

# AS YOU ANTICIPATE NORMAL THIS WEEK...

Carry around with you the conviction that God wants to change every relationship that you have, for the better. He started by offering you a healthy relationship with Him. He has no interest in just leading you into normal human relationships.

There are relationships that are unhealthy in all our lives. In some cases these must be stopped and re-started with new motives, new respect and new vulnerability. Some simply must be ended. But in these verses God asks us to have relationships with unreasonable, self-centered people. He did. Aren't you glad? We must not decide to end relationships such as these too quickly. God didn't.

The verses Kyle taught through on Sunday have crazy potential. They involve making ourselves uncommonly vulnerable. That idea has been rejected by humanity. So we are left in a world of people unskilled at love, though they are crying out for it.

Now, there are people you cannot be vulnerable with. But don't jump to that posture too quickly or you will never be skilled at love. Be wise in your vulnerability. But remember this, He wants us to love as He did. So we must be willing to be vulnerable. He greatly uses our suffering.

Many have taken advantage of God. Or have they? Do we really think anyone can take advantage of the One who knows all, has power over all and has the final say in everyone's eternal destiny? You're safe as you stay with Him, trusting and imitating Him.

## **Work through these questions 1 Peter 2:11-25 raises.**

(Pastor Kyle's sermon and Pastor Bob's commentary below will help you.)

1. What experiences have you had that taught you false wisdom, making you less willing to be vulnerable and subject to others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. As you think about becoming more like Jesus in your actions and thoughts, what acts are you praying for transformation in? What thought patterns are you praying for transformation in?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Unreasonable bosses, neighbors, friends, family members are a trial! Given Peter's words, what do you want said about you and your handling of such people in the future?

4. Would others say that you need to win, or would they say you can let it go? What is the big win you could seek to gain instead of the hollow

5. Read Psalm 139:23-24. As you think about praying this prayer are you fearful? How can you grow past those fears?

## **A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY**

There are seven short notes Jesus had John write to seven first century Churches. They are recorded for our benefit in Revelation chapters two and three. It has turned out that the weaknesses of these seven churches are inherent in all people. So they have been passed on and can be seen today. These notes then, are a great source of wisdom from Jesus Himself. They give us great counsel as we journey together until He comes again.

Read one of these short notes each day this week. Meditate on the words and phrases. Think about each church's weakness. Listen for how the Spirit wants to change how you THINK. That's why Jesus wrote the notes and it is why each note ends with the same phrase, "Let the one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

There's a couple of things that might puzzle you in these notes John wrote. Watch for this term, the Nicolaitans. There was a system of thought people were falling for (2:6). The Nicolaitans twisted God's grace into permission to sin. Sin was "no big deal" to them, because God would forgive them. You need to catch yourself imagining this at times. Watch for this term, the Nicolaitans.

In Israel's past there was a spiritualist named Balaam (2:14). He actually made some great prophetic statements about Israel's future, though he was evil. He became a consultant to an enemy of Israel, a king named Balek. He told Balek that no curse had power over Yahweh's people. But Balaam advised Balek in a devious way. He taught Balek to have his people be friendly to Israelites and invite them to participate in their own religious celebrations. These included rites that involved promiscuous sexual activity. The Israelites were only too happy to take part, to their own spiritual demise. Out from under Yahweh's protection, the curse that came with the evil they engaged punished the Israelites. One of the hazards of the Christian journey is that the wrong people can lead us into what will become a curse to us.

You'll also read about a lady named "Jezebel" (2:20). There was such a lady in the Old Testament who was from another country, married an Israelite king, worshipped a different god, spread that worship through the kingdom along with many immoral practices. She not only gave permission to act against God's advice, she actually advocated for and led defectors. Churches can have Jezebels in them. Individuals can allow themselves to wander away and follow to their own demise.

The notes to the churches will help you understand your own history as one journeying with God. They will equip you with wisdom to persist in the journey and to keep from any road that leads downward. Every-so-often return to these letters and take a week to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of each church.

## 1 PETER COMMENTARY

**2:11—Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.**

What is going on inside us is of tremendous importance. There is a battle for control of our inner being, our soul. We belong to Christ, but we have been conditioned in a fallen world to think in a certain way. We must learn and respond to truth as the Holy Spirit uses it to transform our minds. In addition to living in a fallen world, we are fallen people living in that fallen world. We have desires that are fleshly, that is, they are centered on us and advancing our agenda and bringing profit to us. These can easily shape how we invest our strength. We must abstain from that which is of our own flesh, all that has its source in us rather than in God.

