

19For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. 21For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 22"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

"Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh."

"Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct."

These two sentences are both written as part of Holy Scripture. In between these two sentences in First Peter comes our second lesson about being like Christ in suffering unjustly.

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Jesus suffered meekly. Slaves should suffer meekly. Women should suffer meekly. And those who cause the suffering will get their payment someday.

In 1865 the sentence with which I began this sermon was cut right out of scripture. In the United States it was recognized that no human being should have authority over another, one master, the other slave. Until that time ministers in some parts of the country stood in pulpits and declared with certainty that slavery was according to God's will. "See, here it is in scripture."

But for us today, it seems impossible that Christians once believed that.

It is like this little piece that Harold Furniss made. When you look at the dark portions, you see only a strange design. But once you see that the white spells JESUS, you can never see it the same again. The name jumps out at you, you wonder how you ever could have missed it.

For thousands of years God's people could only see the dark when it came to slavery. But once Christians were led by God to recognize the evil in one person claiming ownership over another, then it seemed so very clear that slavery was wrong.

Today the authority of men over women is being questioned. And some hold up their Bibles and say, "See, it says in God's word that wives should accept the authority of their husbands." But more and more people are no longer focusing on the dark threads, and seeing in a new way.

There is a great wind of change blowing through the world and through the church. What was yesterday certain, is today crumbling. What was obvious yesterday, is questionable today, what was hidden yesterday, is revealed today.

Time and again Jesus has been used by those in power as a chain to bind the weak. "Do not resist my power, be like Jesus. Slaves, women, suffer abuse like Jesus." So the abusers say.

Husbands, slave owners, all who are in positions of domination want those under them to be like Jesus so that their dominating will encounter no resistance.

When a husband abuses a wife either verbally or physically, when a male boss does not treat the female employee with respect, when high school girls are regarded as inferiors by arrogant boys, God is not pleased. Such behavior is evil. We Christians need to take a stand against it. God created us male and female in God's image, not just the males.

But then what of these words in First Peter, calling us to endure abuse as Christ did?

"For it is a credit to you, if being aware of God you endure pain while suffering unjustly. For to this you have been called for Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps."

Let's no longer preach these words to the abused, but to the abusers. Let the husband who has come home after a bad day no longer complain if supper is not ready on time. Let him suffer a little by pitching in and helping.

Let the male worker swallow his words of criticism, the male driver no longer focus on the mistakes a woman might make. Let those who have dominated bear with the failings of others in love.

For surely Christ is most of all an example for the powerful. For he is the highest authority, not some slave enduring the whip, but the Lord and creator choosing to turn the other cheek. Yes we are called to follow him in this, precisely in those who have the authority and the power to get an eye for an eye. Let the rich suffer under the poor, the strongest suffer injustice from the weakest, the holiest suffer abuse from the most sinful.

But no more let Christians use Jesus to prop up their authority and domination. It is time to see things in a new way, for Jesus is already in places we never thought to look for him.
Amen