

1 Peter 2:16-25: ¹⁶ **Submit as free people**, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor. ¹⁸ Slaves, submit to your masters with all reverence not only to the good and gentle ones but also to the cruel. ¹⁹ For it brings favor if, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if when you do wrong and are beaten, you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God. ²¹ **For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.** ²² He did not commit sin, **and no deceit was found in his mouth;** ²³ when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

Christ's example of submission and obedience.

- **Submission to his parents.** Luke recalls a story when Jesus was a little boy and he got into trouble. Nearly gave mother Mary a heart attack. The family left Jerusalem after the festival had ended and Jesus stayed behind. The men travelled separately from the women—bringing up the rear in order to watch over them, and children could be in the mother or father's party. Both thought he was with the other one. When they stopped for rest and water along the way they discovered Jesus was not among them. They lost the son of God. They returned and found him sitting among the groups of disciples in the temple, so enraptured by the discussion and conversation; so they returned down to Nazareth and the **boy was obedient to his parents (Lk. 2:51).**
- **Submission to the rabbinic system of worship.** It's clear from Jesus's life and teachings (as an adult) that he had to bring correction and challenge to the authorities leading Israel's worship in the local synagogues and the temple. But as a child, he first fully submitted to it. Being reared in synagogue. **How many times did Jesus here the Pharisees teach pugilism, chauvinism, legalism, ethnocentrism and cringe at the leaders before him, supposing to represent God and later Jesus will call these same leaders "children of the devil" and "hypocrites on whom God is pronouncing judgment."** But for now, little Jesus sits and learns, he asks questions and takes it all in. He submitted to the system he was reared in.
- **Submission to the authorities of the land.** At one-point Jesus was so popular that multiple thousands surrounded him in outdoor amphitheatres to hear his teachings, to witness his miraculous power—ready to receive orders to take up the sword against Rome. And instead Jesus said things like this, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. If you love only those who love you in return, what reward is that to you?" Jesus said, "if someone forces you to go one mile go an extra mile with him. If someone takes your outer coat, give him the shirt off your back as well. Do not resist and evil person."

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- **Submission in the face of false accusations.** Jesus was charged with **blasphemy and sedition**. Neither of those charges were true. The Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin charged him with sacrilege because he claimed to be the Son of God—Messiah and the Son of Man from Dan. 7 who would ascend on the clouds of heaven and receive from the Father all power, dominion, glory and worship from his people and the nations. At that confession, Caiaphas orders him struck, tears his priestly robes, and asks, “What more do we need to hear.” Pilate and Herod both cannot find a legal reason to condemn Jesus. He has, by all accounts, **not led a revolution**, he has not taken up the sword against Israel or Rome and there is no basis for his death. He sets Jesus’s fate before the crowds in a kind of democratic vote.

Jesus surrenders willingly to their authority. He is beaten within an inch of his life. He is nailed to Roman high cross. He gives up his last breath committed his spirit to God for vindication.

Peter’s example

Peter follows this outlawed, blasphemous rabbi to his own demise. Peter is persecuted by his own countrymen. And years later he surrenders to authorities and is crucified upside down on a cross for Christ.

Jesus is the Master and we are the disciples. The Master’s role is to set the pace, set tone and the terms of his followers’ discipleship.

The disciples’ role is to follow his teaching his way of life and to emulate his pattern—his mindset and his way of life.

Philippians 2:3-11 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, **but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves.** ⁴ Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others. ⁵ Adopt the same **attitude as that of Christ Jesus,** ⁶ who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. ⁷ Instead he **emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant**, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, ⁸ he humbled himself by becoming **obedient to the point of death**—even to death on a cross. ⁹ For this reason God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Transition: Jesus’s attitude of submission to authorities, to the death *was his act of obedience to the Father*. It was the Father’s will that he be crushed, for our sake.

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And it is the Father's will that we be crushed for our neighbors' sake.

So, Peter says:

Submit to human authorities—individuals in places of authority over you.

Slaves submit to your masters—so as to emulate the servant-King Jesus.

Wives submit to your husbands—so as to win the unsaved through faith and a good conscience.

Today we are looking at the first century issue of slavery and how Christian slaves were to behave and interact with their earthly masters.

²¹ For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

This is what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, to emulate his pattern of life, to reflect his character in the face of injustice.

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History: Understanding the nature of Roman slavery will help us with these verses.

Slavery in the Roman era looked just about the same as it had been in every empire before it.

3 Reasons why you might become a slave in the ancient world:

(1) **Slaves of War:** You are part of a conquered people hauled off to Rome after your demise in military defeat.

(2) **Legacy Slaves:** You were born into the house of a slave, you inherited their social status in life.

(3) **Debt-Slavery:** You had to indenture yourself because of your debt. There was no chapter 11 or bankruptcy safety net in those days, so the way you got out of crushing debt was to agree to enter a life of servitude for your debtor (the lender).

In all these situations, **this form of slavery was not racial, it was not endless in terms of scope, and it was not chattel slavery**—human beings were still considered human beings not cattle or less than human.

Additionally, you could win your freedom in several ways: (1) through gladiatorial contests, (2) paying off life-debt, (3) voluntary manumission due to the Master falling on hard times.

