

# Fourth Sunday of Easter – Epistle

**We Are A Credit To God By Faith In Christ**

**1 Peter 2:19-25**

**Fourth Sunday of Easter**

**Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer**

For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. 20If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. 21For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

*22 "He committed no sin,  
and no deceit was found in his  
mouth."*

23When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

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## DIAGNOSIS: All We Like Sheep Have Gone Astray

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Right and Wrong*

An older woman, well up in years, has kidney cancer. Hospice has begun its ministry of help. Every three days she replaces the morphine patch. It's the arthritis in her back that presently causes her the most pain. She is a loving person who has lived life well. She is not a slave, as African Americans were in this country, or as numerous women are as sex slaves around the world, or workers who are paid a wage so low it is called slave labor. Many early Christians were slaves who had to endure pain while suffering unjustly. To endure pain when you only have done right is so grossly unfair that children know it and will scream in protest, "It's not fair! I didn't do it. He did it, not me!" Whether literally slaves or not, we are all subject to what we call "Right and Wrong." It is wrong to be punished (beaten, whipped) when you have done right. Knowing what is "Right and Wrong" is something that is written upon our hearts. "Right and Wrong" is part of how God preserves and protects the world. God's way is that doing right is rewarded and doing wrong is punished, and no mixing the two (2:13). In our hearts we think it is wrong that an older woman, who has been so loving, has to suffer pain.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *Suffering Unjustly*

In our hearts, though, we are not "aware of God" (v. 19) "who judges all people impartially according to their deeds" (1:17). We do not "live in reverent fear during the time of (y)our exile" (1:17). Instead, we are guarded by the "futile ways inherited from our ancestors" (1:18). We spend our "time in living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry" (4:3). We are not aware of God because we are aware only of "Right and Wrong." We have gone astray, following "Right and Wrong," making it the shepherd and

guardian of our lives. We trust “Right and Wrong” to determine our credit rating in life, and thus, by implication, our credit rating with God. Slaves would have looked to “Right and Wrong” to determine their credit rating with their master. However, “Right and Wrong” cannot prevent hearts unaware of God from dealing harshly with others—masters dealing with slaves, husbands and wives dealing with each other (3:1-7), and Christians with one another. And when we sit by the bed of the older woman with cancer thinking it wrong she suffers, we are trusting “Right and Wrong” instead of God to determine her credit rating.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Justly Judged**

All people, masters and slaves, husbands and wives, the old with cancer, Gentiles, “have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead” (4:5). Our approval rating is not determined by how well we may have obeyed “Right and Wrong.” Rather, “Right and Wrong” shows us that we have strayed from our trust in our Creator. “Right and Wrong” is a false god that has failed us. Our conscience is not clear or good. We are thus left to the one who judges justly those who do not love and fear God: Death is our just judgment. That does not give hope to anyone, slave or master, husband or wife, or to one lying in bed who knows she has less than six months to live. “All our flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls” (1:24-25).

## **PROGNOSIS: The Good Shepherd**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Christ Suffered**

Among the stray sheep “a lamb without defect or blemish” suffers for our sake (2:21). “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (2:22). He did not trust “Right and Wrong,” but bore our sins (our not fearing and loving God) in his body on the cross (2:24). By his suffering Jesus brings us strayed

sheep back to God (3:18). For God “raised him from the dead and gave him glory” (1:21). God raised Jesus, not just as a great miracle, but in order that our faith and hope are set on God (1:21). Slaves, who are not a people, are now God’s people. We and all who had not received mercy (“Right and Wrong” cannot offer mercy), have now received mercy from God because of Christ. We are saved by being united with Christ in baptism, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ to whom all authorities and powers are made subject (3:21-22). We have been healed by his “wounds” (a word used to describe the scars slaves received from beatings).

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – God’s Approval**

Our faith and hope are set on God (1:21). We now bless God our Father who by his great mercy has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We have been chosen to be obedient to Jesus Christ (1:2). He is our approval before God. He is our credit that gets us salvation from God’s judgment and wrath. By baptism we have been returned to the true shepherd and guardian of our souls (2:25).

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Live for Righteousness**

By faith we are now obedient to Christ, not to “Right and Wrong.” We have been purified by our obedience to the truth of Christ. We follow Christ’s way of entrusting ourselves to the one who judges justly—the God who now gives resurrection to those with faith in Christ as the shepherd who leads us to God. Following Christ’s way, instead of insisting on our innocence, we now quietly suffer for doing what is right. We arm ourselves with the same intention as Christ (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin (4:1). We no longer live by human desires (for revenge, for mastery over others) but by the will of God. When we are abused, we do not return abuse. When we

suffer, we do not threaten. When our kindness to others is returned with pain, when our forgiveness is returned with reviling, we do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because we bear Christ's name. It is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil (3:17). When we suffer, as Christ suffered to save according to God's will, we will entrust ourselves to a faithful creator, while continuing to do good. God protects us for salvation through faith (1:5). It is by mutual love that we do not cause pain to one another. We live, not by "Right and Wrong," but for righteousness—making others right with God with the rightness of Christ. ... So that special woman, who faces death by God's alien word, faces death without fear. She has hope through faith in Christ who has been raised. Therefore, united to Christ is a death like his, she shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.