

I Have Decided To Follow Jesus

1 Peter 2:18-25

Introduction: For most of my life I have been a member of churches that give a public invitation after the preaching of the Word of God. People are invited to publicly confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, present themselves for baptism or church membership, rededicate their lives to Christ, or simply to come and pray. I know the “walk the aisle invitation” can be abused or misunderstood when given poorly. But, I have also seen countless lives changed when it is extended with care and sensitivity. Many times the invitation hymn sung was “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.” The four stanzas are simple, clear and convicting.

1. I have decided to follow Jesus; I have decided to follow Jesus;
I have decided to follow Jesus; No turning back, no turning back.
2. Though none go with me, I still will follow; Though none go with me,
I still will follow; Though none go with me, I still will follow; No turning
back, no turning back.
3. My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus; My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus;
My cross I'll carry, till I see Jesus; No turning back, No turning back.
4. The world behind me, the cross before me; The world behind me, the
cross before me; The world behind me, the cross before me; No turning
back, no turning back.

The theme of following Jesus, especially in his suffering, is an important emphasis in 1 Peter 2:18-25. It is the essence of discipleship (Mark 8:34-38). His “example” (1 Pet 1:21) also is a legitimate aspect of his atoning work. But, and this is critically important, it is not the heart and primary focus of the atonement. The heart of the atoning work of Christ is what we call “penal substitute.” This teaches that Jesus by his death on the cross paid the penalty of our sins and died in our place. As v. 24 so beautifully says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.” J.I. Packer says the doctrine of penal substitution “takes us to the very heart of the gospel” (“What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution,” Tyndale Bib. Theo. Lecture, 1973). And, Australia theologian Rory Shiner provides a clear, careful and concise definition of this wonderful doctrine, “The idea of penal substitutionary atonement is, as the name suggests, the claim that Christ’s death paid a penalty (“penal”). As Christ did not deserve a penalty, he was paying it for others (“substitutionary”). And, the result of Christ’s paying this price for others is that we are now forgiven (“atonement”)...when we speak of penal substitutionary atonement, we are highlighting the “in our place” aspect of substitution. The penalty was due to us. It fell on Christ. And this is because he stood where we otherwise should have been, and received what we otherwise should have received. By this means our sins are atoned. Because Christ substituted as our penalty, we are now able to stand before God guiltless. We have

no case to answer, no penalty to pay, no punishment to await. This is what is meant by penal substitutionary atonement.” (“In My Place Condemned He Stood: Penal Substitutionary Atonement, TGC, 1-11-22). So, it is correct to say Jesus is our example. Of course He is! But, even more important, it is correct to say He is our penal substitution. Let’s examine both of these truths.

I. Submit to those in authority even when you suffer unjustly 2:18

Peter continues his teaching on Christians rightly submitting to various authorities in life. He knows there are times when submitting is not a problem. Those over us make laws and demands that are no burden at all. However, this is not always our experience. Case in point: slaves who are subject to masters who are “cruel” (v. 18), bring “grief” (v. 19) and cause them to “suffer unjustly” (v. 19). Our human nature says fight back and get even. Christ says not so. Submit and know, “this brings favor with God” (v. 20).

Now, before diving into these verses, we should make a few observations about slavery. Our assessment will be short and concise (for a longer treatment see Akin and Merritt, *1 Cor.*, CCE, pgs 151-53).

- 1) Slavery is regulated by God but it is not ordained by God.
- 2) Slavery is evil in whatever form it has been practiced in human history.
- 3) Slavery has been practiced in various ways in human history; some even sold themselves into slavery to live.

- 4) American slavery was race based with slaves having no rights or independent existence apart from their masters.
 - 5) In the NT times a slave might be able to purchase his freedom, though this was the exception.
 - 6) Paul encouraged slaves to obtain their freedom if possible (1 Cor 7:17-24).
 - 7) Christianity transformed the relationship of master-slave to brother-brother (Philemon).
 - 8) Christianity always sows the seeds for the destruction of human Chattel slavery.
 - 9) Though Peter addresses the master-slave relationship in 1 Peter 2:18-24, these verses readily apply to many of our relationships in the 21st century. The world finds these principles nonsense, but the Bible says they invite the “favor of God” (vv 19, 21) and follow in the footsteps of Jesus (v. 21).
- 1) Do good to those who treat you well 2:18

Peter admonishes “Household slaves,” a good translation, “to submit to their masters with all reverence (*ESV*, “respect”) not only to the good and gentle ones but also to the cruel.” Interesting, the initiative is with slaves. This could hint that saved slaves are under the authority of unsaved masters (*Gr. despotais*). Such submission is to be with all reverence (*NASV*, “respect”) towards God, because ultimately we “serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:24).

