

I Peter 2:18-25
March 26, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

All of us suffer from time to time. Sometimes suffering comes with short durations, and sometimes you endure it for longer durations. Consider those who have battled cancer through surgeries and chemo treatments, and those battles can be a year-long, if not longer. Some of you perhaps suffered in difficult relationships, or even abusive relationships that went on for years. Perhaps you suffer unfair treatment in a work relationship that never stops.

Q: When you've experienced a chapter of suffering, whether it is short-lived or longstanding, how did you process it that helped you get through it? What do you tell yourself? [This too shall pass; no one is immune from suffering, so it's my turn; the Lord is with me and knows exactly what's going on. He already has a plan as to how He will take care of me;]

Transition: Peter has been focusing on the topic of submitting to those who are causing suffering because he wants to help these younger Christians deal with it appropriately. In 2:13 he challenged his readers to “submit yourselves **for the Lord's sake** to every authority instituted among men: whether the king, as the supreme authority...” He wanted his readers to understand that **it is God's will to do right, even when someone is inflicting suffering** (v.15). So now he turns his attention from submitting to governmental authorities to more specific relationships. You will notice that Peter wasn't interested in social reform, but rather teaching these Christians the proper spiritual perspective to suffering. He will challenge our view of suffering at the hands of those who have specific authority over us. Accordingly, consider that **all of us can submit to those who cause suffering by remembering the spiritual BENEFITS that come with it.**

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.18:

- 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.

V.19:

- For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

V.20:

- 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.

V.21:

- To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

V.22:

- “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

V.23:

- 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.

V.24:

- 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.

V.25:

- For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Process Questions:

Q V.18: How are slaves to submit to harsh masters? [“With all respect” whether they are harsh or good and considerate]

Fact: Servants and slaves made up a high percentage of the early church, and undeserved punishment and suffering was common for the underlings. To be sure, there were some **good and considerate** masters. Certainly Christian masters were to be numbered in that category. However, Peter challenged Christian slaves to a new behavior which required them to submit to and respect even **those who are harsh**.

Q V.19-20: What is the commendable motivation when we “suffer for doing good and endure it?” [A believer’s **conscious** awareness of God’s presence. No **credit** accrues for enduring punishment for **doing wrong**.]

Q: What is the human tendency when you are being wronged or treated unjustly? [To fight back and demand our rights. But that is the natural response of the unsaved person, and we must do much more than they do (X-REF Luke 6:32–35). Anybody can fight back; it takes a Spirit-filled Christian to submit and take the high road. And that’s what we’re called to do. (X-REF Rom 12:16–21).

Q V.19: What do you think Peter means by “being conscious of God” while bearing the pain of unjust suffering? [It is respectful submission to undeserved suffering that finds favor with God because such behavior demonstrates His grace.]

Q V.21-23: Not only does God view it as commendable to suffer for doing good, but Peter says it’s more than that. How does he frame it? [“We are **called to this because Christ suffered for us and left us an example that we are to follow! (v.21)**”]

Q: How many of us when we are unjustly suffering think to ourselves, “I’m called to this?!” [I venture not many! It takes spiritual maturity to view this as a “calling.”]

Q: So if we are to emulate Christ in our suffering for doing good, what behaviors did Jesus model that we should engage that shows we’re following Christ’s example? [When Jesus endured suffering, Peter reminds us that 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.]

Q: When I read a list like this, my knee-jerk reaction is that it seems impossible, especially in the face of injustices or undeserved suffering, etc. So how does it become possible to successfully

emulate Christ? [Remember that we're doing this through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit; the mindset has to be that we're suffering "for the Lord's sake;" by enduring suffering and injustices we are becoming more like Him.]

Q: Where did Jesus place His trust when he suffered unjustly? [He entrusted himself to God who judges justly (v.23)]

Q V.24-25: When Peter says, "by His wounds we've been "healed," what does he mean by "healed?" [The healing Peter mentioned is not physical healing, but rather the spiritual healing of the soul (Ps. 103:3).]

Personal Reflection: As I have been studying these passages, I was personally struck by this whole idea of "submission" that Peter keeps emphasizing. Here's what came to mind: When we made a decision to accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, didn't we agree to "submit" ourselves to Jesus? Our life is not our own, right? We were bought at a great price. So "submitting" to Christ is what we agreed to from the very beginning.

