

I Peter 2:18-25

In the context of chapter 2, a proper attitude toward submission becomes Peter's first example of what it means to keep our behavior excellent among the Gentiles (2:12). In this section he elaborates on three areas where submission is needed: citizens to government (2:13, 17), slaves to masters (2:18-25), and wives to husbands (3:1-6). From Peter's instruction it is obvious that Christianity is intended to be lived out within the context of culture, even in the most basic unit of society, the household.

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.

The Greek word for "submit" is hupotasso (ὑποτάσσω). Tasso (τάσσω) means "to arrange" and hupo (ὑπο) means "under," thus the word means "to arrange under." Behind the idea of submission is that of order. It translates 13 different words in Hebrew that can mean "to acquiesce", "to submit," "to acknowledge someone's dominion or power," or "to humble oneself." Hupotasso (ὑποτάσσω) was used of hierarchical positions and stresses one's relationship to his/her superiors. Submission could be mandatory or voluntary.

[Grammar note: Every time hupotasso (ὑποτάσσω) appears in the active tense, it is used in relation to Christ (I Cor. 15:25-28; Eph. 1:22; I Peter 3:22; Heb. 2:8). The middle voice verb is used of having to submit to someone else – Lk. 10:17-20 (demons are to submit to the disciples); Ro. 8:7 (speaks of Jews who do not submit to the law); I Cor. 15:28 (Christ submits to the Father); Ja. 4:7, Heb. 12:9 (men submit to God); Lk. 2:51 (Christ submits to His parents – cf. v. 40 & 8:21); Col. 3:18, Eph. 5:22-24, I Pet. 3:1, Tit. 2:5 (wives to their husbands); Ro. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13 (citizens submit to the government; I Pet. 2:18, Tit. 2:9 (servants submit to their masters); I Pet. 5:5a (younger people submit to their elders).]

It is clear from the 40 NT passages where the word appears that submission has to do with subordination to someone of higher authority in an ordered system. God has established certain authorities and submission to them is due to the recognition of their divinely given positions. Submitting to them is submitting to the will of God.

In 2:18 the appropriate attitude toward an authority is described as "fear" or "respect." When we submit, we are to do so with a sincere and willing reverence, where we acknowledge and accept our station in life. In short, respect arises from a right understanding of our God-given position.

The opposite of "fear" is what Paul calls "eye-service" (ὀφθαλμοδουλεΐα, Colossians 3:22). In Ephesians 6:5-7 it says, "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and

not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”

In these verses, the service of the slave is described in four ways:

(1) “with fear and trembling in sincerity to Christ (6:5),”

(2) “not as merely eye-service to please men (6:6),”

Eye-service is serving only while the master's eye was on the slave, but doing nothing beyond that.

(3) “as slaves of Christ doing the will of Christ (6:6),”

As a slave of Christ, our motive in serving others is a response to divine authority. For that reason, serving earthly authorities should be from the heart and the performance of even the most mundane task seen as an act of worship.

(4) “as service to the Lord” (6:7).

Since Christ is our Master who tells us to obey our earthly masters, regardless of how kind or severe they may be, there is no excuse not to obey them fully. To obey them is obeying Christ; to disobey or disrespect them is rebellion against Christ. When a superior abuses his power, he must give an account to God, but he does not lose his position of authority.

19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

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.

Most people don't have any trouble submitting to people they love, but have a multitude of reasons for not submitting to someone who treats them poorly. People throughout the centuries, including Christians, justify their anger and their critical spirit by the wrongs that have been done to them. Therefore, Peter wants to emphasize that our reason for submitting to those in authority has nothing to do with how they treat us; they could be incompetent, abusive, unloving, harsh, self-centered, or display any other type of ungodliness. We do not submit to others because of their behavior; we submit because we serve Christ who established their position over us. Submitting for HIS sake finds favor with God.

It is a general truth that what we do is approved by God when we are influenced to act by our desire to serve Him.