We are called three things in this verse. We are called beloved, aliens, and strangers. The words each highlight the fact that we are different than the rest of humanity. By God's plan, His design, and His grace we are no longer to be creatures of instinct and habit that fit right into the world system in a predictable and logical way.

This does not mean being such creatures of instinct is an impossibility for us. If that were true, Peter would not have to urge us to live differently. What it does mean is that God has made available to us all that we need to rise above such a lifestyle. What shapes others need not shape us. What is predictable behavior in others need never be seen in us. That is what Peter is calling for here, and it is because of who we are. Christian behavior, behavior like Christ, is not absolutely foreign behavior to us. Because of who is in us we are capable of rising to it. It is in that sense natural and logical in that it is the only reasonable response to what we know to be the truth about ourselves and the world we are in.

**2:12—Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.**

There has always been suspicion and distrust among unbelievers of those who embrace the Christian faith. We are not absolutely certain of the range of those suspicions during the first century. We do know that there was concern about their loyalty to the empire of Rome and to all governing authorities. We know that there was suspicion surrounding their communion services which were closed to those who had not been baptized. There was concern over a possible slave revolt spurred on by Christian teaching that obviously laid down all the principles that would lead eventually to its abolition.

Peter's solution to these suspicions was what God's solution often is, to overcome evil with good. Christians were to be of such reputation that such accusations fell on deaf ears and found no basis. That is a fascinating thought, a solution so simple yet to our shame, so illusive. If Christians simply lived out excellent behavior a number of their PR problems would go away.

But Peter was envisioning us assisting God's mission through such behavior as well. He was asking the Christians to behave with moral excellence so that gentiles would "glorify God in the day of visitation." The term "visit," is a verb form of the word which we have rendered "bishopric," the sphere of an Elder or bishop's ministry. So the verb form conveys the meaning of inspecting or scrutinizing as leaders do in their sphere of influence. He was speaking of a day when Christ would visit to inspect the condition of His ministry.

Now what day was Peter speaking of? There are two primary options. The first is that he was referring to the day when Christ returns to earth as its king. Peter taught of such a day (1 Peter 4:13, 5:4, 10-11, 2 Peter 3:8-14), and expected that his readers would experience it. The idea of God visiting us is most commonly used in the Old Testament of some special work or intervention of God (Genesis 21:1; Exodus 3:16; 4:31; Ruth 1:6; 1 Samuel 2:21; Psalm 17:3), so that there is strong scriptural basis for understanding this phrase in this way.

The second option is that he is talking about a personal day, that time when God makes clear to an individual the reality of the truth and that individual comes to embrace Christ and glorify God. So the question is whether or not Peter is speaking of an eschatological event, the second coming of Christ to earth, or a spiritual visit sensed by individuals in their own beings.

The first option has much to commend it, since all of Scripture speaks of a day when God will intervene in the affairs of man on earth. He will do so personally and powerfully (Isaiah 2:12-24). The idea that gentiles would glorify God on that day fits with Old Testament projections. I think Peter may have had both of these ideas in mind when he wrote these words. It is quite likely that he is thinking of the ongoing work he was witnessing among the gentiles, beginning with Cornelius (Acts 10), in which God was making Himself known to more and more of them. Peter had a good grasp of the fact that God's kingdom is here, though not in its fullest sense. We are seeing its lead edge, and experiencing some of its characteristics, though in germ form. God has visited, is visiting, and will yet visit in the fullest sense when He comes as the earth's rightful ruler and judge. It seems best to view Peter making here a statement that has a present fulfillment and a future one.

We are here commanded to carry out our sanctification and we are told by doing so we will add to the progress of faith in others. As God's plan moves toward completion, that day when He comes to earth to establish His kingdom, that day when He will clearly be established as Lord of the earth, we contribute to the preparation of the hearts of humanity for that event by the way we live. When they see Him, the light of truth will enable them to understand the implications of all that they have seen in us, and they will glorify Him. The verses that follow describe some of the specifics of this excellent behavior that we are to display.

### **2:13—Submit yourself for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as to the one in authority,**

It is an important idea that for the Lord's sake we submit to human institutions. His purposes are advanced through human institution. Elsewhere (Romans 13), we are explicitly told that all authority is of God, instituted by Him for His purposes. Here such authority is called "human institution" because God's will in civil matters is brought about through human means and agency. From all appearance it is human institution and bears the marks of human imperfection. But regardless of this marred appearance, it serves the Lord's purposes and is superintended by Him. Human authority rises and falls by His plan, that much is clear in Scripture (Isaiah 40).

