

The Supernatural Level of Life

Above Politics and Parliaments, Part 4

1 Peter 2:21-23

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

The call of the Christian faith includes the call to follow the example of Jesus in enduring suffering.

Discussion Points:

Stephen presented a three-part matrix for responding to other people.

- 1) Sinful Response - Returns evil for good.
- 2) Natural Response - Returns evil for evil.
- 3) Spiritual Response – Returns good for evil.

- Which of these marks you most often?
- Evaluate the last time you responded sinfully or naturally. What could or should you have done differently?

1Peter 2:21 tells us that Christians are called by God to suffer injustice because of ungodly rulers and face harsh circumstances because of unreasonable authorities.

- How does that reconcile with your view of God?
- What are some experiences you've had that reveal this to be true?

Peter presented Jesus as the pattern for us to follow in that Jesus suffered for us.

- In your everyday life, what are some ways that following Jesus could lead to suffering and hardship?
- When faced with prospect that obedience will bring suffering, how are you tempted to respond?

Look up some of the references Stephen mentioned, and observe what Jesus had to endure. (*John 8:41; Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34; John 8:48; Mark 3:22; Luke 23:2; Mark 14-15*)

Discussion Guide cont.

- Stephen asked this question: “How do you follow Him like this? How do you do this tomorrow at work, or school, or in the neighborhood or home where you’re treated unjustly and unfairly?” What’s your response to this question?
- Jesus drew the strength He needed to respond properly to suffering through His trust in His Father’s ultimate purpose to accomplish righteous justice on His behalf in the end. How does that perspective strengthen and encourage you?

Gospel Connection:

Salvation does not mean a life of ease and comfort. What God saves us, He calls us to follow the example of Jesus. That example includes bearing up under unjust and harsh treatment.

Practical Implications:

Think: What are some areas of your life where you have pursued ease over obedience?

Pray: Ask God to help you choose the bath of following Christ, even if that means you will need to endure suffering.

Respond: Commit to following God obediently, no matter the cost.

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I Peter 2:21-23

About 20 years ago, my wife and I went through a long ordeal with a prank caller. Nothing was ever said by this caller . . . they would simply call our home . . . nothing was ever said – but as soon as we said, “Hello” – they’d hang up.

It began with a call every other day – and it was usually around supper time, which was an obtrusive time to interrupt us – dinner time with 4 young children. But then it accelerated to several times a day. Marsha would pick up the phone and say “Hello” and they’d hang up . . . which was, as you can imagine, frustrating but also unnerving.

The calls began to accelerate even more – sometimes 3 or 4 calls in the space of an hour during the day. But then the calls began coming at 2 and 3 o’clock in the morning.

Because I felt it was my responsibility to keep the phone on the hook in case of some pastoral emergency, we answered the phone – no matter what time of day or night. Keep in mind this was before cell phones and caller ID. The telephone was on the kitchen wall and another on the bedside table.

3:00 o’clock in the morning, I’d fumble for the phone and say hello – and I’d hear silence for just a moment and then that “click”.

Oh - they got me again! Now it's three o'clock in the morning and we can't go back to sleep . . . is it going to ring again?

After months of this, I finally talked to the police about it and they said there was nothing they could do without proof. And the only way to get proof was to dish out some money to put call tracing on our home phone line – and then painstakingly log all the calls that came in with the Annoyance Call Center – this had become more than annoyance, trust me.

So for months we logged the calls and reported them . . . but the problem was, they were always traced to grocery stores or gas stations or public phone booths – for those who are younger, those are tall rectangular booths . . . where Superman changed his clothes.

Finally, after nearly a year of this I got a phone call from the Center and they said that they finally had a match on the number with a personal home address of this person.

They asked me – Do you want to pursue prosecution? I didn’t want prosecution – I wanted capital punishment . . . slow starvation.

After talking it over, we simply asked that they be informed that we knew . . . they’d been caught . . . and to please stop calling us . . . which they did.

You have no idea how much we appreciate caller ID.

Years ago I read Warren Wiersbe’s comments on how we react to both good and evil against us. Wiersbe once pastored Moody Church and taught on the radio program, Back to the Bible.

I can’t remember the name of the book, but I remember he wrote that believers all live, at any given time, on three possible levels:

1) He called the first level, Satanic, or sinful – which returns evil for good.

In other words, when you’ve had someone do something good to you or for you, you respond with unkindness or sinful selfishness.

This is that evil of returning evil for kindness. Like an elderly couple in our former church while I attended seminary, who greeted a young man who’d come to church that night for our services.

After the service he told this sweet couple that he basically needed a place to stay for just one night, if they would be so kind. They agreed and took him home.