The following notes on I Peter 2:21-25 are all taken from D. Edmund Hiebert (Bibliotheca Sacra 139 (1982) 32-45) but have been modified for easier reading. At times he is quoted directly. At other times I have paraphrased and condensed. I am indebted to him for the clarity he brings to this text. Additional thoughts are noted. The original text is available at http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/BSac-NT/Hiebert-1Peter2-Pt1-BS.pdf

The Call to Suffering Confirmed by Christ's Example

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,

"You" is speaking of the household slaves mentioned above. The verb "called" looks back to the time of their conversion and indicates that God Himself acted in calling them to such a life. We have been called to suffer for, and while, doing good. Williams rendered this phrase, "It is to this kind of living that you were called."

Peter's words assure servants that God has given them a new dignity; their suffering is no longer to be seen as a personal fate, it is suffering because they are the people of God. Secondly, they have a new motivation to endure, for by doing so they are following the example of the Lord Himself.

Since this "call" applies to them not as slaves but as believers, it holds true of all Christians. It is a clear reminder to all believers that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Jesus, Himself, repeatedly stressed that being His disciples involved cross-bearing (Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Luke 14:27).

The motivation that should compel us to suffer voluntarily is found in the words "Since Christ also suffered for you."

"Nothing seems more unworthy," Calvin observed, "and therefore less tolerable, than undeservedly to suffer; but when we turn our eyes to the Son of God, this bitterness is mitigated: for who would refuse to follow Him going before us?"

Christ's example of suffering involves suffering for the good, or wellbeing of others. His actions provided us with a picture of what our behavior should look like. The word "example" is a rare word in the NT, denoting a model to be copied by the novice. The term, literally an "under writing," could refer to a writing or drawing which was placed under another sheet to be retraced on the upper sheet by the pupil. More probably, the reference is to the "copy-head" which the teacher placed at the top of the page, to be reproduced by the student. Another possibility is the suggestion that the reference is to an artist's sketch, the details of which were to be filled in by others. Under any view, the example was not left merely to be admired, but to be followed line by line, feature by feature.

"For you to follow in His steps" asserts the purpose in citing Christ's example, but also changes the figure of speech. Christ's example now becomes the guide along a difficult way. "His steps" are elaborated in what follows.

The words "follow in" means to follow 'upon' the line that Christ's footprints mark out. This same verb also occurs in Mark 16:20 and 1 Timothy 5:10, and in neither case does it denote stepping precisely in the footprints being followed. The picture is rather that of following in the direction that the steps lead. In the elaboration which follows, it is soon obvious that failing human beings cannot always place their feet exactly in the steps of the Lord Jesus. Niebor aptly suggests that the situation is "like a little boy following his father through the snow. The father takes far too long steps for the boy to step in them, but he can go the same way his father went."

THE PORTRAYAL OF CHRIST'S REDEMPTIVE SUFFERINGS

In the verses that follow, as Peter continues to address suffering servants, he refers to Isaiah 53 in which, Messiah, the Servant of God (Isa. 52:13) suffers unjustly. Isaiah 53:5 says, "But He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed." Isaiah 53:7 states that "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth." Significantly, Peter addresses household servants with a passage in Scripture that refers to Messiah as God's Servant (Isa. 52:13).

Verses 22-25 develop the picture of Christ's sufferings and can be broken into four sections marked by the four relative clauses; the first two clauses tell us what Jesus did *not* do, the third one tells us what He *did* do, and the last one tells us the purpose of His suffering.

WHAT CHRIST DID NOT DO (vv. 22-23a cf. Isa. 53:7, 9; Mk. 14:61; 15:5, 12-20)

***22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;
23 (a) and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats***

The first relative clause, in verse 22 declares that Christ "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth."