Of course, Christ is our supreme example of one who submits. Peter just highlighted for us that Christ, who was sinless, "submitted" to His Father. He had a choice, but in the end, He wanted to do His Father's will. So Jesus, our Lord, our Master, has modeled this for us.

So it occurs to me that when we said "yes" to Jesus, we signed on to be submissive to Him. And if Christ asks us to submit to institutional authorities, then we should do that. If he says to Christian slaves that they should submit to their masters with all respect even when they're harsh, then they should because they are reflecting Christ when they do. We become a powerful witness to those who are lost. We present a radical approach to those who cause us suffering and pain that is contrary to the world. We endure it "for the Lord's sake" because we are carrying His name. We are to be bringing glory and honor to His name.

Peter is going to keep speaking about the importance of submission and the "why" behind it. If we understand the why, it will hopefully inspire us to follow the example of Jesus.

Q: Do you have any thoughts or reactions that you'd like to add? [Let class engage]

Application: So I suggested at the beginning of our study that all of us can submit to those who cause suffering by remembering the spiritual BENEFITS that come with it. After studying these verses, what spiritual benefits do you gain by enduring unjust treatment or suffering?

Possible Answers:

- Suffering gives us an opportunity to witness to the unsaved.
- Suffering leads us to imitate Christ, which helps us grow to become more Christ-like.
- Suffering for doing good brings God's favor upon us.

LOOK:

Here is the wonderful truth Peter wanted to share: as we live godly lives and submit in times of suffering, we are following Christ's example *and becoming more like Him*. We submit and obey, not only for the sake of lost souls and for the Lord's sake, but also for our own sake, that we might grow spiritually and become more like Christ.

The unsaved world is watching us, but the Shepherd in heaven is also watching over us; so we have nothing to fear. We can submit to Him and know that He will work everything together for our good and His glory.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 405-407). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

For Our Own Sake (1 Peter 2:18–25)

In this paragraph Peter addressed the Christian slaves in the congregations, and again he stressed the importance of submission. Some newly converted slaves thought that their spiritual freedom also guaranteed personal and political freedom, and they created problems for themselves and the churches. Paul dealt with this problem in 1 Corinthians 7:20–24, and also touched on it in his letter to his friend Philemon. The Gospel eventually overthrew the Roman Empire and the terrible institution of slavery, even though the early church did not preach against either one.

There are no Christian slaves today, at least in the New Testament sense; but what Peter wrote does have application to employees. We are to be submissive to those who are over us, whether they are kind or unkind to us. Christian employees must never take advantage of Christian employers. Each worker should do a good day's work and honestly earn his pay.

Sometimes a Christian employee may be wronged by an unbelieving coworker or supervisor. For conscience' sake, he must "take it" even though he is not in the wrong. A Christian's relationship to God is far more important than his relationship to men. "For this is grace [thankworthy]" to bear reproach when you are innocent (see Matt. 5:10–12). Anybody, including an unbeliever, can "take it patiently" when he is in the wrong! It takes a dedicated Christian to "take it" when he is in the right. "This is grace [acceptable] with God." God can give us the grace to submit and "take it" and in this way glorify God.

Of course, the human tendency is to fight back and to demand our rights. But that is the natural response of the unsaved person, and we must do much more than they do (Luke 6:32–34). Anybody can fight back; it takes a Spirit-filled Christian to submit and let God fight his battles (Rom. 12:16–21).

In the Bible, duty is always connected with doctrine. When Paul wrote to the slaves, he related his admonitions to the doctrine of the grace of God (Titus 2:9–15). Peter connected his counsels to the example of Jesus Christ, God's "Suffering Servant" (1 Peter 2:21–25; see Isa. 52:13–53:12). Peter had learned in his own experience that God's people *serve through suffering*. At first, Peter had opposed Christ's suffering on the cross (Matt. 16:21ff); but then he learned the important lesson that we lead by serving and serve by suffering. He also learned that this kind of suffering always leads to glory!

Peter encouraged these suffering slaves by presenting three "pictures" of Jesus Christ.

He is our Example in His life (vv. 21–23). All that Jesus did on earth, as recorded in the four Gospels, is a perfect example for us to follow. But He is especially our example in the way He responded to suffering. In spite of the fact that He was sinless in both word and deed, He suffered at the hands of the authorities. This connects, of course, to Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:19–20. We wonder how he would have responded in the same circumstances! The fact that Peter used his sword in the Garden suggests that he might have fought rather than submitted to the will of God.

