

1 Peter 2:18-21 | “Responding to Mistreatment”
Preached on April 18, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

How do you respond to mistreatment?

I'd say one of the most common responses to mistreatment is to try to get back at the person in revenge.

This response is even promoted among our culture as there's that widespread saying that, “Revenge is sweet.” *[pause]*

I was interested in some of the top quotes about revenge in our world, so I looked up, “quotes about revenge,” in a search engine.

And these are some of the top quotes that show how prevalent the response of revenge is to mistreatment...¹

One is, “My silence is not weakness, but the beginning of revenge.”

Another is, “No trait is more justified than revenge in the right time and place.”

And then I found one that took the passive aggressive tactic, as they said, “The best revenge is no revenge. Just forget that they exist.” *[pause]*

There's even a “how-to” website online that has an article called, “How to Get Revenge on Anyone.”²

In it, they gave suggestions such as...

Ignore the person, don't help the person when they need it, show the other person up, undermine their efforts, and embarrass them publicly. *[pause]*

Are these the ways that we ought to respond to mistreatment as Christians?

Maybe you're here thinking, “No, a Christian shouldn't take revenge on someone for treating them badly.”

But what about other responses to mistreatment?

Is hatred acceptable? What about bitterness and resentment?

Now even to those responses, you might still say the same thing that a Christian shouldn't respond in those ways.

¹ <https://duckduckgo.com/?t=ffab&q=quotes+about+revenge&iax=images&ia=images>

² wikiHow. “How to Get Revenge on Anyone.” *WikiHow*, 25 Mar. 2021, www.wikihow.com/Get-Revenge-on-Anyone.

But here's where it gets difficult...

It's easy to say that those aren't the right answers to mistreatment, but it gets hard when you face mistreatment *personally*. *[pause]*

How do you respond then?

How do you respond when simply by being a Christian, you are made fun of or treated as inferior to others?

How do you respond when you are nice to someone, and yet they say some horrible things about you?

How do you respond when you are kind to your spouse, but they won't stop treating you like dirt or saying hurtful things?

How do you respond when you are working hard at your job, following the company's rules, and yet your boss treats you awfully?

You see, in theory, responding to unjust treatment is simple, but in real life, when you're the very one suffering unjustly, it's not so simple and easy. *[pauseeee]*

When we face mistreatment personally, something within us rises up in anger, desiring to get back.

Or something in us overwhelms us with despair, resentment, or depression, leading us to want to give up on the situation, the person, or give up on God. *[pauseeee]*

Mistreatment isn't easy, and yet it happens often in people's lives.

The pain is real, the hurt is felt, and you're faced with the decision - how will I respond? *[pause]*

This is the topic that we will study this morning, as we consider 1 Peter 2, verses 18 through 21.

Let's READ THE PASSAGE. *[pause]*

Peter wrote about how Christians are to relate to the government, and now in our text today, he writes about how slaves are to relate to their masters.

Now this whole topic of slave and master can bring up lots of questions.

We don't have time to address them all this morning, but we will discuss some of these things in our evening study tonight. *[pause]*

So for time's sake, I'll just briefly cover some preliminary items...

First, unlike Paul, who speaks both to the slave and master about their responsibilities as Christians, Peter focuses solely on the slave's role.

Also, we must understand that the reason that Peter speaks about the slave-master relationship is because it was so widespread in the 1st century.

Slaves probably made up a portion of the early church, as is evidenced in Paul's writing to a slave owner, Philemon, about his slave. *[pause]*

In that day, this slave-master relationship was one of the most common employee-employer relationships, and slaves received varying degrees of treatment.

Some slaves were even pretty educated and were doctors, teachers, and musicians. *[pause]*

So when we come upon a passage like this that speaks about slaves, we first shouldn't try to water down the reality of it, and simply think that there was no mistreatment of slaves in this time.

That's simply untrue, for why would Peter even give this passage if there wasn't any mistreatment or abuse?

But we must also not think that slaves back then were *all* treated horribly like we think of when we think of American slavery in America's past. *[pause]*

One commentator said that a word between slave and servant would probably get the idea across in our modern context.³ *[pauseeee]*

With these things in mind, now we are confronted with an application dilemma...