The next morning he thanked them for their kindness and left . . . I remember thinking we’d begun the first step of disciple making – perhaps he was ready to receive the gospel.

What none of us knew until the next day was that he’d unlocked the window in the guest bedroom, and when this elderly couple returned home the next afternoon, they discovered that all of their valuables had been stolen.

That's nothing less than digressing to live on the selfish, Satanic, sinful level of life – returning good with evil.

2) Level number 2 is natural, that is – returning evil for evil.

We start doing this when we're really little . . . we learn to treat other kids like they treat us . . . they push us down and we trip them back. "I'm going to treat you like you treat me."

And then we get older and it's more like – I'll get in the last word; you get in my way and get even; you criticize me and I'll criticize you back.

I'm reminded of what one author advised, with a humorous tongue in cheek way – "Before you're tempted to criticize someone, walk a mile in his shoes. That way, when you yield to temptation and criticize him, you'll be a mile away . . . *and* you'll have his shoes."

And the natural world will applaud you and say, "You played it just right . . . you got the best of him . . . you got even!"

Has it ever occurred to you that if you spend your time getting even, you will never get ahead?

3) You have the sinful level of living – returning evil for good; you have the natural level – returning evil with evil; and then, thirdly, you have the spiritual level which returns good for evil.

In other words, you respond to people like you wished they responded to you, but don't. You might even call this, a supernatural response to living.

Because everybody knows in your world that you've got to stand up for your rights; you don't take anything on the chin; you fight back against intolerance, prejudice, unjust or unfair treatment; somebody steps on your toes, or crosses the line or intrudes into your private domain – watch out.

This was the attitude of the believers in Corinth who'd begun suing each other – and taking each other to court – responding sinfully; actually, they were responding naturally . . . hey, everybody does it out there . . . but the cause of Christ was being hindered (1 Corinthians 6).

The Apostle Peter has been in the process of challenging our sinful and our natural way of thinking.

His letter has called us to a higher plane of living; a higher perspective in thinking – to see beyond the insults and the injuries; beyond the mistreatment and the misunderstandings – to see higher and farther than earth . . . to see beyond politics and parliaments, as we've called this series.

Let's go back to that letter – we call it, 1 Peter; chapter 2 has been our focus of exposition and I invite you to return there where Peter has shocked his world – and our world by commanding that the believer:

- Submit to institutions like government and governors – *v. 1-16*;
- Honor the king – *v. 17*
- Submit to earthly masters – employers, in our culture today – even when their thinking isn't straight and they are hard to work for and unreasonable – *v. 18-20*

And about the time that the first century believers would more than likely be holding back their emotions and probably holding their tongues and thinking, "Peter, you have no idea how bad I have it . . . you have no idea how much I am suffering unjustly and being treated unfairly."

The Spirit of God, through Peter, anticipated we'd all be thinking the same thing . . . and he effectively responds to that by saying, "Let me give you an example of supernatural level living . . . and then I'll tell you how to do it too."

And with that, we arrive at *1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 21. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.*

Go back to just that first rather shocking phrase for a moment – in fact, let's back into verse 20 and get a running start – *20. For what credit is there if when you sin and are harshly treated you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God . . . for you have been called for this purpose.*

Wait a second, does Peter mean that God has actually called us to suffer injustice because of ungodly rulers and face harsh circumstances because of unreasonable authorities?

Yes, in fact, Peter says this happens to be your calling according to the purposes of God – and by the way, it will more than likely be God *alone* who

knows all the purposes He has in mind for your suffering.

But Peter actually informs us that God called us to suffer . . . the Latin root *voco* for calling gives us our English word vocation.ⁱ

It's the Greek word for election. Your election – your spiritual vocation just happens to be suffering.

You're going to have to turn off those television preachers who promise you that God has in store for you today one more promotion and one more wonderful event and one more victory over difficulty and disease . . . so start thinking positive thoughts because God will honor your happy thoughts with happy things.

It would be humorous if it weren't so well received and so theologically tragic. Just read the New Testament. God didn't call you to the comfort of a Lazy Boy, He called you to a cross . . . you want to be my disciple, I have a cross designed for you (*Matthew 16:24*); you want to come after me, get ready to run the race (*Hebrews 12:1*)

At those moments of unjust treatment, you discover what you really worship – and pursue – a comfortable life . . . or Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱ

Williams translates this first phrase – it is to this kind of living that you were called.ⁱⁱⁱ This happens to be your vocation.

Now notice; there happens to be a pattern. Notice *verse 21* again – *since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example.*

In other words, He's leaving us a pattern for how to suffer – how to live on nothing less than a genuinely supernatural level.

