

In the Fallen World and Workplace

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[0 : 00] week. But we're going to turn now to our scripture reading, and once again we're back in Peter's first letter this morning, reading in chapter 2. If you have one of our church Bibles, you'll find that on page 1014. And we begin a new section of the epistle. It would have been more helpful, really, if the paragraph heading had been before verse 11 instead of verse 13.

These headings, of course, are not inspired. Sometimes they're very uninspired, actually. But verse 11, with that word beloved, begins a new section of exhortation. It goes right through to chapter 4, verse 11. Then you'll see in chapter 4, verse 12, you have the same word appearing again, the final section of the letter, beloved, each of these introducing a long section of exhortation.

We're going to read from verse 11 down to the end of chapter 2. Peter says, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul, your whole being. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution, whether it be the emperor, supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. But thus is the will of God, so that by doing good, you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Submit as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants or better, bond slaves of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood.

Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants, household servants, be subject to your masters.

And this would read better if we said, with all fear. He means their fear of God, not of the masters.

It's not really translated very well in our versions, but wherever that word fear or reverence or respect, you get it again in chapter 3, verse 2, all the way through 1 Peter, we're only ever told to fear God. Nobody else. That's a very important point. So let me read it again. Servants, be subjects to your masters with all fear and reverence to God. Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust or the crooked. For this is a gracious thing when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it when you sin and are beaten for it and you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

[3 : 33] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example or better, an exact pattern so that you would 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 and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Amen. And may God bless to us this his word.

Amen. I'll do turn, if you would, to the passage we read together, 1 Peter chapter 2, page 1014, if you have our church bibles. And the passage is all about authentic Christian living in a fallen world and in fallen workplaces. What is God's will for my life? What is God calling me to do?

It's a very common question, isn't it, that many Christians ask ourselves and often get in a real turmoil about it? What career should I be having? What's the right thing for me to do? Who's the right person for me to marry? And all sorts of other things like that. Well, the interesting thing, and I think the liberating thing, is that the Bible doesn't tell you any of those things.

And that's because God really doesn't mind what you do. God really doesn't mind who you marry.

[5 : 58] Within certain limits, of course, he's not too keen on you being a gangster or a professional thief or something like that. And of course, he's pretty clear he does not want you marrying somebody who doesn't share your faith and your love for him. That is obviously a way of disobedience, a way of disaster. But apart from that kind of thing, the Bible's attitude is very simple.

Make a choice and get on with it in a godly way. Don't wait around expecting all sorts of special guidance about every detail in your life. That is treating God like some kind of clairvoyant, like the genie of Aladdin's lamp, like your personal Mr. Fix-It. And that is just sheer paganism, not Christianity.

That's not biblical faith at all. No. God wants you to use your wits and to get on with your life. But what he does tell us very clearly is how to live our lives. In this world, in the workplace, in our marriage and family life, in our church life. In every area of life, whatever our position is, we have a very clear and a very unequivocal calling. We don't need to search for it. It's very, very plain all through the Bible. It's very plain right here in Peter's first letter.

We are to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. Look at verse 21, where Peter holds up the gratitude of the most lowly household servant as the paradigm for all Christian believers in the face of hardship and unjust suffering. For to this you have been called, he says. That is to follow in the steps of Christ who suffered. Our calling in all of life is to live in the pattern of our Savior.

You see it again in chapter 3, verse 9, following his discussion on how we're to live in the Christian family and in the Christian fellowship with sympathy and love and humility, not repaying evil with evil, but blessing and so on. For, he says, to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. Peter then quotes from Psalm 34, and he's showing it that this is both the pattern of the Savior and it is the pattern of the whole of the scriptures. This is your calling in life. Whoever you are, whatever your circumstances, wherever you find yourself. And what Peter is talking about in this new section of the letter that begins, as I said, at chapter 2, verse 11, and goes on until chapter 4, verse 11, is how Christians are to live authentic lives of worship in the midst of a world that is pagan and hostile to God.

