

# 1 Peter 2:18-25

## I. Slaves, submit to masters with reverence (18)

This passage is part of what is often called a “house code,” where the author gives separate instructions to the different members of a typical household. Other examples of this kind of house code are found in Eph. 6:5-9 and Col. 3:22-25.

### A. Slaves submit to masters with all reverence. (18a)

This is the same word “submit” that Peter used for all people submitting to rightful authorities (2:13), for wives submitting to husbands (3:1), and younger men submitting to elders (5:5). This is a participle with imperative force, see BDF § 268 (2). And it means to obey in a subordinate relationship.

And they were commanded to submit with reverent fear (see 1:17, 3:2, 14, 16, Eph. 6:5). This has a connotation of respect and reverence, but it also includes fear, because the masters had the authority to harm them. And in the context of this passage, this attitude of reverent fear is not primarily toward their masters. It is primarily toward God, Who is the ultimate master of all.

This command was intended for household slaves in those particular churches. But this attitude and its accompanying reasons and required attitude, can also apply to other authority relationships. And we need to keep in mind that there are limits to submission as seen in other Scriptures and in the nature and legitimacy of the authority. We can give no human or human institution unquestioned ultimate submission, because that belongs only to God.

### B. Specifically, to whom to submit (18b-c)

#### 1. Neg: Not only to the good and kind masters (18b)

“good” is the generic word for good. This implies the good characteristics the slaves would wish their master to have.

“kind” has the connotation of tolerant and forbearing - not harshly punishing any deviation from custom. This kind of master would allow the slave to have some leeway and a measure of freedom in their life and activities.

#### 2. Pos: But also, to the harsh ones (18c)

“harsh” has the connotation of being morally twisted. We would describe these masters as crooked, unscrupulous, or unjust.

In that day, the life and treatment of the slaves depended entirely on the character and mood of their master. And slaves were typically expected to share the same culture and religion as their masters. So, a Christian slave of a non-Christian master was sometimes seen as a threat and persecuted as disloyal to the family. So, Peter clarified that they were to submit to their masters, even when they were harsh and unjust.

In that day, the slaves’ options were limited. If they would have fought back or run away, they would have risked being killed, because slave rebellion carried the death penalty in the Roman empire. And that is why Peter did not counsel that kind of response. Rather, he gave a better response, based on the reality of the Gospel and the hope that Christians have as elect strangers.

## II. Two Reasons: (19-25)

The rest of the passage is two general reasons why the slaves should submit to their masters.

### A. First Reason: This is right and pleasing to God (19-20)

#### 1. It is good to bear under unjust suffering. (19)

##### a. For this is praiseworthy (19a)

This means that it is pleasing to God, it brings God’s favor. And this strongly implies that God will reward them for it. This proposition does not explicitly mention God. But this is clearly meant, as evidenced by the mention of the “consciousness of God” in 19b and the specific mention of being “praiseworthy before God” in the summary statement of 20h.

This refers to whatever brings someone God’s favor and goodwill, or wins a favorable response from God, as elaborated in v. 20. Of course, in the larger New Testament, most of God’s favor and grace is completely undeserved and not conditioned at all on our works. But there is also some teaching in the New Testament that tells us how to live in a way that places us in the condition where God’s tangible favor is more readily experienced.

b. The condition for it to be praiseworthy (19b-d)

This is the explanation and elaboration of the previous statement, describing what kind of behavior is praiseworthy and pleasing to God.

1) If someone responds in this way (19b-c)

a) The reason: because of consciousness of God (19b)

That is, because they are mindful of God. They are aware of God, and keep God's character and promised vindication in mind as the reason for their bearing up under suffering.

b) Someone bears suffering (19c)

If the person endures, they bear up under this pain and affliction. This assumes that they bear it in a Christian manner – they bear it rightly, graciously, and humbly, as Peter will explain in v. 20 and illustrate with Christ's example in 21-25.