In fact, the word Peter uses here for the word *example* is packed with implications. The only time the word is used in the New Testament is here and it literally means, *under-writing*.^{iv}

In the early centuries – long before the Victorian era with its educational slate boards for students and, in many ways, our own schools which still do the same thing; children were taught to write by tracing over letters – or drawing lines which connected dots that formed letters when finished.

Then, as the children advanced, they would be given a copy of letters and even sentences that they could look at while they wrote the letters down. This is how they learned to write.

Peter is saying, "Do you remember how you learned to write? Well, Jesus is going to show you how to react!"^v

Copy Him . . . trace the alphabet of His disposition and demeanor.

And by the way, back to those television preachers and prosperity authors, in case you're thinking that you must be in *trouble* with God because you're suffering . . .

Jesus happens to show you with His own life that a person can be in the will of God the Father, greatly loved by God the Father, experiencing the approval of God the Father, walking in fellowship with God the Father – and be suffering at the same time . . . and suffering dearly.^{vi} Don't be discouraged . . . this is your divine calling and Jesus is your divine pattern.

Peter then changes the figure by showing us why Jesus provided the example – notice *the end of verse 21, for you to follow in His steps*.^{vii}

Peter shifts gears a bit; you're not writing now . . . you're walking. You are tracing His *footprints* – the word can be translated.^{viii}

This has the idea of taking note of His direction – the line of footprints which Jesus left behind . . . which is actually an encouraging way for Peter to put it.

Because as consistently failing disciples – we can't put our feet perfectly in each of Jesus' footsteps – like a child walking behind his father in the snow; he's trying to put his feet in the snow prints of his dad's feet – but he can't take steps that big and he loses his balance no matter how hard he tries – it's one out of five at best.

But don't miss this . . . like that little boy or girl, you're heading in the same direction as your Heavenly Father. It's one out of five footsteps along the way – on a good day . . . but your direction is right and your desire is right and the pattern is right. Peter is suggesting – while you can't put your feet perfectly in the steps of Jesus, you're following the line of footprints – you're heading in the same direction He is. And especially in how you respond to unjust treatment.

And now, it's as if Peter says, "Just in case you forgot how He responded . . . let me back up the truck and remind you."

Verse 22. Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth – in other words, he didn't deserve the treatment he received. Get this – it was all unfair and unjust treatment.

Verse 23. And while being reviled, He did not revile in return. The word used here for reviling means to deliver vile verbal abuse.

One Greek scholar translates it, *when they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate.*^{ix}

And by the way, this was true not only at the event of His crucifixion, but throughout His ministry – they were constantly insulting Him and mocking Him and accusing Him.

They called Him:

- an illegitimate child, born out of wedlock (**John 8:41**)
- a glutton (**Matthew 11:19**)
- a drunkard (**Luke 7:34**)
- possessed by demons (**John 8:48**)
- in secret alliance with Satan (**Mark 3:22**)
- a deceiver, a tax evader and false teacher – all that in one verse (**Luke 23:2**)

They hurled abusive accusations at Him constantly. Peter uses a present tense participle to inform us that it never let up.

In fact, if you want to get a picture of the reality of His ministry, He was on the receiving end of one insult after another – in fact, even when He’s dying on the cross, they can’t help but march up that hill and mock Him and throw a barrage of abusive insults at Him (**Mark 14**). Jesus was the epitome of being treated unfairly and unjustly.

It’s as if Peter is asking all of his readers – including us – “Remind me again – how unjust is your treatment? How unfairly have you been treated? How deep are your wounds? How great are your insults?”

Jesus Christ, your High priest, has been touched by everything you feel – He felt it too . . . deeply (**Hebrews 4:15**).

Just move into that mock trial at midnight. The Sanhedrin has gathered unlawfully in a mock desire for justice – Jewish law never allowed for a trial to be conducted in secret during the nighttime.

The Jewish Supreme court – sometimes referred to as “the Senate” or “the council”, was composed of 71 men – they were the sages – the wise men – the godly men of their generation.

And they have convened an illegal trial, with paid witnesses to perjure themselves by lying. The problem is they can’t find two witnesses who can lie consistently enough to corroborate false testimony. (**Mark 14:56**)

But finally, even though in the Sanhedrin system of jurisprudence, the accused was never required to speak in any way that could incriminate him, they demanded that He speak.

And when He did, He gave them what they wanted – the High priest demanded that He answer one question – “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

And Jesus said, “You have said it yourself” . . . in other words, “Yes, I am.” (**Matthew 26:63**)

Now according to the Sanhedrin custom, the death penalty could not be determined until after a day of fasting. It symbolized the fact that they were agonizing over their decision to end a man’s life.

