

The Christian Pilgrim and Unjust Suffering

One of our greatest and most effective tools that the LORD God has given to us, his children, to assist us in our walk with him, to assist us in our godliness, and our holiness, to assist us in our spiritual journey, our pilgrimage through this world, is the life and example of his son, Jesus Christ. As the God-man who dwelt among us, and whose glory was seen, the LORD Jesus Christ lived an exemplary life. The LORD Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, he perfectly followed the LORD God, he perfectly obeyed the LORD God. Jesus Christ perfectly walked through this sinful and fallen world in complete submission to the will and purpose of God the Father.

The manner in which the LORD Jesus Christ lived his life, his words and his works, serve as the pattern to which we must closely follow. The life of Christ, his words and his works, are a tremendous help to us in our sanctification, in our ongoing conformity to the image of Christ. Consider the following passages:

Matthew 11:29, Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.

Matthew 16:24, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

John 10:4, When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

John 13:15, For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Romans 15:5, May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2, Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

1 John 2:6, whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

As Christians pilgrims, as sojourners, as exiles, as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, as those who are temporarily traveling through this world, we must look and learn from the example set by the LORD Jesus Christ. Christians ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. Our lives must be lived in accordance with his life. We must look to him. We must learn from him. We must follow him. We must follow the pattern and example of the LORD Jesus Christ, who was given as our example, that we should do as he has done.

I grew up in Seattle Washington, right across the street from Woodland Park. I spent a lot of time at that park. There were playing fields, tennis courts, a running track, and a large wooded area

with lots of walking trails, and bicycle trails all throughout. My all-time favorite activity was riding my BMX bike on these trails, because the entire park was situated on a steep hill. So riding from the top of the hill to the bottom of the hill was a whole lot of fun. On one of these steep trails there was a bike jump at the very bottom of the path, and it was called the Parachute jump. It was called the Parachute jump because if you were to go off that jump, you would need a parachute to safely land it. None of my friends, including me, had ever attempted the Parachute jump. There was a lot of legend that surrounded this jump (no one knew who built it, it was illegal, kids had died trying, that sort of thing, etc.). But then one day, some unknown kid, on a sweet BMX bike, came soaring down the hill and flew off the parachute jump, landing it perfectly. It was amazing. I still vividly remember it. At 10 years old, my world had just been turned upside down, because the impossible had just become possible. The Parachute jump had been conquered and I had seen it with my own two eyes. I do not know who that rider was, and I never saw him again, but his example gave us the confidence to attempt the Parachute jump. And that very day, every one of us successfully attempted and landed that jump, and none of us died.

What made our attempts possible? All it took was someone to go first. All it took was for someone to lead the way. For us to make the jump, all we needed to do was to follow the example set by the unknown rider. So we followed the same route, down the same track, at the same speed, and we successfully made the jump. In our walk with the LORD God, in our journey through this world, the LORD Jesus Christ went first. The LORD Jesus Christ led the way. He has gone before us and he has set the standard. He is the benchmark. His life is the pattern, and the mold, to which our lives must conform.

Our passage this morning is 1 Peter 2:21-25.

1 Peter 2:21-25, For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin live to righteousness. By his wound you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

In this passage, Peter reveals to us that the example set by the LORD Jesus Christ, provides for us everything we need to know, in order to endure and triumph over unjust suffering and tribulation. Peter reminds us of four things:

1. The Call to unjust suffering (v21).
2. The Example set by the LORD Jesus Christ amidst unjust suffering (vv22-23).
3. The Purpose of unjust suffering (v24).
4. The Results of unjust suffering (v25).

The Call (v21). The Example (vv22-23). The Purpose (v24). The Results (v25). This morning we will look at points one and two (The Call and The Example), and Lord willing we will conclude next month with points three and four (The Purpose and The Result).