Jesus proved that a person could be in the will of God, be greatly loved by God, and still suffer unjustly. There is a shallow brand of popular theology today that claims that Christians will *not* suffer if they are in the will of God. Those who promote such ideas have not meditated much on the Cross.

Our Lord's humility and submission were not an evidence of weakness, but of power. Jesus could have summoned the armies of heaven to rescue Him! His words to Pilate in John 18:33–38 are proof that He was in complete command of the situation. It was Pilate who was on trial, not Jesus! Jesus had committed Himself to the Father, and the Father always judges righteously.

We are not saved by following Christ's example, because each of us would stumble over 1 Peter 2:22: "who did no sin." Sinners need a Saviour, not an Example. But after a person is saved, he will want to "follow closely upon His steps" (literal translation) and imitate the example of Christ.

He is our Substitute in His death (v. 24). He died as the sinner's Substitute. This entire section reflects that great "Servant Chapter," Isaiah 53, especially Isaiah 53:5–7, but also verses 9 and 12. Jesus did not die as a martyr; He died as a Saviour, a sinless Substitute. The word translated "bare" means "to carry as a sacrifice." The Jewish people did not crucify criminals; they stoned them to death. But if the victim was especially evil, his dead body was hung on a tree until evening, as a mark of shame (Deut. 21:23). Jesus died on a tree—a cross—and bore the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13).

The paradoxes of the cross never cease to amaze us. Christ was wounded that we might be healed. He died that we might live. We died with Him, and thus we are "dead to sin" (Rom. 6) so that we might "live unto righteousness." The healing Peter mentioned in 1 Peter 2:24 is not physical healing, but rather the spiritual healing of the soul (Ps. 103:3). One day, when we have glorified bodies, all sicknesses will be gone; but meanwhile, even some of God's choicest servants may have physical afflictions (see Phil. 2:25–30; 2 Cor. 12:1ff).

It is not Jesus the Example or the Teacher who saves us, but Jesus the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

He is our Watchful Shepherd in heaven (v. 25). In the Old Testament, the sheep died for the shepherd; but at Calvary, the Shepherd died for the sheep (John 10). Every lost sinner is like a sheep gone astray: ignorant, lost, wandering, in danger, away from the place of safety, and unable to help himself. The Shepherd went out to search for the lost sheep (Luke 15:1–7). He died for the sheep!

Now that we have been returned to the fold and are safely in His care, He watches over us lest we stray and get into sin. The word *bishop* simply means "one who watches over, who oversees." Just as the elder-bishop oversees the flock of God, the local church (1 Peter 5:2), so the Saviour in glory watches over His sheep to protect them and perfect them (Heb. 13:20–21).

Here, then, is the wonderful truth Peter wanted to share: as we live godly lives and submit in times of suffering, we are following Christ's example *and becoming more like Him*. We submit and obey, not only for the sake of lost souls and for the Lord's sake, but also for our own sake, that we might grow spiritually and become more like Christ.

The unsaved world is watching us, but the Shepherd in heaven is also watching over us; so we have nothing to fear. We can submit to Him and know that He will work everything together for our good and His glory.

Raymer, R. M. (1985). 1 Peter. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 844-848). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

3. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT AS SLAVES (2:18–25)

Peter's instruction to slaves included two reasons why they should patiently endure personal injustice. First, this found favor with God, and second, it faithfully followed Jesus Christ's example.

2:18. The Greek word for **slaves** here is not *douloi*, the common term for slaves (cf. v. 16), but *oiketai*, which refers to household or domestic servants (cf. Luke 16:13; Rom. 14:4). The word translated **submit** (*hypotassomenoi*) is a nominative participle that continues the idea of submission expressed in 1 Peter 2:13 through the aorist imperative *hypotagēte*. This word of exhortation was relevant to a large number of Peter's first readers. Servants and slaves made up a high percentage of the early church, and undeserved punishment and suffering was common for the underlings. To be sure, there were some **good and considerate** masters. Certainly Christian masters were to be numbered in that category. However, Peter challenged Christian slaves to a new behavior which required them to submit to and respect even **those who are harsh**. "Harsh" is from the Greek *skolios* (lit., "curved," "bent," or "not straight"). The medical term "scoliosis," referring to curvature of the spine, comes from this word.