[8 : 57] As I said, you can see it's a new section. It begins with that exhortation, Beloved, I urge you. Let's repeat it again in chapter 4, verse 12. Beloved, don't be surprised when he moves on to that final section of the letter. If you look also, you'll see that this section begins and ends with the purpose of all this exhortation. That God will be glorified through all his people's witness. So chapter 2, verse 12, so that people will see your good deeds and glorify God. Chapter 4, verse 11, that in everything, God will be glorified through Christ Jesus. Well, how will God be glorified in this world through his people?

Well, having begun his letter focusing on the privilege that Christians have as God's elect people, whose privilege is to be special to God, and whose destiny is to share in God's glory to come, Peter now turns to remind them once again that they are still an exiled people, whose path is to be strangers on this earth, but whose calling is to show God's glory in the world now, as they live lives of authentic holiness in a hostile world. And so this is where the worship of God's temple that we spoke about last week, the people of living worship and witness, this is where it spills over from Sunday into Monday morning and into the rest of the week, into our classrooms, into our offices, into our workshops, and all the other places that we will find ourselves before we meet again next Sunday. And this whole section then is what the authentic Christian lifestyle is to look like as we live as exiles and aliens in a fallen culture that often perverts

God's good pattern for life, in a community, in national life, in the workplace, in married life, even in the Christian fellowship. That's what he's talking about. That's the focus in 2.11, right down to chapter 3, verse 12. And Christians, he says, in all these circumstances are to shine justly for doing good. But also we're to live in a fallen culture that will often persecute God's people.

That's the focus from 3.13 down to chapter 4, verse 11. And the message is very similar, that we may have to endure even unjust suffering for doing good. And through the whole section, the message that Peter has is very, very clear. The gospel of Christ is advanced and the social order itself will in time be transformed as a result when Christians live authentic Christian lives in this fallen world. When they do in all things follow in the steps of the Lord Jesus.

They use Jesus' words when they deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow him. I just remember how resentful and how resistant Peter himself was way back when Jesus first spoke those words to him. Do you remember? Never, he said. Jesus had to rebuke him. And yet now, well, as you can see, everything he says about the authentic Christian lifestyle in this whole section is centered upon these verses 21 to 25 of chapter 2 on the pattern of Christ, whose path led to the glory of heaven, yes, but only through the shame and suffering of Calvary. It's his willing submission. It's his winsome service.

[13:04] It's his worthy suffering also that gives the pattern for all authentic Christian living in our attitudes to public life and society, to our work life, to marriage, to family life, and to our life in the fellowship of believers.

I want to focus today on the rest of chapter 2. And if you look, you'll see in verses 11 and 12 that Peter lays out his governing principle.

And then he applies it very practically to our world generally in verses 13 to 17. And then in verses 18 to 20 to the workplace specifically. And then he reinforces what he's saying by reminding us of the pattern of the Lord Jesus.

So look first at verses 11 and 12. Peter shifts abruptly here in his focus from relationships between believers, which is what he's been talking about, to relationships with the unbelieving world outside. A world where he says we are sojourners, that is, aliens. And we're exiles, that is, we're strangers. And this point is very clear. God's people have always been outsiders in this world.

[14:21] This is the exact phrase that's used of Abraham in Genesis 23 verse 4 when he was among the Hittites. He wasn't one of them. He was an alien and a foreigner.

He's not one of us, is what they said of Abraham. Just as Christians don't belong in many of the world's cultures today. We have to remember that in the West we've lived in our lifetimes for a very long time indeed, in very unusual times.

And that is because Western culture was eventually so transformed by Christianity that the church did feel for many centuries very much more at home. But of course that is rapidly changing.

It's changed hugely in the lifetimes of most of us here this morning. But in most places through history and most times throughout history as today, the attitude to Christians has largely been that of chapter 4 verse 4.

They're maligned because they don't endorse the beliefs and the practices of a godless culture round about. And so Christians find themselves often, indeed I would almost say always, embattled in a culture which is foreign, which is alien, which may be very hostile, and where we just don't really belong.

[15:46] And indeed in a world which we know is not our true home. And according to Peter also, in bodies which are still weak and sinful and awaiting our full salvation in the glory of Christ's resurrection when we receive our sinless resurrection bodies.

But we don't have that yet. And so we're embattled. We're in a war, says Peter here in verse 11. The passions of the flesh wage war against our soul, our whole being.