2) In the situation where they are suffering unjustly/undeservedly (19d)

This praiseworthiness only applies to situations where they are suffering unjustly, as Peter will explain in v. 20. In this situation, it might be expected that the person would complain and fight back, because the suffering is unjust. But for Peter, it is praiseworthy because they don't respond as expected.

2. Reason: Some kinds of suffering are praiseworthy, some are not (20)

This verse is an elaboration and explanation of the previous verse. It uses a negative/positive contrast to describe some suffering that is praiseworthy by contrasting it with some suffering that is not.

a. Negatively- some are not (20a-d)

This uses a rhetorical question to describe what kind of suffering is *not* praise worthy, in order to highlight that which is praiseworthy by contrast.

1) What credit is it? (20a)

This is a rhetorical question. Peter is stating that there is no credit, there is no honor in what he is about to describe. This is what is *not* meritorious in any way. The word "credit" has the connotation of good reputation and high status. It is the legitimate honor which is deserved based on some good accomplishment.

This negative statement of what is of no credit is setting up for a positive statement reinforcing the previous proposition, which described what is pleasing to God, and therefore is a credit and honor to the person who does it.

2) Condition: If you bear under suffering which you deserve (20b-d)

This is a hypothetical with a number of related conditions, used to state what is not praiseworthy, what is of no credit.

a) Situation: If you suffer for sin (20b-c)

(1) If you sin (20b)

Peter used the general word for sin. This means any activity that is against God's will or which fails to live up to God's will and character. This word covers all possibilities of cause for deserved suffering.

(2) And you are beaten as a result (20c)

This is deserved suffering. This type of suffering, illustrated by the specific experience of physical beating, is deserved because of the person's sin.

b) Response: And you bear up under it (20d)

This is a different word than "bear" used in 19c. It has the connotation of endurance, to stand firm and put up with it in the midst of affliction and persecution.

To endure under deserved suffering is nothing unusual, nothing praiseworthy. Usually there is no choice but to endure in this kind of affliction. But there is no credit in this. The person is only getting what they deserved.

b. Positively- some are praiseworthy (20e-h)

This is the positive side of the contrast, describing what kind of suffering *is* praiseworthy.

1) Condition: If you bear up under unjust/undeserved suffering (20e-g)

a) Situation: If you do good and suffer anyway (20e-f)

(1) Even if you do good (20e)

“doing good” is also a generic word covering all types of appropriate and positive behavior. This is an adversative clause, showing that what happens is against the expected response for doing good. “You still suffer even though you did not deserve it, even though you behaved well.”

(2) And still suffer (20f)

This is Peter’s standard word for suffering, which he also used in 19d.

b) Response: And bear you sufferings patiently (20g)

“bear” is the same word Peter used in 20d. But because the suffering is undeserved in this case, it is implied that this takes more patience and endurance, enduring not only the punishment and suffering, but also the injustice.

2) This is praiseworthy before God (20h)

This phrase summarizes all of v. 20 and ties it to v. 19. All of v. 20, by the negative/positive contrast has elaborated and illustrated the kind of response that deserves honor and favor.

And here, Peter explicitly says that this favor is before, or in the sight/opinion of God. This clearly says what was only implied in 19a.

So, for Peter, there are three main factors in suffering rightly: 1) that you are mindful of God, 2) That you suffer well, not returning in kind, and 3) that you suffer innocently – your suffering is not deserved by your own conduct. Later in chapter 4 (vv. 15-16) Peter will tell his readers, “If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler, but if you suffer because you are a Christian, you should not be ashamed.” So, the first reason Peter gave for his readers to submit to unjust suffering is that it is pleasing to God when we suffer in the right way, with the implication that God will eventually reward.

B. Second Reason: It is part of God’s plan (21-25)

1. We are called to follow Jesus’ example (21)

a. You were called to this (21a)

“this” refers to bearing up well under unjust suffering. The context makes this clear.

