

1 Peter 2:18-25 (Part II)

Introduction

Let's start with a question. What are the "good"—*and* holy!—lives that we're to live before the world as the sojourners and foreigners that we are? Peter sums up the answer in one word. We are to submit ourselves – or place ourselves willingly under the authorities in our lives. So, in verse 13 Peter says: "**Submit** yourselves to every human creature"; in verse 18 he says, "Household slaves, **submit** yourselves to your master"; and in the first verse of chapter three he says, "Wives, **submit** yourselves to your husband." Last week, we just introduced the second of these three sections. This week, we'll look at the whole passage more closely.

I. 1 Peter 2:18 — Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

We pointed out last week that Peter never once speaks against the institution of slavery. This is NOT to say that he approved of slavery or thought it was a good idea, but only that for Peter, slavery—and especially slavery to an unjust master—was in some sense the *ULTIMATE* platform and context for faithfully living out the Gospel. So when Peter addresses the slaves, he's addressing them as a model for us all. The Gospel is not the promise of escape from unjust authorities in this fallen world. The Gospel is the freedom to live faithfully under these authorities as an expression of the Gospel itself.

So the first thing we notice is that Peter is talking to the slaves – he's addressing the slaves directly. ("**Slaves**, submit yourselves to your masters...") We might take this for granted, but in Peter's day, as in other cultures before and after Peter's day, slaves were thought of as less than full persons. Because of this, they were not thought to be capable or worthy of receiving moral instruction. So, in the secular household codes of the day (which the household codes in the Bible are patterned after), it was the masters who were addressed, and not the slaves. It was the masters who were to keep their slaves under submission. But what's Peter doing here? He's addressing the slaves directly. And when he does this, he's recognizing the slaves as full and equal, participating members in the covenant community. When the slave, Onesimus, ran away from his Christian master, Philemon, and was converted under the ministry of Paul, Paul sent him back to Onesimus with this message for Philemon:

- Philemon 15–16 — For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as [just] a bondservant but more than a bondservant, **as a beloved brother... in the Lord.**

In Peter's day, that was revolutionary talk! It was a new and radical teaching! But it was grounded in the very heart of Christianity – in the Gospel itself.

- Galatians 3:28 — There is neither Jew nor Greek, **there is neither slave nor free**, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- Colossians 3:11 — Here **there is not** Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, **slave, free**; but Christ is all, and in all.

The Gospel welcomes into the covenant community all who believe on a completely equal footing. So Jesus said that the greatest would be the servant of all (Mat. 20:26; 23:11), and the least of all would be the greatest (Luke 9:48). Because of the Gospel, we're all equally in Christ, and Christ is in all of us equally, and so it's impossible for there to be any levels of membership or any hierarchy of privilege or status. All of us together, no matter what our station in life, have equal access to God and all of us together enjoy equally His favor and His blessing. What a glorious, wonderful truth this is! And the more we really grasp this, the more profound should be its impact on all our thoughts towards one another and on all our treatment of one another. But what would this radical and revolutionary teaching mean for those believers who happened to be slaves in Peter's day? If, in the Gospel, they were actually equal to their unbelieving masters, and if, in fact, they were even *more* privileged than their masters as sons and daughters God, then was it really reasonable to expect them to go on living as slaves? What did this completely revolutionary teaching of the Gospel mean for slaves? Would it lead them to revolution, as no doubt would be assumed by the pagan culture surrounding them?

Peter directly addresses the slaves as full and equal, participating members in the covenant community, and so he *also* addresses them as those who are personally and morally responsible. And this is what he says: "Slaves, submit *yourselves* to your masters." It's natural for us to think that it's the job of authority to enforce the submission of those under authority. But Peter emphasizes that it's the moral responsibility of the slaves—of those under authority—to submit *themselves*. And so what's amazing here is that this command to submit to authority is actually the most powerful sign of the slave's real freedom. Only those who are truly free can freely choose to submit in obedience to God's command.