But not with Jesus. In this courtroom of 71 men, who have sworn to uphold the law of God, without any deliberation or fasting or even a moment’s hesitation – they call for the death of Jesus.

There is no injustice that turns our stomachs like the injustice of those who are supposed to uphold and demonstrate justice, right? There’s nothing that upsets us more than a crooked judge; a crooked attorney; a crooked jury; a crooked deal; a crooked contract.

Why? Because they are the very people who have sworn to uphold justice.

But that isn’t all. The Gospel’s record that they immediately surrounded Jesus and began spitting in His face, slapping him in the face (**Matthew 26**); **Mark’s Gospel** adds that they blindfolded Him and began to beat him in the face, mocking Him and demanding that He prophecy who it was who hit Him last.

Can you imagine, beloved, the Supreme Court of the United States, condemning a criminal to die, and then – robes and all – coming down from their bench into that courtroom and begin spitting in the face of the condemned; blindfolding him and beating him with their fists and mocking him with verbal abuse and mockery.

The Supreme Court of Israel degenerated into an abusive, vile, spitting, slapping, mocking, punching, cursing mob of men.

And Peter says here to you and me, “Watch Him . . . follow that!”

- Have you been cursed at and spit upon – follow His footsteps;
- Have you been unjustly treated or ignored –
- Have you been insulted and verbally abused –

- Have you been slandered and unjustly treated –
Have you been beaten and might you be killed – you are following the line of footprints left behind by your Lord.

This is living on a supernatural level of life. He was in the right, but He was being treated wrong.

How do you follow Him like this? How do you do this tomorrow at work, or school, or in the neighborhood or home where you're treated unjustly and unfairly?

Peter not only gives us our vocation and our pattern, he provides us with a key transaction

Notice *verse 23* again – ***and while being reviled*** – verbally abused, ***he did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept*** – here it is – ***but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.***

Jesus drew the strength He needed for this kind of amazing response through life from His trust in His Father's ultimate purpose to accomplish righteous justice on His behalf in the end.^x

In other words, Jesus saw beyond this Jewish courtroom to the final courtroom. Jesus saw beyond these Supreme Court justices to that final courtroom of Holy justice. And He knew that His vocation in life was to die so that those who would believe would be spared the wrath of God and His crushing, fearful, holy justice in the end.

Jesus saw beyond the political stuff of life and saw all the way to the end of human history and the judgment of God (***Revelation 20***).

And that kind of perspective – which we've been commanded to trace and write and then follow in our own lives – will allow us to live on the highest level of responding to our world – returning good for evil.

Jesus, we're told here ***kept entrusting Himself*** – the word ***entrust*** means “to commit – to hand over”

and the tense signifies repeated past action – in other words, with each new wave of abuse; with each new wave of insults and injury; Jesus was always handing Himself over to His Father.^{xi}

Would you notice that Jesus never handed His mind and heart and emotions and feelings to His accusers; He kept entrusting Himself to His Father.

In fact, this will actually be among His final words – the final transaction from the cross where Jesus says, – ***Father, into Thy hands I commit*** – same verb – ***into Thy hands I entrust my spirit*** (***Luke 23:46***).

How do you avoid living on the sinful level – returning evil for good; or living on the natural level – returning evil for evil; how do you live on this supernatural level of returning good for evil?

A Christian author and poet from the early 1800's writes this transparent prose, “Have you never tasted the luxury of indulging in hard thoughts against those who have injured you? Have you never known what a fascination it is to brood over their unkindnesses, and to pry into their malice, and to imagine all sorts of wrong things about them? It has made you miserable, of course, but it has been a fascinating sort of misery that you cannot easily give up.”^{xii}

Peter would say it has everything to do with understanding your vocation – your calling from God – which includes suffering wrong willingly, even when you're in the right.

It includes following your pattern – tracing the Lord's footsteps and head in that direction even if it leads you into a dark valley.

And it demands engaging often in this transaction . . . entrusting ourselves back, again and again, to our Heavenly Father – who in the end will correct every wrong . . . and make everything right.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 04/30/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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- i R. C. Sproul, 1-2 Peter (Crossway, 2011), p. 83
- ii Adapted from Juan R. Sanchez, 1 Peter for You (The Good Book Company, 2016), p.
- iii D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH, 1984), p. 181
- iv Hiebert, p. 182
- v John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of Peter (Kregel, 2005), p. 122
- vi Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Hopeful: First Peter (David C Cook, 1982), p. 75
- vii Hiebert, p. 183
- viii Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 755
- ix Hiebert 184
- x John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 168
- xi Ibid
- xii Hannah Whitehall Smith, The Christians Secret of a Happy Life, Christianity Today, Volume 31, no. 4; citation: www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1998/april/2980.html