So how are we to live in a world that is hostile? When we face prejudice. When we face vocal criticism and opposition.

Like a Christian teacher perhaps running an SU group in a school, but increasingly sensing the rumblings of disapproval from colleagues, from parents, no doubt stirred up by these machinations from the National Secular Society.

Or as a Christian pupil in school. Very isolated feeling. Out on a limb in their class. The only one in their PSE lessons.

[16:53] Who dares perhaps to question the mantra that is trotted out relentlessly today. That the condom is the answer to all the problems of the world. And because they dare to do that, they feel they're made to be an idiot.

Or an oddity. Or a hundred other situations that all of us will face before this week is out. How are we to respond living as Christians in this world?

Well friends, Peter's pattern is remarkably simple. Of course that doesn't make it easy. But it is simple to understand. Verses 11 and 12 is plain.

We're to turn away from evil and sin. And we're to commit ourselves to doing good. And being so honorable, he says, verse 12, so that even though we are maligned, our conduct speaks for itself. And it will bring glory to God in the end. However grudgingly that might sometimes be given. That's the pattern. And most of the attacks that Peter is speaking about here are verbal ones, just as it is today.

[18:09] He says, Christians, verse 12, are spoken against as evildoers. These people who want to force their narrow religious dogma on the rest of us. Some, verse 15, verse 23, are doing the same.

Reviling. Reviling of ignorant and foolish people. By the way, in the Bible, when you read ignorant or foolish, it doesn't necessarily mean intellectually inferior or stupid. It means morally blind and

stupid.

You can be very, very intelligent, and yet make ignorant and foolish statements like these. Think of all the railings of the likes of Richard Dawkins and so on. But Peter says the answer to sheer slander is sheer godliness.

Of course, he knows that even a pagan society is not totally devoid of moral sense. Of course not. Mankind is still blessed with enough of God's image that most people recognize goodness when they see it.

And they will see it, says Peter. And some, at least, he says in verse 12, will glorify God because of it in the end. We'll come back to that.

[19 : 24] But do you see what Peter's saying? As Christians, we are not of this world. We don't belong to it. And we will always feel aliens and foreigners in it and to it.

We're a holy nation, he says. And that's at odds, of course, with a pagan and godless nation. It always will be until Jesus comes. But we are in this world, like it or not.

We can't escape this world, even if we wanted to. And Peter does not want us to. Not to think like that. He's very plain in all that he says in what follows.

He does not want us to be engulfed by the world. We're not to passively welcome the world's ways for the sake of popularity. No, he says, abstain from the passions of the flesh.

And by the way, that's not just sins of sexuality and sensuality and so on. It includes very definitely the social sins he's already spoken about in chapter 2, verse 1. Malice and hypocrisy and envy and all of these things.

[20 : 30] Not being engulfed by the world. But he doesn't want us either to try and escape from the world. As if we could. But some of our pious Christians have always wanted to do that and hide from reality and live in a little cocoon of Christian fantasy.

No, no, no, says Peter. We are not to piously withdraw from the world for the sake of protection. That is the way to oblivion. The history of many Christian sects, which began with all the best motives, has shown us that abundantly.

No, Peter does want us to engage with the world. In all that we do, in every area of life, what he wants us to do is purposefully witness to the world.

We are in it to win it. That's what Peter's saying. But we'll do that, he says, only through authentic Christian living. Through exhibiting authentic holiness in the midst of alien hostility.

In our culture. In our communities that speak against us as they will. As evildoers. And maybe even do worse than that. That means, he says, living in a way that doesn't just passively welcome ungodly ways.

[21 : 52] That doesn't just piously withdraw from society. Nor, for that matter, petulantly war against society as though we're against everything in the world. Fighting and retaliating defensively as the world does.

No. Rather, he says, patiently and powerfully witnessing in the world and to the world.

It's what we must do. However hard that is. However much hardship it may bring us. Because, verse 21, to this you have been called. Because Christ also suffered for you.

Leaving you the pattern of following in his footsteps. What is our calling in life? What is God's plan for your life?

That's what it is. Whether you're a banker or a baker. Whether you're a surgeon or a sailor. Whether you're a plumber, yes, or even a preacher.