The Calling (v21)

1 Peter 2:21, For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Notice the first section of v21: For to this you have been called. What is Peter referring to? What is the “this?” To what have we been called? The term “this” refers back to the previous passage of vv 18-20, which addresses believers who experience unjust suffering. Believers who are suffering for doing what is right, suffering for doing what is pleasing to the LORD God.

1 Peter 2:19-20, For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Unjust suffering is a gracious thing in the sight of God, and it is for this, unjust suffering, that you and I have been called. The LORD God calls his children to suffer unjustly. Back in 1 Peter 2:9, we learned that we are a people of tremendous blessing. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, so that we might proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. Just as we have been called from death to life, just as we have been called out of darkness into the light, so also have we been called to unjust suffering. The call to salvation and the call to suffer go hand in hand. In fact, it is actually through unjust suffering that we will experience our great salvation. In other words, in the life of a Christian, suffering is not just a temporary detour on the road that leads to everlasting glory, but rather, suffering is the road that leads to everlasting glory. To this we have been called.

Why does the LORD God call us to suffer? Suffering is necessary for us, because suffering was necessary for him, our example, the LORD Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:29-30, For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

As Christian pilgrims, our suffering for the sake of Christ has been granted. Our suffering for the sake of Christ is to be counted a privilege, because Christ Jesus also suffered for us. Charles Spurgeon commented that "There are no crown bearers in heaven that were not cross bearers on earth." J.C. Ryle remarked, "A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing! A cheap Christianity, without a cross, will prove in the end a useless Christianity, without a crown." Suffering must precede glory, the cross must precede the crown, and this is our calling, this is our road to travel, because Jesus Christ also suffered for us.

What kind of suffering are we talking about? How did the LORD Jesus Christ suffer for us? Peter is referring to the condescension and the humiliation of Christ Jesus. The LORD God entered into his own creation. The LORD God Almighty became flesh and blood. He took upon himself humanity, he dwelt among us, his glory was seen, and he was crucified at the hands of his own sinful creation. Jesus Christ was our sacrificial lamb, he was the divinely appointed substitute for sinners. Jesus Christ stood in the place of sinners, as the propitiation, as the wrath absorber of God, and he received in full the penalty and the consequence of sin.

Philippians 2:6-8, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

For the LORD Jesus Christ, the road to everlasting glory was the road of suffering, and the example of his life, serves as the pattern that his children are called to follow.

The Example (vv22-23)

Look again at 1 Peter 2:21.

1 Peter 2:21, For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

The Greek word translated “example” is *hypogrammos* meaning to write under, to copy, or to trace. This is an educational term, which refers to the faint outlines of letters or patterns, which are then traced over by those who were seeking to duplicate the original image. Just as a student, with painstaking effort and close application, follows the contour and shape of the letters of his teacher, so is the Christian pilgrim, with the same effort and application, to trace and follow the pattern that was set by the LORD Jesus Christ. Again, he is our standard, and we are to follow all of his lines, we are to follow in all of his steps. The Greek word for steps literally means a footprints or a track. And the picture that comes to mind is a small child attempting to walk in the footprints made by his father, or his mother, in the snow, or in the sand. Likewise, we are to follow, with extreme diligence and effort, in the same footprints, and the same path that our LORD Jesus Christ walked. Amidst suffering, amidst unjust suffering, we are to walk in the same manner that he walked.

Practically speaking, what does that look like? What does it look like to follow his example? We live in a very different time, in a very different culture, with very different challenges, how are we to follow in the footsteps of the LORD Jesus Christ, who lived over 2000 years ago? The answers to these questions are found in the next two verses.

1 Peter 2:22-23, He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Peter highlight's the response of his unjust suffering, by alluding to the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53 –the Suffering Servant.

