

‘When the going gets tough.’ (13)

The last time we were together we saw the importance of submission to our governments no matter they are like. And we also saw that God is the very person who puts people in these positions and He is the person who removes them when the time is right. Peter reminded us that we have a responsibility to pray for our governments and our behaviour towards them needs to be honourable. And today we’re going to see that Peter isn’t finished with the topic of submission and although he starts by talking about servants we’re going to find that the principle is still the same, **submit**.

A guy named Sid was notorious for his bad luck. After he returned from the Korean War, he was arrested while driving through a small town in Scotland and accused of burglary. Despite his protestations, he was found guilty. Before the judge passed sentence, Sid's desperate lawyer said, "Your honour, I submit that my client did not break into the house. He found the living room window open, inserted his right arm, and removed a few trifling articles, a newspaper and a tangerine. Now, my client's arm is not himself, and I don't feel you should punish him for an offence committed by one of his limbs." "Your argument is an interesting one," said the judge, "albeit not particularly convincing. I'll tell you what I'll do. I will follow your tenuous logic. Therefore, I sentence the prisoner's right arm to one year's imprisonment. He can accompany the arm or not, as he chooses." The judge looked rather pleased with himself, but Sid had the last laugh. He calmly removed his artificial right arm, handed it to the dumbstruck judge, and walked out of court with his lawyer.

Now in the eyes of the world Sid’s lawyer needs to be commended for getting his client off the hook, but in the eyes of the Lord I think this may be a different matter. You see when we become Christians we’re told time and time again about our behaviour towards those who are unbelievers. But in today’s sermon Peter is going to remind us that our behaviour also needs to be commendable before the Lord.

1 Peter 2:18-20 “Servants, be in subjection to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the wicked. For it is commendable if someone endures pain, suffering unjustly, because of conscience toward God. For what glory is it if, when you sin, you patiently endure beating? But if, when you do well, you patiently endure suffering, this is commendable with God”

So the first question Peter asks and answers is this, **what is commendable conduct before God?** You see loved ones we’re all servants; some have earthly masters whilst others have a heavenly master and some may even have both. But Peter says if we want our behaviour to be commendable before God, then we need to suffer patiently when mistreated for doing good.

Now I know this is difficult for us to try and imagine today because we don’t really understand the concept of what it means to be a slave like it was back in Biblical days. But Peter says imagine there is a slave who is trying his best to serve his master well. But for one reason or another, his master mistreats him.

Peter says it’s then that the slave **finds favour** in God's sight, as some translations have it, if he patiently and submissively endures the mistreatment. Let me put it another way, when you are doing something that is good and despite doing those good things you are still being mistreated, but you continue with the unjust treatment patiently. It’s then Peter says that your patient tolerance is commendable in the sight of God.

Now please listen closely to what Peter is telling us this morning loved ones. It is not simply suffering patiently that is commendable but suffering patiently when you did good, and yet you are still badly treated for it. 1 Peter 2:20 “For what glory is it if, when you sin, you patiently endure beating? But if, when you do well, you patiently endure suffering, this is commendable with God”.

You see loved ones its one thing suffering because you’re a Christian but it’s another thing when you’re a Christian and you get all sorts of grief from people when all you want to do is help. Now please don’t think that this only applies only to the master and servant relationship.

When Peter speaks to brethren in general he says in 1 Peter 2:13+14 “Now who is he who will harm you, if you become imitators of that which is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. “Don’t fear what they fear, neither be troubled.” He also says in 1 Peter 3:17 “For it is better, if it is God’s will, that you suffer for doing well than for doing evil.”

In other words although he is addressing servants here, Peter is applying a general truth to a specific application and the general truth is **submit**. The last time we were together he gave us that general truth of submission concerning our government. **1 Peter 2:13** “Therefore subject yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether to the king, as supreme.”

He will give us that general truth of submission again concerning our martial relationships. **1 Peter 3:1** “In the same way, wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; so that, even if any don’t obey the Word, they may be won by the behaviour of their wives without a word.”

Paul also gives us that general truth of submission concerning our relationship between each other. **Ephesians 5:21** “Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ”. And so loved ones, whenever we do good and suffer for it, don’t give up. Endure that suffering patiently because if we do, then Peter says this is commendable conduct before God.