And, in God's goodness, some work or serve under authority that is "good and gentle," those who treat their subordinates with kindness and consideration.

When we find ourselves in these kinds of situations, we should be grateful and thankful to God for His gracious providence and plan for our lives.

2) Do good to those who treat you unjustly 2:18-20

Vaughn and Lea remind us, "Reverence for God should indeed govern all our conduct" (*1 Peter*, BSC, 64). This is especially true when we find ourselves in an unfair, harsh and unjust position. This is Peter's primary concern and so he addresses it more extensively in verses 18-20.

You find yourself serving under a cruel and unjust master or boss. What do you do? You submit. Why? It brings favor with God when you do it "because of a consciousness of God" (*ESV*, "when mindful of God"). I trust God when I "endure grief from suffering unjustly" (v. 20). I trust and believe that "the Judge of the whole earth [will] do what is just" (Gen. 18:25). My relationship with God and my obedience to God will be rewarded (bring favor, vv. 19, 20) by God. I will believe this and trust in God's promise.

Peter tells us in verse 20 to weigh what I call the spiritual logic of the thing.

"For what credit is there if when you do wrong and are beaten, you endure it?"

The question is clearly a rhetorical one and the answer is obvious. None. If we sin or act unjustly there is no credit when we suffer. It is what we deserve. In

contrast, “But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.”

In our modern context, we are insulted, mocked, slandered (2:12) and passed over because we follow Christ. We are rejected, face false accusations and suffer. Our response: we do what is right, good and godly. We do not fight back on a personal level, nor do we seek revenge. We listen to the wisdom of Paul in Romans 12:19-20, “Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.” We suffer the wrong and follow Christ our “example and follow in his steps” (2:21).

This is the main emphasis in verses 21-25.

II. Follow the example of Jesus when you suffer unjustly 2:21-25

Mark Dever says the life of Jesus is both unique and exemplary (*It Is Well: Expositions on Substitutionary Atonement*, 195). Dever is right. And, because Christ’s life is both unique and exemplary, he can meet us where we are and take us where we need to go, returning us “to the Shepherd and Overseer of [our] souls.” (2:25). Peter expounds on three truths related to this wonderful

Savior. Isaiah 53 and the “Suffering Servant” song is foundational to all that Peter writes.

1) Christ suffered for us 2:21-23

Peter once more applies spiritual logic for his readers. “For you were called to this” (v. 21) refers back to verses 18-20 and the subject of suffering. We were called to suffer unjustly “because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” Christ suffered “for you,” in your place. He is your substitute, which is more fully explained in v. 24. Schreiner writes, “Christ suffered for you refers to the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, especially since such an idea is explicitly taught in v. 24 and is clearly taught in 3:18” (*1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 142). The vicarious sufferings of Christ also have an exemplary aspect. He has left us “an example, that [we] should follow in his steps” (v. 21). Dever notes, “The word for “example” here conjures up the image of a pattern that taught children how to write correctly, tracing the shape of letters over models or examples. That’s what Jesus’ life is for the Christian. It is a life that we are to follow in order that we might learn to live a truly, fully human life” (p. 201). J.N.D. Kelly says the word “has the air of the schoolroom clinging to it” (*A Comm. on the Epistle of Peter and Jude*, Thornapple Com., 120).

Now, spiritual logic appears once again demanding that we ask and answer an important question. Why follow the example of Christ and no other? Why not Buddha? Socrates? Ghandi? Mother Teresa? Drawing from Isaiah 53, Peter provides the answer in vv. 22-23. Let me highlight Peter's list and then return to the first and most important.

- 1) He did not commit sin.
- 2) No deceit was found in his mouth (Isa. 53:9)
- 3) When he was insulted, he did not insult in return (Isa. 53:7)
- 4) When he suffered, he did not threaten
- 5) He entrusted himself to the one who judges justly

No lie was ever found in the mouth of Jesus. Not once did he retaliate against those who insulted, beat and crucified him. He prayed for them! (Luke 23:24). Though he could have called on his Father to send twelve legions of angels and wipe out his enemies (Matt. 26:53), he did not threaten. Rather, he entrusted (*ESV*, "continued entrusting") himself to his Father "who judges justly." All of these amazing truths flow from the fact "He did not commit sin." He is a sinless Savior. He never ever committed a single sin. The witness to our Lord's sinlessness finds a mountain of evidence in the Bible. It is a non-negotiable doctrine of the Christian faith!