Now, this is very different kind of practice of slavery than that of the Americas because that type of slavery was chattel slavery—people made in God's image were treated like animals—though there are certainly exceptions to this. It was racially based slavery, not indentured servitude (as was the case of Irish slaves transported to the Caribbean and the Americas—that slave trade was also racial but not chattel slavery). **So Why Don't Paul and Peter (in their writings when they mention slavery) condemn it and call for it to be abolished?**

Christian Influence: We are reading about a period in human history in which Christians have *less influence (as a legal entity) in society than household slaves and servants.*

The Class System of Greco-Rome

Emperor

Consul and Pro-consul (similar to president and vice-president)

Senatorial (The most powerful aristocratic and privileged class in society)

Patrician

Equites

Plebeians

Freedmen

Women

Children

Slaves

Christians (illegal religion)

Why doesn't Peter and Paul demand that the system of slavery be ended immediately? Because they have absolutely no social standing in this world. The Christian faith was considered an illegal cult and had no political power or influence in this Roman hierarchy.

But in fact the Christian faith was instrumental in undermining the value of slavery because of its vastly superior moral and ethical system. [By the early 4th century, the emancipation of slaves was included into Roman law. Slaves could be emancipated by a ceremony in church.](#)

1 Tim. 1:8-11 "We know that the law is not meant for a righteous person, but for the lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinful, for the unholy and irreverent, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers,¹⁰ for the sexually immoral and males who have sex with males, **for slave traders**, liars, perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching¹¹ that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which was entrusted to me."

1 Cor. 7:20-22 "Let each of you remain in the station to which he was called.²¹ Were you called **while being a slave?** Don't let be anxious. But if you can become free, by all means take the opportunity to do so.²² For he who is called by the Lord as a slave is the **Lord's freedman**. Likewise, he who is called **as a free man is Christ's servant.**"

1 Cor. 9:19 "Although I am **free** from all and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a servant to everyone, in order to win more people."

Gal. 3:28 "There is no Jew or Greek, **neither slave nor free**, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Gal. 5:1 "It is for **freedom** that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery."

Col. 3:11 "In Christ there is neither **Greek nor Jew**, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, **slave and free**; but Christ is all and in all."

1 Pet. 2:16 "Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as **servants of God.**"

The value system of the Christian faith was eventually responsible for undermining the system of slavery in Rome.

Takeaways related to all this.

1. Regardless of one's station in life, all people are enslaved to sin.

Sin has corrupted every faculty of the human being.

We are enslaved to sin...

- **Cognitively**—Paul says the effects of sin is a diminished cognitive function (**Rom. 1:21, 28, 31** “corrupt mind” and “stupid”). Sin results in a diminished cognitive capacity to perceive the truth about the nature of God. It blinds us to the obvious truth that God exists and has sent a Savior.
- **Morally**—This moral faculty distinguishes between good and evil; right and wrong. In cases where the distinction is obvious and subtle. But that moral capacity has been darkened through sin so that we are apt to call what is good “evil” and what is “evil” good.
- **Spiritually**—We were made with a spiritual capacity to dwell with God in an earthly sanctuary where is manifest presence was made accessible to us. But sin cut us off from relationship with God such that the spiritual faculty of perceiving his presence is diminished. It's damaged.
- **Physically**—having access to the tree of life. Bodily death now reigns in the human experience.
- **Socially**—in place of social unity and harmony is the corruption and factionalization of human relationships.

Jesus said, *everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*

Paul said *“it is for freedom that Christ set you free.”*

Regardless of your socio-political, ethnic status every person apart from Christ is a slave to sin.

2. Regardless of one's station in life, all people are freed by faith in Jesus's death and resurrection.

- **Cognitively**—Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:16 “For who has known the Lord’s mind, that he may instruct him? But we have the **mind of Christ.**” Rom. 12:2 that we are to actively renew our minds in the Word. We have a restored cognitive function to see God’s revelation of himself in nature and the book.
- **Morally**—The first thing the Holy Spirit of God does when he enters your life is to convict you of sin. 2 Pet. 1:4-6 “**make every effort to supplement your faith with moral excellence**”
We have a restored moral capacity to distinguish between activity that is proper for a human image-bearer and improper for a human image-bearer.
- **Spiritually**—where once we were dead relationally to God, now we are alive. Rom. 6:11 “**So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**” (CSB)
Our spiritual faculty of communion, our ability to perceive God’s presence in worship, to have access once again to his glorious presence—that is restored.
- **Physically**—Jesus promised the churches in Revelation that he who stands firm to the end “**I will give the right to eat of the tree of eternal life which stands in the paradise of God**” (Rev. 2:7). His cross was the tree where God’s wrath and the nations were poured out on Christ in our place and now we have access to eternal life. Resurrection glory.
- **Socially**—we are the one family of God, unified in the Spirit in doctrine and in baptism, and growing in unity and maturity.

These values and virtues are like a ticking time bomb in Roman culture. Once the Christian Faith takes hold among the mass population of Roman slaves and Freedmen and some prominent philosophers and politicians—the ethics of the Christian faith will eventually work to undermine Roman slavery.

It is a quite, subtle but devastating revolution—like leaven working itself through a batch of dough.

But in the meantime...

Have the same attitude in you that was in Christ when he voluntarily emptied himself of his heavenly prerogatives.

Next week we’ll unpack what Peter has to say to us relative to life in service to Jesus despite the conditions of our environment.
What should the Christian response be when they are being forced to suffer injustice?