

1 PETER: SUBMISSION IN THE AGE OF CHAZ

Living Hope Series #3, 1 Peter 2:13-25

Father's Day, June 21, 2020

*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority
To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you,
leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps.*
1 Peter 2:13-21

Dear friends

1 PETER

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

- GOD'S PEOPLE ARE A MISUNDERSTOOD MINORITY, LIVING UNDER THE RULE OF A DIFFERENT KING.
- PERSECUTION OFFERS A CHANCE TO SHOW OTHERS THE GENEROUS LOVE OF JESUS.

1:1-2 GREETING

HELLO, GOD'S PEOPLE WHO ARE CHOSEN & EXILED...
OLD TESTAMENT DESCRIPTIONS OF ABRAHAM & ISRAEL

1:3-12 SONG OF PRAISE

"PRAISE GOD WHO CAUSED US TO BE BORN AGAIN INTO A LIVING HOPE."
NEW HOPE, NEW IDENTITY, NEW FAMILY
SUFFERING IS A PURIFYING FIRE THAT CAN DEEPEN OUR FAITH.

2:11-4:11 SUFFERING AS A WITNESS TO JESUS

THE PROBLEM: HOUSEHOLDS EXPECTED TO SUBMIT & WORSHIP THE PATRIARCHAL GODS

THE RESPONSE: CHRISTIANS ARE LIBERATED TO LOVE THEIR ENEMIES

3:0-7:10 THEIR FUTURE VINDICATION

BAPTISM
A SACRED SYMBOL SHOWING THEY ARE JOINED TO JESUS

PERSECUTED • MURDERED

VINDICATED • EXALTED

4:12-5:9 SUFFERING & FUTURE HOPE

"RESIST EVIL WITH FIRM FAITHFULNESS."
THE REAL ENEMY: SPIRITUAL EVIL

5:10-14 CLOSING

MAY GOD STRENGTHEN YOU!
GREETINGS FROM THE CHURCH IN ROME

BABYLON
-ARCHETYPE FOR CORRUPT RULERS (SEE JEREMIAH 50-51)
-GOD'S PEOPLE ARE EXILED FROM THEIR TRUE HOPE

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The basic rule

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

1 Peter 2:13-17

- 1) _____ is the "instituter" of every authority

- 2) Honorable living as "scattered" begins with _____

- 3) Submission requires that I respect _____

Tough example #1: slaves and masters

¹⁸ Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

1 Peter 2:18-20

- 1) _____ bookends our discussion of servants and slaves

- 2) Submission is always a _____

- 3) Submission will always lead to _____

A theology of example

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

²² “He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 2:21-24 (quoting from Isaiah 53:9)

1) Jesus is the _____ of suffering

2) The atonement is more than substitution – it is also _____

3) _____ is the definition of the high cost of healing

Encouragement for a suffering church

²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 2:25

1) _____ is the ultimate deceiver

2) Shepherd reflects Jesus' _____

3) Overseer reflects Jesus' _____

Resources for further studies of 1 Peter

I found Kenneth Wuest’s “First Peter in the Greek New Testament” very helpful (Eerdmans, 1942).

Bob Deffinbaugh’s sermons on 1 Peter at <https://bible.org/series/glory-suffering-studies-1-peter>

Spurgeon’s series of messages on 1 Peter at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/by-scripture/1-peter>

ThirdMill has a collection of sermons on 1 Peter at <https://thirdmill.org/sermons/series.asp/srs/1%20Peter>

John Piper has a wonderful series of sermons at desiringgod.org but the best might be “God’s Great Mercy and Our New Birth” at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gods-great-mercy-and-our-new-birth>. He borrows from John Bunyan’s “Last Sermon” on John 3:13 at https://biblehub.com/library/bunyan/the_works_of_john_bunyan_volumes_1-3/mr_bunyan_last_sermon_.htm

Reformation21’s “resident aliens” blog on suffering at <https://www.reformation21.org/blog/suffering-and-redemption>