Our Christian faith will not progress far until we learn submission. The person who has not yet learned it will be taken by God through situations that are designed to conform him in this way to Christ. It is impossible to achieve God's purposes in one's life apart from submission. So as Peter begins to describe the excellent behavior that will help bring about the transformation of evil men (see verse 12), the first word that he uses is "submit." That theme will continue into chapter three.

We are to submit to various institutions of human authority, or what we might call lines of authority, for the Lord's sake. This means to advance His interests, what is dear to His heart. In verse 18 slaves are told to submit to their master's authority. Verses 21-25 describe the submission of Christ to the insults and injustices of godless men. Chapter 3 begins with instructions to wives to submit to their husbands. Husbands are then told to love their wives. This love is a selfless one that involves submitting one's own desires and needs to those desires and needs of the one you love. And so this idea of submission is a primary subject of concern to Peter which he wants to make sure is applied in very personal and practical ways.

Peter's instructions do not include all areas in which we are to be submissive. The applications were likely given as key examples to simply support the idea of verse 12, that they were to keep their behavior excellent among the gentiles to combat the suspicions that were rampant, specifically, the fear that culture was going to be undermined by this new way of living.

There is in each of these particular instructions regarding submission a cultural element that must be factored in. One has considerable freedom to protest and to dissent in America, without being considered outside the laws of the land. Those boundaries would not be permissible in China today or in ancient Rome in Peter's day. In our western culture we do not legally have slavery, but we apply the principles given regarding submission to masters to our employer/employee relationships. Submission of wives to husbands is expressed differently as well in our culture. Peter's point is that for the sake of the advancement of God's agenda, we should not undermine culture but respect its boundaries. We should be at peace knowing that the various boundaries seemingly imposed by humans within culture are not only known to Him, but have been permitted by Him for at least a season to accomplish a purpose that is important to His plan. In this sense they are ordained by Him.

The list of such human institutions ordained in this way by Him begins right at the top with Kings. One thing is certain from the Scripture. No king has ever reigned on earth without the permission of God (Daniel 2:21, 4:28-37; Isaiah 40:23-26; John 19:11; Romans 13:1). We can completely depend on this, whether from our perspective the king is evil or good, cruel or benevolent, we can be certain that without God's permission he would not be ruling. Therefore to rebel against him is to be working against God's plan and His purposes. For His sake we are to submit. We do not submit because it is expedient, or because we agree, or because our submission is deserved by the character of the king. We submit for the Lord's sake, to further His work.

We assume from Scripture that there are also acts of insubmission that are God's will. Moses was directed by God to lead Israel out from under Pharaoh's rule. Various individuals were directed by God to overthrow established kings. The apostles did not submit themselves to the ruling religious leaders among the Israelites. But we are to view submission as the norm. We are to start from a position of submission in our lives. Only when we have learned submission can we be trusted and used to bring about change. The individual who is not themselves submissive should not be trusted to lead and influence others, or to speak against established order. Such a person is merely a rebel, doing what the flesh naturally orchestrates. They are simply self-willed, and there is no limit to the excesses they will fall into. They can only lead, who are being led themselves.

### **2:14—or to governors as sent by Him for the punishment of evil doers and the praise of those who do right.**

This is an important verse because it shows that God's sovereign ordination of authority does not stop with the king but extends through the whole regime, down to the various agents of the king. This too is a principle of Scripture that there is present in all authority the hand of God. Such authority is in place to maintain order, for it is when there is domestic order that God's people can freely carry out His work.

God also seeks moral order and legal order so that justice prevails. He establishes earthly authorities so that evil will be punished and good will be reinforced. It never happens to perfection, but we must trust in His sovereign plan in the working out of this in a fallen world with fallen men.

There are regimes that come to power and prominence where the opposite seems to happen. That will always remain an enigma to us. We will never be able to justify God's sovereignty with the existence of seemingly godless and cruel empires. We must trust that He will right such wrongs and repay the down-trodden and abused on the day when He establishes truth and justice and reveals all things to us.

We must also remember the context from which these words were written. They came from a man who was under a regime that 21st century Christians would certainly view as oppressive, vile, and unjust. Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, embraces this principle of submission. We must trust it as well.

