

Let us resolve therefore to turn away from all that is ungodly and instead aggressively embrace the challenge of accomplishing everything our Lord wants us to do in this life, making it our purpose to grow, progress and produce for Him, in spite of any and all suffering and opposition that may stand in the way of doing so, whether on the job or in any other facet of our lives.

### **By His Wound you were Healed (v.24):**

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness. By His wound you were healed.  
1st Peter 2:24

The wound here is of course His death for our sins on the cross. All that we have as believers, anticipation of the resurrection and eternal life wherein all present bodily troubles will be forever banished, depends on our Lord's having "borne our sins in His body on the tree". That is how we have been "healed" from the sin that would otherwise have doomed us to the lake of fire forever, and that is why instead we have only eternal bliss to look forward to. All the more reason never to let gratitude to our Lord for what He has done for us ever drop away from our hearts and minds.

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14 NKJV

### **Sheep Going Astray but Now Turned Back (v.25):**

For you were once like sheep going astray, but you have now turned back to the Shepherd and Overseer of your lives.

1st Peter 2:25

To help us cement this perspective of putting away the things of the past and embracing with all of our hearts the new life we have in Jesus Christ, Peter invites us to remember – briefly – the pointlessness and the sorrow of our lives before we belonged to our dear Savior. Just as there is nothing worse for sheep than to be without a good shepherd, so all was vanity and despair before we were saved. We had no direction, and the direction we were proceeding in augured nothing but darkness and death. But now that the light of salvation has dawned for us in Jesus Christ, we have a Good Shepherd, in fact the perfect One (Ps.23:1ff.; Ps.80:1; Is.40:11; Ezek.34:11-16; Matt.2:6; Lk.12:32; Jn.10:11-16; Heb.13:20; 1Pet.5:4; Rev.7:17). He was always our rightful Shepherd, having paid for all with His own blood in dying for our sins on the cross. And we who are His true flock have indeed "turned back" from the world and from the broad way that leads to damnation to follow instead the One who has nothing but our absolute good in mind at all times (Rom.8:28). He is the One who cares for us always, and He will superintend our lives all the way to the end, until that glorious day when we finally see our dear Savior Jesus Christ face to face at last.

For this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto death.

Psalms 48:14

Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His holy ones.

Psalms 116:15

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2nd Timothy 4:18 NIV

So it makes no difference who our worldly king (or shepherd) happens to be at present or who our worldly boss may be now (or overseer): the One who is really in charge of our lives now and forevermore is Jesus Christ – and it is incumbent upon us to live those lives accordingly, bearing

up in a way pleasing to Him under whatever sharing of the sufferings of Christ we are called upon to endure . . . and never ever giving up.

(2) Turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep in mind all the terrible opposition He endured against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:2-3