"Who committed no sin" asserts His sinlessness in the realm of conduct. Christ performed many deeds but none that were sinful, falling short of the divine standard. This testimony by one who was closely associated with Jesus during His entire earthly ministry cannot be lightly set aside. In 1:19, Peter declared Christ's unblemished character; here he asserted His unique sinless conduct. Christ's sinlessness is explicitly declared in 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; and 1 John 3:5. It is also asserted by Christ Himself in confronting His enemies (John 8:46), and affirmed by Him before His disciples just before His death (John 14:30). The testimony of history has sustained the claim. He demonstrated His sinlessness under the most intense provocation and undeserved suffering.

"Nor was any deceit found in His mouth" The verb "found" is stronger than "was," and indicates that His speech passed the most rigorous scrutiny of His enemies. No evidence of guile, so characteristic of fallen

man (cf. 2:1), could be detected in His words. Sinlessness in speech is a mark of perfection (cf. James 3:2) and confirms the purity of His heart (Matt. 12:34-35). This aspect of Christ's example was "particularly applicable to slaves in the empire, where glib, deceitful speech was one of their notorious characteristics, adroit evasions and excuses being often their sole means of self-protection."

Christian slaves are reminded that in their trials they must look to the Lord Jesus and strive to copy His innocence and truth.

The second relative clause that develops the nature of Christ's sufferings is in verse 23a: "while being reviled, He did not revile in return"

To revile denotes the hurling of insulting and abusive language at an opponent. On various occasions Jesus' enemies spoke bitterly and viciously against Him. They said "he was possessed with a devil. They called him a Samaritan, a glutton, a wine-bibber, a blasphemer, a demoniac, one in league with Beelzebub, a perverter of the nation, and a deceiver of the people." But it seems that Peter had especially in view the scene during Christ's trials and crucifixion, events during which the normal human urge to "revile in return" would be especially strong.

During the week of His passion, Jesus was subjected to severe physical sufferings: He was struck in His face, crowned with thorns, beaten with a reed, savagely scourged, forced to bear His own cross, and crucified, the most painful method of execution ever devised. Yet through it all, He never threatened retaliatory revenge on His tormentors, nor even predicted that they would be duly punished for it. It had been noted that some of the early Christian martyrs could not resist the natural urge to threaten their executioners with divine punishment. Even the Apostle Paul on one occasion, when abused in court, did not resist the temptation (Acts 23:3). Mistreated slaves at times threatened revenge in some near or distant future. Peter's picture of what Jesus did not do speaks clearly to all who suffer.

WHAT HE DID DO (v. 23b; cf. Mk. 14:62)

23(b) but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

"But" marks the transition to what Christ DID when suffering. It is summed up in the statement "kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

The verb "entrust" basically means "to hand over" and was commonly used of delivering up a criminal to the police or a court for punishment (Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:41-42; John 19:11, 16). Here it states Christ's own action of "entrusting" or "handing over" the situation to God, the righteous Judge.

The point is, not that the Lord was concerned about His own fate, but that He preferred to leave vindication to God rather than take action Himself against His enemies.

"That is, he handed over to God the whole situation including himself and those abusing him and the hurt done and all the factors that made it a horrendous outrage of injustice that the most innocent man who ever lived should suffer so much. He trusted it all into God's hands as the one who would settle the matter justly someday. He said, 'I will not carry the burden of revenge, I will not carry the burden of sorting out motives, I will not carry the burden of self-pity; I will not carry the burden of bitterness; I will hand all that over to God who will settle it all in a perfectly just way and I will pray, Father, forgive them they don't know what they do (Luke 23:34).'" (Piper)

Jesus' suffering did not mean that God had abandoned Him, but His suffering was God's mysterious way of accomplishing the redemption of humanity. His trust paid off (Jobes, 197).

THE NATURE OF HIS REDEMPTIVE SUFFERINGS (v. 24a cf. Isa. 53:4)

In the original text, "***He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross***" begins with a **third relative clause** (who Himself bore our sins. . . NKJ) and introduces the nature of Christ's suffering.