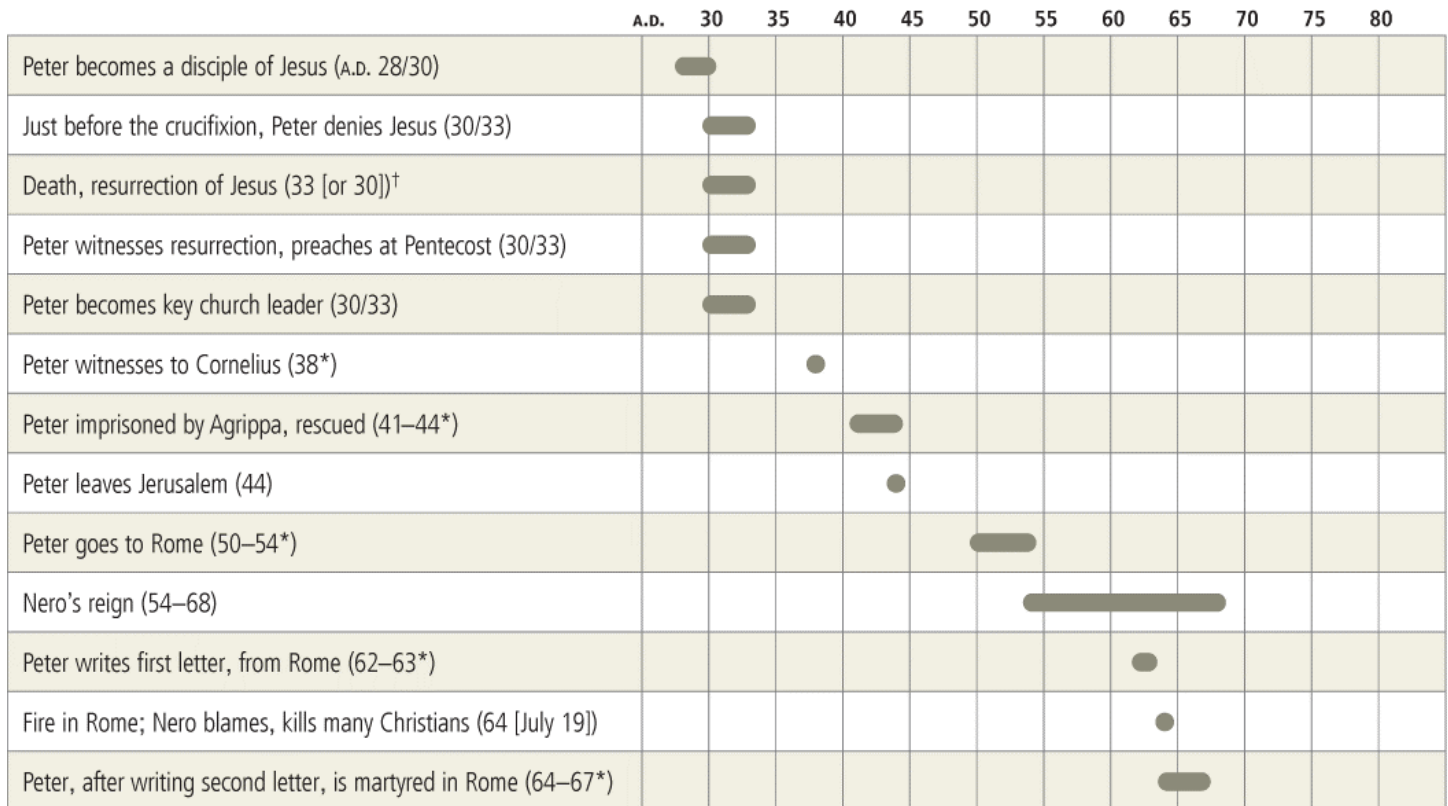
Ligon Duncan, and other First Presbyterian, Jackson, preachers has a wonderful series of messages at <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/scripture/1-peter>

Karen H. Jobes’ commentary of 1 Peter in the Baker Exegetical Commentary series (Baker Academic, 2005).

The Gospel Coalition produced this animated introduction (on which this week’s coloring page is based) and study taken from the ESVSB at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/1-peter-introduction/#overview>

Jonathan Edwards’ wonderful 1 Peter 2:9-10 sermon at <https://www.biblebb.com/files/edwards/chosen.htm>

The Gospel Coalition offers a introductory lecture series on 1 Peter at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/study-1-peter/#course-introduction>



1 PETER

HOPE
IN THE
MIDST OF
SUFFERING

• GOD'S PEOPLE ARE A MISUNDERSTOOD MINORITY,
LIVING UNDER THE RULE OF A DIFFERENT KING.
• PERSECUTION OFFERS A CHANCE TO SHOW OTHERS
THE GENEROUS LOVE OF JESUS.

SIMON PETER
(ARABIC; KENNAH) GREEK
- KEY LEADER IN THE EARLY
FIRST DISCIPLES
JERUSALEM CHURCH (ACTS 1:1-10)

YOU ARE A ROCK!
(MATTHEW 16:18-19)

TO REBUILT THE CHURCH I WILL BUILD ON YOU
AND THE GATES OF HELL WILL NOT OVERCOME YOU.

TO REBUILT THE CHURCH I WILL BUILD ON YOU
AND THE GATES OF HELL WILL NOT OVERCOME YOU.

ROMANS
SALVANS (ACTS 13)

ASIA MINOR

HOSTILITY & HARASSMENT
(2:11-17)

1:1-2 GREETING

HELL, GOD'S PEOPLE AND ARE
CHOSEN & EXILED
(GENESIS 12:1-13; 15:7-10)
OLD TESTAMENT DESCRIPTIONS
OF ABRAHAM & ISRAEL
(GENESIS 24:10)

AND THE
GENTILES
AND WOULD BELONG TO THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM...
(GENESIS 24:10)

1:3-12 SONG OF PRAISE

PLEASE GOD AND CAUSED US TO BE
BORN AGAIN INTO A LIVING HOPE. (1:3)

NEW HOPE
NEW IDENTITY
NEW FAMILY

SUFFERING IS A
PURIFYING FIRE
THAT CAN DEFEAT
OUR SIN. (1:7)

