

“Following Jesus –For Real (Part 2)”

1 Peter 2:18-25

18 You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. 19 For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. 20 Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.

21 For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in His steps.

22 He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. 23 He did not retaliate when He was insulted, nor threaten revenge when He suffered. He left His case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. 24 He personally carried our sins in His body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By His wounds, You are healed. 25 Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.

Irritated by the loud TV blaring in the restaurant where you’re eating? Bugged by the guy yakking on his cell phone a few feet away? Thanks to new technologies you don’t have to suffer any more.

There’s a good chance this has now happened to you: You’re having dinner in a nice restaurant with your significant other when the evening is marred because some inconsiderate individual (we will refrain from calling him a “jerk”) at a nearby table is carrying on a long cell-phone conversation at a volume level that nobody within 50 feet can ignore.

You’re irritated, but given that people today sometimes become explosive in public — giving rise to terms like “road rage” and “going postal” — you know that it’s probably unwise to confront this person. But wouldn’t it be cool if you had in your pocket some sort of electronic jamming device that would allow you, without the yakker’s knowledge, to instantly shut down his cell phone with the touch of a button? Indeed it would, and what’s more, you may soon be able to purchase just such an implement for a few bucks at your local electronics store.

According to a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal*, titled appropriately “Revenge by Gadget,” there’s an emerging subcategory in the realm of electronics that is churning out gadgets designed expressly to neutralize inconsiderate behavior. The people driving this field include not only freelance inventors, basement tinkerers and savvy entrepreneurs, but even students at MIT’s Media Lab, where such devices are collectively dubbed “annoyance-tech.”

Here’s a partial list of such inventions that are currently available:

- A \$50 device that shuts up other people’s dogs by answering their barks with an

electronic squeal that humans can't hear. It's disguised as a birdhouse so the dog owners won't know that you're silencing their mutts.

- A \$20 handset that enables you to shut off loud TV sets in public places like bars and doctors' offices.
- A product called "the Mosquito" that emits high-frequency sounds that particularly irritate teenagers, usually causing them to move along and congregate elsewhere. The rest of us can't hear the noise because, by the time we reach adulthood, we have lost the ability to detect sounds that high.

People are regularly coming up with new creations to deal with irritating situations, especially now that the cost of the microchips used in electronic equipment has fallen dramatically. These inventions are creating another whole level of human interaction, though we have an idea that some of it may backfire; many actions that are retaliatory in nature do. But don't be surprised if eventually someone comes up with an appliance to counter your pet peeve. That means that, sooner or later, you will have at your disposal a low-cost device *to exact some kind of revenge against those who bother you.*

Speaking of irritating situations: A group of chess enthusiasts checked into a hotel and were standing in the lobby discussing their recent tournament victories. After about an hour the manager came out of the office and asked them to disperse.

"But why?" they asked as they moved off. "Because," he said, "I can't stand chess nuts boasting in an open foyer."

And that leads us to today's Scripture reading from 1 Peter. It says that Jesus, when he was abused, did not return abuse. It says that when he suffered, he did not threaten. Admittedly the suffering of Jesus went way beyond the little irritations of daily life that the annoyance-tech products are aimed at countering, but there's a common principle.

It's hard to see at first though, because this reading starts by addressing *slaves*, and it advises them to accept the authority of their masters, even if those masters are harsh with them. Thus, we may expect not to find much in this passage for ourselves, but if we make that assumption, we're wrong. In fact, I would argue that this passage in its entirety has as much to do with following Jesus as does any reading from the whole New Testament. And that's because *Peter has developed his specific advice for Christians who are slaves from a larger principle that broadly applies to all Christians and is based ultimately in the behavior of Jesus himself.*

After instructing slaves who are followers of Jesus, Peter explains his thinking behind it in a way that we can all identify with. "For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval" (vv. 19-20).

I am sure there were much worse things that I was undeservedly accused of but I remember one time in the car on the way to visit my grandparents. My sister and I argued and bickered and fussed a lot before I moved away to college. This one

particular time my sister had learned that if she yelled “stop it” at the right time my Dad would reach back and hit me. But this time my Dad just happened to be looking in the rearview mirror when she yelled “Rick stop it” and my Dad reached back and hit her. The shocked look on her face was priceless.