Peter says, "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all fear." In verse 17, Peter just made a distinction between the "honor" that we owe to the emperor and the "fear" that we owe only to God. In the next chapter, Peter tells wives not to fear anything that is frightening (3:6) and he tells all Christians not to have any fear of those who mistreat them. (3:14) So when Peter tells slaves to submit themselves to their masters with all fear he's thinking of a submission that's always flowing from their fear of the Lord. When we're truly fearing the Lord, that fear—which is a wholesome, and healthy, and saving, and healing thing—that fear of the Lord drives out all other fears (Luke 12:4-7) Peter wants the slaves to see that the Gospel calls them to submit not in the fear of men or earthly masters, but only in the freeing fear of the Lord, who is their master in heaven. And Peter wants us to be thinking in the same way, so that we will freely choose to submit ourselves always in the true fear of the Lord – always as an expression of our obedience and devotion *to Him*. But how far does this really go? Has Peter forgotten the realities of slavery, and of cruel and unjust masters? We know he hasn't because he goes on to write this:

"Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust." The word for "unjust" is "*scolios*," related to our English word "scoliosis" and it means crooked, or bent, or twisted. (cf. Luke 3:5; Phil. 2:15) These aren't just unjust masters, they're perverse and depraved masters. And it's even to masters like these, Peter says, that Christian slaves are to submit. Now, let's just admit for a moment that this is a really, really, *really* hard saying. Peter knows this, and so he goes on to explain and also to encourage us and

strengthen us with these words: “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust...”

II. 1 Peter 2:19–20

For **this is grace**, when, because of conscience toward God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten [for it], you endure?
But if when you do good and suffer [for it] you endure, **this is grace** in the sight of God.

Notice how Peter begins and ends with the same words: “This is **grace**.” I wanted to start off with this very literal translation because I think there’s a beauty and a power just in *how* Peter says it. “For this is grace.” We’ll think more about what this actually means in a moment, but is this what any of us would have expected to hear right after Peter exhorts slaves to submit even to perverse and depraved masters? At first, it might feel like all of a sudden, Peter’s taken this beautiful, wonderful word that we all know and love—“grace”—and introduced it into this totally foreign and alien context where it doesn’t seem to fit at all. God’s ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts! So let us work diligently to be able to think His thoughts after Him and to see their goodness and their beauty.

“For this is grace, when, **because of conscience toward God**, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.” Just like in the last verse when Peter said that the slaves were to submit to their masters in all fear [of the Lord], so we have here again the Godward, God-centered, God-focused orientation of our lives. A conscience directed to God is a conscience that’s always mindful—always aware—of His will and His Word. We could think of our conscience being oriented to God like the needle on a compass is oriented to the magnetic north, so that all that we do is the direct result of our consciousness of Him – including even our endurance of sorrows while suffering unjustly.

This is grace. In other words, it’s not the endurance of unjust suffering by withdrawing into ourselves and mentally resigning ourselves to the “way things are.” That’s what the Stoics did. No, what is grace is enduring **sorrows**—real *sorrows* caused by unjust suffering—not resigned to our fate and not simply because we can’t see any way out, but rather fully surrendered and resting in the will of God for us. Can you see what a difference there is between these two ways? In both of these scenarios one “endures,” and yet only one partakes of “**grace**,” while the other does not. Whatever Peter may mean by this “grace,” it’s never found in passive resignation, but in an active and purposeful submission and obedience for the sake of a conscience directed towards God. I wondered if we would describe our lives more as active expressions of Christianity or more as passive expressions of Christianity? Because, in the end, the only Christianity that partakes of “grace” is always an “active” thing – and never passive.

In contrast to the “**grace**” that is “enduring sorrows while suffering **unjustly**,” Peter asks: “For what **credit** is it if, when you **sin** and are beaten [for it], you endure?” We all know there’s nothing praiseworthy or honorable about enduring a beating or a punishment that you deserve. “But if when you do good and suffer [for it] you endure,” Peter says, “**this** is grace in the sight of God.” Now again, remember what this endurance is! It’s not a “passive” endurance. It’s an

endurance characterized by active obedience and even by continued willing service and submission to the master who has beaten you. And in this case, why has your master beaten you? Because you did what was “good” in God’s sight God when it was apparently not “good” in the sight of your master. So what we see here is that even when our loyalties conflict and we must obey God *rather* than man, our obedience to God is never to be an obedience in **defiance** of human authorities. Here’s an amazing thing: Our obedience to God rather than man only opens a new and even more powerful opportunity for displaying the true power of the Gospel in our lives through a submission that endures even a beating without complaint.