1:13-2:10 A NEW FAMILY IDENTITY

OLD TESTAMENT IMAGES APPLIED TO GENTILE CHRISTIANS
1:13 CAN YOUR LINKS
SEE EXODUS 12:11

ELIHA
1:15-16 THE ONLY PEOPLE IN THE
LANDS... SEE LEVITICUS 11:1-7

THE NEA EXODUS & PASSOVER
1:17-21
SEE EXODUS 12:1-5

THE NEA COVENANT PEOPLE
1:19-20
COVENANT PEOPLE
ISAIAH 40; JEREMIAH 31

THE NEA TEMPLE!
2:11-12
ISAIAH 20:1-6; TRALIT 108-122

THE NEA MENTIONS
1:19-20 A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS
EXODUS 19:4-6

2:11-4:11 SUFFERING AS A WITNESS TO JESUS

THE PROBLEM:
HOUSHOLDS OF SUFFERED TO OBTAIN
A WITNESS THE EMPHATIC'S SOUS
(1:13-17)

THE RESPONSE:
CHRISTIANS ARE URGED
TO LOVE THEIR ENEMIES?
(1:18-21)

THEM THINK & VINDICATION
3:9-11

PERSECUTED & MURDERED

VINDICATED & EXALTED

A SACRED SYMBOL SHOWING THEY ARE JOINED TO JESUS

4:12-5:9 SUFFERING & FUTURE HOPE

RENOUNCE WHEN PEOPLE PERSECUTE YOU BECAUSE OF ME
MATTHEW 5:29-30

CHRISTIAN SLAVES, WIVES & HUSBANDS
2:18-19

LEADERS TO CARE FOR THE CHURCH
5:1-5

THE REAL HERO!
5:6-7

"RESIST EVIL WITH FIRM FAITHFULNESS."
(5:9)

5:10-14 CLOSING

MAY GOD STRENGTHEN YOU!

GREETINGS FROM THE CHURCH IN BABYLON

ROME

ARCHITECT THE KINGDOM

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TRULY FROM HEAVEN

created by the Bible Project

2. Submit Even to Pagan Authority (2:13–17)

Peter here begins to specify how citizens of God’s holy nation are to relate to the sociopolitical authority of the world in which they live. It may be tempting for Christian believers, especially in pagan societies, to construe their loyalty to Christ as a license for rebellion against the ungodly authorities that govern them. In Peter’s view, Christians must be subject to even pagan authorities, even those as ungodly as the Roman emperor, who, at the time Peter wrote, was probably Claudius or Nero. Not only must Christians be subordinate to secular authorities, but they must also “do good” (2:14; ἀγαθοποιέω, *agathopoieō*), for by doing so they will silence slander against Christians, as is God’s will.

Exegesis and Exposition

¹³Be subject to every human institution because of the Lord, whether to the emperor because he is the supreme authority ¹⁴or to the governors because they are sent by him to punish those who do evil but to commend those who do good.¹⁵For it is the will of God that by doing good [you] silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶[Live] as free people, but not as using freedom as a cloak for evil—[living] rather as slaves of God. ¹⁷Respect all people; love fellow believers; fear God; honor the emperor.

Subjection to secular human authority is defined in 2:13–15 as part of God’s will that his people “do good” in order to silence ignorant slander. Various ideas have been offered as to what “doing good” might involve in first-century society and how that principle might be applied to Christian responsibility at other times and places, especially our own. Reicke (1964: 95–96) suggested that Peter means nothing more than that Christians must be good, law-abiding citizens. He points to organized labor actions of the first century as an example of “subversive activity against society” in which Christians should not have participated (Reicke 1964: 96). Reicke has been criticized on the grounds that his understanding of Peter’s ethic results in a social quiescence and maintenance of the status quo that may be inappropriate in certain situations (Sleeper 1968). Sleeper (1968: 284) raises the issues of Christian responsibility toward evil regimes and criticizes Reicke for giving the impression that “a program of non-resistance and an avoidance of ‘social aggressiveness’ is an adequate Christian ethic today.” He points to the eschatological perspective that provides encouragement to Christians to witness to their world, but he admits that 1 Peter does not give us answers at the level of strategy in “concrete sociological and political terms for our own situation” (Sleeper 1968: 280, 286).

Van Unnik (1954–55: 99), writing a decade before Reicke, points out that “good works” must mean more than simply obeying the laws of the land, “for people obeying the law are not distinguished in a particular way [by the authorities], their conformity being taken for granted.” Here in 2:14 Peter suggests that the governors recognize “those who do good” (noun). Following that train of thought, Winter (1988) suggests that the issue here is the Christian as public benefactor, who is honored publicly by the governing authorities for undertaking good works that benefit the city. According to Winter, Peter encourages his Christian readers not to reject or neglect that great civic tradition. If Winter is correct, Peter’s original readers must have had both the resources and the standing to do so. This view is congenial to the theory that Peter’s readers were among colonists sent from Rome to build up the Roman way of life in cities in Asia Minor (see “Roman Colonization and the Origin of 1 Peter” in the introduction). It would argue against J. H. Elliott’s theory that the original readers were from the poorest and most marginalized masses (1981).

