

## 1 Peter 2:18-20

1Pe 2:18 (NKJV) **Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.** <sup>19</sup> **For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.** <sup>20</sup> **For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.**

As we come to this passage on the relationship of “servants” to masters, it is important to understand that Paul was addressing individuals who were household servants that in fact could be slaves. The Greek word for “servants” is “oiketes” and simply means household servants, those that were involved in domestic duties. The root word is “oikos” which means “house”, or a place of one’s residence. However, because of the context, the NIV, HCSB, NLT, and NRSV all use the word “slave” in their translations. Some of the translations identify them as “household slaves”. However, there is nothing in this word that has to mean that they were actually slaves. They may have been slaves or they may not have been slaves, but the use of the word “oiketes” does not necessarily indicate that Paul’s audience was in fact slaves. However, based on the context, it appears that most likely many were actual slaves.

Obviously, there were many slaves in the Roman empire. It has been estimated that up to nearly 40% of the Roman Empire was composed of slaves at the time that [1 Peter](#) was written. That should be easy to understand based on Rome’s imperial conquests throughout the world, as well as their practice of relocating many of the people that had been conquered. For instance, the book of Philemon was addressed to a “Christian” slave owner who was having difficulty with a runaway slave named Onesimus that Paul later led to Christ. It is very interesting that there is nowhere in that small letter where Paul addresses the social injustice of slavery. The primary concern of Paul was the brotherly love and forgiveness that Philemon should show to Onesimus after he became a Christian.

One of the reasons that many actually take the passage to be talking about slaves, and this theological position appears very legitimate, is because of v20 that talks about the servants being “beaten for your faults”. The Greek word for “beaten” is “kolaphizō” and comes from a root word that literally means to be hit in the face with someone’s clenched fist.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the [1 Peter 2](#) passage, the meaning can be either to be beaten and/or to be mistreated. This particular word for “beaten” is only used five (5) times in the New Testament, and two of those times it is referring to Jesus being beaten by the soldiers at his trial. For instance, [Matthew 26:67](#) says,

Mt 26:67 (NKJV) **Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands,**

Then, in [1 Corinthians 4:11](#) it seems to refer specifically to the apostles being physically beaten as well.

1Co 4:11 (NKJV) **To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.**

[2 Corinthians 12:7](#) uses the same word, however, but it carries the idea of being mistreated in some way other than being beaten that is not specifically identified.

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<sup>1</sup> Zodhiates, 874.

2Co 12:7 (NKJV) **And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.**

So, it appears in this context, and legitimately so, that many of those to whom Paul was writing in [1 Peter](#) were in fact household slaves who were believers. There was no place for them to go and no laws to protect them from the slaveowners physical abuse, and so it was important for their Christian witness that they develop a mindset and perspective that their suffering was in fact an opportunity for them to follow the model of Christ. No one wants to suffer and no one is predisposed and inclined to suffering unjustly, so a passage like this almost seems to fly in the face of the American mindset. However, notice how Paul addresses this whole issue in v20 and v21,

1Pe 2:20 (NKJV) **For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, *this is* commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:**

Take what “**patiently**”? “**Being beaten for your faults**”. Then Paul specifically says “**For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps...**” Paul actually says that this was an actual calling on their life – “**for to this you were called**” where the “**this**” is referring specifically to suffering for doing what is right and commendable before God. The idea of being unjustly mistreated is almost repulsive to the American mindset because we are very protected by laws that prevent that kind of mistreatment. Those laws are good, and there is nothing wrong with a Christian using those laws to protect themselves from unjust mistreatment. The downside, however, is that the tendency is to see anything unpleasant that happens to a believer as being bad – and that is not necessarily the case. More often than not, God intends to use seemingly unpleasant circumstances as one of His primary tools for developing the character of Christ within the believer.

The problem that so often exists for us is the idea and mentality that “*you cannot do that to me, you cannot take advantage of me, you cannot treat me that way, I will sue you, etc.*” However, as we will clearly see in v23-25, often times God has a much higher purpose for our life than just living the good life or always having everything work out the way we want it to work out. The story of Joseph is a great example of this in Genesis. Do you remember what Joseph said to his brothers in Genesis? Listen to these verses in [Genesis 45:5](#) and [Genesis 50:20-21](#),

Ge 45:5 (NKJV) **But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.**

Ge 50:20 (NKJV) **But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. <sup>21</sup> Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**

Talking about the sovereignty of God, well this is it! The sin of Joseph’s brothers was as bad of a sin as they could have committed, but it became their salvation. The point is that in His sovereignty that God is able to use whatever happens to us in our life for His glory. How a believer may be treated or how they may be impacted by someone else in their life can greatly impact the believer’s life, but it cannot

frustrate or obstruct the purposes of God for that individual. Whenever a believer's life is fully committed to Christ, even though they may be greatly challenged, they have nothing of which to be afraid or frightened simply because God is in control of all circumstances that they are in or will face.