Isaiah 53:7-9, He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

The LORD Jesus Christ committed no sin, neither was any deceit found in his mouth. Even though he was unjustly afflicted, even though he was unjustly oppressed, even though he was cut off from the land of the living, and stricken for the transgressions of the people of God, yet, in all of this he did not sin. Jesus Christ is the Holy One. He is the Righteous One. He is the Lamb who was slain, yet without spot, yet without blemish, and yet without sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21, For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Hebrews 4:15, For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

1 John 3:5, you know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

I want you to think for a moment about the life of the LORD Jesus Christ. I want you to think for a moment about what he had to endure as a man: hostility, exile, threats, danger, temptation, disrespect, mockery, rivalry, unbelief, misunderstanding, rejection, name calling, gossip, slander, intimidation, betrayal, false witness, false arrest, unjust trials, conspiracy, beatings, flogging, imprisonment, public shame, and crucifixion. In all of these unjust difficulties the LORD Jesus Christ did not sin. In all of these, he did not violate the word of God, he did not transgress the law of God.

Peter's reasoning is clear: if in the most difficult of circumstances, the LORD Jesus Christ did not sin, then neither should we sin in far easier circumstances. In our unjust suffering, in our mistreatment, in our difficulties and trials, we too must strive to be without sin, we must strive to be like Christ—including our speech.

What is the first thing that typically goes when you experience pain, or suffering, or frustration? The control of your tongue, your speech, the things that you say. For most people, myself included, pain, suffering, and frustration will often remove the filter between my brain and my mouth. Do you know why? Because your mouth is the spout of your heart. So, what comes out of your mouth actually proceeds from out of your heart.

Matthew 12:33-37, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. The words that come out of your mouth proceed from your heart. Thus, evil words proceed from an evil heart. Good words proceed from a good heart. Angry words proceed from an angry heart, and joyful words proceed from a joyful heart. At the heart of all of our communication problems is the heart. The reason why there was no deceit found in the mouth of the LORD Jesus Christ is because there was no deceit found in his heart. In our pain, and suffering, and difficulties, the reason why we lose control of our

tongue, the reason why we lose control of our speech, is because our mouths are simply speaking from the overflow of our hearts.

Even after our conversion to Christ, even after the LORD God replaces our heart of stone with a new heart of flesh, indwelling sin is still ever present, and our speech reveals the idolatry of our hearts.

James 3:2, And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

It is only the perfect man, who will never stumble in what he says. The LORD Jesus Christ was and is the only perfect man. He never stumbled in what he said. “He committed no sin, neither was any deceit found in his mouth.”

Again, the reasoning is clear, if in the most difficult of circumstances, there was no deceit found in the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, then neither should deceit be found in your mouths, in far less difficult circumstances. The Greek word translated “deceit” is *dolos* and it refers to a fishhook, a trap, or a trick. This term is a reference to every form of deceitfulness. To be deceitful is to deliberately attempt to mislead, to snare, or to bait other people by telling them lies. It is a desire to gain advantage over another, or to preserve your own position, by deceiving other people through cunning and guile.

Proverbs 12:22, Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are His delight.

Ephesians 4:25, Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

Deceit must not be found in our mouths. In pain, suffering, and difficulty, our speech must reflect a regenerate heart. It must reflect the speech of the LORD Jesus Christ. It must be honest and truthful. It must be righteous. It must be sound. There should be no form of deceitfulness, none whatsoever, in any part of our speech.

As we strive to follow the example of Christ, there are many forms of deceit to which we must pay careful attention. One of the most common forms of deceitfulness is the outright lie. An outright lie is a complete fabrication of the truth. A good example of an outright lie, is the conversation between Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:1-4, Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will surely not die.”

What was God’s command and promise in these verses? “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.” What was the

serpent's response? "You will surely not die." Was he speaking the truth? No, that was not the truth. That was a blatant lie. Satan outright calls the LORD God a liar, and he verbally negates his promise. He deceives Eve into thinking that she will most surely not die. But what were the consequences for Adam and Eve? Death. Both Adam and Eve died. And what were the consequences for the rest of mankind? Death, one trespass led to condemnation for all men.