“called” is the standard New Testament word for being chosen for a special benefit, experience, responsibility, and/or task. It also implies a new kind of relationship with the One doing the calling (God). For Peter’s readers, this is a reminder that their suffering is not just the random accident of fate or chance in an impersonal universe. Rather, it is the carefully chosen providence of the One they trust as their Heavenly Father. And it is not just one slave being singled out for the painful experience of unjust suffering. All true believers in Christ are called to this experience to at least some extent.

Sometimes suffering is part of God’s plan for each of us. We were called to this.

b. Reason: Jesus gave us an example (21b-d)

1) Jesus suffered leaving us an example (21b-c)

a) Because also Christ suffered on our behalf (21b)

Peter included the word “also” to remind his readers that they were not alone in their suffering. Jesus Himself also suffered, and therefore knew what they were going through. But this also reminded them that their suffering was small in comparison with the suffering that Jesus endured on their behalf.

“suffered” is the same word used in 19d and 20f.

And Christ’s suffering was on their behalf. They were the recipients of the benefits brought about by the suffering of Jesus. This fact encouraged them that they were elect, with an eternal destiny purchased by Christ. But it also prepared for the following statements, encouraging them with the benefits they had received in order to strengthen them to suffer for the benefit of others.

b) **Result: Leaving us an example (21c)**

There are many times in the New Testament where Jesus is said to be an example for His followers (e.g. Jn. 13:13-17, Mk. 10:42-45). There are an abundance of ways that we cannot follow His example, because His identity and mission are unique. And He is much more to us than just an example for us to follow. But He is not less than an example. There are many ways He demonstrated how we are to live and expects us to follow His example.

Peter highlighted one particular way that Christ modeled behavior to his readers, which was most applicable to their current experience suffering as slaves under unjust masters.

2) **Purpose: that we would follow in His footsteps (21d)**

This is obviously the purpose statement elaborating on why Jesus left us an example. The metaphor to follow in His footsteps means to broadly follow in the pattern He left, even if the particulars are not exactly the same. Peter highlighted the model of Jesus' attitude, which led to His particular actions and responses. Peter's readers are to actually use Jesus' behavior as a model which they emulate in their own lives. They are to take on the attitude and mindset of Jesus in the midst of suffering, and from that attitude, respond in the way most appropriate to their own circumstances.

2. **Specifically- the example he left for us to follow (22-25)**

Peter connected the reader with the example of Christ, and he connected Christ with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. These verses contain two quotes and many allusions from Isaiah chapter 53.

a. **He suffered innocently (22-23)**

1) **He didn't sin (22)**

This verse is a quote from Isa. 53:9

a) **He didn't commit sin (22a)**

Jesus was completely sinless throughout His life. But here Peter emphasized that during his arrest, trial, suffering and death, He committed no sin in responding to the injustice committed against Him. He was innocent of the false charges against Him, and He responded to His punishment in an innocent manner.

b) **And deceit was not found in His mouth (22b)**

He never spoke in a deceiving or treacherous manner. But Peter's emphasis is that He did not resort to verbal trickery or flattery to get out of suffering. The Gospels note that Jesus was mostly silent at His own trial. This was noted by Pilate, who was used to prisoners either pleading, threatening, or saying anything to try to get out of their punishment.

2) **He bore suffering in a godly way (23)**

a) **Negatively- what He did not do (23a-d)**

This verse alludes to Isa. 53:7

(1) **He did not abuse his abusers (23a-b)**

cf. 3:9

(a) **Even though He was insulted (23a)**

Jesus was insulted at His trial. He was abused and mocked by the soldiers in preparation for His execution. And He was mocked and insulted by the people while He was hanging on the cross.

