

1 Peter 2:18-25

“Following In The Footsteps Of Jesus”

For weeks now we’ve been speaking on the principle and the practicalities of keeping our conduct holy. We’ve been talking about what it means, what it looks like, how it plays out in real time in our lives that we might emulate, that is accurately imitate the conduct and the characteristics of Christ. We’ve spoken what holiness means *to* us, or what it looks like *in* us personally, the way it displays itself as we interact as a body congregationally, last week we were considering practical holiness in the midst of a secular society, and on into today the reference we’ll be making will be regarding employer/employee. However, the principle of holiness is one that plays a part in our lives as believers generally; Peter is simply placing it in these various contexts so that we can understand what’s supposed to be happening in certain case scenarios specifically.

But the bottom line is that as we mentioned last week in every arena of life the scriptures teach that there is to be a certain order of structure and what? *Submission*, that’s the element that we’re working with as it pertains to keeping our conduct honorable among the unbelieving world around us. In a very real respect practical holiness gets placed on display in our lives to those around us by simply keeping our conduct honorable as we deal *with* them, or are ministering *to* them, that we show respect *for* them and the structure of the society in which we live. In many respects we could simply call it common courtesy, showing submission to proper authority whether it’s a legislative authority, employer/employee, or even in the family (that’s next time).

As we approach this portion of scripture in Vs 18 we find “The Exhortation” in Vs 19-20 we have “The Explanation/Application” and in Vs 21-25 we have “The Illustration.”

Vs18

The Exhortation? “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear,” then Peter qualifies that, or clarifies it, “not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.”

Few things we want to consider about this Vs; we want to understand its *interpretation* but we also are then free to make an *application* that pertains to us today. Peter is obviously addressing slavery as it pertained to the Roman world in which they lived. Now you’re going to find that the bible doesn’t really address slavery as such with regard to what’s right, or what’s wrong, you find it addressing slavery as it pertained to various cultures, acknowledging its reality and how it is that people were to treat other people generally. In every culture in which slavery has existed you’ll find that there were some slave owners who were unusually cruel and abusive (something that bible obviously has never condoned or approved of on any level) and others who treated their servants like family.

The NT approach was never to engage in the affairs of society politically. Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't vote, I believe it's our biblical responsibility, I'm not saying that we don't need to make our voice known on policies that affect our society. I'm glad that we have organizations like the A.C.L.U. that are out there on the hill fighting to keep our country standing on some semblance of godliness legislatively. We need god fearing men in office and all of that.

But you find that the NT goes beyond seeking to shape political policy, the approach of the apostles was more to go for the jugular, straight for the heart (literally). You see, fighting for appropriate laws is only tending to symptoms (though we thank God for those who are on the front lines of such things). But all of those things will correct themselves when you get the heart of the man who's placing those laws into our society to turn to Christ. If we want godly legislature than we need godly men in office, we need the men/women who are in office to turn their hearts to Christ. Then all of the issues of ungodly legislature go away.

With regard to our passage the issue of slavery crumbles as people come to Christ; that's the point I'm driving at. Now, having said that I should say that the word, "Servants" here in Vs 17 isn't the common word for slave in the NT, it's not *doulos* (bond slave). It's a word that speaks of a household servant, again it would be more like unto our employer/employee relationships.

Understand that in the Roman world there were some 60 million slaves, and being a slave didn't necessarily indicate an uneducated, unsophisticated individual. There were slaves who were doctors, who were accountants, some were actors and entertainers, they were apart of virtually every profession (outside of Roman royalty [obviously] or having positions and platforms politically things of that nature). So you might be the household doctor, yet you were still under the family's authority.

So Peter says, "Servants be submissive to your masters with all fear" (or with all respect). Part of "honoring all people" (Vs 17) is being submissive to the authority that's over you personally.

Paul, in speaking to bondservants said, "*Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,*" Ephesians 6:5-7

In the book of Colossians we read, *“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.”* Colossians 3:22-25

Of course what Paul was driving at ultimately, and what Peter will get to specifically is that our service to those who are in authority over us amounts to our witness and reflection of Christ to them. The way that we serve, our attitude in submitting is demonstration/illustration of Christ.

Now, we’ve rested for a while on the interpretation, I want to move on into a couple of applications, one of which applies to all of us generally, the other of which speaks to employees specifically.

As for an application to all of us specifically let’s focus for a moment on those 1st 3 words. “Servants be submissive.” How does this apply to everyone? Simple, as followers of Christ *we’re all* called to be servants, it doesn’t matter what your profession is, what trade you happen to earn income from or what your social status may be. In Christ we’re called to be servants. Jesus said, *“You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”* Mark 10:42-45

The way things work in the kingdom are not the way they work in the world. Greatness is not determined by social status, your particular profession, or how much money you make or happen to be worth. Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured in servanthood, submission and walking in humility serving others willingly. Placing others above myself, “Servants be submissive.”