The outright lie is the mother of all deception, but more commonly, I think most of us probably struggle with the lesser forms of deception, the respectable side of lying and deceit. Such as exaggeration. "You know what, you have never treated me right. You have never supported me. You have never ever been nice to me." Never? Never ever? I have never been nice to you? Not even once? Do you know what you always do? You always leave a mess wherever you go. You always make a mountain out of a molehill. You always hurt my feelings." I always do these things? I may do them quite often, but always?" Do you see what's happening here? Exaggeration. Exaggeration is when you take the truth and you go far beyond it. Using words like always and never will get you into trouble. Always and never are exaggerating words. And let me tell you, beyond the truth, lies nothing but falsehood and deception. Exaggeration is a common and subtle form of deception that we must be on guard against.

How about another respectable form of deception, the half-truth or the partial truth? This is when you give only part of the information, so that you lead a person to believe that something is true when it is really not entirely true. For example, Abraham and his wife Sarah traveling to the land of Egypt.

Genesis 12:11-13, When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, "I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."

Was this an outright lie? No, this was a half-truth. Sarah was actually Abraham's sister, she was his stepsister, but the other half of the truth was that Sarah was also his wife. Be very cautious of presenting a half-truth as a whole truth. A half-truth presented as the whole truth becomes an untruth.

Another subtle form of deception is evasion, the evasion of the truth. Do you remember the story of Cain and his brother Abel? Both brothers bring their offerings before the LORD God. The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

Genesis 4:8-9, Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother?" He said, "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?"

Do you see what Cain did there? He played dumb. He played the "I don't know card," and then he changed the subject. He did not honestly answer the question, but rather he was elusive to the truth and answered the question with another question. Be on guard against every form of deceit. Be cautious of the outright lie. Be cautious of exaggeration. Be cautious of telling half-truths. Be cautious of evading the truth. Determine now and always to speak the truth each one of you.

Commit no sin, and let no deceitfulness be found in your mouth. Always speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the whole truth. Strive to follow the footprints and example set by the LORD Jesus Christ, who always spoke the truth, because he himself was and is Truth.

1 Peter 2:22-23, He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

What is the definition of the term revile? What does it mean to revile? This is a term that is not often used in today's vernacular, but it is quite often seen in our speech. To revile means to verbally abuse, or to vilify, or insult strongly. The term implies an abusive attack, which is prompted by anger or even hatred. To revile someone is to reprove them in a highly insulting and scolding manner. John Calvin defined this term as "a harsher railing, which not only rebukes a man but also sharply bites him, and stamps him with open contempt. It is to wound a man with an accursed sting."

The LORD Jesus Christ was reviled, he was continually reviled, but he did not revile in return. The LORD Jesus Christ did not retaliate. He was goaded, he was incited, he was provoked, he was stamped with open contempt, and wounded, but nothing broke his countenance. No matter how hard they tried, the enemies of our LORD could not make any sin come out of his mouth.

Isaiah 53:7, He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

Under sustained and repeated provocation, the LORD Jesus Christ, King JESUS, the Almighty, Omnipotent Creator and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth, did not revile in return, while greatly suffering, he uttered no threats, but rather he persevered, and he entrusted the entire situation in the hands of him who judges justly –God the Father.

The LORD Jesus Christ was and is the perfect example of submission. He is the greatest and the highest example of submission. In the midst of the most unjust and difficult suffering, he submitted his will, to the will of the Father. He continued to entrust himself, and his circumstances, to him who judges righteously. To entrust means to give into the hands of another. It means to commit, or to commend something into the hands of another, to keep, or to use, to care for, to manage, or to protect. This term was commonly used of delivering up a criminal to the police, or to the court for punishment, and implied is the idea of one being given over into another's power. In other words, this phrase paints the picture of the LORD Jesus Christ surrendering himself, and his circumstances, into the hands of his Heavenly Father. Jesus Christ yielded himself and his circumstances into the hands of his Father's righteous judgement, and he did so continuously. Every injustice, and every difficulty, every persecution, was handed over to, and entrusted to, God the Father.

