

1 Peter 2:19-25

¹⁹For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God. ²⁰For what credit is it to you if you receive a beating for sinning and patiently endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God.

²¹Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. ²²He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. ²⁵For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Favorable

I.

“This is favorable,” Peter said as this reading began. What is favorable? The things you say are “favorable” are simply not fair.

I can hear the puzzled words and see the puzzled faces of some of those who first read Peter’s letter. If we could step back in time and walk in their sandals, Christians of today would be indignant right along with them. The people Peter addressed in this section of his letter were most certainly *not* being treated fairly. Here’s who he was addressing: “Slaves, submit to your masters with total respect, not only to those who are good and kind but also to those who are harsh” (1 Peter 2:18, EHV).

I suppose some of those who found themselves as slaves or household servants might have come to terms with their position. They might have accepted it, at least to a certain extent, but they still saw it as unjust and unfair.

Just a few verses into today’s reading Peter says: “For what credit is it to you if you receive a beating for sinning and patiently endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God” (1 Peter 2:20, EHV). “This is my *pastor* speaking to me?” they might have thought. First he tells me that if I—as a slave, mind you—am not completely obeying my master and get a beating, I deserve a beating. Then he tells me that what’s *really* favorable to God is when I endure a beating even though I’ve been doing what is good and right. *That* is totally not fair.

Christians today would not disagree with them. What they went through was unfair.

“For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God” (1 Peter 2:19, EHV). Just like Christians of Peter’s day, Christians today suffer unjustly when we are conscious of God—in other words, when we follow what God says is good and right and just in his Word.

While the First Amendment to our nation’s constitution guarantees Christians the right to worship God as we choose, there are constant pressures to adjust our worship and our beliefs and our practices to what society deems appropriate.

Back in the days of *Roe v. Wade*, Christians were told that abortion ought to be safe, legal, and rare. When that ruling was overturned by the US Supreme Court recently, many Christian people cheered. Even before the ruling, abortion activists had expanded from “safe, legal, and rare” to “shout your abortion” and “celebrate your abortion.” States like our own have now codified abortion even more deeply and radically than it ever was before. The matter is now settled, we are told, and Christians really shouldn’t talk about it anymore—just accept where things stand; don’t rock the boat.

Homosexuality has also progressed from something Christians were told to acknowledge as an alternate lifestyle to something Christians are told we must accept and embrace. As more and more people accepted homosexuality, the culture pushed further—into the transgender movement.

What is the Christian to do? Those who push back against any of the cultural norms in any way, or even just hold firm to their own beliefs, are called bigots who are filled with hate for people. It's not fair that we should be seen this way or treated this way.

II.

The injustice and persecution Christians face bring on stress and anxiety. Typically, there are two responses to anxiety: fight or flight.

The abuse suffered by Christian slaves could not be taken lightly. The anxiety endured as Christians are pressured to embrace the common sins of today cannot be taken lightly, either.

There is a temptation to lie in wait and plot revenge. Peter knew all about that one. His first instinct in the Garden of Gethsemane when soldiers came to confront Jesus and arrest him was to draw his sword and fight back. Other disciples reacted in similar ways. When James and John were the advance party preparing for Jesus to enter a Samaritan village, they found that Jesus would not be welcomed there. They asked Jesus: "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" (Luke 9:54, EHV).

The urge to fight back over injustice suffered for Christ is powerful. I don't think most Christians fight back by trying to physically assault those who oppose the Bible and cause us to suffer unjustly. Instead, they fight back by pushing for legislation that promotes Christianity, or at least doesn't relegate Christianity to an underground religion.

The "flight" response might be even more powerful than the "fight" response when it comes to the stress and anxiety of persecution. Christians become worn out with the assaults on their faith. One social issue after another comes into direct opposition. It's tempting to flee from the attacks. Not only individual Christians but even whole churches flee by softening their stance on biblical teachings, even if they have to twist God's Word like a pretzel to make it plausible. Even churches that soften their theology will be attacked, so flight dictates a total change of belief system; generic spirituality or some other religion might offer paths to a brighter immediate future.

"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps...²³When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats" (1 Peter 2:21, 23, EHV). Jesus didn't just *preach* turning the other cheek, he modeled it—he showed us how it's done. *That's* the way Christians are to behave, Peter says. In the readings from Peter's First Letter coming up in the weeks ahead, Peter will say: "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult" (1 Peter 3:9, EHV). I don't know about you, but I haven't always been very good at that. It's not the way of the world to suffer in silence.

"For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God.²⁰ ...If you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God.²¹Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:19-21, EHV). How do you stack up on the "favorable" scale? Are you pretty good at following Christ's example? While sometimes you might outwardly suffer for doing good, inwardly you rebel and chafe at the insults. Among your family and friends you complain about what you must endure as a follower of Jesus.

III.

"He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.²³When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats" (1 Peter 2:22-23, EHV). What was *really* unfair was the way Jesus was treated. Talk about suffering unjustly!

All throughout his earthly ministry Jesus was insulted. He was constantly challenged. The Pharisees and Sadducees and teachers of the Law constantly tried to trick him and to trap him into saying something they could use against him. When they failed—they made it up.

Never did Jesus sin. Not once. When he stood before the High Priest in the kangaroo court convened illegally in the middle of the night, still he did not retaliate to their lies and threats. Without retaliation he endured the insults of the guards as well as their beatings.

“Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23, EHV). God knows the truth. God knows the guilty from the innocent. The individual is not to take such things into his own hands. God said: “To me belongs vengeance and repayment” (Deuteronomy 32:35, EHV). Rather than seek a means of revenge, Jesus entrusted judgment to his Heavenly Father.

“He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24, EHV). Jesus’ sinlessness and righteousness and holiness were all part of God’s plan to make him our substitute.

Luther says: “When the merciful Father saw that we were being oppressed through the Law, that we were being held under a curse, and that we could not be liberated from it by anything, He sent His Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all men upon Him, and said to Him: ‘Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that You pay and make satisfaction for them’” (Luther’s Works, 26 p. 280).

Jesus became the slave who found it impossible to endure the unjust suffering of a harsh master. He became the weak-kneed Christian who softened his stance against sin. He became the preacher who decided it would be easier to twist God’s Word and make it say what his people wanted to hear. He carried every single one of those sins to the tree of the cross. He made satisfaction for them, as God demanded. By his wounds you were healed.

IV.

“For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25, EHV). You *did* find it difficult, if not impossible, to endure unjust suffering. The wounds of Jesus have changed all that. You *were* sheep that were going astray. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has brought you into the sheep pen. He is the Overseer of your soul.

“For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God” (1 Peter 2:19, EHV). The only way you and I are able to do what is favorable is out of thanks to our Lord Jesus, who first did it in our place and suffered death and abandonment by God to pay for the times we haven’t been perfect in endurance.

Even knowing what Jesus has done and wanting to show thanks to him for it, suffering unjustly will still be overwhelming sometimes. God has promised to never leave us or forsake us. Jesus has promised that he would be with us until the very end of the age. When it all feels too overwhelming to endure, he will carry you through.

This is favorable. Keep enduring. Keep enduring even the sorrows, for Jesus has already brought you everlasting life. Amen.