Now, as it relates to the employer/employee relationship, here’s the hard news to swallow. Some of you work for godly employers, that’s a blessing, praise the Lord for it, be submissive to them *in* it, don’t take advantage of them because *of* it. Others however work for employers who are the polar opposite of godly and they treat you harshly, unfairly, but submissive to them as well... “Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.”

The word “harsh” there is the Greek word, “Skolios” from which we get our word, “Scoliosis” it speaks of being bent, or twisted. There are people who are not going to treat you well in the work force. What are you to do? Well, hey if a better opportunity presents itself feel free to take advantage of it, if not, meanwhile you submit to him/her, do what they say. Now if they’re asking you to violate God’s word as we discussed last week we can’t do that, we’re not going to do something illegal for them or help them cover their illegal activity. Other than that we show them Christ by the way we submit to them willfully in humility and work diligently for their profit. Sometimes they’ll grill you or try to work you over and push your buttons simply because they know that you’re a believer. That’s really the context we’re in here, being mistreated because of your position in Christ, what do you do in that situation, you endure patiently.

Vs19-20

You see, Peter makes the application, gives us the explanation. It’s commendable before God when you take mistreatment, or being treated unfairly patiently because you want to show the love and grace of God accurately. “If because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.” You might understand it like this, “Respectful submission to *underserved* suffering finds favor with God because such behavior demonstrates His grace.”¹ “How so?” In that Christ was treated unjustly/unfairly as well but in His grace He didn’t retaliate, even so when you or I don’t retaliate to unjust treatment for the Lord’s sake we demonstrate the grace of God in like manner.

That’s why it’s so important that we underscore those last 2 words in Vs 19, *suffering wrongfully*. He says there’s no credit in suffering *rightfully*, if you do something wrong, or act in blatant disregard for your employer or place of work and because of that you get written up or fired...well, you may suffer for that, but it’s only right. No credit from God because of that... and Really the true test of our witness come to full fruition in a case of injustice toward us doesn’t it? If I’m getting raises, accolades and proper or even above par recognition at my place of work it’s pretty ez to show the character of Christ in that situation.

It’s when I’m overlooked, someone else gets credit for what I’ve done or I get reprimanded for what someone else has done, that’s when it gets difficult.

¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., and Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:848). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Jesus said, “*But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.*” Luke 6:32 It’s no special witness to love the lovely, the lovable, the ones who love you in return, the unbeliever will do that. He said in Matt’s gospel, “*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,*” Matt 5:43-45 That’s precisely what Peter’s point here before us, “*But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.*”

Because our natural reaction is to strike back when we’ve been treated unjustly, “*Hey I don’t have to take this kind of abuse,*” “*Hey, I did nothing to deserve this,*” “*You better look around before you start pointing fingers!*” We want to defend ourselves, it’s only natural, it takes the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in us to entrust it to the Lord, to leave it in the hands of the Lord. To allow Him to be our defense and to be satisfied with, “*“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*” Rom 12:19 Jesus said, “*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*” Matt 5:11-12 Or to understand that another way, “*If because of conscience toward God you endure grief suffering wrongfully, it’s commendable before God.*”

Vs 21-23

The *illustration*: think of how many people Peter could’ve called on throughout the scriptures to illustrate suffering unjustly yet enduring it patiently committing themselves to Him who judges righteously. We could go all the way back to Joseph, how he suffered unjustly at the hands of his brothers, was thrown in a pit, sold into slavery and they told his dad that a wild animal tore him from limb to limb and killed him. Then ascending in Egypt being accused of attempted rape in Potiphar’s house and thrown into prison for 3 yrs; we could think of David and how he subjected himself to Saul’s authority even though he was treated unjustly and Saul sought to hunt him down and kill him relentlessly; yet these guys committed themselves to God and whatever it was that He wanted to do both in them and *through* them in the situations. We could think of Daniel at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar being thrown into the lion’s den, committing himself to God’s care, or Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego being sentenced to the fiery furnace if they didn’t bow to his statue. They answered the king saying, “*If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.*” Dan 3:17-18 Being reviled they didn’t revile in return, when faced with suffering they didn’t threaten, they just committed themselves to Him who judges righteously. They simply entrusted the situation into the hands of the Lord come what may, because of conscience toward God.

Do yourself a favor and underline that last phrase there in Vs 23, "...but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." We're to commit ourselves, and our situation into the hands of God. Because if you desire to live godly in Christ Jesus there will be some sort of suffering some kind of persecution that comes your way.

Vs 21, "For to *this* you were called..." "Uh, for to *what* was I called, to suffering?" Yeah, listen, Jesus said it like this, "...*he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.*" Matt 10:38 and Again, "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*" Matthew 16:24 The cross does not point to a "primrose" path, it involves suffering, and concerning this context it involves suffering for doing good.