[22 : 56] That's God's calling upon your life. And whatever you are in life, says Peter. It must be played out in a right attitude of submitting to authority.

And of service. And even of suffering. That's a language that he uses in applying these principles of verses 11 and 12 to the world generally.

In terms of the secular authorities in verses 13 to 17. And in the workplace specifically. In the verses that follow. So this is very practical teaching for every single one of us.

We all have to think about living under authority in various areas of life. Now we, of course, have the privilege of living in a democracy. We get to vote. We're not under a dictator, an emperor, as Peter was.

But still, we are citizens who must live under the authority of law and order. Not all of us work either.

[23 : 59] That's true. Not all of us work necessarily for an employer or a master. But Peter deliberately chooses the household slave. Who is the lowest rung of the ladder. And it's he that

Peter chooses as a paradigm for every Christian believer.

Not because most of them were slaves. Although, of course, some of them were. But because, says Peter, Christ became a servant.

And Christ dignified the most lowly. Not only by serving all. Remember how he even knelt down and washed his disciples' feet.

But by dying the death that was reserved only for slaves in the Roman world. Crucifixion. Hung on a tree, as Peter puts it.

Recalling that it was a death reserved only for those who were under God's curse. As far as the Bible was concerned. So what he says to servants here.

[25 : 00] He is saying for every Christian. Because each of us works and lives under authority in all kinds of ways in life. And above all, he says in verse 16.

All of us live as slaves. Not just servants. But bond slaves to God himself. So whoever you are. Wherever we live.

Wherever we work for. Whatever we do. Whatever sweet sphere of life. Our service is in. The way of purposeful witness that will bring glory to God, says Peter.

Is that we must be people who submit willingly. And who serve winsomely. And who suffer worthily. Because that, says Peter.

Is what will bring glory to God. And will bring blessing and honor to his people. Submit willingly, says Peter.

[26 : 00] Even in this fallen world with its fallen authorities. Because, he says, to do so expresses your submission to God himself.

That's what he's saying in verses 13 to 17. Do it in the world generally. The pagan culture you live in. And, he goes on to say, do it in your workplace.

In your own personal calling. Now, this teaching is not unique to Peter. Of course it's not. It's common to the New Testament. Read Romans 13. Read Titus chapter 3. They all tell us to submit to the government.

Because, it is God's appointed authority. Government is a gift of God's common grace. To restrain evil. And to promote good in our society. Whether it's the king, says Peter.

The emperor. Or, whether it's his governors. And, we're to submit. Verse 15. For, this is the will of God. You should subject yourself.

[26 : 59] Verse 13. He says, for the Lord's sake. As Christian citizens. Today, we are often so disillusioned, aren't we? By politics and politicians.

And, we really find this sort of thing very hard to stomach. I have to confess, if I'm honest. I think I would find it much easier to be a subject of the queen. And, submit to her if she got rid of all of our government.

And, governors. And, a whole lot of them in parliament. Of course, not all monarchs have been as our present queen is. And, it might not always have been so nice that way. We mustn't forget. But, you see.

Even in our cynicism. All we need to do. Is just think for a few moments. About the failed states of the world. The lawless places where anarchy reigns.

And, very quickly we realize. That almost any form of government. Is better than no government.

And, even the most despotic regimes in the world. Do, in general.

[27 : 57] Tend to praise good. And, punish evil. It's one of the very salutary truths. About the regime changes. That have taken place in the Middle East. Over these recent years.

That many, many people in Iraq. And, in Libya. And, in Egypt. Would say that they were safer. And, that they were better off. Under the dictatorships of the past.

Than they have been in these recent years. In the current situation. And, that is especially. So, very sadly for Christians. And, Peter you see. Recognizes that even pagan.

Even corrupt governments. That they govern. He says, verse 13. For the Lord's sake. Now, Rome. Under Claudius or Nero.

Was certainly not an easy place to be. No general elections. No free press. To call them to account. And, yet. Peter says. They had a divine function.

[28 : 55] A divine authority. And, therefore. Christians were to submit to them. And, yet. Don't miss the care. With which Peter writes. Neither the emperor.