**2:15—For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.**

Again, we do not know what was being said about Christians. They were in some way being slandered as a threat to the established order of things. They were being wrongly accused as to their agenda and their motives. Peter reveals the Lord's strategy in the matter, and this is often His strategy. Yahweh would not vindicate Christians through some miraculous intervention. Not yet. He would not remove the perpetrators of this false notion so that it would die out. Not yet. Instead, Christians are charged with vindicating themselves. They would of course have the help of God's grace in doing so, but they would have to intentionally rule themselves in the matter by His power and grace and persist so that in time they would prove their detractors wrong.

It is a principle of Scripture that good can overcome evil when we persist in it (Romans 12:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:8-17). There are many times when we witness this outcome. There are those times when we do not, but will when the final judgment has been completed. It is an important rule to institute in one's life and a must for those who wish to lead themselves well. God's will often involves us being committed to a process of gradual erosion, slowly eroding the resistance in the hearts of others through love and good deeds.

**2:16—Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.**

This verse is one that is full and rich. It alludes to all in us that is holy and good and all that is perverted, twisted and evil. We are free. Grace has given us a free pass. We are absolutely forgiven for all sins, past, present, and future, and so we are free from sin's claim (Romans 6:17-23). We are free from the law because we are joined in union to the giver of all law, God Himself (Romans 7:4-6, 8:1-2; Galations 2:19; 1 Timothy 1:19). We are related to the King of all that is and in a sense bear no obligation or responsibility to the kings of this world (Matthew 18:24-27).

We are also still fully capable of sin and rebellion against God. We are capable of all deviousness so as to intentionally live as hypocrites, skillfully hiding behind our belief while all the while seeking to gratify our own desires. We can twist our beliefs to justify our sin. And so we can use our freedom as a covering for evil. We can embrace with joy the doctrine of grace only because we see in it license to do as we please. This is never presented as a viable lifestyle in Scripture, though it seems to be everywhere considered a distinct danger that we can slip into. That can only mean that it is a trap true Christians, not just "professing ones" as some have suggested, can fall into. We must guard against our evil hearts coming up with such a scheme, because such a thought can occur in every redeemed but fallen mind.

Instead of falling into the trap of abusing our freedom we are to use our freedom purposefully and strategically. We are to seize the opportunity that being set free from sin affords us. The opportunity is to submit ourselves to God, to become chained to Him, servants for the bringing about of all that is dear to Him.

It is bizarre that submission leads to freedom, but it does. To do anything other than to submit to God is to not act like a free person. It is to be enslaved in the same way an unbeliever is enslaved. It is to lose one's opportunity at freedom. It is a choice we continually make at the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This choice explains why some Christians can have a life like that of Lot, where they never really get free from their earthly desires and their life follows a course which is, at its very best, mediocre.

## **2:17—Honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.**

These are the things that characterize a “free” person. There is honor extended by them to all men. They see all as uniquely valued and loved by God. They do not merely tolerate people, they seek to be a blessing to them. They habitually place others ahead of themselves.

They have a special love for their fellow-believers. Whereas they honor all people, they extend themselves in special ways for those who have embraced the truth. They have dedicated themselves to the body of Christ and so sacrificially give themselves for its good.

They fear God. They properly reverence Him by holding before Him even the minute details of their lives. They have given Him His rightful place at the controls. This is the fear of God and to one who practices this, it very soon becomes intimacy with God.

They also honor the king. They see him as a tool in the hand of God, for better or for worse. Their submission to God is proven by their submission to earthly authority.

These four commands are specific ways in which we demonstrate that we are free from what we would have naturally become. The first and last of the four concern those we are to honor. The middle two just may be the heart of the matter, the love of our brothers in Christ and our reverence for God. Together these four commands prescribe behavior which makes for a submissive lifestyle, and they describe a kind of “spirit” that can be detected in those dedicated to the truth.

## **2:18—Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.**

With this phrase Peter further applies the principle of verse 12 that we must demonstrate excellent behavior that lends credibility to the truth. Once again submission is the key to the specific command. The Christian life is a life of submission. Submission produces a certain “spirit” about someone that permeates their various roles and relationships in life.

We must for the most part be gainfully employed. It is a fact of our existence in this life and is endorsed by the Bible as one of our key responsibilities (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Therefore one of our most important relationships is to those who direct our work.