- Judas called him innocent (Matt. 27:41)

- Pilate called him innocent (John 18:38)
- Jesus spoke of his sinlessness (John 8:29)
- Paul said he was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21)
- The author of Hebrews said he was sinless (Heb. 4:15)
- John said he was sinless (1 John 3:5)
- Peter says he was sinless (1 Pet. 2:22)

And remember, John and Peter got an up close and personal look at Jesus over a number of years. That adds additional weight to their witness to his sinlessness.

To err is not human. Jesus makes that clear in his sinless life, in his suffering for us, and in the example he provides for us.

2) Christ was a substitute for us 2:24

This is one of the great atonement verses in the Bible. Peter once again draws from Isaiah 53 and also Deuteronomy 21:23. We must remember and never forget that we, as sinners, cannot atone for our sins. Only the sinless Savior can do that. Peter writes, “he himself bore our sins in his body.”

Jesus lived the life we should have lived and didn't. He died the death we should have died and bore in his body the wrath that we should have bore but now don't have to. This is sacrificial language. This is substitution language. This is satisfaction language. Jesus by his death on the cross took

our place, took on the curse of a criminal by his death on the tree (see Deuteronomy 21:23), took on the judgment and wrath of God, and in so doing satisfied the righteous judgment of God.

“Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood,
Hallelujah! What a Savior!”

And, there is more. Christ died to forgive our sins, but He also “died to sins, so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds (see Isaiah 53:5) you have been healed” (v. 24). Because of his work on the cross, and our union with Christ, we have died to sins and we continue to die to sin. We have the power to “live a new kind of life” (Schreiner, 146). This life is not characterized by sin but by righteousness, a God kind of life. Returning to Isaiah 53:5, Peter declares “By his wounds you have been healed.” The death of Christ (“his wounds”) are my physical healing (ultimately) and my spiritual healing (immediately). Summing up the atoning work of Christ, I would put it like this:

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by offering Himself as a sacrifice, by substituting Himself in our place, paying in full by His bloody death the penalty of our sin and actually bearing the punishment which should be been ours, satisfied the Father’s righteous demands, effected a reconciliation between God and man, and became our justification by imputing His

righteousness to us by faith in His perfect and healing work of atonement.

This is amazing! And, it is true!

3) Christ is a shepherd to us 2:25

Verse 25 once again takes us back to Isaiah 53, in particular v. 6. “We all went away like sheep; we have all turned to our own way’ and the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all.” We were like lost wandering sheep. But then our Shepherd (Gr. *poimena*) stepped in to rescue us. He has turned us and returned us. He has taken us to a place of salvation, safety and security. Our souls now rest in the care of the Good Shepherd (see Ps. 23; John 10) and Overseer (*episkopos*) of our souls. Christ now has absolute authority in our lives as our protector, provider, and pastor. There is no better place to be. There is no better person to whom we can flee.

Conclusion: “In Christ Alone Not Welcomed!”

In 2013, The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) was revising their hymnal. The much loved Christian hymn “In Christ Alone” did not make the cut. Why? The Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song wanted to edit out the phrase “the wrath of God was satisfied.” Instead of singing, “when on the cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied,” they wanted to substitute the phrase, “the love of God was magnified.” The committee opined the problem was not the word “wrath” but the word “satisfied.” Rev. Chris Joiner said, “But the words of the song don’t

work. That lyric comes close to saying God killed Jesus. The cross is not an instrument of God's wrath" (Bob Smietana, "Presbyterians' decision to drop hymn stirs debate," *USA Today*, 8-5-13). Authors Stuart Townend and Keith Getty said no to the change. "The committee voted to drop the hymn."

Now, let me be clear. When on the cross as Jesus died, the love of God was magnified. Why was it magnified? Because the wrath of God was satisfied. When the Son of God died on the cross and "the Lord [His Father] was pleased to crush him severely" (Isa 53:10), the wrath of God was poured out on His Son and His justice satisfied. Why? Because the Son of God took our place (substitution) and paid in full our penalty (penal).

It has been said that the atonement is "perhaps better sung than said" (Rory Shiner). There is wisdom in that thought. So, let us close by drawing from the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" by Horatio Spafford. It sings it perfectly!

"My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!

"My sin, not in part but the whole.

"Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O' my soul!"