Nor the governments. Are divine. He calls them human institutions. Literally human creations. And, his command. Is to be subject. For the Lord's sake. So, obviously. It's not an absolute. An unqualified obedience. You cannot. For the Lord's sake. Do something. That will win. Willfully. Sin against God. Of course not. Peter was very clear about that. In Acts chapter 5. We must obey God. Rather than men. Even if governors demanded. As they did. That they must cease. Preaching the gospel. Even if it threatened prison. As it does. Just as Daniel. And his three friends. Submitted willingly. And served. The Babylonian. Empire. Until. They were commanded. To do something. That would utterly. [29 : 52] Dishonor God. By bowing down. To the emperor. Or an idol of him. They couldn't do that. Now. There could many Christians. In Rome. Later. Who did the same.

And who were martyred. In the Colosseum. Because of it. So you see. There is a subversive element. Here. In Peter's teaching. It is not just. Conservative. Establishmentism. Now. He says in verse 16. You submit. As people who are free. That was a very subversive thing. To say to many people. Who were not free. Citizens of Rome. And many of whom. Were even slaves. They are slaves.

Says Peter. But primarily. You're slaves to God. And you choose to submit. Because God commands it. You're liberated. Says Peter. For good. Not for evil. For obedience to him. Not for license. To do as you please. And this is God's world. And so we're to honor his created order.

[30 : 47] Even in a fallen world. Because human authority exists. For our good. For the blessing. Of human society. That's the teaching of scripture.

So all the bane. Of these child protection. Legislations. For example. However cumbersome. However irritating they are. However expensive they are. Well they exist. For good. However clumsy they must be. And we must submit. For the Lord's sake. Or your medical. Revalidation procedure. And believe me. If you're married to a doctor. You know all about that one. Or your charity. Accounting regulations. Or your tax form. Or your tax rates. Or millions of other things. That we really hate. Our attitude must be one of submission. Our attitude is to be clear. Says Peter. Towards everything.

[31 : 44] And everyone. In this fallen world. Verse 17. Honor. Everyone. Yes there is a special place. For the Christian church. Love the brotherhood. And fear God.

But honor. Even the emperor. Rulers deserve honor. And respect. As human beings. And because of their. God given office. But notice.

He doesn't say. Fear the emperor. As though he were God. No. Sometimes fear of God. Will mean choosing. Suffering. Rather than obedience. To even the emperor.

Fear. But only when it is. A real and true clash. Of that nature. Not when it is just an example. Of indulging our own preferences. Or our own foolish.

Scruples. It's the same in the workplace. Verse 18. We are to submit. Not just to the government. But we are to submit. To the gaffer. Servants.

[32 : 40] Be subject. To your master. Now the household slave. Was often a very highly educated person. With great responsibility. In the household. Remember Joseph.

In Potiphar's house. But he still had no rank. No rights. At all. He was the lowest. In the social order. And yet. Peter makes the servant. The paradigm.

For all Christians. Because. Christ himself. Dignified. The role of the servant. And Peter again. Is implying.

A subversive. A gospel. Transforming. A gospel. It's a total. A gospel. A gospel. It's a special. Because he addresses. The servant. As an independent. Morally responsible being.

Being able to choose. His own actions. He's according huge dignity. Upon the servant. Here. As he does. In chapter 3. Upon the wife. Neither of these. Would ever in that culture.

[33 : 32] Have been addressed. Individually themselves. Only through the master. The head of the household. The husband. so just to address a servant in this way was highly subversive as it was to speak of unjust suffering because no Roman would ever think that anything done to a slave could ever be unjust and yet again Peter does not at the same time say to the servant that he's free to rebel he's to submit to the master even if he's unjust the word means crooked and again he says be subject verse 18 literally with all fear as I said he doesn't mean their respect for the master he

means out of fear and reverence for God it's the same in chapter 3 verse 2 as I said all through Peter it's always fear of God not man whether he's a master or an emperor this submission too is in honor and devotion to God so Peter recognizes that Christians are first of all human beings and they are free under God alone there is neither slave nor free in God's economy but in that culture fallen as it was there were slaves and servants and they had to live with it now you might say well why doesn't Peter write railing against the institution of slavery why doesn't he incite rebellion why doesn't he tell Christian slaves to rise up and throw off the shackles well the answer is because like all the other apostles