Winter’s epigraphic evidence establishes the practice of publicly honoring benefactors of the city, but his claim that *agathopoieō* refers specifically to acts of public benefaction is not convincing (cf. Danker 1982, who does not list the cognate verb among those used specifically to refer to benefaction). In 2:15 the noun stands in

opposition to the general term “evildoer” (κακοποιῶν, *kakopoiōn*), which has no corresponding place in the semantic domain of public benefaction, suggesting a more general sense for both terms.

Moreover, the verb *agathopoiēō* occurs three times in the letter, in reference to slaves, wives, and then generally to all Christians (2:20; 3:6, 17). Peter is apparently applying the general principle of “doing good” in 2:14–15 to the specific cases of slaves and wives in 2:18–3:6. Since slaves and wives were typically not in a position to be public benefactors, it is probably best to construe this verb and its cognate noun to mean good works beyond that normally expected in a given situation, which could be noted by the authorities, by the master, or by the husband. The same verb, *agathopoiēō*, is found on the lips of Jesus in Luke 6:35, where he instructs his followers to “do good” even to their enemies. In both Luke and 1 Peter, the deeds encouraged do not seem to be merely private acts of Christian piety but deeds that would also be generally acknowledged by society as good. As seen in 2:12, this further implies that Peter recognizes some common definition of “good” between that society and Christian ethics. As Winter (1988: 93) rightly argues, how could the authorities in Asia Minor observe the good works of their Christian citizens if the word refers only to good morals that are privately expressed? Certainly works of public benefaction cannot be excluded from Peter’s idea of “doing good” within the civic sphere for those Christians who have the resources and standing to do so. This thought fits quite well with the Diaspora motif in which the letter is framed, for it follows Jeremiah’s instructions: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare” (Jer. 29:7 NASB).

Peter’s exhortation here is prefaced by a claim to divine authority. It is God’s will (not simply Peter’s) that Christians do good even in pagan societies, for by such behavior they will silence the slander about Christianity, and all the more so if they are publicly recognized by the authorities for good works that benefit their city. It is difficult to square this teaching with any worldview that recommends strict separatism from society and withdrawal from civic responsibility as a legitimate Christian lifestyle.

Peter’s instructions are firmly positive toward the Roman emperor and provincial governors. He seems to assume that if Christians live as good citizens, the ruling authorities will look with favor upon them—or at least not trouble them. His assumption must be considered in the attempt to date this letter. It is difficult to imagine such an irenic exhortation being issued during the time of Nero’s horrific persecution of the church in Rome or anytime after Christians began being martyred by state-sponsored persecution—especially in comparison with the attitude toward Rome presented in the later book of Revelation. The relatively optimistic outlook reflected here comports better with the earlier decades of the church, toward the end of the reign of Claudius or the very beginning of Nero’s. At that time Christians were socially and perhaps professionally ostracized in various ways, but they had not yet suffered state-sponsored persecution as a matter of policy. As long as the church enjoyed some protection from the state’s suspicion of new religions by virtue of its association with Judaism, Peter appears to be hopeful that it could maintain a measure of good relations with the state, at least to the extent Judaism did.

Peter’s exhortation that his readers must be subject to “every human institution because of the Lord” (2:13) is not to be taken as an invitation to slavery. On the contrary, Peter declares his readers to be free people (2:16). They were free to choose to be slaves of God. On the nature of Christian freedom, Selwyn (1958: 174) comments: “The connection of freedom with virtue was well established in antiquity. . . . Christian freedom rests not on escape from service but on a change of master.” Being free from sin, they are therefore free to choose to live in a way that honors the God whom they serve before the eyes of a pagan society to whom they have no similar obligation. The Christian life “is a free servitude, and a serving freedom” (Calvin 1963: 272). Throughout his teaching, Peter affirms that Christians have been set free from their former way of life so that they can become slaves of God and live in obedience to him rather than as they once did. Peter will soon introduce Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant (i.e., slave) of God (2:21), as the supreme example they are called to follow.

The question arises how the four imperatives in 2:17 are related. The first of the four is in the aorist tense with the following three in the present; the first and fourth are forms of the same verb, τιμάω (*timaō*, honor). Would this change in tense suggest that the last three elaborate on what it means to “respect everyone,” as suggested by the syntax of the NIV? However, because it does not seem apt to include God in the reference “everyone,” some interpreters see no significance to the variation in tense (e.g., TNIV). Various pairings of the four imperatives in verse 17 have been suggested. Bammel (1964–65: 280) proposes an a-b-b’-a’ structure by

pairing the first and last imperatives because they are forms of the same verb. Achtemeier (1996: 187) observes that the first and last refer to secular concerns, the middle two to Christian. It should also be noted that the first two imperatives are directed at the two social groups in tension (society versus the Christian community) and the last two at the two authorities in tension (allegiance to God versus the emperor), which may suggest an a-a'-b-b' organization. All people are to receive due respect, but fellow believers are to be loved. God is to be feared; the emperor, honored.