How do we apply a passage about slaves when we have no exact parallel in America today?

I believe that although there is no exact parallel in modern day, you can certainly apply this to the workplace.

The general truth is that the relationship talked about here deals with one who is under the authority of another in the realm of work.

So while as employees, we are not the possession of our bosses, we are certainly under their authority when it comes to the workplace.

This is why from now on, I will be explaining and applying this text by talking about the workplace, but I'll always keep in mind the original meaning as I do. *[pauseeee]*

Let's get into the passage...The first point that I would like to bring out comes from verse 18...

I. Christians are to be submissive to their bosses, even bad ones. (The Command)

Peter addresses servants here and says, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust."

³ Grudem, W. A. (1988). *1 Peter: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 17, p. 132). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

We hear that phrase, “be subject,” once again, as we just heard it about our relationship to the governing authorities.

It’s to be submissive.

To listen to them, obey, voluntarily yield to their authority, and to place yourself in your proper, God-given role. *[pause]*

So employees should not refuse to listen to their bosses.

They should not resist their orders, unless of course it goes against what God says. *[pause]*

To “be subject” inherently involves having a good attitude, but Peter also adds the phrase, “with all respect.” *[pause]*

So we are to listen to our supervisors and submit to what they call us to do.

We don’t do it disrespectfully, but respectfully. *[pause]*

The word there is actually “fear”.

We submit to them in reverence and respect for their position over us. *[pauseeee]*

Do you submit to your manager or supervisor at work?

Do you submit with a good attitude or are you disrespectful?

This is what God wants, he wants Christians who submit to their employer with respect.

So we don’t sarcastically say, “Yes, bossss.”

We don’t ignore them or their instructions, but we are to be good, reliable, and obedient employees. *[pause]*

It could also be said that we are not to be lazy, either, because that goes against what our bosses want, too. *[pause]*

An evaluative question for your own life is this: when your boss thinks about you, what do you think comes to his or her mind? *[pause]*

Even if you are younger and you don’t have a job, this topic can help you as you think about how you will conduct yourself in your future jobs. *[pauseeee]*

The command is pretty straightforward, and then Peter expands upon this.

He says, “not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.” *[pause]*

Oh man, now Peter’s really making this hard, isn’t he?

It's easier to submit to a good and kind employer, but not to a harsh and crooked one, yet Peter says to submit to both!

God is showing us that the person's character in charge of you doesn't change the command. *[pauseeee]*

That word that the ESV translates as 'unjust' is actually the word, 'crooked'.

Anyone have a crooked boss?

Do you have a boss that shows favoritism to others?

Do you have a boss that puts you down because you are a Christian? *[pause]*

To be crooked in the Bible relates to something that is bent, twisted, and deformed.

So it figuratively points to a master who deviates from what is morally right.

For Peter's readers, this not only implied physical beating, but can also mean having unrealistic expectations, creating bad working conditions, and possibly holding back some pay. *[pause]*

Not long ago, I read a news story about a Georgia man who was trying to get his last paycheck from his employer after he quit his job.⁴

His employer wouldn't pay him, so he kept trying to get his final paycheck.

Eventually, one day he was leaving his house and there at the end of his driveway was a huge pile of something.

When he got closer, he found that his boss had unloaded 915 dollars worth of oily pennies at the end of his driveway.

That's an example of a crooked and harsh boss. *[pause]*

Do you have a bad, unjust, crooked boss? Peter says, "Submit even to them with respect." *[pause]*

But how can we do that?

How could we possibly submit to an unjust boss, knowing that that will mean we will suffer unjustly?

Peter tells us as he moves on...

⁴ Musto, Julia. "Georgia Man Receives Last Paycheck in Oily Pennies Dumped on His Driveway." FOX News Network, 25 Mar. 2021, www.foxnews.com/us/georgia-man-receives-last-paycheck-in-oill-pennies-dumped-on-his-driveway.

II. Christians can endure mistreatment by being a God-focused person. (The Motivation)

Now you may be thinking, “What exactly does ‘God-focused’ mean and how does it relate to this passage?”

Well let me tell you.