Peter was a realist this is a real letter to real people in the real world trying to give them help how to live in the world they actually live in not in the world they wish they lived in the whole Bible is like that it doesn't deal in over the rainbow fantasy it deals in realities and the apostles knew that the social order wasn't going to be changed by revolution like that their concern was to rescue people from sin and from hell to reconcile them to God but they also knew that when the seeds of this gospel took root in the lives of more and more and many many people then ultimately through that the culture could be transformed and these kind of evils could be rooted out and that is precisely what did happen in the ancient western world as the Roman culture was transformed and there was the rooting out of these things like slavery and that is exactly what happened all over again in modern western culture in the 18th and 19th century when it was Christian teaching that led to the abolition of the dreadful Atlantic slave trade but you see the Bible is not full of grandiose romantic fictions and fantasies about making poverty history and making slavery history and expecting huge worldwide change on a macro scale but totally ignoring the reality of life among ordinary people no Peter wanted to help these people in the lives they actually had not to give them false dreams about lives they didn't have and likely never would have in their own lifetime and friends we've got to heed that principle and listen to his words and take direction from them it's no good is it us railing against the hardships of our own particular employment situation if it's things that we can do absolutely nothing about doing that will just make you bitter

Peter says you have to be godly where you are whatever situation you're in however crooked it is teachers you have to witness in your school with your headmaster and your colleagues however tough that might be doctors you've got to work in your department with all its problems and faults you've got to do that in your office or in your building site or in your school pupils you've got to live and work in the school that you're in with the teachers you've got not the ones you wish you had see we're not social revolutionaries that's not to say of course don't misunderstand me that we can't work to bring change to what's bad of course we can and we should and Christians always have but what it is saying is that even in the midst of hard and harsh situations submission to authority in this spirit is an expression of our submission to God lawlessness is the definition of sin according to John heart rebellion is refusal to submit to God's law to submit to God's righteousness that's Paul's language but we are his children we are his chosen people we are his slaves says Peter and we are to submit willingly even in this fallen world because it expresses our submission to God himself and Peter says this is not just a passive thing he says we have to serve serve winsomely in this fallen world because this is what engages our world with the power of God it's not just negatively refraining from evil he says we are to be active in good deeds verse 12 verse 15

God's will is that we are doing good verse 20 we are to do good do you get the point even if doing good doesn't avoid suffering but actually leads into suffering and it's the very hardest thing to do is it not to work for a boss to work for a master who is not good who is not gentle and kind but is unjust and is crooked but Peter says because you are doing this primarily out of respect not for him but for God you can do it you must do it he says indeed verse 19 it's a gracious thing when you do that and even endure suffering when you do it because you're mindful of God you're doing it for him he says and he knows that it's a gracious thing in the sight of God your boss might be thoroughly nasty might be unjust might be even crooked but if you serve him winsomely you're doing God's will and you're to do that this of course forces you to do things that are wicked in themselves so you might be a prison officer you might work for a very vicious and unpleasant warden but you can't disobey him just because he's like that obviously though if he asks you to go and abuse a prisoner or commit a crime you don't do that because you fear God you're mindful of him or you might be a car salesman and you work for an avaricious and thoroughly nasty garage owner they're not all like that but some are

I have to say that you might abhor him but you've got to serve him willingly and winsomely for his profit and for his gain even if it kills you unless of course he's asking you to cheat customers and lie to them and of course you can't do things like that or you might be a doctor and you might work for a thoroughly obnoxious surgeon and believe me I've worked for some of them myself you've got to be the best junior doctor they've ever had of course you can't collude in hushing up a negligent accident that they make just because they threaten you with a bad reference if you do of course you can't sin like that but just because they're horrible doesn't mean you mustn't work hard for them sometimes I think the most crooked and most unjust masters we have in society is just the system especially I think if you work in the public sector with all its bloated bureaucracy with all its stress inducing absurdities that make it so hard for many of you who work in the public sector but friends if that's you take heart or if any of these other situations just ring true to you look at that little sandwich in verses 19 and 20 see in the middle in verse 20