2:19–20. Peter set forth a principle here that may be applied to any situation where unjust suffering occurs. The **commendable** (lit., "for this is grace") motivation for patiently bearing **up under ... unjust suffering** is a believer's **conscious** awareness of God's presence. No **credit** accrues for enduring punishment for **doing wrong**. It is respectful submission to *undeserved* suffering that finds favor with God because such behavior demonstrates His grace.

2:21–22. Peter powerfully supported his exhortation to slaves by citing Christ's example of endurance in unjust suffering. The Williams translation renders the opening phrase of this verse, "For you have been called for this purpose," referring to suffering for doing good. Christians are **called** (*eklēthēte*; cf. 1:15; 2:9) to **follow** Christ, to emulate His character and conduct, because He **suffered for** them. The word rendered **an example** (*hypogrammon*, lit., "underwriting"), appearing only here in the New Testament, refers to a writing or drawing that a student reproduces. Peter delineated Christ's example in verse 22 by quoting from Isaiah 53:9. Jesus **committed no sin**, either before or during His suffering (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5). He was completely innocent in both deed and word: **no deceit** (*dolos*; cf. 1 Peter 2:1) **was found in His mouth**.

2:23–25. Christ was the perfect example of patient submission to unjust suffering. **He did not retaliate ... He made no threats** (cf. Rom. 12:19–20). Humanly speaking, the provocation to retaliate during Christ's arrest, trial, and crucifixion was extreme. Yet He suffered in silence, committing Himself to God. Peter explained (1 Peter 2:24) why the One who could have destroyed His enemies with a word patiently endured the pain and humiliation of the Cross. God was justly judging **our sins** which His Son **bore** (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). In the Greek the words "our sins" are near the beginning of the verse and thus stand out emphatically, while **He Himself** stresses Christ's personal involvement. His death makes it possible for believers to be free from both the penalty and the power of sin and to live for Him: **so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness** (cf. Rom. 6:2, 13). Christ suffered so it would be possible for Christians to follow His example, both in suffering and in righteous living. Peter made a general reference to salvation: **by His wounds you have been healed** (Isa. 53:5). This does not refer to physical healing for the verb's past tense indicates completed action, the "healing" is an accomplished fact. The reference is to salvation. Christ's suffering (lit., "wound"; *mōlōpi*, "stripe left by a lash," referred to Jesus' scourging) and death accomplished "healing," the salvation of every individual who trusts Him as his Savior.

Christ not only set the example and provides salvation, but He also gives guidance and protection to those who were headed away (**like sheep going astray**) from Him, but who then “turned about” (rather than **returned**) **to the Shepherd and Overseer** (*episkopon*) **of their souls**. “Shepherd” and “Overseer” stress Christ’s matchless guidance and management of those who commit themselves to His care (cf. Ezek. 34:11–16).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1853). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

2:18–25 Students of the Word often ask why NT writers did not criticize the institution of slavery or advocate its overthrow. But we must recall the social situation of the young churches in the Roman Empire. They lacked political power and could do nothing to dismantle the institution. In addition, NT writers were not social revolutionaries (see 1 Co 7:17–24). They did not believe that overhauling social structures would transform culture. Their primary concern was the relationship of individuals to God, and they focused on the sin and rebellion of individuals against their Creator. New Testament writers, therefore, did not complain about the oppression imposed by others but concentrated instead on the godly response of believers to mistreatment.

If enough individuals are transformed, of course, society as a whole benefits and the Christian faith begins to function as a leavening influence. We are keenly aware from history that Christians have too often failed to live righteously, and yet we may also fail to see that the Christian faith has been a force for good in Western civilization. History demonstrates the impact of Christian faith upon social structures. One of the consequences, under Christian influence, was the eradication of slavery. Christians, of course, have inflicted evil on others throughout the centuries as well. As sinners, we have left a legacy that is disappointing. A realistic appraisal of history, however, includes both the evil and the good that Christians have accomplished.

It is crucial to note that the NT nowhere commends slavery as a social structure. It nowhere roots it in the created order, as if slavery were an institution ordained by God. The contrast with marriage is remarkable at this point. God ordained the institution of marriage, but slavery was invented by human beings. The NT regulated the institution of slavery as it existed in society, but it did not commend it per se. Hence, Peter’s words on slavery should not be interpreted as an endorsement for the system, even if he did not denounce the institution.