Snyder (1991) defends the understanding that the first of the four is a general command that should be understood not as honor to all people but as honor to all whom honor is due: the Christian brotherhood, God, and the emperor. This interpretation avoids the problem of God being included in the phrase "respect everyone." Furthermore, this construal avoids the tension of an apparent discrepancy between this verse, which limits love to fellow Christians, and Jesus' command that Christians must love all their neighbors, even their enemies (Best 1986). Moreover, Snyder (1991) points out that the first of the three present imperatives echoes Peter's prior teaching to live out one's life in fear of God (1:17) and to love fellow believers (1:22), relating those exhortations to the present discussion. More likely, the statement is a comprehensive reference to all contexts in which a Christian lives: social, ecclesial, spiritual, and political. While the syntax and precise structure of 2:17 are difficult to decide, the thrust of the exhortation is clear: Christians must live well by giving each type of relationship its due.

These general instructions about Christian relationships form the immediate context of the specific instructions to servants, wives, and husbands that follow. In fact, the verbs translated "submit" (2:18; 3:1) and "live with" (3:7) are all participles, the first two being forms of the same verb found here in 2:13, ὑποτάσσω (*hypotassō*). Spencer (2000) concludes that the instructions to the household that follow are syntactically connected to these four directives enjoined on all believers, further specifying the command to be subject to all human authorities (2:13). Proper household relationships "are one type of submission to one human creation, ancient marriage" (Spencer 2000: 111). Although the syntactic connection may be debated, certainly the instructions for relationships within the household must be read within the larger social context of the church, one's relationship to God, and pressing sociopolitical considerations.

3. Christ's Example in Society's Most Basic Unit (2:18–3:7)

Peter further focuses his exhortations concerning the nature of Christian relationships that bring glory to God and form a winsome witness to unbelieving society. Because the household was understood in Greco-Roman moral philosophy to be the foundational unit of civilization, the influence of suspect religions on the family was closely observed. Peter is especially concerned that the freedom of the gospel be expressed in the Christian household in such a way as not to provoke unnecessary accusations against Christianity. At the same time, Peter understands that the gospel of Jesus Christ is subversive to the Greco-Roman social order. The cornerstone of Peter's teaching is the example of Jesus Christ, whose undeserved suffering for the benefit of others and the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan is to be the paradigm for all Christian relationships.

a. The Slave as the Paradigm for Believers (2:18–25)

Peter points to the slave, who was most vulnerable in Greco-Roman society, as a paradigm for the Christian believer who follows Jesus Christ. Because of their Christian commitment, Peter's readers may have been facing a loss of status and empowerment in their society. The slave had the lowest social status and least power and so is a fitting role model for this situation. Moreover, regardless of their social standing, as Christians they

are to live as slaves to God, obeying him in every aspect of life (2:16). Peter recognizes that Jesus Christ, God's very Son, was the Suffering Servant (i.e., slave) of Isa. 53, who submitted to unjust suffering in order to serve God's plan of redemption. His suffering provides the example that all Christians are to follow. Therefore, Peter begins to address the issue of commendable behavior in society's most basic unit, the household, by first addressing the Christian household slave before turning to the Christian wife and finally to the Christian husband as head of the household.

- i. The role of "household codes" in Greco-Roman culture (2:18–20)
- ii. Christ dignifies the lowly (2:21a)
- iii. Peter's Christology and the Christian's calling to unjust suffering (2:21b–25)

Exegesis and Exposition

¹⁸Servants, be subject with all respect to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹For this is grace, if because of a consciousness of God someone bears grief, suffering unjustly. ²⁰For what credit is it if because you have sinned you are beaten and endure it? Rather, if because of doing good you suffer and endure it, this is grace before God. ²¹For to this you were called, because Christ also □suffered□ on your behalf, leaving you an example in order that you might follow in the footsteps of him

²²who did not commit sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth;

²³who when reviled did not retaliate, when he suffered he did not make threats, but instead trusted the One who judges justly;

²⁴who himself bore our sins in his body upon the tree, so that having no part in sins we might live in righteousness;

by whose wounds you are healed.

²⁵For you were like wandering sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

i. The Role of "Household Codes" in Greco-Roman Culture (2:18–20)

In this passage the heart of Peter's Christology provides the foundational principle for living rightly in society's most common and mundane structure, the household. The juxtaposition of these two seemingly disparate topics is better understood when the importance of household relationships within Greco-Roman society is appreciated. For centuries the Greek moral philosophers wrote about proper relationships within the household, slaves to masters, wives to husbands, and children to parents. Instructions with important points of contact with the NT, "household codes" can be found in Plato's *Republic* (384–370 BC), Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* (ca. 430–355 BC), Aristotle's *Oeconomica* (384–322 BC), Plutarch's *Advice to Bride and Groom* (AD ca. 46–120), Seneca's *Moral Epistles* (ca. 4 BC?–AD 65), and Dio Chrysostom's *On Household Management* (AD 40–ca. 112). (For a comparison of these Greek writers to 1 Peter, see Balch 1981.) Although these writers had different views on slaves and women, all shared a common belief that order in the household, which they believed to be divinely ordained, was the constituent basis for a strong, orderly, and prosperous society.