Brothers and sisters! How radical and revolutionary is this? How completely foreign to our natural and fleshly way of thinking. Indeed, it’s far more revolutionary than any revolt could possibly be. Listen to what this commentator says:

“If the Christian responds in kind – good for good, evil for evil – he becomes merely a victim when he is treated unjustly. In burning resentment he seeks an opportunity to repay the evil. But if he bears the evil patiently he has broken the chain of bondage in the power of the Lord. He shows his confidence in God’s justice; he need not avenge himself. He also shows that his service is not really forced but voluntary. He is willing to serve his master for the lord’s sake, even to honor him for the Lord’s sake. His master cannot enslave him, for he is Christ’s slave; he cannot humiliate him, for he has humbled himself in willing subjection.” (Clowney)

And so it’s this submission—it’s this active, obedient, patient enduring of sorrows while suffering unjustly—it’s this submission, Peter says, that is grace in the sight of God. Sometimes, God’s grace is simply God’s favor. His grace can even be, by extension, the reward that He gives that expresses His favor.

- Luke 6:32–35 — “If you love those who love you, what **benefit [grace]** is that to you? ... And if you do good to those who do good to you, what **benefit [grace]** is that to you? ... And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what **credit [grace]** is that to you? ... But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and **your reward will be great...**”

So when Peter says that something is grace “in the sight of God,” he’s talking about something that’s pleasing and favorable and praiseworthy in His sight and that He will not fail to reward. But if that’s the case, then why doesn’t Peter just say “this *finds* grace/favor in the sight of God”? Why does he say instead, “This *is* **grace** in the sight of God”? I think it’s just because he wants to emphasize the magnitude of the grace of God – of the favor and commendation and reward that He will lavish specifically on all who submit and endure faithfully under the sorrows of unjust suffering. This is grace. Know this, brothers and sisters, and let this grace begin to renew, and transform, and change our thinking even now.

Not only does Peter say that this is grace—this willing submission under unjust suffering—but he even goes so far as to say that this is our calling.

III. 1 Peter 2:21–23 — For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

What is our calling, brothers and sisters? It's not just to obey Christ's commands, but to actually follow in His steps and in the path that He walked. The word for "example" is used elsewhere for an imprint of the alphabet over which children could trace their letters. So Peter's point is not just that Jesus is an example for us to copy, but that His life is the mold that is to shape all of our own experience of life. He uses the example of following in Jesus' steps as though we were walking behind him and always placing our feet in the exact same place where we see the imprint of His feet.

So, if the path to glory for Jesus was through suffering, then we are to see our path to glory as lying in the exact same direction. If we've been called to share in Christ's glory, then we've also been called to share in His suffering as the path to that glory. One commentator says this: "One cannot step into the footsteps of Jesus and head off in any other direction than the direction he took, and his footsteps lead to the cross, through the grave, and onward to glory." (Jobes)

Now Peter's point isn't that all will suffer equally or in all the same ways, or that we should be looking for suffering. His point is that for all of us this is to be the calling that we know is ours and that is therefore always informing our thinking and our living – always causing us to live with a true readiness not just to suffer, but to willingly submit ourselves to unjust suffering for His sake and as a sharing in the sufferings of Him who suffered for us. This is grace, and it's to this submission in suffering that we have all been called. To paraphrase one commentator: "Jesus' suffering [and especially His response to suffering] is... *the* paradigm by which [we] write large the letters of his gospel in [our] lives." (Jobes) Jesus' response to unjust suffering was submission, but it was a submission that only displayed in the most vivid and powerful way that He was the only one in that whole story who was really and truly "free."