Now please don’t ever think I don’t know how hard this is to do. I’m sure we’ve all been in situations where all we do is good and it just gets thrown back in our faces. I understand it’s hard because there’s always something inside us that wants to jump up and defend ourselves. There’s always something inside of us that wants to leap to our feet and say, ‘**hey, I’m in the right**’, especially when we’re being treated badly because of it. In other words we want to stand up for our rights.

Listen loved ones, I think we want to stand up for our rights and go on the attack because we don’t fully understand why doing the opposite from what the world finds acceptable is so important to God. You see as Christians we were called for this very purpose.

Peter says following on in **1 Peter 2:21-23** “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps, who did not sin, “neither was deceit found in his mouth.” Who, when he was cursed, didn’t curse back. When he suffered, didn’t threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously.”

Christians are called to follow the example of Jesus. And so, just as Jesus suffered patiently when He was mistreated without cause, so should we. As Christians we’ve been called to respond with good even when someone treats us bad. **1 Peter 3:9** “Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult, but instead bless others because you were called to inherit a blessing.”

Jesus Himself reminds us in **Luke 6:27-36** “But I tell you who hear: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer also the other; and from him who takes away your cloak, don’t withhold your coat also. Give to everyone who asks you, and don’t ask him who takes away your goods to give them back again. “As you would like people to do to you, do exactly so to them. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive back as much. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing back; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, even as your Father is also merciful”.

Are Christians to return good for evil to the non-Christians who treat us badly? Yes they do. Are Christians to return good for evil to other Christians who treat us badly? Yes they do. And that’s where it gets tough for us doesn’t it?

A man who had hitchhiked from coast to coast and had walked many miles in the process was asked what he had found the most difficult to endure. To the surprise of his questioner it was not the steep mountains or the dazzling sun or the scorching desert heat that had troubled him, but, in the words of the traveller, “**it was the sand in my shoe.**”

You see loved ones I’ve found in my short time as Christian that it’s the little things in life that makes the practice of the Christian faith most difficult. Somehow the great trials of life, moments of crisis, of serious illness, of death and bereavement, have a way of raising us and bringing us closer to the only source of spiritual strength, our Savior, Jesus Christ. But those smaller trials, oh how they plague us **don’t they?**

How they succeed again and again in causing us to fail and stumble.

Those little irritations in the home, those endless annoying moments at the shop or at work, and those little rubs with the neighbours, those petty quarrels at church, those are the "sand in our shoe," which wear our Christianity thin. But loved ones; always remember being patient and kind does have its good side.

Just think about Jesus Himself and what He patiently endured, and look at what the end product was. **1 Peter 2:24+25** "Who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed. For you were going astray like sheep; but now have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls".

Peter says when you think about Jesus Christ Himself and how he patiently endured being treated badly for doing good all the way to cross. He says it was all worth it because we now have the forgiveness of our sins. He says it was all worth it because those who were straying away have now been brought back to their Shepherd. And so love ones following Jesus' example can really have a positive effect for the good.

The apostle Paul also reminds us that returning good for evil can actually help us overcome evil. **Romans 12:19-21** "Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head." Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good".

A very young girl, who often read her Bible, gave proof that she understood her obligations to obey its precepts. One day she came to her mother much pleased to show her some fruit which had been given to her. The mother said the friend was very kind, and had given her a great many. "Yes," said the child, "very, indeed; and she gave me more than these, but I have given some away." The mother inquired to whom she had given them, when she answered, "I gave them to a girl who pushes me off the path, and makes faces at me." On being asked why she gave them to her, she replied, "Because I thought it would make her know that I wanted to be kind to her, and maybe she will not be so rude and unkind to me again."

That's the attitude that Paul is talking about loved ones. That little girl understood what many Christians fail to understand. She understood that if is she kind to the very person who is evil towards her; she may actually change the attitude of that person. She understood that those who do evil against us are often ashamed when they see how we patiently endure their mistreatment by doing good.

In other words, just as we were moved by the sacrificial death of Jesus for our sins, so we might best move others to change their evil ways by patiently doing good even when they mistreat us. And that is why we have been called to follow the example of Jesus.