I am so very grateful that neither Brenda nor myself were seriously injured in the accident that we were involved in recently that was not our fault. We just seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. As we always do, we had actually prayed before we left that God would protect us and keep us safe and that we would be protected from those who were careless drivers. As soon as the car broadsided our truck, I immediately asked my wife if she was okay, and then I said this to her – *“Hallelujah, God is sovereign!”* As I look back on that very simple statement, it is a great encouragement to me as to where God has brought me in my life. Rather than being bitter, mad, angry, or even upset, to this very moment I have not had any of those reactions. To the contrary, Brenda and I are grateful for God's sovereign protection of our life. In the big picture, God is sovereign and it is important that I allow that spiritual perspective to govern and control my reactions and responses to what happened. I have no clue as to what could have happened to us somewhere along the trip that we could never have foreseen. Maybe one of my ball joints would have come off and we would have been involved in a major accident on the Interstate. Maybe some 18 wheeler would have collided with us and both of us would have been killed. I am so grateful that God protected us from what we could not have seen or known. I want to side with Joseph that **“God meant it for good”**. We had a great opportunity to witness to the driver of the wrecker about Christ and about his commitment to Christ. I will probably never see that young man again, but it might be that our testimony and encouragement to him may be a major turning point in his life – something that he simply could not get out of his mind, something that just “stuck” and began to make a difference in his life.

So, in beginning this passage on being submissive to those whom God has sovereignly placed in our life in some area, it is important to immediately make a cultural transition simply because the culture in which we live does not have many **“servants”** and certainly no slaves. We may have people that are hired and paid to be servants, but that is not necessarily very common place for the average family. I think of people who become caregivers for someone who is elderly and they actually live in their home and take care of the individual. When my grandmother was alive, she had had a stroke and was paralyzed on her right side and could no longer talk and was completely bedridden. So, the family hired a full-time lady to come and live with us and take care of my grandmother for the last seven years of her life.

I am saying all of this because in handling this passage, it is important not to press the meaning into that of slave / slaveowner. From our modern and cultural perspective, these principles would fall under the category of employee / employer, and specifically unjust employers who have a tendency to mistreat and take advantage of their employees. I am fully convinced that this is much more normative for the Christian life than not. I am convinced that God sovereignly allows difficult people into our life to mold us into the character of Christ, and when we find ourselves squirming and fleeing from an often difficult circumstance, it is most likely our simply forfeiting, giving up, and sacrificing a much greater purpose that God has for our life. We must remember that God's ways are not our ways, and that God's purposes are much higher than our personal little fetishes about what we may want for our life. In reality, because we are so blessed and live such an abundant lifestyle compared to most people throughout the world, we have also become some of the most selfish and self-consuming people in the world. The American

culture has been excellent at producing whining, self-absorbed, and self-gratifying citizens. It is all about the individual. However, that is the very opposite of the New Testament picture of the Christian life. The New Testament Christian is to be Christ-centered, not self-centered. The New Testament Christian is to give thanks in the midst of all things, not complaining and whining and finding fault about every little thing that does not go their way. [Ephesians 5:20](#) clarifies what God is after in our lives,

**Eph 5:20 (NKJV) giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

[1 Thessalonians 5:18](#) amplifies the same,

**1Th 5:18 (NKJV) in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

The goal for the New Testament Christian is to give their life away, both to Christ and to others, rather than being self-absorbed and self-indulgent. The idea of someone actually giving their life away seems almost non-existent in many Christian venues.

So, it should be obvious that in the same way that not every servant then had a good master, neither does everyone today have a good employer. Obviously, in today's culture it is against the law for employers to strike their employees. If an employer did that, they could be sued and put in jail for that kind of treatment of their employees. However, none of this means that believers will not have very demanding and difficult employers that often times bring great measures of grief and emotional and/or mental discomfort. After having said all of that, the question will naturally arise as to the kind of attitude that Christians should have towards those employers who are harsh to them. How much should the believer endure? Given the laws that protect the believer, how much is enough? Where does the believer draw the line?

However, what needs to be understood is that this passage is simply an introduction into a description of what Jesus endured unjustly (v21-25). We must understand that Christ is the Christian's model for behavior under very adverse and unjust circumstances. The teaching on how Christ responded in those verses is probably the main and controlling passage of the entire letter of [1 Peter](#). Everything in life needs to revolve around the Person of Christ, how He lived, and then how we imitate Christ so that He can reproduce His life in our life. The goal is to always emulate Christ. So, just to keep all of this in perspective, there were times when people wanted to take advantage of Christ, but He did not allow that to happen. For instance, [Luke 4:28-30](#) says,

**Lk 4:28 (NKJV) So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,<sup>29</sup> and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.<sup>30</sup> Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.**

The goal is not to just allow people to take advantage of us – not at all. That is not the goal of this passage. The goal is to make sure that we are not personally running from something that God has sovereignly allowed in our life to build our character and to glorify Him. If that were not the case, then in reality there would be no need for v21-25. There simply are some things that God is pleased with, and He says in v20 (b),

**<sup>20</sup> ...But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.**

The Greek word for “**suffer**” is “*páschō*”, and in this particular context it means to be subjected to evil and to suffer because of that evil.<sup>2</sup> This particular Greek word is used 40 times in the New Testament, and of those 40 times, 12 of them occur in [1 Peter](#). It is only used 13 times in all four gospels, and is used in [1 Peter](#) more than any other book. So, without being naïve, if this word is used more in [1 Peter](#) than any other book of the New Testament, as well as twice as much as in any other book (Luke – 6 times), we should at least glean that this idea of suffering is a major element with which Peter is dealing. So, if we are going to properly interpret this passage, then we must have a clear understanding of what it actually means to suffer “biblically”. There does not appear to be any spiritual value in just suffering meaninglessly, in just allowing people to take advantage of us. So, we will look at those issues in the next study, as well as define what it means to “**take it patiently**” – which is the verb “*hupomeno*” which means “**to endure**”.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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<sup>2</sup> Zodhiates, 1127.