So now Peter looks back to the pattern of Jesus' submission, which he witnessed firsthand, and he describes it as the fulfillment of God's Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53: "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth (cf. Isa. 53:9). When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." (cf. Isa. 53:7) Brothers and sisters, here is our pattern. This is the mold by which our own lives are to be wholly shaped and lived. How hard is it not to give back what we get? How much harder is it not even to want to give back what we get? So then, I wonder how much time we ought to spend just reading and meditating on the pattern of the submission of Jesus in the face of unjust sufferings. I really wonder if we shouldn't be reading the story of Christ's passion over and over and over again so that it leaves its imprint upon our hearts and actually empowers us and emboldens us to truly follow in His steps.

We know that we have been "called" to submission in suffering first of all because this is the path that Jesus walked in as the pattern for all of us who follow in His steps. But there's another reason that we know we're called to suffering, and this reason, too, is rooted in the sufferings of Jesus. Still echoing the words of Isaiah 53, Peter writes:

IV. 1 Peter 2:24–25 — He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree [cf. Isa. 53:4, 6, 12], that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed [cf. Isa. 53:5]. For you were straying like sheep [cf. Isa. 53:6], but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

What we see here is that Jesus suffered not only as our pattern, but also as our substitute. The sufferings of Christ as our pattern can be traced and reproduced even in our own lives. But the sufferings of Christ as our substitute are by their very nature something we can't ever copy.

Jesus, in His suffering, endured not only the unjust treatment of men, but also the just and righteous wrath of God that was due to us for our sin. "He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree." The Old Testament law says that the man hanged on a tree is cursed by God. (Deut. 21:23; cf. Gal. 3:13) And so as Jesus was hanging on the tree, we see and know that he was redeeming us from the curse of the law by bearing that curse for us. Brothers and sisters, in these sufferings of Jesus we have no part at all! Instead, quoting Isaiah again, by His wounds we have been healed.

The judgments of God poured out on sinful Israel in the Old Testament are but a picture of the eternal judgment of God due to sinners.

➤ Isaiah 1:4–6 (cf. Jer. 30:12-16) — Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.

In Isaiah one God has struck the people so that they are sick and faint and covered in undressed wounds. But in Isaiah 53, Isaiah sees a day when God's righteous servant will be struck and wounded by God with all the blows and the wounds that were due to His people – with all the blows and wounds that were due to us.

➤ Isaiah 53:4, 10 — Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains... it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has made him sick...

And so now we can say along with Isaiah and along with Peter with joy and everlasting thankfulness in our hearts: By His wounds, we have been healed. (cf. Exod. 15:24-27; Isa. 30:26; Jer. 30:17)

Do you see how we've moved from submitting to **unjust** sufferings as we walk in Jesus' steps to the **justly deserved** sufferings that we will never ever have to endure because Jesus has already submitted to them and endured them all for us. So here's the mystery and the beauty and the power of what Peter wants us to see. It's by these same vicarious sufferings of Jesus in our place that we have now died to the sin by which we once merited God's judgment and live to the righteousness by which we now find grace and favor in His sight. Did you see that? Peter has

said that we are called to follow in Jesus' steps by **submitting** to suffering for doing **good**. And now we're reminded that any of the "**good**" we will ever do and suffer for at the hands of men has actually been made **possible** only by the sufferings of Jesus under the righteous curse of God. By His wounds we have been healed, so that now we are free to do the "good" and to follow faithfully and willingly in His path of suffering.

We were straying like sheep—we had turned, every one of us, to our own ways—but now we have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. And who is the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls? He is Jesus, the one whose sufferings we willingly submit ourselves to only because He submitted Himself to a suffering that we will never know.

Conclusion

May the living of our lives today always reflect the mindset of a true willingness and readiness to submit ourselves to the sorrows of unjust suffering – a suffering always for doing good. This is true freedom. This is grace. This is our calling. This is to follow in the steps of Jesus on the path that leads to glory. And this is to know that all the blows and wounds, all the everlasting punishment that was justly due to us, He has borne fully in our place – "By His wounds we have been healed."