In the culture of the New Testament world many were servants. The word used here for servant means just that, a house servant. It was not the term used for a slave who was chained to his work. By speaking to this relationship, neither the human nor the divine author is condoning the institution. Whatever its trappings, slavery has always been full of abuses. It is certain that the principles of the Bible have led to the eventual abolition of slavery in much of the world. By those principles the groundwork was laid that brought about a transition in the slave master relationship to the employee employer relationship. But for His own reasons and as in much that He has done, God allowed this to be a process and for us to be stewards of that process. The result is that the process of doing away with slavery took a rather deliberate course. That is the greatest of understatements. To any who were enslaved it was painfully slow. It enslaved multitudes for their entire lifetimes. The failure of Christians to submit themselves to God’s truth impeded this process. But there is no doubt that as the Church was formed we find that both servants and their masters were under certain obligations by apostolic teaching. These led to its demise.



Peter's words here describe the obligations of servants to submit themselves to their masters. Most important is the spirit in which this submission was to be carried out. It was not to be done grudgingly or resentfully. It was to be done with respect. And this did not depend on how respectable the masters were. Here servants are to be submissive even to those masters that are unreasonable, not simply to those who are good and gentle. A good employee is a powerful witness to a boss. That does not mean the boss will respond. It simply means that an employee can fill a strategic spot in a life by God's providence and plan. That is the thing we are to ultimately strive to do, and so it is critical that in our occupation we fill our roll in a way that we fill our more significant role and purpose in God's eternal plan as it is carried out in the lives of those around us.

It should be noted that by the voice of Scripture, our behavior seldom is to be regulated and shaped by the respect and dignity afforded us. We are to have a standard we cling and adhere to because of our submission to Christ

**2:19—For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.**

God never misses our sacrifice. He holds it dear and knows of each moment when, out of concern for His objectives and plan, we have died even a little to ourselves and given up just a little more. He looks with favor on those who are willing to be His servants in this way and He bestows favor on them. The time when we are unjustly treated is just the time when we must submit to Him. It is not just when submission is easy. It is to be true especially when it makes us vulnerable.

In truth, we should look for ways to serve such that men do not repay us. Then we can be certain that God will repay us (Luke 6:27-36). As long as we live by the rule of treating others as they deserve, we will never know the ways of God and never experience the immensity of His blessing. We will inherit simply what earthly profit our own schemes and efforts bring about.

Our challenge is to rise above what is merely normal behavior. That is what the world conditions of Peter's day demanded of Christians, and it is true to this very day. An extraordinary cause and an extraordinary need require an extraordinary effort, and make possible an extraordinary reward.

**2:20—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.**

There is no credit due us if we patiently endure consequences of our own making, by our mistakes and errors. That is simply taking responsibility for our own actions. There is no reward in that. It is the very least we can do and it is what we owe. No one but a criminal would judge it otherwise. It is when we suffer for doing good that we are doing something noble and notable. We are at that point distinguishing ourselves. Our service is at that point above and beyond the call of duty. Most importantly, God looks on it as favorable. It gives us special standing in His eyes. We are serving with distinction, and He will take note and reward us accordingly.

This is one of only a few times in the Scripture when the possibility is raised of individuals finding favor with God. Elsewhere it is faith that brings such favorable standing about, and that is the underlying reason here as well. It is an act of faith and trust in God to endure harsh treatment and such faith He always responds to.

If we wish to send something ahead to eternity, we should not moan and groan at those situations where we are overlooked or taken advantage of. We should leap at the opportunity they afford and secretly find great joy in them.

**2:21—For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in His steps,**

We have been summoned to a certain kind of life. We have been given an example of that life. The word rendered here by our word “example,” is used of a writing sample placed in front of a student to be used as a pattern. The student’s formation of letters was to be such that it conformed to the pattern. That’s what Christ’s life is to us. The outstanding mark of Christ’s life is that He suffered unjustly for our benefit. We must be willing to suffer unjustly as He did, for His good. Therefore, in all our relationships this is the rule for us, that we are not looking for our own advantage or comfort. We are not looking to gain but to give so as to further the progress of truth in that individual’s life.

No one has stooped lower than Christ. We can be certain that no injustice or even abuse we endure will begin to compare to what Christ has endured for us.

**2:22—“Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;”**

This verse is a quote from Isaiah 53:7. Peter had witnessed day in and day out Christ in real life. He had been one of Christ’s closest companions and friends. He quotes Isaiah’s words and so affirms Christ’s character and identity. The person of Isaiah 53 had been a great mystery to the Jews until the sacrificial death of Jesus fulfilled it. The apostle’s teaching focused first on the Jews to show them that the Old Testament Scripture spoke of Jesus and that they should believe in Him as their Savior and Messiah. In the flow of the context these words establish that Christ did nothing at all that justified the abuse and punishment inflicted on Him by God’s permission. It was all borne in behalf of us, for our good.