God-focused means I’m constantly thinking: How does God view this? What does God care about? What does God want? What pleases Him? What has God done in Christ?

It means in whatever situation that I find myself in, I’m considering God. *[pause]*

If you look over this passage, you will see that being God-focused makes all the difference for how we can go through mistreatment. *[pause]*

As Peter explains how we can endure mistreatment, notice what he emphasizes...

Verse 19, “For this is a gracious thing, when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.”

Then at the end of verse 20, he says, “this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.”

So you have to be mindful of God and what he cares about in order to endure - that’s having a Godward focus. *[pause]*

And then in verse 21, Peter explains that it is to this enduring unjust suffering that we are called by God.

And he helps us to look to the example of Christ. *[pause]*

These motivations are only helpful when you are a God-focused person.

For if you couldn’t care less about God, what would his commendation of your endurance of mistreatment do for you? Nothing.

If you are focused on yourself and not God, then your relief from suffering is more important than whatever God would want.

If you are focused on yourself and not Christ, then his example does no good for your motivation to endure. *[pause]*

A God-focused person thinks about and cares about what God wants, and is focused on how God views things.

That’s essentially what a Christian is *supposed* to be like.

He's the one who has caused us to be born again, and redeemed us from sin by the blood of Christ.

He's our new Master, so our focus should be on Him. *[pauseee]*

If you profess to be a Christian, and you have no desire to please and obey God, and no focus on Him at all, then you really need to take a hard look in the mirror.

Are you His child?

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."⁵

Certainly, this won't be done perfectly, as we have to grow in this area, but there should be a love for God and a desire to listen to Him.

How could we not love and want to follow the One who sent his Son to die for our sins, and completely changed our lives? *[pauseee]*

Each Christian should have a God-focus, and as we grow in our walk with the Lord, our God-focus grows.

So let this sermon be a time of growing in your focus on what God wants and how he views things. *[pauseee]*

Looking closely at this passage, we see that a God-focused person is mindful of God even in suffering.

Verse 19 says, "For this is a gracious thing, when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly."

To be 'mindful of God' here refers to being aware and conscious of God.

So it means, first, that a God-focused person is mindful that God knows and sees their suffering, and rests in that.

Isn't it an amazing truth that God knows and sees our suffering?

He doesn't say, "You're not suffering," or "Just toughen up," but he knows and sees. *[pause]*

One thing I love about the Bible is that it acknowledges that suffering is painful, and therefore, it doesn't make us feel guilty or unique in feeling hurt. *[pause]*

That word "sorrows," means emotional or mental pain.

The Bible doesn't try to sugarcoat the truth, for it shows us that mistreatment *does* bring mental and emotional anguish.

⁵ John 14:15.

I was reading an article online from this couple who use Yoga and Buddhism to try to teach people, and they wrote an article on *Huffpost* called, “6 Cool Things To Do If Someone Hurts You.”

And just listen to what they say as one of their points to help you if someone hurts you...

They say, “*No one can hurt you unless you let them. Hard to believe, as no one actually wants to be hurt but it's true.*”

When someone hurts us, we are inadvertently letting them have an emotional hold over us. Instead, if someone yells at you, let them yell, it makes them happy!”⁶ [pause]

That’s some interesting advice, isn’t it?

They’re saying that the only way someone can hurt you is if you let them.

But is that true? Maybe in some small comments they make, but people do hurt us. [pause]

I know of someone who in their exit interview of their job literally cried recounting the experiences they had with their supervisor at work.

The Bible is showing us that pain and hurt is *real* and it doesn’t deny it.

You will feel emotionally and mentally hurt when you are mistreated. [pause]

But it also doesn’t say, “Grit your teeth and move on,” but it shows us that we can endure by looking to someone greater than ourselves, God. [pauseeee]

He sees and knows what you are going through, so rest in the fact that although no one else may know, God does.

Yet that’s not the end.

He doesn’t just see and know about when you suffer for doing good, but it is a gracious thing in his sight.

That’s the second thing I want to bring out - a God-focused person is mindful of what God commends, and strives to live that way. [pause]

Peter says that when you endure sorrows while suffering unjustly, that is a gracious thing to God.

That word, “gracious,” doesn’t necessarily convey the meaning here to us.

