

## 1 Peter 2:18-21

Note: Greek σκολιους = crooked; English - *scoliosis*

Three Observations:

- 1) exhortation - *submit yourselves*
- 2) motivation – *out of reverent fear of God / doing good to gain God's commendation, as our ultimate Master.*

**NOTE: v. 16** δουλος = bond-slaves of God; **v. 18** οικεται = household servants of human masters; wordplay underscoring their submission to God as the **M**aster is paramount to their submission to human **m**asters. Although, socially, they slaves in this world, as God's holy priests, spiritually, they are free people in Christ.

- 3) foundation – *Christ's example of suffering injustice*

Peter speaks here only to those who are being mistreated.

This, and passages like it in Paul's letters, are troubling, not so much by what they say, but by what they don't say.

Why doesn't Peter and Paul emphatically denounce slavery as an insidious evil?

Six Biblical Truths:

- 1) Every human being equally bears the image of God (**Genesis 1:26-28**).
- 2) Every human being matters deeply to God and God is glorified in their salvation (**2 Peter 3:9; Luke 15**).
- 3) We are to love all our neighbors as ourselves, even our enemies (**Mark 12:31; Matthew 5:44**).
- 4) We are to treat every person as we would have them treat us (**Matthew 7:12**).
- 5) We are to be devoted to one another, prefer and honor one another above ourselves (**NT "one anothers"**).
- 6) We are to pay a worker a fair wage (**James 5:4**).

Although Paul encouraged believers to remain in their present station in life when they come to faith in Christ, he tells slaves, to seek their freedom, if they can (**1 Corinthians 7:21**).

**1 Timothy 1:9-10** Paul calls *slave traders*, which referred to those who captured people to sell them as property, *ungodly, sinful, unholy and profane*.

Evangelical Christians took the lead in abolishing slavery in the West. William Wilberforce argued his case from the precepts and principles of the Bible.

Away with any notion that God condones slavery. God tolerated slavery just as he tolerated polygamy. In doing so, as with other forms of evil, he shows the unsurpassable greatness of his power and glory by using evil to destroy evil and bring good out of evil.

Why didn't Peter and Paul simply call for the abolishment of slavery?

The Bible reveals universal principles that apply to all of life. The Bible never deals with social issues abstractly, but always from the standpoint of our relationship with God.

### Slavery in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Rome

There were elements of slavery in 1<sup>st</sup> century Rome that were as detestably inhumane as slavery in American history.

One third of the Roman Empire (approx..60 million people) were slaves in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

You couldn't tell a slave from a freeman walking down the street. Slavery in Rome was not a racial thing. Masters and slaves were often times the same race.

Slavery was inextricably woven into the very fabric of Rome's culture and commerce. Debts were covered through slavery.

Most slavery was neither life-long nor generational. You could win your freedom in several ways, and most did by age 30.

Many slaves were provided education, training, and resources by their masters to be accountants, chefs, potters, bakers, miners, business agents, teachers, physicians, municipal services, tailors, stewards of supplies.

Often, after a slave won his/her freedom, the cliental and business relationships they developed while a slave, remained, as they started their own businesses, including with their former master!

People even sold themselves into slavery, because it was better than being homeless and starving.

Some sold themselves into slavery to avoid paying taxes. For many, slavery was a better way of life.

In Jewish homes, household servants had more rights than the hired help.

The Jewish *adonai* (master) was obligated under God's law to treat his/her servants with great care and respect, just as God, whose name is *Adonai* (Lord/Master), treats them!

Neither Peter nor Paul ever try to support or buttress the institution of slavery. Instead, they cast vision for living within this social structure as followers of Christ, without ever giving a theological justification for the system itself, as they do for both government and marriage.

They motivated Christian servants to be counter cultural, because of their relationship with Christ.

For Peter or Paul to simplistically insist that masters suddenly free all their slaves and all slaves leave their masters, people would have been hurt. It would have caused a complete collapse of society.

Nowhere do we find Jesus bringing about social change through social engineering or political action. Otherwise, the Gospel and the mission of the Church would have been lost in the politics of secular society.

Jesus preached the Gospel and brought God's rule to people's hearts in order to change them, and even society, from the inside-out.

Like Jesus, the apostles planted the seeds that would eventually obliterate slavery.

One problem facing the early church was Christians were seen as a threat, enemies of the empire.

One tension that emerged in the early church was slaves were coming to Christ, growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and becoming elders. At church, they were leaders. At home, they were servants.

**Ephesians** - Submission to authority in marriage, family, and the marketplace is part of being Spirit-filled. Mutual submission is to be shown out of reverence for Christ (**5:18ff**) as a humble, gentle, loving, patient, forbearing response to gospel grace in our own lives (**4:1ff**). In other words, we are to have the mind of Christ (**Philippians 1:27-2:5**).

Both Peter and Paul address servants directly, as well as their unjust treatment. That was outrageously counter-cultural. They address slaves as fully human, who, in Christ, can think and choose for themselves to have a submissive spirit and bear up under unjust treatment.

This is the subversive genius of a gospel-centered, Christ-centered life. It brings about radical change in a non-radicalized, non-violent ways.

### Application of This Ancient Text to Our Modern World

If there is illegal or criminal activity happening in your workplace, you would be completely within the spirit of Peter's and Paul's instruction to report that to the authorities. That would be the submissive thing to do.

In the business world, Christian employees should be known for their industriousness more than their assertiveness.

God makes the greatest impact less through assertion of self than through denial of self.

Peter says that by *bearing up under the pain of unjust suffering because you are conscious of God*, God will see this as gracious and commendable--you gain God's reward, even if you don't gain your boss' approval.

That's the power of the gospel to transform lives and, eventually, society at large. It's all about our foundation—the example of Jesus' submissive spirit in suffering injustice for us.

### Communion

Communion is central of our faith. In the elements, we not only remember how Christ's sacrifice saved us from death, but how his death teaches us to live.

**1 Peter 2:20-25**

**Matthew 26:26-28**

The Bread: *"Take, eat; this is my body."*

The Cup: *Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