[42 : 32] Peter's quite stark sometimes our misfortune is just purely our own fault it's not the system against us it's not our boss who's against us it's just me and my sin and my stupidity and I deserve everything I get don't moan about that but you see on both sides he says when we do suffer unjustly for doing good for doing our very best to serve winsomely for God's sake out of honour for him God doesn't miss that it's a gracious thing in his sight that's the first result of authentic Christian living in a fallen world in a frustrating world it's pure worship to our God these are the spiritual sacrifices of verse 5 that are acceptable to God in Christ and it rebounds says Peter in blessing upon our heads the gracious thing the word there is so often used in scripture of God's blessing his reward that he gives to his children especially when they're reflecting his goodness and grace in the face of enemies who revile them for Jesus sake read Matthew 5 11 and 12 read Luke 6 verse 32 and following and you see to receive the father's reward and blessing that's more than all the rewards that this world can ever afford and he will bless but the result isn't just that we worship

God as we do these things in his sight Peter says also the result is witness people will see our gracious and godly submission and our service of others and verse 15 some he says will be silenced ignorant and foolish criticism will be silenced and people will have to acknowledge real goodness and healthiness and genuine Christianity and in time that is what leads the world to listen to Christians to be willing to learn from Christian ways and change things some criticism will be silenced he says but verse 12 some of these unbelievers will be saved that's the implication of these verses some will be so impacted by this real Christian witness that they too will come to glorify God on the day of visitation they'll find on that great day of the

Lord that they're praising him along with us and we will rejoice to see that we may not see that for many people until that great day and the surprise will be enormous but sometimes we will later on in life I remember some years ago meeting a guy who'd been in my class at medical school 20 years before and he was one of the most bitter scornful vindictive abusers of all of us in the Christian medical fellowship and especially me and I met this guy at a pastor's preaching conference he came up to me and he told me how he'd been converted to Christ and I was a pastor and how utterly ashamed he felt of the way he used to treat the Christians at university and he was full of shame and I was full of joy so go on says Peter submit willingly because that expresses your submission to God himself serve winsomely because that is what engages the world with the power of God the power that changes lives and if that does mean he says that you suffer unjustly and you often will and he says you suffer worthily because above all you are exhibiting your union with the Lord Jesus Christ you are showing your true identity with the servant of God who is our great shepherd you see when you submit and serve and suffer like that it's a gracious thing in the sight of God because nothing could fill our father's heart with more joy than that we should share the glory of his dear son it's to this that you have been called so go labor on spend and be spent our joy to do the father's will this is the way the master went should not the servant tread it still he suffered for us as Peter now we suffer for him he's our pattern example is far too weak a word the word speaks of a template over which you trace letters to make an exact copy he is the paradigm by which Christians write large the letters of his gospel in their lives says one writer and is it not a pattern with mighty witness when we don't respond to unjust treatment with slander and worse when we don't return deceit and reviling when we don't retaliate or threaten when we like Jesus entrust everything to God confident in his power to judge justly confident that he will silence critics confident that he will even save some of these critics is that not powerful he is our pattern yet Peter is saying here he's much more than our pattern an example is not nearly enough is it he is saying here in verses

24 and 25 he is our power he suffered for us he bore away our sins on the cross verse 24 so that we might die to sin and that we might live to righteousness like him healed of all the bitterness and the malice and the sense of injustice that self righteous sinful hearts are so full of he died for us so that we would be transformed to be like him truly returned to our true home truly led by our true shepherd his protection and under his authority so friends when this pattern of worthy suffering is being written across your life painfully as it may be as you submit willingly as you serve winsomely in this fallen world mindful of

[49 : 40] God and seeking in your small corner to shine for his sake and be encouraged be encouraged that pattern is the evidence of God's power at work in your life you are following in his steps you have returned to the shepherd and the bishop of your souls and you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you this is a gracious thing in the sight of God this is the true grace of God says Peter stand firm in it let's pray heavenly father will you lead us in the path of our Lord Jesus Christ who is our pattern and will you through his power at work in our lives help us to be a people whose goodness and whose

Christlikeness silences the foe and brings many to salvation through seeing in us and then hearing from us the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for in his name we pray amen and we Folge of our time our Father has to and compta the and enough