(b) **He did not insult back (23b)**

"insult back" is related to the word "insult" in the previous proposition. Jesus did not respond in kind when He was mocked and abused. Rather, as the Gospels tell us, He prayed for those who were mocking and crucifying Him

(2) **He did not threaten when suffering (23c-d)**

(a) **Even though He suffered (23c)**

"suffered" is the same word used in 19d, 20f, and 21b. Christ suffered beating, mocking, and crucifixion. Peter's point here is to emphasize Christ's response to His experience of suffering, as stated in the next proposition.

(b) **He did not threaten (23d)**

Christ did not speak of His authority to judge those harming Him, even though He truly had that authority. He never threatened them with retribution. Rather, He prayed for them. He did not respond with hate and reviling to those who hated and reviled Him. Rather, He responded with love and pity. All of Christ's responses were so far from what was typical and expected of a prisoner in His situation, that they were noticed and remarked by everyone involved.

b) Positively – But He entrusted Himself to the One Who judges righteously (23e)

All of the previous mention of what Christ did *not* do was leading to this emphasis on what Christ *did* do. Christ's attitude and actions demonstrated that He was fully mindful of God and His plan throughout all of His experience of suffering. He entrusted Himself to God, knowing that God would make it right. He modeled faith and looking forward to future reward, knowing that His vindication would happen, because God is faithful and always judges rightly. Jesus knew that His case would be heard by a higher court and that God's justice is never corrupted or mistaken. So, Christ suffered innocently and rightly because He knew that God would make it right in the end.

And this is the overall attitude that Peter was teaching his readers. They could follow Christ's example of suffering innocently, because they were chosen, and therefore, they could temporarily live as strangers, even suffering, because they knew their destiny.

b. He suffered redemptively (24-25)

1) He suffered for our sins so we would be set free from them (24a-c)

a) He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross (24a)

This is a quote from Isa. 53:11, and also echoes Isa. 53:4 and 53:6.

By the word order, Peter puts emphasis on the phrase "our sins." Our sins were the reason for Christ's death, and the purpose and result of His death is to deal with our sins and their effects, including our guilt and lostness. There is also an echo of the emphasis from Isaiah 53:4-6 which alternates between the first person (we, our, us) and the third person (he, him, his). This constant back and forth between "he" and "us" in Isaiah drew attention to the substitutionary nature of the servant's work. This is reflected in how Jesus took our sins and their penalty on Himself, and we received the benefits of His obedience and righteousness. And there is also emphasis on Christ as the One who bore our sins. There is an emphatic pronoun, "He *Himself*" is the One who removed our sins.

The term "bore" is often used as a technical term for offering sacrifice, so this phrase may have connotations of the sacrificial system. But in this context, the object is not some sort of sacrificial offering, but rather our sins. It also could mean "endure" which would make sense in this context, and serve as encouragement to slaves having to endure the sins of their unjust masters. However, in this passage, that probably is a secondary connotation that was included in the primary meaning of this word. The primary meaning of this word here is to take away our sins, thereby removing (carrying away) the punishment for our sins. On the cross, Jesus took away our punishment by His bodily death.

The word translated "cross" could be translated "tree." It refers to an object made of wood. But in this context, it obviously refers to the wooden structure used for crucifixion, i.e. the cross (see Deut. 21:22).

b) The purpose: (24b-c)

The following statements might possibly refer to the result of Him bearing our sins. But they are almost certainly the purpose for Him bearing them. And because He is an effective savior, He attained the results which He purposed to do. And this is more than just freedom from eternal punishment. It impacts our daily lifestyle as well, which is Peter's emphasis.

(1) dying to sins (24b)

This phrase is a subordinate, supporting thought, modifying the next statement. But that does not mean it is unimportant or secondary. It means that this phrase gets its meaning in connection with the next statement about living for righteousness. The connection is somewhat ambiguous. It could possibly be the means by which we can live for righteousness. "we live, by dying to sin." And that is true whether or not that is what Peter intended here. One of the ways we live for righteousness is by dying to sin. However, it is more likely that this is a cause/effect relationship – "because we died to sin, we can live to righteousness. This is very similar to Paul's argument in Rom. 6:2-11.

