

OVERVIEW: 1 PETER 2:18 -25

These verses are directed initially to first century slaves (see note below on slaves and masters in the bible), yet Peter's bigger concern is how Christians (again in this context, slaves) respond to unfair treatment from their masters. Peter's interest (as always) is to point his readers to Christ, and in particular, to his example of enduring unjust treatment. Be careful to not too quickly apply this passage to the context of the modern workplace. There might be parallels yet the main point of this passage is to encourage Christians to see how knowing God's love for them in Jesus, enables them to not only endure unfair treatment from those in authority over us, but also to see the eternal value of such endurance.

Here is a simple **summary** of how these verses hold together:

v18 The *exhortation* to slaves to submit themselves to their masters, even when treated unfairly.

v19-20 The *reason* given for this exhortation

v21 The deep *connection* between our unjust suffering, Christ's suffering and our divine calling

v22-23 How Christ's sufferings are a *template* for us to follow

v24 How Christ's death in the *past* gives our life *now* real *purpose*

v25 The *comfort* of knowing who our *ultimate* master is

SLAVES & MASTERS

When we read exhortations for slaves to submit themselves to their masters, we need to note a few important realities.

First, that 1st century slavery is different to most modern day slavery and certainly different to the 19th century slave trade. Yet slaves in the 1st century were, like today, were still regarded as 'second class citizens'. For them to be addressed directly in this letter is counter cultural for the time.

Second, the biblical exhortation for slaves to submit to their masters is *not* an endorsement of the institution of slavery itself (since we know from 1 Cor. 7:21 that if slaves were able to acquire their freedom, they should do so).

Third, we should be cautious to too quickly read direct parallels between slaves and masters in 1 Peter and employees and employers in 21st century Sydney. There will be some general similarities, but there are also significant differences.

How then are we to understand this part of the bible as God's word to *us* today, just as much as it was God's word to the original readers?

At a basic level Peter is instructing Christians how they are to conduct themselves in a social context that is unfair and that they are unable to change for good of everyone. At a deeper level, Peter is teaching us how accepting the good news of Jesus, doesn't necessitate that we immediately must remove ourselves from social settings where we are treated unfairly. In fact it is precisely within these contexts that Christians are able to uniquely bear witness to Jesus.

GODLY LIVING: SERVANTS - 1 PETER 2:18-25

GETTING STARTED

1. What is your default response to being treated unfairly? Aggression, passive aggression, withdrawal, gossip, avoidance etc...?
2. Do you think anything good can come as a result of being treated unfairly by someone else?

INTO THE TEXT

Read 1 Peter 2:18-20

3. The exhortation here is not for slaves to simply 'do what they are told', because in the first century they had little choice. The exhortation is about the manner of their service to their masters. What do you think this distinct kind of submission (v18) would have looked like?
4. The reason given for slaves to submit themselves to their earthly masters is because it is commendable (v19) if they bear up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. What difference does being 'conscious of God' make as to how we conduct ourselves?
5. Sometimes Christians can assume there is virtue in any kind of suffering, we can be quick to find a way to paint ourselves as the victim or the martyr. What kind of suffering is commended in this passage?

Read 1 Peter 2:21-23

6. The word 'example' (v21) literally could be translated as something like a 'stencil', 'tracing' (like a drawing) or 'template'. If you were able to do a 'tracing' of the sufferings in your life and overlay it with a tracing of the sufferings of Christ's life, how would they compare?

7. How would following more closely the 'tracing' of Christ's sufferings (described in v22-23) play itself out in the concrete realities of your life? (Think about your various networks of relationships)

8. How does following the 'tracing' of Christ's suffering liberate us from both the need to avenge those who have wronged us and also the danger of becoming desensitised to injustice?

Read 1 Peter 2:24-25

9. How might the description of who our ultimate master is be a comfort to the Christian who is suffering under a harsh master? How is this a comfort to you?

TAKEAWAY

10. If you have never suffered unjustly *for being a Christian*, what might this suggest about the extent to which you are actually following in Christ's footsteps?

11. Take a moment to share with your group areas in your life you would like to follow Christ's footsteps more closely. After you have shared, commit these things to God in prayer.