

Text: 1 Pt 2.18-20

We continue with the “all Peter all the time” tonight. This will conclude that push through 1 Peter 2 for the last two weeks. We started it in verse 5, on Nov 17, and have powered through to the end of v. 20 tonight. That’s good progress, for me!

However, as I look at our material for tonight, I could see myself getting stuck on the first word... and that would mean we only made it to v. 18a.

Read 1 Pt 2.13-20, text 18-20

I begin with v. 13 because we see the command to submit there. The subject will come up again in 3.1:

1 Pt 3.1 ¶ In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

Now, note! I am not going to get into 1 Pt 3.1 tonight, just to point out that the theme of submission continues to that section.

When it comes to submission, I think Christians understand it to a point. However, in our society, we seem to have a loose hold on the subject. We basically are for law and order. We basically agree, “Yeah, we should obey the law.”

Except, as they say, when we don’t.

When our government puts on us unreasonable and irrational regulations, what do we think? (Most of us are disgusted, I guess.) Even more importantly, what do we do? Perhaps we comply, sort of, without much enthusiasm.

I think the same is probably true of marriage, but I said I wouldn’t get into 1 Pt 3 tonight!

Our passage tonight, however, puts everything into sharp focus, if we simply let it speak to us and don’t argue with it.

Read 1 Pt 2.18-20 again

Proposition: God expects his people to live in submission to authorities, even twisted authorities, for His sake.

I. The subject of slavery in the Bible

A. Understanding ancient slavery

1. The term in our verse

- a. The term is unusual, *oikete*, “household servant” (used just 4 times in NT [55 in LXX])
- b. Some commentators suggest that this included ‘domestics’ rather than ‘slaves’
- c. However, the term in general means slavery, and very few ‘domestics’ in the first century were free
- d. A very high percentage of all people in the Empire were slaves

2. The condition of slaves in the Roman Empire

- a. For this, I’m just going to quote from one of my commentaries:

“People became slaves by being captured in wars, kidnapped, or born into a slave household. Those facing economic hardships might choose to sell themselves into slavery in order to survive. Many slaves lived miserably, particularly those who served in the mines. Other slaves, however, served as doctors, teachers, managers, musicians, artisans, and could even own other slaves. It would not be unusual for a slave to be better educated than the master.”¹

“Still, slaves in the Greco-Roman world were under the control of their masters, and hence they had no independent existence. They could suffer brutal mistreatment at the hands of their owners, and children born in slavery belonged to masters rather than the parents who gave them birth. Slaves had no legal rights, and masters could beat them, brand them, and abuse them physically and sexually. J. A. Harrill remarks: ‘Despite claims of some NT scholars, ancient slavery was not more humane than modern slavery.’ [J. A. Harrill,

¹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 135.

“Slavery,” *DNTB*, 1125.] Slaves could purchase their freedom in the Greco-Roman world with the help of their masters, a procedure called manumission. Manumission, however, was available mainly for urban slaves, and most slaves had no hope of being manumitted.”²

b. Slavery, in Rome, as in all other places where allowed, was a brutal aspect of daily life

1) As our passage intimates, some slave-owners behaved well towards their slaves

2) Yet the very fact of enslavement puts even the good practices of the “good masters” into question

B. Understanding the Bible and slavery

1. How the apostles dealt with slavery

a. The message is consistent

1) The apostles made no attempt to criticize or overthrow slavery

2) The apostles simply gave spiritual advice about how to live with slavery (from both master and slave perspectives)

b. The basic apologetic for this approach

1) Christianity was a new and very small group, holding little influence in public affairs

2) Slavery was an entrenched system in the empire (and in many, if not most, cultures of the world through history)

3) Agitating against slavery among the newly converted slaves would lead to violent reprisals

4) The apostles focused on spiritual growth and development, they would let society take care of itself

² Schreiner, 135.

2. How Christianity affected slavery in history

- a. The very discomfort we have in thinking about slavery is the consequence of the Holy Spirit witness against it
- b. The fact is, Christianity led the way in abolishing slavery — no other religion has done this (certainly not Islam)
- c. The anti-slavery (and anti-racism) points of view held widely in the West are Christian ideals (a vestige of the former Christian predominance in the West)

II. The requirement for slaves from God

A. The command to submit

1. Grammar alert!

- a. The word in v. 18 is a present participle, usual translation something like “servants submitting in all fear to the despots”
- b. Everyone translates as an imperative, however
- c. Some think this is a pure “imperative participle” (incl. Daniel Wallace, eminent Gk scholar)
- d. Others point to the imperative in v. 13, and say the imperative force comes from that verb — this section continues the idea
- e. In ch 3.1, we have another participle for the wives, “be submissive to your own husbands”

I like the “continuity” idea, but can see the Independent Imperative use also.

2. The call to submit ... “in fear”

- a. The concept of submission is conformity of the will
- b. The question here is, “in fear” (“with respect” NAU)
 - 1) Most commentators point out that Peter always directs fear towards God
 - 2) In other words, this is similar to “for the Lord’s sake” in submission to human institutions (v. 13)

B. The challenge of the command – not just the good, but the twisted

1. New American gives us “unreasonable,” κῆρ “froward” (I like that word)

2. Gk. is *skolios*, “twisted, crooked, perverse”

We get “scoliosis” – curvature of the spine – from this word.

3. Unfortunately, the system of slavery enabled the twisted to work out their hostilities on slaves

4. Even “good” masters could mistreat slaves at times

5. The message of God: submit

III. The reason for God’s requirements

A. The next two verses form a package

1. V. 19 begins “For this *finds* favor” (lit. “this is grace”)

2. V. 20 ends “this *finds* favor with God” (lit. “this is grace with God”)

B. The concept is that obedience to the command gains God’s approval

1. There is “credit” for obedience (20a)

2. But especially, that credit comes when one submits to a froward master (19, 20)

“It is acceptable to God, if we bear wrong with a proper spirit, from whatever quarter it may come. Our proper business in life is, to do the will of God; to evince the right spirit, however others may treat us; and to show, even under excessive wrong, the sustaining power and the excellence of true religion.”³

Conclusion:

This is a hard word, isn’t it?

Proposition: God expects his people to live in submission to authorities, even twisted authorities, for His sake.

³ Barnes, 150.

We see how profound submission is in this passage. We have some caveats in this.

- We do this “in fear” – to God
- We suffer injustice for doing “right”

In other words, if a master requires someone to do evil, submission doesn't require explicit obedience, but patient endurance of crookedness.

Nevertheless, I want to think back to the whole concept Peter is teaching us.

Government can act forwardly – unreasonably.

Husbands can do the same.

Employers as well.

“What is commendable in the lives of believers? It is ‘grace’ (*charis*) if they endure pain while suffering unfairly.”⁴

Spurgeon: “Not always ‘sticking up for his rights,’ as an ungodly man says, but feeling that the greatest right in the world is the right to do without your rights. To suffer wrongfully will often glorify God much better than to stand up for what you have a right to be or to have.”⁵

May God help us as we face challenging times, challenging “bosses,” and other authorities in our lives.

⁴ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 139.

⁵ Spurgeon, *1 Peter*, 1 Pt 2.19.