Of course, our society is different from Peter’s. Slavery is not a legal part of our society, so none of us have had the experience of being flogged by someone who owns us. We know, of course, what it means to be held responsible for our actual mistakes and failures, but most of us have also been treated unjustly in some other way at some time. We’ve been blamed for things we didn’t do, accused of bad motives when our intentions were quite the opposite or smeared as an opportunist when we were unselfishly trying to help someone. We’ve had reason to understand the saying, “No good deed goes unpunished.”

Thus, Peter’s logic makes sense to us. If you accept blame when the screw-up really is your fault, why should you expect credit for that? You *should* take responsibility; it’s the right — and only — thing to do. But if you suffer for doing the right thing, then you’ve done something noteworthy — and, Peter adds, “you have God’s approval.” [NOTE 1]

But Peter’s not done with his explanation yet. He now brings it to the source of Christianity itself, Jesus Christ. Peter says, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps” (v. 21).

At this point, it should be obvious that what Peter is saying applies much more widely than just to slaves. In fact, the lectionary which suggests passages for Pastors to preach on weekly, actually starts this reading at verse 19, omitting the reference to slaves, probably to emphasize that Peter’s words have universal application for Christians.

But what is the application? Is it that we should seek occasions for suffering unjustly? Should we be glad for the rude guy in the restaurant yakking on his cell phone because it provided an opportunity for us to *not* retaliate? As already mentioned, Peter says that when Jesus was abused, he did not return the abuse. So, if we actually had an electronic jamming device in our pocket, should we get some sort of credit in heaven for not pushing the button?

The problem is, when we focus the question on a single incident such as the restaurant situation, where at most it involves a minor inconvenience, the matter can sound silly. But what Peter’s talking about is anything but silly. In effect, he’s saying that Christians must not divide life into compartments where each section has different, and sometimes incompatible, principles of behavior. *What guides us in our relations with fellow Christians ought also to come into play in our relations with irritating strangers, and both situations should be guided by the example of Jesus.*

“An eye for an eye.” The way of the world is the way of revenge. Jesus Christ demonstrates for us a higher way: the way of forgiveness. Forgiving others, especially when the wound is deep, is one of the most difficult things any of us will ever be called

upon to do. Yet, few tasks are more important, for the person being forgiven, or for the person doing the forgiving. It's Frederick Buechner who says, in one of his books: "Forgiveness is when you set a prisoner free, and then you realize the prisoner is you."

The defining character of a Christian is as a "servant", not a master – and it is only in service to others that the Christian becomes most fully Christ-like. The Bible tells us that Jesus came to serve!

Now even aside from the example of Jesus, there are plenty of reasons why payback can make things worse. When we're responding to someone else's troublesome action, whether it was driven by thoughtlessness or deliberate selfishness, our line of thinking is apt be something like, "Well, he/she started it." Thus we think our retaliation is merely a matter of "getting even."

But the problem with that is that not everyone counts from the same initiating event. A study conducted at the University of Texas not long ago explains. For the study, the testers asked several pairs of volunteers to role play world leaders who had to decide whether to initiate a nuclear strike. The first volunteer was instructed to make an opening statement and the second volunteer was told to respond. Then the first was to respond to the second, and so on. Once the conversation was over, the volunteers were shown several of the statements from the debate and asked to recall what had been said just before and just after each of them. **[NOTE 2]**

The results were revealing. When the volunteers were shown their own statements, they easily remembered what had led them to say it. But when they were shown one of the other person's statements, what they remembered *was how they had responded*. In other words, they recalled the causes of their own statements and consequences of their partner's statements. That means that while they tended to see everything from their own perspective, they didn't really notice how *their own statements had triggered the other person's response*. Thus when we're reacting to someone else's affront of us, we may be overlooking altogether our own contributions to the clash.

So, for purely behavioral reasons, it's wise to think twice about our attempts to put others in what we think is their place. But Peter isn't thinking about behavioral psychology, he's thinking about Jesus as the model for Christians to follow. That has always been the basic message of this passage. **[NOTE 3]**

I've got a news flash. Life is NOT FAIR! Jesus' example reminds us to keep our eyes focused on Him, submit humbly, and leave the paybacks, the revenge, to God. What goes 'round comes around. The world will get what it has coming, those who persecute, tease, or cause you pain will get what they deserve, but it is not up to you or me to make sure that happens. We must leave it in God's hands and simply trust God to handle it.

