

Following In His Steps

1 Peter 2:18-25



Live Honorably

- ❑ In his letter to Christians in Asia Minor, Peter exhorts his readers to “Live...good lives” (*1 Peter 2:12, NIV*). In other words, “Conduct yourselves honorably” (*HCSB*).¹
- ❑ Peter applies this exhortation to different relationships within society, including the following relationships: citizens to governing authorities (*2:13-17*); household servants/slaves to masters (*2:18-25*); wives to husbands/ husbands to wives (*3:1-7*).

Slaves to Masters

- ❑ 1 Peter 2:18-20 concerns the relationship between household slaves² and masters. Slavery was firmly established in Greco-Roman society. Read 1 Peter 2:18-25.
 1. Since slavery seems opposed to Christian views of justice, we might expect Peter to condemn it. But he doesn't. Why do you think Peter doesn't confront slavery itself?³
 2. Why should slaves submit to their masters, even masters who are harsh⁴? (*2:18-20*)⁵
- ❑ After talking about “the pain of unjust suffering,” Peter says, “To this you were called...” (*2:21a*). Why? Because following Christ involves ‘following in his steps,’ and Christ endured unjust suffering for us (*2:21*). Such is life in a world that is opposed to God.

¹ The Greek word *kalēn*, translated ‘good’ in the NIV, can mean ‘morally good, noble, praiseworthy, or beautiful.’

² The Greek word *oiketai* is translated ‘slaves’ (NIV), ‘servants’ (ESV), and ‘household slaves’ (HCSB). The usual word for ‘slave’ or ‘servant’ is *doulos*. *Oiketēs* (related to the word *oikos* – house) is used only four times in the New Testament and refers more specifically to ‘household slaves/servants.’ Translators differ on whether ‘slave’ or ‘servant’ is the proper translation. The debate is complex and beyond the scope of this lesson. The word ‘slave’ is probably more precise, but it needs to be understood in the context of first century Greco-Roman society.

³ Similarly, the apostle Paul did not directly confront the existing social structure of slavery but rather instructed slaves (and masters) how to behave within it (*Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; Philemon 1:8-16*), though Paul did list ‘slave traders’ among the ungodly and sinful (*1 Timothy 1:10*). Peter and Paul’s lack of direct confrontation does not necessarily mean they approved of slavery, for they had other purposes. ‘Both [Peter and Paul] teach that new life in Christ is to be lived out within existing social structures’ (Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 182). While revolt against slavery was not explicitly encouraged by the apostles, the liberating and life-changing truth of the gospel would eventually subvert and overcome slavery.

⁴ ‘harsh’ (*skoliois*) – unjust (ESV), cruel (HCSB), crooked.

⁵ Slavery was an authority structure, even if not established by God. Peter says slaves should submit ‘in reverent fear of God’ (*2:18, NIV*). Other translations say ‘with all respect [to your masters]’ (ESV) or ‘with all fear to your masters’ (HCSB). The Greek text doesn’t have the word ‘God’ so translations differ. Jobes says, “To submit ‘in all fear’... means that one’s reverence for God translates into ‘respect’ for both good and harsh masters” (Jobes, 190). Peter says ‘it is commendable’ (literally, ‘it is a gracious thing’) if a slave endures the pain of unjust treatment by their masters (*2:19-20, NIV*). ‘God’s special favor rests upon the righteous sufferer of injustice, further enabling that one to behave in a manner that is commendable by God’ (Jobes, 191). Peter’s instructions are in the context of living honorably so that unbelievers ‘may see your good deeds and glorify God’ (*2:12*). Paul wrote that slaves should submit to their masters ‘so that... they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive’ (*Titus 2:9-10, NIV*).

The Suffering Servant

- ❑ To encourage slaves who may suffer when doing good, Peter points to the example⁶ of Jesus Christ (2:21). Peter describes Christ as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 (a prophecy written about 700 years before the time of Christ). Read Isaiah 53:4-9 and 1 Peter 2:22-25.
- ❑ Jesus Christ “committed no sin” (2:22) but he humbly and willingly suffered and died for *our* sins on the cross (2:23-24) so that we could be set free and have a new life (2:24; see 3:18).
 3. While Christ’s suffering was unique,⁷ his attitude and behavior provide an example for his followers. In what ways can slaves (or others facing unjust treatment and suffering) follow Christ’s example?⁸ How can we stay encouraged? (2:22-23, 25)
- ❑ Christ is the perfect model of humility, trust, faithfulness and endurance. His suffering is unique, but it is still our model. “Christ’s suffering is our model because it is our salvation. It does not simply guide us; it is the root of all our motivation to follow.”⁹



Application to Us

- ❑ While we may not be slaves serving unjust masters, this passage still applies to us. In general, the principles taught apply to any unjust suffering we may face. More specifically, we may apply these principles to employee-to-employer or student-to-faculty relationships.
 4. Does this teaching mean we should always *silently* suffer unjust treatment by those in authority over us? Does it mean we should never pursue changes? Explain.¹⁰
 5. In situations where our employer, supervisor or advisor is treating us in a harsh or unjust way, how can we apply this teaching?



Reflection & Application

- Christ suffered and died for our sins so that we could be set free and have a new life with God. We receive new life with God through faith in Christ. Do you need to trust in him?
- Believers, are you submitting to those who have authority over you, even if they are harsh? How do you handle unjust treatment? Do you return bad for bad? Reflect on the Bible verses referenced in footnote 3, and ask God to enable you to “live honorably” in the world.

⁶ ‘example’ (*hypogrammon*) – pattern of letters of the alphabet over which children learning to write would trace.

⁷ Christ’s sufferings were unique because only he could suffer and die for the sins of humanity. Still, Christ’s followers are called to ‘follow in his steps’ (2:21) which involves sharing in his sufferings (*Romans 8:17*).

⁸ Christ ‘committed no sin’ (2:22). Unlike Christ, we are not sinless (*1 John 1:10*), but we can seek to ‘abstain from sinful desires’ and ‘live honorably’ (*1 Peter 2:11-12*). The point is, Christ did good (perfectly!) but still suffered. Christ ‘did not retaliate’ (return bad for bad). ‘Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly’ (2:23). “Jesus kept ‘handing over’ (*paredidou* – [entrusting]) to God every dimension of his life, including the fate of his enemies” (Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* [Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2003], 144). In verse 19, Peter talks about being ‘conscious (mindful) of God.’ When God’s children are facing unjust suffering, we need to stay mindful of God, knowing that He will ultimately right all wrongs. In verse 25, Peter reminds slaves (and all believers) that God is our ultimate Master, and we are safe in the care of the ‘[Good] Shepherd and Overseer of our souls’ (*John 10:11-18*).

⁹ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 118.

¹⁰ Many slaves could become free, but as long as they were slaves, opportunities for change were limited. As we think about slavery today, we may think of various situations where change (even escape) would be reasonable. In our own situations, pursuing change may be an option – either seeking change in the relationship or seeking to get out of the relationship. Nevertheless, we should still seek to have a Christ-like attitude in whatever route we pursue.