Modern scholarship has held differing views of the origin and purpose of the NT household codes (Balch, *ABD* 3:318–20; Fitzgerald, *ABD* 3:80–81). Household codes do not appear in the OT or in Jewish writings until Judaism engages the Greek worldview (e.g., Philo and Josephus). The copious writings concerning household management and their prominent place in the Greco-Roman culture suggest that no religion or philosophy entering that moral world could ignore addressing the same topic. Peter and Paul, whose theology and ethics are deeply rooted in the tradition of the OT, nevertheless include household codes in their letters to audiences

whose worldview probably would have been influenced by the Greek moral writings. Even though both apostles address the topic of order in the household, neither simply affirms Greco-Roman expectations.

The function of the household codes in the NT ethical instruction is also debated (Balch, *ABD* 3:318–20; Fitzgerald, *ABD* 3:80–81). Some argue that they represent a legalistic response to social unrest in the church caused by egalitarian movements among women and slaves (Crouch 1972). J. H. Elliott (2000) argues that the household code functions to bring to the church a cohesive identity that would be consistent with its missionary goals. Balch (1981) contends that the codes function apologetically in response to social criticism of the effect of Christianity on the household and therefore on the social order. These various views are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Moreover, Peter and Paul may not have had precisely the same reason in mind for including the household code in their writings. Both apostles do teach that new life in Christ is to be lived out within existing social structures. However, the function of the code in Col. 3:18–4:1 seems directed to correcting false teaching. Peter's use of the code functions apologetically in its immediate context (cf. 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:15). While addressing the topic of household management and using a form similar to the Greek moral writers, Peter puts household relationships on an entirely new footing that subverts the moral code as previously taught by the Greek philosophers.

In reference to the precepts given to parents, children, and brothers in Greco-Roman thought, Seneca (*Ep.* 95) writes: “No one will do his duty as he ought, unless he has some principle to which he may refer his conduct. We must set before our eyes the goal of the Supreme Good, towards which we may strive and to which all our acts and words may have reference—just as sailors must guide their course according to a certain star” (Gummere 1943: 87). Seneca further observes that humankind cannot make progress until it “has conceived a right idea of God.” First Peter agrees that there is a right idea of God, which must guide all of life, but goes further by claiming that the right idea of God is to be found in Jesus Christ (1:3). It is not the philosophy of great thinkers but the new birth through Christ's resurrection that is needed as the basis of ethics. The “certain star” to which all our acts and words as Christians must have reference is not the Supreme Good of Greek philosophy but the Supreme God revealed in Jesus Christ. Thus, Christian slaves, wives, and husbands are to conduct themselves within the social expectations of their day as transformed by Peter's instructions because of their new relationship to God in Christ.

Because of the pervasive and sustained interest in proper household relationships as foundational to the empire's well-being, it is not surprising that when both great apostles, Peter and Paul, write to destinations holding a Greco-Roman worldview, they give instructions on how Christians who have realigned their sociopolitical loyalties with the kingdom of God are nevertheless to live responsibly in society. The same slave-master, wife-husband, child-parent pairs found in the NT *Haustafeln*, or “household codes,” are found throughout the Greek philosophers, but with significant differences between the NT and the Greek writers. The similarity in form indicates that the NT writers are deliberately engaging this aspect of Greco-Roman culture. The differences between the NT and the Greek philosophers on this topic demonstrate that the apostles' view on this topic has been formed by the religious convictions of the OT and not by the Greek thought they are engaging.

The very name “household codes” obscures the original function of the teaching as instructions on how to fulfill one's sociopolitical duty within greater society as a slave, a wife, or a husband. Plato taught that each person in the household has a place under the man's authority. The child, the woman, and the slave are each to submit in different ways to the man's authority and are not to aspire to the roles of another (*Republic* 4.433A, C–D). The acceptance of one's station is fundamental to right household management, which “demands in the first place familiarity with the sphere of one's actions”—in other words, behaving in the manner appropriate to one's own role (Aristotle, *Oeconomica* 2.1.1). Goppelt's (1993: 162–79) suggestion that these be understood as “station codes” is more accurate to their function, since Greek moral philosophy understood each person's position in life to be divinely mandated, and the wise person faithfully performed the duties of his or her station.

Because of the importance of household relationships for social stability, religions introduced into the empire by foreigners were judged in large part by whether or not they complied with the expectations for household relationships. One of the apologetic tasks for a religious group was to show compliance with the important elements of social order, as Josephus does for Judaism (*Ag. Ap.* 2.158, 193, 220, 225, 235, 293). In contrast to Judaism, the Egyptian Isis cult was viewed as a threat to the Roman way of life because it permitted a woman authority over her husband (Balch 1988: 29). Therefore, the “household codes” of the NT had

important apologetic value as the newly formed religion of Christianity took root in Greco-Roman society. This no doubt was a concern of the apostle Paul, since he teaches on proper roles for men and women in church order in the city of Ephesus (1 Tim. 2:1–3:13).