Being dead with regard to sins means being unable to respond or react to any sinful desire or impulse. "to sin" shows the relationship that was terminated by our death in Christ. We have been set free, so that we can and should not respond as slaves to sin in the way that we used to. We died to sin, and so, our time of slavery is finished.

But this is in the already/not yet tension. We are done with sin because we have died, and yet we still need to be vigilant to break with sins on an ongoing basis.

(2) So that we might live for righteousness (24c)

The purpose for Christ bearing our sins on the cross is so that we would live righteously. True Christian conversion results in a change of lifestyle - not perfection, but a growing pattern of righteous behavior in our lives. We have died to sins, so that now, we are not just to live neutrally, or float in some moral grey area. Rather, we now can and should respond as willing servants of righteousness in the way that is pleasing to God, that demonstrates His greatness to a watching world, and that brings us eternal blessedness. This is similar to Paul's argument in Rom. 6:15-23.

"righteousness" is all behavior that is upright, and most appropriate for each situation. It is the behavior that God requires – the behavior that most closely conforms to God's character and revealed will.

Our living for righteousness is the natural outgrowth of us having been given new birth into a living hope (1:3). And these two propositions echo Peter's theme statement of this section of the letter in 2:11-12, that we should abstain from sinful desires, but rather live such good lives that people see our good deeds and glorify God.

2) You have been healed/converted (24d-25)

a) You have been healed by His wounds (24d)

This is a quote from Isa. 53:5

In the language Peter used to write this, "by his wounds" comes before "you are healed" in order to emphasize the means by which we are healed more than the healing itself. And the word "of Him," which is translated as "His" in "**His** wounds" is the first word in the sentence. This means that Christ is the main focus in this sentence, followed by the emphasis on His wounds, and then the fact that we are healed. Our healing is only because of Him, and what He has done on our behalf. Because He was wounded, you were healed. And we only receive healing, not by looking for healing, but by looking to Him.

There is some debate about the meaning of "healed." Does it refer to physical healing, or does it primarily refer metaphorically to spiritual, or to some kind of psychological wellness? In Isaiah, all the times he used the word "heal" it primarily refers to forgiveness and restoration from sin, and only secondarily (if at all) to physical healing. In this context in First Peter, it most naturally fits as figurative healing from sin and its punishment. The next verse explains this healing by talking about conversion. So, this primarily is referring to the spiritual healing of having our sins forgiven and our relationship with our creator restored. However, in Matt. 8:17, Matthew uses Isa. 53 to refer to physical healing. So, physical healing may be a secondary, additional reference, which is dependent on the healing of conversion. In other words, by being healed from sin, sometimes we may also be healed from the physical consequences of sin. Physical healing is a blessing of the Kingdom, which is already and not yet. Therefore, our physical, psychological, and social healing is in the already/not yet tension. We will be fully healed then, and we may be at least partially healed now. Full healing – physical, spiritual, emotional, social, and psychological – is guaranteed. Only the timing is uncertain.

b) The explanation of what it means to be healed (25)

Peter explained this healing by making a contrast between his readers' former lives and their current situation. "you were this..., but now you are that..."

(1) For you were like sheep going astray (25a)

This alludes to Isa. 53:6. In the Isaiah passage the emphasis is that all have gone astray. And here Peter applied it personally to each of his readers. To go astray may have the connotation of innocently getting lost or wandering off, or of being deceived and led astray. But in the context of the New Testament, this idea of going astray always has the implication of willful, sinful rebellion against God and His standards.

(2) But now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls (25b)

“Returned” means to have changed one’s mind and course of action. It is an about-face turning. And this word is often used to speak about conversion. They had turned from sin by turning to Christ. And they had turned to Christ by turning from sin.