Following (again Vs 21) Christ's example. Peter could've called for any # of examples, he went straight for ultimate authority, the example of Christ Himself. This word *example* is a unique word to the NT appearing only here, it speaks of a writing or a drawing that a teacher establishes for the student to copy and learn thereby. When your child is learning to write, the teacher will send home a paper with a particular letter of the alphabet penned or printed perfectly and the child is to take that and copy that so as to learn from that how to write correctly.

Christ has given us an example, He's penned perfectly for you and me the way we're to approach life (and unjust suffering for God's sake specifically). We're to follow His example, the idea being that He left His tracks behind and we're to step exactly as He stepped, it's to be a purposed pursuit of the path He took (taking up our cross and *following* Him). It's true that there's only to be one set of footprints in the sand, but not because we're being carried, but because we're walking just as Christ walked, staying in His stride, following His steps, under the same power and strength of the Spirit to the glory of God. Christ is our pattern for life, we're to look *to* and follow *after* Him and the pattern He established trusting God to strengthen us by His Spirit, through His grace throughout trying times and seasons of suffering unjustly.

If there was ever anyone who suffered unjustly it was Christ. He was completely sinless, He committed *no* sin, there was no deceit in His mouth, He was reviled (meaning railed, or abused) but He didn't revile in return, He suffered but He didn't threaten, He just committed Himself and His situation into the hands of God.

Was that weakness, hardly! It was an incredible display of power, Jesus on the earth was God in the flesh, they were provoking Him, abusing Him, He could've responded in any # of ways justly, destroying them with a word, subjecting them to what they were subjecting Him to. But He didn't why? Because there was something bigger going on than His personal comfort in the moment and He knew it, God was doing something through that circumstance that would bring healing and hope to countless multitudes. Jesus relinquished His rights for the sake of showing love, and mercy, grace and forgiveness to you and me.

What did Jesus demonstrate? That a person can in fact be in the will of God, greatly loved *by* God and still be subjected to unjust suffering, those who purport that God's will holds only health, wealth and prosperity for His people haven't meditated much upon the cross of Jesus Christ

Jesus was wronged by man, but He knew that the Father would do right, maybe you've been wronged by man, trust the Lord to do what's right. There's a much bigger picture than what's happening in my little world, there are much higher things at stake than my rights, Jesus understood that...

Vs24-25

Can God take the things that man means for evil and to destroy and use them for good, to further His purpose and His plan? The cross of Jesus Christ sends forth a resounding "Yes!" If it takes the grace of God in you, suffering unjustly so that others see Christ in you, is their salvation worth your suffering? If after all the abuse your boss or co-workers put you through they see Christ in you and come to the Lord because of what God has shown them through you, what kind of price tag are you willing to place on snatching someone from the pit of hell and seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus?

Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the tree, the word "tree" there literally rendered is the word "wood" it's a reference to the wood of the cross; that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness. Others may do the wrong thing; you and I are to do the right thing, the righteous thing. We're no longer bound by sin, the debt has been paid, once a debt has been paid off you're no longer bound to it. Jesus paid our sin debt, we're no longer bound to it, we're free to lead lives of righteousness, to follow in His footsteps.

“—by whose stripes we were healed.” Is this a reference to physical healing? I do believe that when it serves God’s purpose and God’s plan that physical healing is available through the person of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. However here, with in this context the reference being in the past tense, “...you *were* healed” speaks of your salvation that was secured at the cross. Jesus was wounded that we might be made whole, He died that we might be given the precious gift of everlasting life, He bore our sin that we might receive His righteousness, He took our guilt that we might be made innocent before God in Him.

Vs 25

It’s true, unbelievers are watching you, but Christ is watching *over* you, He is the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul. We were like sheep going astray, lost and wandering, in danger of destruction, but Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. Isa 53:5-6, “... *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*” Now having returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our soul He leads us, tends to and takes care of us, commit yourself to His care. “*Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.*” Ps 95:6-7

Prayer Points:

Father give us the strength to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, that we would learn submission in such a manner that exemplifies and magnifies Christ. That people would see Him in us and be drawn to Him through us. How our flesh resist suffering, retaliates at being treated unfairly, yet we ask for the supernatural strength of Your Holy Spirit and the tenderness of Your mercy to work in us Your will, Your way when placed in such a position. Thank You Jesus for Your example, and for setting our perspective in its proper order concerning such things, may we heed Your word.

We spoke a moment ago about *returning* to the Shepherd, the Overseer of our soul. Perhaps you’ve not *turned* to Him in the 1st place much less the need to *return*. But Jesus has in Himself bore your sins upon the cross, that you might be set free from sin, forgiven *of* your sin and made whole in Him. Not given a primrose, problem free path, but everlasting life and the forgiveness of sin. So if God is dealing *with* you, calling out *to* you, don’t fight *against* Him, surrender *to* Him.