You see loved ones Christians are called to suffer and anyone who tells you different is lying to you. Anyone who say, 'yeh become a Christian and your life will be free from suffering of any sort' have told you a lie. It's a lie because the Bible doesn't promise such a thing, in fact the Bible promises just the opposite. If you become a Christian you're going to suffer even more, for being a Christian. But just because we suffer more as Christians doesn't mean that we can throw ourselves a pity party. The early Christians certainly didn't throw themselves a pity party but what they did was rejoice because of that suffering.

1 Peter 4:12-14 "Dear friends, do not be astonished that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in the degree that you have shared in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory, who is the Spirit of God, rests on you."

Peter says why are you throwing yourself a pity party as if you haven't got a clue what is happening? He says rejoice because your suffering as Christians, he says rejoice and be glad because your going to receive a blessing because of it.

In **Acts 5** when the apostles were preaching the Gospel and doing good, they were thrown in jail but they didn't throw themselves a pity party, they rejoiced. **Acts 5:41** "They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for Jesus' name".

Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 5:10-12** "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. "Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil

against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you”.

The point that Peter and Jesus is trying to make loved ones is that the very fact of knowing that we are blessed in the sight of God. The very fact that we have joined the company of a great group of prophets, apostles, and disciples in suffering for Christ. The very fact that we know we're going to suffer like Jesus can actually help us to have the proper attitude.

It can help us have the attitude which says, 'praise the Lord' instead of, 'I know I'm right and I'm going to get my own back'. And simply knowing that this attitude towards people treating us badly pleases God should give us great satisfaction.

Now like I said earlier this is not easy, but loved ones just as we know that God is always behind the good things, the devil himself is behind the bad things. And he really wants you to retaliate in the way the rest of the world does. When we suffer as Christians and are treated badly by others, Satan is behind it all. **1 Peter 5:8+9** “Be sober and self-controlled. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Withstand him steadfast in your faith, knowing that your brothers who are in the world are undergoing the same sufferings.”

Take a minute to think about the importance of Christ's birth and His life on this earth. Think about the splendour He left in heaven with the Father, to live among sinful men in a sinful world, yet as a sinless man He carried out God's plan. Because Jesus was God, He was humbly willing to fulfil the will God had established.

Christ's focus was clear on this earth although man could not understand. His disciples questioned His direction, the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day questioned His authority, and those who followed Him around the countryside failed to understand His motives.

With all the hardships and misunderstanding that Christ experienced, He remained faithful to God's will. How little it is that can begin to distract and deter us from God's purpose in our lives. Even in His birth, Christ was in accordance with God's plan though Herod would have had Him killed. Reliance on God should be our aim at all times.

And Peter says to do this we must be on our guard, resist the devil, and resist our fleshy desires, especially our pride and cling onto God. You see loved ones the devil would love nothing more than to hinder our walk with God, His people and those in the world. He would love it if we retaliated just as people in the world do, proving that Christians are no different than sinners of the world. Christian, don't let him win, when someone treats you bad do more good back.

Paul says in **Romans 12:20+21** “If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” And so what Peter is reminding us of this morning is simply this, there is nothing commendable about stopping when "the going gets tough" but when "the tough get going", and going about doing good, now that is commendable.

And if all else fails loved ones, follow again the example of Jesus and rely on God to deal with it. In other words sometimes it's best to leave it in the hands of One who knows what really is best. Or as they say in **Alcoholics Anonymous**, 'let go and let God'. Or as Peter says in **1 Peter 2:23** “Who, when he was cursed, didn't curse back. When he suffered, didn't threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously.”

Jesus didn't retaliate but left God to deal with it. And if our Christ-like behaviour does not change the behaviour of those who mistreat us, we know that God will one day do what is right. Paul says in **Romans 12:19** “Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, “Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.” He also said in **2 Thessalonians 1:6** “Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay affliction to those who afflict you.”

And so loved ones, if we follow in the steps of Jesus, if we follow His example when it comes to being treated badly, whether it's for simply being a Christian or for being a Christian and doing good. Always remember that God is very pleased with us when we behave like His Son.

And for those of you who are not Christians this morning, I'm not going to lie to you, being a Christian is tough especially in terms of suffering. But let me tell you that the rewards from being a Christian are far greater. But first of all you need to become a Christian, so let me encourage you to talk to someone today about what you can do to make God be pleased with you.