And Peter said, this returning was to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. The term “guardian” or “overseer” is the same term used elsewhere in the New Testament to speak of leadership in the church, sometimes translated “bishop.” But in this verse, it has no connotation of office, but rather it conveys the idea of function. It refers to one who safeguards and cares for something. So, in this verse, the words “shepherd” and “guardian” are basically used synonymously. They both refer to Christ’s care, protection, and oversight of His people.

So, Christ suffered redemptively, taking away our sins, so that we could live for righteousness. And we have been healed through conversion, turning back to our shepherd after we had gone astray. All of this is because of what Christ has done in His people’s lives.

c. [Implied Result: He was vindicated]

In light of what Peter had written, especially because of his connection with the Isaiah suffering servant passage, there is an unstated implication that Peter clearly wanted his readers to draw from what he had written. And that is that Christ’s experience did not end with suffering.

The readers would have known that Jesus was resurrected, and ascended to the throne of power and authority over all the universe. So, the idea of Christ’s vindication is clearly implied in this passage. This is the only place in First Peter where the word “suffering” is not closely tied to the word “glory.” But this glory is strongly implied and assumed by the larger story of what happened to Christ after His suffering. He was vindicated by the resurrection. And Peter had already mentioned “Christ’s suffering and the glory that followed” (1:11). And Peter had clearly connected Christ’s suffering with the suffering servant in Isaiah, where the servant’s vindication was a major theme. So, part of this passage is Peter’s clear reference to the vindication and victory of Christ as part of the example that his readers were to follow.

## Application:

### A. Suffer Innocently

We should suffer rightly. That means that our suffering should be undeserved. We should live in a way that does not cause our suffering, but rather shows that our suffering is unjust and our accusers are wrong. And we should suffer in a worthy manner, following Christ’s example of not fighting back, not slandering and insulting in return. Injustice will never solve injustice, and we should never resort to it. We should demonstrate that we are in the right by the way that we handle injustice and suffering. And we should do it in a way that does not excuse injustice or empower further injustice. And when we suffer, we should always do it in a way that is mindful of God.

### B. Suffer Redemptively

And we can also suffer redemptively. Of course, we cannot do this in the same way as Christ. We cannot bear anyone else’s sin. We cannot bring healing by our wounds. But we can suffer in a way that leads people to the One Who can bear their sin and effect their healing. In the larger context of 1 Peter, the readers are exhorted to good works in order to display God’s glory and influence others. Following the example of Jesus bearing sins, by suffering, we can take some injustice on ourselves, in order to protect others from injustice. And we should consider the possibility that our sufferings could have redemptive purpose. Because we were called to this by Christ’s saving us, and by Him leaving us an example. In and by our suffering well, we can impact the world. Our good works under suffering could be the means by which our abusers and critics become converts. Respond in a way that returns blessing for cursing, and shows the patience and grace that can only come from Christ. Suffering well, especially when it is known that we are suffering for Christ, is a witness to Christ. And it can be used for the redemption of others. In that sense, we can suffer redemptively.

### C. Trust God and Expect Vindication and Reward

And likewise, we can also expect vindication whenever we suffer rightly. This is a major theme of the book of First Peter. And this is also included in the example of Jesus, Who rose from the dead to glory after His suffering. And we also can entrust ourselves to the very same Judge Who always judges justly. So, all of Peter’s readers can expect vindication when they suffer innocently, and in a worthy manner, being mindful of God, and trusting in His divine justice. We can trust God to vindicate and repay. As Peter wrote earlier (1:13), we should set our hope fully on the grace to be given to us when Jesus Christ is revealed.

2:18 Slaves ought to respectfully submit to their masters, both good ones and bad.

2:19-20 The first reason is that being patient under undeserved (not deserved) suffering is pleasing to God

2:21-25 The second reason is that slaves are called to follow Christ's example of worthily bearing unjust suffering and bearing fruit from it.

Summary: Slaves ought to follow Christ's example in worthily bearing unjust suffering because it is pleasing to God and will bear good fruit.