

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Tenth Sunday after Trinity, August 12, 2012

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 396, 498:1, 408, 400, 383.

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Galatians 3:21-4:9, Mark 8:34-38.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 2:18-25.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

It is human nature to feel that we should be treated fairly. All humans want to be treated fairly. When we feel we are being treated unfairly we aren't very happy. And when we think that we are mistreated unfairly when we did what is right, we get especially indignant.

Peter, writing by the inspiration of God, tells us in this chapter to submit to others for Christ's sake and following Christ's examples.

We see today that slaves – servants – are to submit to, to be subject to their masters. Notice that God does not tell slaves or servants to revolt and throw off the yoke of servitude God has placed or permitted them to live under. Christians are exhorted to be obedient servants because Christ is our example. This is all part of Christian behavior in a pagan society.

All of us must be reminded that

SERVANTS ARE TO BE SUBJECT TO THEIR MASTERS

- 1. It is God's will to be submissive.**
- 2. All are to do this, remembering**
- 3. Christ's example of suffering**

This is one place in Scripture where we need to look at two English translations to get the full flavor of the Greek words used. In the King James Version we read *"Servants, be subject to your masters."* (1 Peter 2:18 KJV) You heard the word "slaves" from the New International Version. The word refers to "household slaves", that is, household servants who were bound to their masters in some way.

Christianity teaches, as you heard in our Epistle lesson, that *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:26-29) There were slaves in Peter's day who imagined that their Christian liberty set them free from their unbelieving and cruel masters. But in the verses immediately before our sermon text God tells us: *"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king."* (1 Peter 2:16-17)

Paul wrote to the Galatians: *"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:13-14)*

Is the Word of God here endorsing the practice of human slavery?

Actually Peter, and Paul, for instance, in his letter to the slave-owner Philemon, neither endorses the practice of slavery nor calls for its violent overthrow. They simply worked with it as an inescapable feature of life everywhere in the Roman Empire. Involuntary servitude has existed from early recorded human history to 19th-century America's dreadful civil war. In fact, there are reports of oppressive human ownership of slaves in various parts of the world into the 21st century. Paul certainly did not approve of the slave trade, for in first Timothy 1:10, he lists the slave traders along with murderers and adulterers as lawbreakers and rebels. In First

Corinthians 7 he encouraged Christian slaves to gain their freedom if they could, but not to worry if they couldn't – those who were called by the Lord are the Lord's freed men. There we read ***"Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you--although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to."*** (1 Corinthians 7:20-24)

Historians make it very clear that slavery as practiced at the time Peter wrote this was far different than the ugly racial slavery of the Americas. Roman slavery was not race-based – people wound up in slavery as captives of war or by hard economic times. By servants Peter means those who were strictly such, whether hired, or bought with money, or taken as captives in wars, or born in the house, or those who served by contract for a limited time, as apprentices. In fact, Roman slaves were often better educated than their masters, could acquire property, buy their freedom, marry when they wished, and had certain legal protections. In some ways being a slave was economically preferable to being a free laborer, for Roman slaves were guaranteed clothes, food, and lodging. The great orator Cicero wrote that the average length of this servitude was only about seven years.

Christianity spread rapidly among the huge slave population of the empire. Peter taught them to see themselves as free in the Lord, but to respect the obligations that their position in society laid upon them. He did not want the Christian faith to be seen merely as a revolutionary political or economic movement – what mattered was people's relationship with their Savior Jesus Christ, and drawing other people into such a relationship with God. That would happen best by showing that Christians were really the best citizens and the best slaves. That is why he gives such high praise to people who bore up under unjust suffering rather than retaliate.

The word translated slaves might better be translated house servants, or as we would call them today, employees. Christians today can live their Christianity by the respectful and cooperative way in which they do their jobs, especially when they have to work for a boss who is oppressive and unfair. Anybody can like a boss who is kind, complimentary, and fair all the time. It takes a Christian to work cheerfully for a mean one. They are to show their masters proper respect, not only good and gentle masters. They are to do it especially if they are mistreated.

"Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God."

Many – and you perhaps have been among them –have been mistreated or not treated fairly by employers. Sometimes it may seem – or actually be true – that you are treated unfairly especially because you are a Christian and live as a Christian in your dealings at work. Our country is constantly trying to provide more safeguards for employees, but we must remember that we are really doing what God wants us to do where God wants us to do it.

Many have thought that they should have more responsible jobs, should get more pay, and are constantly grumbling about it. Of course, in our nation we are not necessarily bound like slaves to do what we do for a living right now for the rest of our lives. We are not indentured servants, or slaves to our jobs. We do have some choices and don't have to toil away at jobs that are unfulfilling for our entire lives. As Christians we should always be conscious of what our primary goals are: to serve God and to share his gospel with as many people as possible. Sometimes what the world considers an unpleasant job may be the place God wants us to do just that. What are we doing each day to help meet our primary goals in life? Jesus asks in Matthew 16:26 ***"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"***

God tells us here ***"For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God."*** Here is another place where the Greek, because of our weak human

understanding, is a difficult grammatical construction. It seems that the KJV *"For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully."* seems easier to understand than the NIV *"because he is conscious of God."* For conscience towards God, Christians suffer wrongfully, that is, they do what is God-pleasing and may still suffer for it here on earth.

Christians will endure unjust treatment and in this way witness to the truth that Jesus Christ himself suffered – and died – for the sins of all mankind – so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have the gift of eternal life. Peter asks, by inspiration, *"But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God."*

Servants – actually all Christians – ought to behave themselves toward their masters with submission, and fear of displeasing them. Sufferings which we deserve must certainly be endured with patience. But especially undeserved sufferings are to be endured patiently. Sometimes our masters or employers or anyone may treat us like their enemies.

Jesus himself has this to say in Matthew 5:43-47 *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"*

Peter quotes our Old Testament lesson, pointing out that Christians are called to follow Christ's example. *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."*

The sufferings of Christ provide spiritual healing by His substitutionary work on the cross. In Christ's sufferings, we find the example that just as Christ suffered at the hands of unjust people because he was faithful to the will of God, so believers may receive the same opportunity to follow in His steps.

We see at least two fruits of Christ's sufferings. These are, first of all, our justification. We are declared not guilty before God because he suffered and died for us, and secondly, our sanctification. We daily put to death our old Adam, our sinful flesh, and daily seek to live a new holy life of righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. The sinless Jesus was the perfect substitute, in His death, for the sins of mankind. Christ suffered wrongfully and without cause, for he did not sin.

Man is a sinner and deserves God's righteous judgment against him. The answer, the solution, is that Christ bore our sins in His own body on the cross. Through his suffering of humiliation and death, we receive the eternal life that perfect obedience deserved. Christ suffered the punishment of hell that we deserved. Christ died in our place on the cross. He died for all sinners as He sacrificed His life. God did all this because he loved us.

Can you make application to your life? This section about slaves and masters can be applied to employees and employers. And Christians have been both. Christian slaves and Christian servants, and isn't that all of us at one time or another? We need to follow Jesus' example in enduring unjust suffering. All disciples need to learn to endure unjust treatment as we carry out Christ's teachings in a sinful, selfish world.

The sufferings of Christ should give us peace under the most unjust and cruel sufferings we meet in the world. May we, as we serve God daily, remember God's admonition to endure sufferings, even if they are unjust. Jesus, God's own son did this himself – for us! Amen.