

1. Facing injustice

I have a poster of a duck at home. The duck has beautiful white sleek feathers as it swims on the water. The caption under the picture reads, "It's easy to be an angel when no one ruffles your feathers."

It is easy to be kind to those who treat us well, isn't it? When your partner cares for you and loves you it is easy to respond with love. When the boss at work thinks of you, doesn't give you too much work and thanks you for the efforts you put in you feel like doing a good job.

But what about when you are mistreated? When your partner ignores or hurts you? What about when the boss loads you with too much work, blames you for things that weren't your fault and never acknowledges your extra effort? Perhaps he cuts your pay. It is very easy to feel resentful, to stop being helpful or kind, to actually rebel or to seek to strike back in some way. I'm sure all of us have experiences times when we have been treated unfairly and know what strong feelings it creates.

Peter says, "¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." (2:11-12)

There are four things to see here:

- a. It is a situation of persecution and injustice. "...*though they accuse you of doing wrong.*" That is the background to the whole letter.
- b. When mistreated they are not to do wrong. "...*abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.*" It is easy to react in the wrong way when treated unfairly but we are not to do this.
- c. Instead we are to do good. "*Live such good lives among the pagans... they may see your good deeds.*"
- d. One of the main reasons we are to do good is to be a witness to God. It is so that others may "*glorify God on the day he visits us.*" In other words, so that they may be converted and come to honour and glorify God. Being a witness to God is an important theme throughout this letter. So Peter is concerned that our words and actions may point other people to God.

In this passage Peter writes about doing good deeds in three practical areas of life where we may face injustice: in the wider society, at work and at home.

Of course we have many more freedoms than they did. We live in a democracy, we don't have slaves and women are not in the position that they were in back then. We have far more opportunity to protest and to redress injustice. But Christians can still experience opposition and oppression in these areas of life today. So we need to know how to live in a way that pleases God and points other people to him even when we are mistreated.

2. Submission to authority**A. People to rulers**

Peter wrote during the time of the Emperor, Nero. It was a time of great persecution and he himself was probably put to death by Nero. It would be easy for Christians to rebel against such a government.

Instead of doing wrong “...it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.” (2:15) They may have been accused of doing evil because they would not offer pagan sacrifice or because they did not join in other social events. But their good deeds should silence this talk.

We have records from a couple of centuries later of how Christians were winning many to Christ by their good deeds. By 250AD the Christian community in Rome was supporting 1500 destitute people every day. All around the Mediterranean churches were setting up food programs, hospitals and orphanages for believers and unbelievers. Large numbers were becoming Christians.

In 362AD the Roman Emperor Julian found that Christians were having such an impact on the Empire that he wrote the following to a pagan High Priest, Arcadius.

“Why do we not observe that it is their [Christians'] benevolence to strangers, their care for the graves of the dead and the pretended holiness of their lives that have done most to increase atheism [i.e. Christianity]? I believe that we ought really and truly to practice every one of these virtues ... In every city establish frequent hostels in order that strangers may profit by our benevolence ... I have but now made a plan by which you may be well provided for this; for I have given directions that 30,000 modii of corn [= 175 tons] shall be assigned every year for the whole of Galatia, and 60,000 sextarii of wine [= 33,900 litres]. I order that one-fifth of this be used for the poor who serve the priests, and the remainder be distributed by us to strangers and beggars. For it is disgraceful that ... the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”

Julian’s plan failed because they did not have a doctrine of grace on which to build their actions and motivate them. The Christians followed Jesus’ example of loving service even to those who treated them badly. They silenced their critics by their good deeds and many people were converted.

We know today that the action of people like Bill Crews at the Exodus Foundation feeding the destitute is commended by society.

B. Slaves to masters

Slaves could easily be treated unjustly. Peter says, “*Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.*” (2:18)

Again it is how to respond when treated unjustly. They are not to rebel but to have a willing respect for their master and to do good. “*But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.*” (2:20)

As I said we have many more freedoms than they did. It may be possible to change jobs, or to get help from a union but sometimes we still face mistreatment at work.

We spent nine years in Canberra. We heard many stories of harsh treatment in the Public Service.

One woman with a fairly senior position was hauled into her supervisor's office and told off largely because she was a Christian and had treated her staff well at a difficult time. She was told she would not be offered a more senior position.

Peter says that even when mistreated we need to respect those in authority and to continue to do good. *"For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God."* (2:19) Our natural response is to rebel or to protect ourselves. But to be *"conscious of God"* is to think of God's will in this situation and to know that he will care for us. He will right all wrongs in the end. It is to trust him.

C. Wives to husbands (6:1-6)

You might wonder why he says so much about wives and only a little bit about husbands. It is because wives then and sometimes today, were in a vulnerable position. They could be treated badly.

I can't deal with the whole question of male headship here but let me make a few points about what it doesn't mean:

a) It doesn't mean the husband should be bossy. Headship in the New Testament is all about being a servant. In Mark 10:42-45 Jesus makes this clear, *"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Jesus set the example of servant headship. He gave his life in love for us. That is the model we are to follow not the world's pattern.

b) That means headship isn't about privilege. It is about the responsibility to care for a wife and family.

c) It certainly does not mean that violence against women is ever acceptable, whether verbal or physical. Never, ever! 3:7 makes it clear that men are to respect their wives as equal to themselves.

d) It does not mean that a wife must tolerate abuse. They don't have to just put up with it. They can take action to get out of an abusive situation.

A lot more could be said about all of this but here Peter calls on wives to act in a way that may win their husbands to Christ. *"Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives."* (3:1) It is clear that their actions are to be motivated by the gospel. They may (there are no guarantee) win their husband to Christ. Here it is not by words but by their good actions.

Again he says we can do this if we trust God to care for us. *"⁴⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. ... You are their daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."* (3:5-6)

3. Jesus' Example

Peter then reminds them about Jesus' example.

Examples are powerful things. Cadel Evans won the Tour de France in 2011. He has been a great encouragement to many cyclists. Many have been inspired just to get on a bike. Those who race have seen the possibilities of winning big races by Cadel's example. No doubt people have looked at his example to see how to train and the tactics to use in a race.

Life can be tough. We live in a world that isn't fair and it can be hard to know how we should act. But in all of this we have the example of Jesus. This is such an encouragement when we really focus on him. ²¹*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.* ²²*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.* (2:21-22)

We see exactly the same pattern here as we saw before:

a) He suffered injustice. *"Christ suffered for you."*

b) He didn't react by doing the wrong thing. ²²*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.* (2:22) ²³*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats.* (2:23) It is always the temptation to act badly when mistreated but Jesus didn't do that.

c) He acted for the work of the gospel. *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross."* (2:24) He faithfully did God's will and was concerned for our salvation. That was his aim in life.

d) He trusted God to protect him and to bring justice. *"He entrusted himself to him who judges justly."* (2:23)

And so for us:

We will be treated unfairly at times - in society, at work or at home.

We must not react in the wrong way

We need to do good and be a positive witness

We can trust God to care for us and to bring justice.