

- Slaves and masters

1. The virtue of submission

- If the Bible can help in the worst kind of employment

- It will help in easier situations

- Is slavery really abolished?

- Submissiveness out of deep reverence to God

2. Submission is pleasing to God

- A difficult instruction

- Excellent behaviour

- Unjust treatment – a Godly response

- An exception

Next Peter comes to write about the relationship between slaves and masters.

1. We notice in this section of the letter the **virtue of submission**. This is a theme that runs through the whole of 1 Peter 2:13–3:6, and Peter applies it in three ways. It involves Christians ‘submitting’ to the people around us, taking note of the position in which God has put them^{☐1}. Or it involves house-servants ‘submitting’ to their employers^{☐2}. Soon Peter will say something similar to Christians wives^{☐3}.

Here he addresses ‘house-servants’ (who were invariably slaves). ‘*Servants, accept the authority of your masters, out of deep reverence to God, not only to good and gentle masters but also to the perverse*’^{☐1}.

One might want to ask: since in many parts of the world slavery is abolished do passages of Scripture like these have anything to say to us? The answer is ‘Yes!’ – for at least two reasons. First, if the Bible can help people in the **worst** kind of ‘employment’, surely its instruction will help us in easier situations. The Bible caters for the worst ‘profession’ that there is – slavery! If the ancient Christians could survive as slaves, surely by following the same advice we can survive anywhere!

But there is a second reason why this advice is practical. It is all very well for people in affluent countries to say ‘Slavery is abolished!’ – but it is really? I personally know dozens of people in more than one country whose labour conditions are about the same as that of the slavery of the ancient world. Peter’s instruction is as up-to-date as tomorrow’s newspaper.

Peter urges submissiveness, ‘out of deep reverence to God’. As in 2:17 some words meaning ‘with fear’ refer to God, not to the master^{☐1}.

2. This is obviously a difficult instruction. Who likes to be submissive to others? Certainly not me! So Peter emphasizes: **submission is pleasing to God**. Anyone can be rebellious and self-willing but it takes special grace to be respectful in an unjust situation. ‘*For this is excellent behaviour, if on account of conscience towards God, anyone bears griefs, suffering unjustly*’^{☐1}. *For what sort of honour is there if you sin and get beaten for it, you endure it bravely? But if when you are doing what is good and suffering for it, you endure, this is excellent behaviour in the sight of God*’^{☐2}.

Peter is giving practical help in this matter. In a painfully unjust situation one must remember that quiet respect even towards the ‘oppressor’ is generally God’s will. It is ‘excellent behaviour’ and God will be pleased with us. It gets ‘honour’ from Him.

Peter asks us to make this a matter that we take seriously. It is to be out of ‘conscience towards God’ that we live as we do. He reminds us that what he is speaking of is unjust treatment. It is no great virtue to be steadfast when we are suffering because of our own sins and foolishness. There is nothing so special about that!

Of course Peter is speaking generally. No one has to submit to any employer when he or she asks us to sin^{☐1}. But if we resist

☐1 see 2:13
☐2 2:18
☐3 3:1

☐1 2:18

☐1 see also
Colossians 3:22

☐1 2:19

☐2 2:20

☐1 see Acts 5:29

someone with authority over us, we had best make sure it is a matter of sin. Defiance out of awkwardness or some minor opinion that we have, receives no blessing.

3. The greatest example is Jesus himself

• *Endurance amidst injustice – part of the Christian’s calling*

• *Jesus’s suffering was real*

• *But this suffering was for us*

• *An example to follow*

• *God’s “well done”*

3. **The greatest example in this matter is Jesus Himself.** Jesus asks us to do what He has already done Himself. *‘For to this endurance you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his footsteps’*¹. Actually Jesus Himself acted as a ‘house-servant’ on one occasion².

Endurance amidst injustice is part of the Christian’s calling! We are ‘called’ to it; it is part of Christian conversion. When we experience salvation it is with the purpose of becoming like Jesus, and this is the kind of life that Jesus lived.

Jesus was a human being. One might think that because we know He was divine that His sufferings were somehow not real. But this is not so. The things He suffered He felt as much as we would have done if we were in His position. When He was slandered it hurt Him as much as it would have hurt us. When His enemies were watching out to find some way of catching Him in what He said, Jesus felt the pain of it. The loneliness, the disgrace, the sense of vexation at the sheer injustice in the way He was being treated – it was all a burden to Jesus just as it would have been to us.

There was one difference. Jesus suffered ‘for you’, says Peter. These sufferings were part of what He had to go through in order to be a real human being. If the Son of God had never become a human being there would have been no suffering for Him. He voluntarily stepped into a position where there would inevitably be much suffering. He took the form of a servant, subjecting Himself to the will of His Father, enduring everything that was necessary for Him to save the human race.

Now, says Peter, Jesus was ‘leaving you an example so that you might follow in His footsteps’. We must simply face the fact that the more we experience God’s grace, the more God will get us to be like Jesus. Then we are to live in the way He lived. He ‘despised the shame’¹. We do the same. We disregard any feelings of embarrassment we might have when badly treated, and we live in the way He lived, with dignity, with faith, with patience. He lived for ‘the joy that was set before him’. We do the same. We live for the joy of God’s saying ‘Well done’.

¹ 2:21

² see John 13:5

¹ Hebrews 12:2



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