Since slavery is not an accepted part of Western society today, modern preaching of 1 Pet. 2:18–3:7 (as well as Eph. 5:21–6:9 and Col. 3:18–4:1) has primarily focused on the instructions addressed to wives and husbands as a type of marriage manual, obscuring its original sociopolitical message and function. Even more distorting is the disproportional attention usually lavished on the instructions to wives. The modern concept of the privatization of whatever goes on within the home further distorts our understanding of this passage as well, for in the first century behavior within the home was perceived very much as society's business. As Balch (1981: 26) observes, "The household relationship which we normally consider private, individual matters are here [in Greek thought] part of a social-political philosophic ethic." The latent sociopolitical function of household relationships within the teaching of 1 Peter must be retrieved if the apostle's teaching is to be more fully understood and appreciated.

Peter's emphatic opening description of Christians as those who have been born again into a new life with new allegiances and the further description of Christians as a people set apart as God's own possession and as a kingdom of priests make it necessary for Peter to explain how the new life in Christ is to operate within the most basic social unit, the household. The apostle Peter informs Christians of their duties in a way that affirms part of the Greco-Roman social order while subtly rejecting those premises that are not compatible with the gospel. Peter is concerned that Christians not use their moral freedom in a way that brings condemnation on the infant church for subverting social order. At the same time, the moral freedom that Christians have been given in Christ transforms their understanding of themselves in ways unparalleled in the Greek moral philosophy of their time.

Slaves (2:18) and wives (3:1) are both exhorted using forms of the same verb, ὑποτάσσω (*hypotassō*, be subject to). Slaves and wives also shared some common social expectations in first-century Greco-Roman culture in distinction from those expected of the male head of household. Therefore, some discussion of the historical background common to both is necessary in order to understand 2:18–25 and 3:1–6 in their original historical setting.

One of the debates of NT scholarship is whether the NT writers were more influenced by Jewish backgrounds or by the Greco-Roman. The either/or polarity sometimes implied by the discussions is misleading because both backgrounds are important in virtually every book. In explaining the significance of Jesus Christ, Peter and other writers of the NT are drawing from the wellspring of Judaism and its religious heritage. The very Jewish nature of Peter's epistle demonstrates that its author's thought is steeped in the traditions and writings of the OT. However, the audiences to which 1 Peter and other NT writings are addressed, whether they were primarily Jewish Christian or Gentile Christian, lived in societies that were shaped by the Greco-Roman worldview. Therefore, it is particularly fitting, when the apostles instruct their readers on how to live as Christians within such a society, that they engage the thought-world of the Greco-Roman writers whose ideas shaped the values and expectations of that society. This is not to say that the NT writers were unduly influenced by pagan thought or to blur the distinction between the Judeo-Christian worldview and that of the Roman Empire. Therefore, those who feel compelled to defend exclusively or primarily a Jewish background and reject the part that Greco-Roman backgrounds play in the household codes miss the nuanced sensitivities of the NT writers.

There is some debate whether the form of the Greek words for "slaves" (οἱ οἰκέται, *hoi oiketai*) in 2:18 and wives (γυναῖκες, *gynaikes*) in 3:1 should be taken as vocative (the case of direct address) or as nominative. Nominative forms are found most frequently in the Greek moral philosophers, who refer to slaves and wives as classes of people but in general do not directly address them. The context and structure of the 1 Peter passage suggests that here these words are vocatives. Unlike the Greek writers, Peter directly addresses both slaves and wives, assuming that both have a moral responsibility for their own behavior that exceeds social expectations of that day.

Although instructions are often given about master-slave relationships in the Greek writings, slaves were not directly addressed as free moral agents as we find in the NT (Balch 1988: 33). Aristotle, for instance, describes slaves as human chattel of two kinds: those in positions of trust and brute laborers (*Oeconomica* 1.5.1–2; cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 47). While wives do not have the full social and legal status of their husbands, they are not thought

of as human chattel (contra popular belief) in Greek moral philosophy. In fact, within the walls of the home, wives enjoyed a large degree of authority over slaves, children, and property. In *Advice* §33, Plutarch (AD 46?–120) explains that a man ought to exercise control over a woman “not as the owner has control of a piece of property, but, as the soul controls the body, by entering into her feelings and being knit to her through goodwill. . . . It is possible to govern a wife, and at the same time to delight and gratify her” (Babbitt 1971: 323).

In the Greek writings, wives, like slaves, receive instruction through their husbands because both slave and wife are thought to be deficient, though not in the same way. Aristotle understands the slave to be incapable of deliberative thinking, while the wife has the capability but not the commensurate authority (Balch 1981: 34–35). Thus, it is proper to direct all instruction through the man, who has both the capability and authority to reason fully. Moreover, the instruction of the wife should be the object of the husband’s unstinting care (Aristotle, *Oeconomica* 3.2). While some modern interpreters consider the NT household codes to be hopelessly chauvinistic, they fail to read the codes against their contemporary literature, which shows that the NT writers actually subverted cultural expectations by elevating the slave and the wife with unparalleled dignity.

