

Lesson 16 – 1 Peter:

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Submission and respect toward others: 2:11 – 3:12

- 3) Duty of Servants to Masters, 2:18 – 21a –
“You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you – not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. For God called you to do good...”

Here Peter discusses ‘slavery / servanthood’ and accepts that it is a part of society in the first century world. This slavery was in households that could be under despotic, authoritarian, tyrannical, dictatorial, domineering, and overbearing circumstances. We can apply these verses in the employer and employee relationship today.

The slave [as discussed in these verses] was legally bound and could not change his or her master. Whereas the modern employee has the right to stop working for a cruel employer. However, there could be an employee that may not be able to change their situation, in which case Peter’s advice to slaves is very applicable to employees today.

In our recent study of the Pauline Epistles, we read and discussed passages where Paul mentions slavery, slave/master relationships and how Christians, either, as the slave or master, are to treat each other as guided by the love of Christ and His principle of submission.

In this verse - 1 Peter 2:18: “You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you – not only if they are kind

and reasonable, but even if they are cruel..” The Greek word used for servants is ‘Oiketai’ and means one who is a member of a household, domestic servants, including ‘freemen’ as well as slaves. What Peter has primarily in mind is not slaves as a class, but the household as a common social institution. The Greek word for masters is ‘Despotai’ and it is a strong word, denoting “absolute ownership and uncontrolled power.”

Many slaves/servants in the Roman Empire held responsible positions and had a decent income, but most were harshly treated and all were deprived of legal status and rights. The phrase **“with all respect”** may mean, as in Ephesians 6:5 **‘out of respect for their position as masters’**, which is along the line of 2:17 – **“honor the king,”** or more probably, meaning “out of reverence for God and His sovereign control and providential ordering of the circumstances of our lives. See Colossians 3:22 – **“Slaves, obey your masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord.”** There is a third possible meaning, Peter could also be calling on slaves/servants to fear their master’s punishment. Either way, Peter often speaks of Christians, whether free or slave, to have a respectful attitude toward others.

Master, may be of two distinct kinds- **“...do what they tell you – not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel..”** The Greek word ‘epieikes,’ means ‘fair or reasonable.’ So, some master may be good and gentle or considerate, while others, as the Greek word ‘skolios’ literally means “curved, bent or not straight” refers metaphorically of people being ‘crooked’ (Phil. 2:15), perverse, and unfair, and so awkward to deal with.’ Phil. 2:15 – **“so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining light bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.”**

v. 19 – **“For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.”**

Peter, here, encourages uncomplaining persistence in submissive loyalty even when it involves the painful endurance of unjust treatment. Peter says there is no credit in submitting to being hit or beaten (Greek word – ‘kolaphizomenoi’ which means ‘struck with the fist,’ when you have done

wrong. It is the patient uncomplaining submission to suffering when one has done well that is acceptable with God.

It is important to note that Peter declares twice in these verses, that this uncomplaining submission is actually about the quality of “grace” – The Greek word ‘Charis.’ Verse 19 begins with the Greek phrase – ‘touto gar charis’ = ‘for this is grace,’ and verse 20 ends with the Greek phrase – “touto charis para-Theo’ = this is grace with God’. “Charis” can describe something that is pleasing to look upon, or graceful in appearance. Usually in the Bible it describes both an undeserved act of kindness, a favor, and the appreciation, thanks, or gratitude, it should call forth in return. It is likely that Peter had in mind the Lord’s own teaching recorded in Luke 6:32-34:

“If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much. And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.”

Three times in this passage, the question is asked – ‘why should you get credit?’ In the KJV the question is “what thank have ye?” Peter’s meaning here is simply this – ‘How are you deserving any thanks or reward?’ See Luke 17:9 and Matthew 5:46:

Luke 17:9 – “And does the master thank the servant for doing what he was told to do? Of course not.”

Matthew 5:46 – “If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.”

As verse 19 continues – “...But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.” Peter notes that the one who patiently endures suffering or ill treatment that is undeserved is acting as Christ acted when He endured the suffering of the trial and crucifixion, which He did not deserve. He took it patiently, in silent submission. That action was and is pleasing in God’s sight. It is an expression of divine grace. It won God’s approval and reward. It is also for our profit or benefit. Jesus provided a pattern of behavior and conduct which we are meant to follow closely. When we manifest the grace of God, we receive divine commendation and men who were previously hostile to the Gospel are moved to acknowledge God.

We cannot argue that this teaching does not apply to us since slavery is in the past. There are comparable situations or positions in business or households, in college, and in the Church, where others are set over us. So, it is then our Christian duty to be submissive, cooperative, and uncomplaining, even in unfair treatment.

The phrase “conscious of His will” means prompted by a conscious awareness of God’s presence and will. So, the man/woman who knows that God sees, and knows what God expects should be concerned to please Him, see Ephesians 6:7 – “**Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.**”

v. 21a - For **God called you to do good...**” Peter now refers to the divine call in Christ to become members of His people. This is the truth to be realized as a believer, whether a slave or free, to consciously or purposely do good, in all of our circumstances, relationships and experiences. For example, a slave becomes a Christian, it is essential part of God’s immediate purpose that he should not cease to be a slave because he has become a Christian, but rather that he should glorify God by beginning to behave in relation to his master as only a Christian slave would.

See 1 Corinthians 7:17-24:

¹⁷ Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches. ¹⁸ For instance, a man who was circumcised before he became a believer should not try to reverse it. And the man who was uncircumcised when he became a believer should not be circumcised now. ¹⁹ For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God’s commandments.

²⁰ Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you. ²¹ Are you a slave? Don’t let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. ²² And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. ²³ God paid a high price for you, so don’t be enslaved by the world. ²⁴ Each of you, dear brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you.”