The word *is* literally ‘grace’, but that word can have a range of meaning and it means more that it is a commendable thing, it is something that finds favor with God.

⁶Shapiro, Ed and Deb. “6 Cool Things To Do If Someone Hurts You.” *HuffPost*, 30 Jan. 2018, www.huffpost.com/entry/6-cool-things-to-do-if-so_b_14481822.

It is something that pleases God, and he will reward us for enduring such things. *[pause]*

It's not that he commends just suffering unjustly, but he commends *enduring* unjust suffering.

'Enduring' here means to have patient endurance, trusting God in the mistreatment - that's what he commends.

This means he isn't pleased when we retaliate in anger or try to get revenge.

He isn't pleased when we become bitter and resentful.

He's pleased, when mindful of his presence and care, we endure such things with trust in Him. *[pause]*

We show reliance upon God in enduring suffering, not in taking things into our own hands in retaliation. *[pause]*

You see, a God-focused person becomes a God-trusting person.

So it's never, "Look at me, I'm so God-focused," but rather, "I'm looking to God and he's giving me grace to do this." *[pauseeeee]*

In our enduring of unjust suffering, what's it doing?

It's showing others the grace of God.

Only the marvelous grace of God could lead someone to not seek revenge.

Only the wondrous grace of Jesus could lead someone to not become bitter and resentful.

Only the amazing grace of the Lord could lead someone to endure unjust suffering, giving the situation to the Lord.

That's why God commends such responses - it brings Him glory and molds us more and more into the image of Christ. *[pause]*

We are ultimately responding this way *for* God, and we can only do it *because* of God.

When you endure mistreatment for doing good, you are doing it for him and so that he is pleased.

Left to ourselves, we will become aggressive in revenge, or passive in retreat.

But when we are mindful of God, we think, "God sees. God knows. God cares. This trusting is what God is pleased with." *[pause]*

So when our boss treats us badly for doing good, we can rest in the fact that "I am not pleasing my boss right now, but I'm pleasing God, and that's what matters." *[pause]*

You can only do this if God is better than your suffering.

You can only do this if God is better than your sorrows, your discomforts, and better than that feeling of getting back. *[pause]*

Many of you could probably have an easier workday, if you cut some corners.

Many of you could probably get that higher position, if you followed what your boss said and did something unethical.

Many of you could probably curry favor with your boss, if you acted like your co-workers and lied about others...

...Or if joined in with everyone else by going to the bar every night after work and lived how they lived.

But yet you don't, and you suffer at the workplace for doing good.

Your manager treats you badly because you don't act like the others.

Your manager treats you badly because you won't deceive the customer to make more money, or you won't falsify the records to make it look like your branch is doing better to the higher ups.

And it's hard, but God sees and he knows and he commends such endurance of mistreatment. *[pauseeee]*

Peter makes it clear that it isn't just any suffering that God commends, for he says, "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." *[pause]*

The point is that if you suffer for doing wrong, you deserve no credit.

Unbelievers can do that easily, so you can't congratulate yourself for doing that.

Is that virtuous to get punished for sinning against your boss? Certainly not.

If you went up to your boss and punched him in the face, and got fired, is the suffering of being out of a job commendable?

No, you deserved it.

So Peter isn't talking about all suffering, but *unjust* suffering. *[pause]*

Peter probably has Jesus' words in mind from Luke 6:32-35. Just notice the similarities...

"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”
[pause]

God rewards those who endure suffering for doing good, not suffering for doing wrong. [pause]

What it comes down to is this: a God-focused person is mindful that God will take care of it, and places the situation in God’s hands. [pause]

God wants us to give the situation to Him because getting back only shows that we want to take justice into our own hands.

By seeking revenge, we are saying, “I need to deal out justice now. I need to be in control.”

And we are acting like the judge, acting like our judgment is right, holy, and perfect.

By retaliating, we are saying, “God doesn’t see, care, or do anything, so I must.”

By becoming bitter and resentful, we are saying, “No good can come out of this.”

But did you notice what all of those responses have in common? All of them are *unmindful of God*.

They are focused on you, not God.

But a God-focus says, “I don’t deserve this, but I’m entrusting the situation to God.”