**2:23—and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;**

There is much to be noted and reflected on in this verse. We must remember that these verses do not stand alone, but occur as part of an exhortation to a certain kind of conduct. The words are specifically addressed to servants to inspire them to be good servants who give credibility to the faith by means of their distinguished service to their masters. There is wonderful doctrine that occurs in them. But the subject is behavior and conduct. That is always the intention of doctrine. It is as D. L. Moody said, “The Scriptures were given not to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.” So it is here.

A right understanding of Christ should make us better employees, not just more religious employees. It should increase our value to our employer, not just increase our piety. The verse concerns what Christ did while He was being reviled. That is valuable information. It tells us not only what He did, but how He thought and the latter is always the key to the former. If we can think like Christ we can behave like Him.

Christ's actions have already been alluded to. Here they are clearly stated. He did not react and allow His conduct to be determined by that of His attackers. He resisted the temptation to give them what they deserved. To give what is deserved is the great human tendency. It is the normal way in which courses of behavior are determined among humans. Christ avoided that pitfall, lived in the moment on a higher plane, and so accomplished a grand and noble work.

The key to His behavior was His thinking while this was going on. "He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." We are to believe that God is a righteous judge who is able and willing to hold every being accountable. We must not allow ourselves in our despair to stop believing that. There in the moment of trial, many times each minute, we must entrust ourselves to Him. We must do so in quiet prayer repeatedly, and allow our minds to reflect on the fact that true justice will be served. If we allow ourselves to be comforted by this truth we will be afforded the strength to endure the temporary injustice of the moment.

**2:24—and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.**

This is the noble work accomplished by Christ because He was submissive, and willing to be submissive in the face of abuse. He made Himself a servant. He had the righteous Judge in mind, and He had us in mind. The example of Christ involves restraint and pain, but it also offers achievement.

This verse is a tremendous theological statement, a concise reminder of the Gospel. None less than Christ, the anointed Messiah, the son of God, bore our sins. His own body became God's appointed instrument of atonement. All of the sins of humanity were placed on His account and He was forsaken by God because of them. As a result of being given over by God, and because of who He was recognized to be, His abusive death was quickly brought about by Satan through the hands of evil men. This was all because He bore our sins in his own body. Those sins put Him on the cross. That is the story of the crucifixion from heaven's point of view.

God, of course, had an objective in this chain of events. We can be confident that He always does. Our suffering is always a means of bringing about things of ultimate value and worth, things relating to matters of eternity rather than the mundane matters of this life.

God's objective was not simply our justification, but our sanctification as well. It was not simply to deal with the penalty sin had laid on us, it was to break sin's power and spell over us. God's plan is that we be forgiven through Christ's work on the cross and that through our new privilege of fellowship with God we act out our righteousness just as we use to act out our sinfulness. Just as our sinfulness identified us as separated from God, so, once we believe, God desires that righteous deeds identify us as those who are in fellowship with God. This is because the sufferings of Christ, His wounds on the cross bring healing to us. We who once were spiritually impaired, unable to realize a relationship to God are now forever joined to him and inhabited by His Spirit.

Some have sought to apply this healing to our physical beings, suggesting that sickness no longer has power over us. There are times we will experience the physical healing of God in answer to our prayers and the prayers of others. But the healing of our physical bodies that is to be found in the atonement will come about in the absolute sense only when God clothes us with our new bodies. This is when our final victory over sin's power will be fully realized. The healing we experience now is primarily a spiritual one where we are forgiven and are freed from that awful isolation from our God. There are instances throughout our lives when we experience healing. But in the end sickness wins this particular round of our existence.

**2:25—For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.**

These words confirm that Peter is speaking of spiritual healing that comes to us through Christ's sacrifice. Here he describes the before and after state of things in our lives. Before we had nothing that drew us to God. We simply wandered and did whatever our instincts suggested we do. But through belief that has changed.

In saying "yes" to the Holy Spirit's initial work of grace in us, His invitation conviction and call, we gave the Holy Spirit permanent residence in us. Now He is always there to do the ongoing work of grace that leads us on the path of obedience. The relationship forfeited by Adam has been recovered for us by God. We have entered into a process that will yield continued experiences of fellowship with our Creator. Then one day the work will be completed and our fellowship will become continuous and unbroken with our God, even as Adam experienced in the garden. We have presently returned, and we await the time when our healing will be completed.