This was the ongoing pattern of his life. Do you remember the LORD Jesus Christ's words just prior to the crucifixion, in the garden of Gethsemane?

Luke 22:42, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.”

Do you remember the last words of the LORD Jesus Christ as he hung on the cross at Calvary?

Luke 23:46, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”

All throughout his life, and at his death, the LORD Jesus Christ continued entrusting himself to the LORD God. In every act of injustice, in all of his suffering, in all of the violent assaults against him by the enemies of the LORD God, Jesus Christ continued to hand it all over, again and again. He committed it all into the hands of his Father. And do you know why? Do you why he entrusted himself, and his circumstances, again and again, into the hands of his Father? Because the LORD God is a righteous judge. He knew that the LORD God would assess the situation rightly, and that he would judge justly. So, rather than depending on his own abilities to retaliate, he kept on entrusting it all into the hands of God the Father, knowing that the LORD God would be just and fair. John MacArthur remarked, “Undergirding Jesus’ peaceful, resolute acceptance of suffering was an unshakeable confidence in the perfectly righteous plan of him who judges righteously. He knew that God would vindicate him according to his perfect, holy justice. He knew. The LORD Jesus Christ knew that the LORD God was big enough, and strong enough, and wise enough, to make things right and to take care of business.

Again, Peter’s reasoning is clear: if in the most difficult of circumstances, the LORD Jesus Christ did not sin, nor did he revile, but entrusted it all into the hands of his Father, then in far easier circumstances, we should not sin, nor should we revile, nor should we seek vengeance, nor should we depend upon our own abilities for retaliation, but rather we should entrust it all into the hands of our Heavenly Father who judges justly, and beloved, he will do just that –he will judge justly. God always does what is right.

As a Christian pilgrim, when you suffer, or you are persecuted unjustly, in your job, in your family, or wherever it might be, you must always focus on and follow the standard. You must focus on and follow the pattern, the example of the LORD Jesus Christ, which is to accept the suffering without any retaliation, and to entrust the situation into the care of the one who judges justly. This is the main reason why the book 1 Peter was written. In suffering and in difficulty, hand it all over to the LORD God. Commit it all into his care. In pain and in sorrow, hand it all over to LORD God. Commit it all into his care. Entrust yourself and your circumstances into the hands of the LORD God, who will, most assuredly, make it right.

What if my employers are harsh to me? What if I’m ridiculed and mocked because of my faith in Jesus Christ? What if I’m passed over for a promotion? What if I’m given all the lousy shifts and all the grunt work because I’m a Christian? What if I’m unjustly terminated? Entrust the situation to the LORD God, he will make it right. But what if the government passes anti-Christian legislation? What if the government starts to infringe upon my Christian liberties and my rights? Entrust the situation to the LORD God, he will make it right. What if I am publicly reviled? What if I am physically suffering? What if I am emotionally suffering? What if I am threatened? Entrust the situation to the LORD God, he will make it right.

Our God is the Creator and the Ruler of this world. Our God is the great equalizer. The LORD God will deal with the unjust in righteousness and justice. This is our unshakable confidence –God is just. God is sovereign, he is in control. God is a righteous God, who judges justly. Our God always does what is right. There is no injustice with God. His purpose, his plan, cannot be thwarted, and his will, will ultimately prevail. It will most assuredly prevail.

As you journey and walk through this world, always remember the benchmark. Always remember, the example of the LORD Jesus Christ. Look to him, learn from him, follow him, and entrust it all into his hands. It is a gracious thing, when mindful of God, you endure sorrows while suffering unjustly. To this you have been called, by a good God, because Christ also suffered for you. So imitate him. Conform your life to the pattern and example of his life. In suffering: do not sin. Do not speak deceit. Do not revile. Do not revile in return. Do not threaten. But rather, entrust it all into the hands of the LORD God. Entrust it all into the hands of him who judges justly –your Heavenly Father.