“This isn’t easy, but God’s grace is more.” [pauseeee]

Some people think that if you don’t retaliate that you are saying that justice doesn’t matter, but that’s the furthest thing from the truth.

When you endure unjust suffering, you aren’t saying that justice doesn’t matter, but that God’s justice will take care of it.

You’re simply not taking justice into your own hands, but placing it in its rightful place, God’s hands.

As Paul says in Romans 12:19, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” [pause]

This is the example of Christ, who according to verse 23, “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” [pause]

We can endure unjust suffering by being mindful of God - he sees, knows, and cares about the mistreatment, but he also commends such a response and he will judge justly. [pauseeee]

That’s one motivation to help us endure unjust suffering, but Peter continues as he points to the example of Christ, also.

So a God-focused person is mindful of Christ, even in suffering. [pause]

Peter brings out the example of Christ suffering unjustly on earth, but right before that he says, “For to this you have been called.”

What are called to?

In one aspect, we are called to suffer.

Throughout the Bible, it’s clear that Christians *will* suffer.

We are told that the world will hate us.⁷

We are told that “all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted.”⁸

Jesus tells his disciples that he’s sending them out as sheep among wolves⁹, and that they will be hated because of him.¹⁰

But I believe that it’s not merely suffering that Peter is emphasizing, but more specifically, we are called to *patient endurance* in unjust suffering.

That is, we are called to imitate what Christ did in suffering.

This calling was perfectly exemplified by Christ in his life.

When he was mistreated, he didn’t revile in return or threaten, but entrusted himself to the Father. [pause]

So we see that a Christian can endure mistreatment by being mindful of their calling in Christ and Christ’s example of that calling.

When we are mindful of Christ, we start to say more and more, “I want to follow Christ.”

And we look to Him, “who for the joy set before him, endured the Cross.”¹¹ [pauseeee]

⁷ See John 15:18-21.

⁸ 2 Timothy 3:12.

⁹ See Matthew 10:16-25.

¹⁰ See Matthew 24:9; (1 Thess. 3:3-4 also describes how affliction is a sure thing for a Christian.)

¹¹ Hebrews 12:2.

Christ suffered this way, showing us an example, but also leading the way, showing us the path that we are to follow. *[pauseeee]*

When Christ says, “Follow me,” we often say, “Yes, of course I will!”

But then when we hear about him suffering unjustly, we think, “But not in that way.”

Yet if Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could lovingly suffer unjustly for sinners, then don’t you think we can follow him, even if it means suffering?

He came to a sin-cursed world and was betrayed by one his closest followers.

He was criticized and attacked by his own people.

He was beaten, flogged, spit upon, and killed, and yet he didn’t revile and threaten, but went the way of the Cross, obeying His Father.

And by his sacrifice and then his resurrection, we are forgiven, given eternal life, and saved from condemnation.

That’s our Savior, that’s our Leader, that’s our Forerunner, so let’s rest in his work on our behalf, and follow him and his example, no matter what may come. *[pauseeee]*

What a powerful message this morning, which teaches us that...

A God-focused person is able to submit to their boss and patiently endure mistreatment.

This isn’t easy, but it’s God’s command and our calling, which leads to God’s commendation. *[pause]*

Just like we learned last week in regards to our relationship with the government, we do this for Him.

He’s our good and gracious Master, who we serve with every single area of our lives. *[pause]*

In each situation, we ought to be God-focused.

In our relationship with our employer, we ought to think: what does God want?

And he says, “Submission to your employers with respect.” *[pause]*

When we suffer by doing good at our workplace or really anywhere, we should think, how does God want me to respond?

And he says, “I am pleased not with retaliation, revenge, or resentment, but patient endurance, entrusting Me with the situation.” *[pauseeee]*

The difference between a person who responds in retaliation and a person who patiently endures mistreatment is God's grace.

We can only act that way because Christ acted that way out of grace for us, and has changed our hearts.

And we can only act that way because God gives us the grace needed to live out his commands in the power of the Spirit.

All we are doing is looking to God, trusting Him, and following Christ's example, so that it's shown that it's nothing in us, but it's God who makes the difference.