One of the things that brought the main message of following Jesus and living His way was brought sharply into view more than a century ago in a novel by Charles Sheldon titled *In His Steps*. This is a phrase right out of verse 21 in this biblical passage. In fact, the book begins with the pastor of a fictional congregation working on a sermon

from that very verse. Sheldon's book was written in 1897, and it became a blockbuster, selling over eight million copies, and it never has really gone out of print since. It tells the story of what happened in the lives of members of a church after they committed themselves to approach the decisions in their workplaces and other arenas of life by asking themselves what Jesus would do and then trying to do that. The results were life-changing for the members of that congregation and this also had a positive impact in the community.

That was only a story, of course, but the spark for it came from the author's personal experience. At the time he wrote the book, he was a minister in Topeka, Kansas, but before that, he had been in social work, and as an experiment, he once disguised himself as an unemployed printer. He then walked the streets of Topeka to see what would happen. What he discovered was indifference among many professing Christians toward those in need. That shocked and saddened him, but it also led him to imagine how different things would be if Christians did not compartmentalize their lives and allowed their Christianity to be equally applied to all situations. The book, *In His Steps* was the result.

A service filled life does not mean we can't sleep in comfort, or that we only eat certain foods. A "sacrificial life" does not have anything to do with a long list of do's and don'ts. It looks like putting others first and truly loving God and our neighbor! The only way to be able to submit to suffering that is undeserved is to keep your focus totally on Jesus Christ. The kind of behavior that patiently and humbly waits on God even during undeserved suffering is the kind of behavior that brings glory to God and ministers to others. God knows how to make our witness effective if we are but willing to let Him work through us. "Humble yourselves therefor, under God's mighty hand that He may lift you up in due time; cast all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7).

And do you remember the WWJD campaign that reached out to young people about 20 years ago? That stood for "What would Jesus do?" and it was an outgrowth of both the book "In His Steps" and Peter's statement that "because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps" (v.21).**[NOTE 4]** The real subject, then, of this passage is not turning the other cheek, or saying no to revengeful acts. It is about following Jesus — *for real*. It means looking at his footsteps as revealed in the Bible, and then trying to place our feet in the same places.

If we do that, sooner or later we will come to someplace where we cannot see his footprints, simply because we are in a situation Jesus did not specifically address. We still have to walk through it, but we can do so taking what we know of Jesus, and trying to step as we think he would. That is why it is so important to be reading your Bible every day. So that you have a good idea what Jesus might do. Then, of course, He will help us find the right path, too, for as Peter also said in this section, before we followed Jesus, we "were going astray like sheep." Now, however, in following in his steps, we have "returned to the shepherd and guardian of our souls" (v. 25). Proverbs 3:5-6 reads, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not depend on your own understanding. Seek

[Note 5]

His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.”

So let us not merely talk about Jesus, or merely admire him, but let us follow him — for real. How might you take a step today towards following Jesus for real? How are you going to apply what we talked about today to your life? Please, write something down on the Sermon Notes in your bulletin. What are you going to do different this week, starting today, to get better at following Jesus ... for real!

Let's pray ... Lord God, teach us what it means to truly live with Jesus as our Lord and our Savior. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit afresh and renew our hearts and minds that we may follow in His steps. Help us to make time to read and study Your word, to pray, and to fellowship with our brothers and sisters daily. Thank You for being such a wonderful and perfect example for us. It is in the name of that wonderful perfect example, Jesus Christ that we pray. AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Following Jesus—For Real (Part 2)”

Based on 1 Peter 2: 18-25 given at Doster Community Church September 3, 2023

- I. In effect, Peter is saying that Christians must not divide life into compartments where each section has different, and sometimes incompatible, principles of behavior. What guides us in our relations with fellow Christians ought also to come into play in our relations with irritating strangers, and both situations should be guided by the example of Jesus.
- II. In a study done at the University of Texas it was shown that while volunteers tended to see everything from their own perspective, they didn't really notice how their own statements had triggered the other person's response. People tend to ignore their own contributions to a clash.
- III. Peter is proposing Jesus as the model for Christians to follow. The results of approaching all your decisions from the perspective of what Jesus would do and trying to do that are life changing and impact the community.
- IV. The real subject of this passage is not turning the other cheek or saying no to revenge, it is about following Jesus – for Real! Know Jesus well enough to be able to step forward in the way Jesus would. Do life His way.
- V. So let us not merely talk about Jesus, or merely admire Him, but follow Him for real! Think about it, how do we be more like Jesus? So what are you going to do about it? Please write something down. How can you get to know Jesus better?