Christ was our sin bearer. "Sin" basically portrays a falling short of the target or missing the mark, and thus characterizes sin as a falling short of God's standard and purpose for man. But in the New Testament, the concept is not merely negative; it also involves a positive element of willful disobedience to the known will of God. The plural "sins" embodies the multitude of sins committed since man's fall.

"To bear" is a verb which means "to carry up, to bring from a lower place to a higher place." It is a ritual term; in the Septuagint it is used of bringing a sacrifice and laying it on the altar (Gen. 8:20; Lev. 14:20; 17:5; 2 Chron. 35:16; etc.). In James 2:21, it is used of Abraham bringing his son Isaac up on the altar. Clearly Isaiah 53:12 was in Peter's mind, "He Himself bore the sin of many." Christ's death was not that of a heroic martyr dying for a rejected cause; it was redemptive and substitutionary in nature.

THE PURPOSE OF HIS REDEMPTIVE SUFFERINGS (v. 24b)

so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness;

Christ's redemptive sufferings had a practical purpose: they were so "that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." Though this translation makes it sound like dying to sin is part of our daily experience, it actually relates to our death to sin in the past, while living to righteousness depicts God's purpose for our present life. An experiential realization of the release from sins makes it possible to live a life of righteousness.

Peter's **fourth relative clause**, "by His wounds you were healed," gives us the result of Christ's death that we experience. The words are an allusion to Isaiah 53:5, "And by His scourging we are healed."

The literal reference is to the scourging which Christ endured, but possibly the picture may be understood as including all the sufferings which terminated in His death. By Christ's stripes, the wounds

that sin had inflicted on our souls "were healed", not merely "will be healed." Peter's words involve a striking paradox, well summed up by Theodoret (ca. 393-ca. 458) in his oft-quoted exclamation, "A new and strange method of healing; the doctor suffered the cost, and the sick received the healing!"

THE RESULT OF HIS REDEMPTIVE SUFFERINGS (v. 24c-25 – cf Isa. 53:6)

2:24(c), 25 for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

"For" in verse 25 explains how and from what state we came to our experience of spiritual healing. "You were continually straying like sheep" pictures our previous lost condition, but a decisive change has taken place. That is, "Now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

Our conversion brings us into personal union with "the Shepherd and Guardian," one individual identified under two aspects. In the New Testament the shepherd is a familiar figure of Christ (Mark 14:27; John 10:1-18; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 7:17). The term "Guardian," used of Christ only here in the New Testament, is to be taken in close relationship with "Shepherd." Derived from the verb which means "to look at, to care for, to oversee," the noun designates one who inspects something or someone and keeps watch over it or him; hence he is an "overseer." In the New Testament the term is used in close association with the pastoral function (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Pet. 5:2-4). The double designation assured the afflicted readers of Christ's full care for His own. He not only leads and feeds and sustains His own, but He also guides and directs and protects them. As Shepherd and Guardian He cares for their "souls," their true inner selves. The Christian slaves addressed are reminded that their bodies may be subject to the power and caprice of harsh masters, but their inner life is under the constant watch care of their Great Shepherd.

In Isaiah 41 God's words to Israel surely apply to us as well:

⁹ You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts And said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.

¹⁰ 'Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

Additional thoughts:

Is it God's will that His people suffer unjustly?

This text assumes so. Peter says in verse 21: "*you were called to this purpose.*" But he also says in 4:19, "Let those also who suffer *according to the will of God* entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." And again in 3:17, "It is better, *if God should will it so*, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong."

God wills that we live our life out in a world full of evil, that we might make His excellences known in behavior that reveals a changed life and trust in God.

When we endure unjust suffering as is described here and trust God:

- We demonstrate that God is more precious than whatever we lose through suffering.
- We show that we truly believe that God will take care of us (He is the shepherd and guardian of our souls).
- We believe in His justice and that one day He will settle all accounts (He judges righteously).
- We acknowledge that we are still sinners and are not earning anything by this patience. Therefore, we show the greatness of God's great grace.