The second distinctive difference between Greek writings and Peter’s instructions to Christian slaves and wives is that he rejects the cultural expectation that a slave must worship his or her master’s god and a wife must worship her husband’s. As Oborn (1939: 135) observes, every well-to-do Roman family had slaves, in some cases in large numbers. It is estimated that almost one-quarter of the empire’s population were slaves, so their role was significant to socioeconomic stability. The slave’s loyalty to the master’s gods assured economic stability. In particular, any religion that advocated equality of any kind between slaves and masters would be met with swift and certain opposition. Wives were similarly expected to follow the husband’s religion. In *Advice* 140.19, Plutarch instructs:

A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband’s friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions. (Babbitt 1971: 311)

If Plutarch’s view represents that of first-century Greco-Roman society, a pagan woman who becomes a Christian could appear rebellious for not worshipping her husband’s gods, as well as for making friends in the Christian community who were not her husband’s friends. First-century social expectations of the wife were quite different from those of our own society, where both husband and wife may have friendships apart from the other and be of different religions without provoking accusations of perverting the social order. This large difference in social expectations suggests that we must be thoughtful about how these biblical instructions are to be observed by Christians today.

Furthermore, the expectation that a wife would worship her husband’s gods also raised a problem for the first-century husband who had converted to Christianity. He may have faced the problem of a wife who, though formally expected to follow his new faith, in reality resented being socially demeaned by her husband’s association with this strange, new religion. Her rebellion against Christianity might in turn diminish her husband’s status in society’s eyes because the man was responsible for order in his own household regardless of his religion. What was a man in such a position to do so that he could fulfill his duty as the head of the household while respecting the reality in which he lived? Peter saves his final household instructions for married men (3:7).

In the first century, any religion that did not uphold the proper order between men and their slaves and between husbands and their wives was severely criticized. In fact, foreigners were evaluated and welcomed into society to the extent to which their household patterns were compatible with those of the Greek moral philosophers (Balch 1981). Christianity was not the only religion to come under such scrutiny, but its worldview was certainly suspect. In these verses Peter affirms the sociopolitical order, on the one hand, while simultaneously reworking it on Christian principles so that Christian households become a direct expression of eschatological self-understanding lived out in society (Goppelt 1993: 173). As Volf (1994: 22) observes, “The household codes in 1 Peter are in fact an example of differentiated acceptance and rejection of the surrounding culture.” Balch (1988: 36) refers to them as “selective acculturation.” The basis for Peter’s reworking of social

expectations is the example of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant of God, in whose footsteps all Christians—including slaves, wives, and husbands—are to follow.

ii. Christ Dignifies the Lowly (2:21a)

Peter's readers may have been feeling a loss of empowerment and status because of their Christian convictions and the various social misperceptions of what those convictions meant for the social order. As Christians who are to "be subject to every human institution because of the Lord" (2:13), slaves and wives are to be subject to their masters and husbands. Slaves, the lowest social class in Greco-Roman society, have to submit to even unjust masters, and they therefore are here paradigmatic for the status of all Christians (as also Achtemeier 1993: 177; 1996: 195; B. Campbell 1998: 143; J. H. Elliott 1981: 207). Regardless of one's social status, Christians are to consider themselves to be slaves to God, and so the actual slave who is obedient to his master exemplifies that role for the entire Christian community.

But this is not the only reason Peter addresses slaves, and addresses them first at that. Peter here makes the point that God sent his Son as one who would seemingly have so little sociopolitical power that he would end up dying a slave's death by crucifixion. In this passage, Peter identifies Jesus as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, providing us the only NT passage that does so this explicitly and extensively. Peter bases his instructions for *all* Christian members of society on the example of Christ's lowly position in human society, but he first addresses the lowliest—the slave, who by definition is being treated unjustly. The role of the slave in Roman society images the role of Jesus Christ, who was a suffering slave obedient to God but treated unjustly in the world. Therefore, Peter addresses slaves first for the purpose of motivating ethical behavior by Christology, not because they are particularly numerous in the church (though that may well have been true). This intent also explains why he does not address their powerful masters at all. Peter also does not address the parent-child relationship at all because he is primarily interested in instructing the least powerful adults of society on how they should conduct themselves as Christians. The unique nature of Peter's purpose also explains why his sequence and content are different from similar passages in Eph. 5:21–33 and Col. 3:18–22 and calls into question whether the *Haustafeln* provide any relevant evidence of literary dependence between Peter and Paul.

The apostle Peter elevates the dignity and self-understanding of the least empowered people of that time, the slave first and then the wife. The Son of God has dignified even the lowliest in society by becoming like them in his incarnation. Wives, being next to slaves in the hierarchy of social power and status, are addressed next. Christian husbands, whose social status and power have probably also been compromised in some way because of the gospel, are addressed not only last but also with the fewest words. Peter points to Jesus Christ as the true model for how to live a significant, dignified life of freedom even in the midst of the most oppressive situation.

Peter addresses household slaves by using the more specific word οἰκέται (*oiketai*, household servants) rather than the more general δοῦλοι (*douloi*, slaves) simply because he is concerned specifically with the household unit. Even though household servants fared better than field slaves, both were the property of others and subject to harsh treatment at their master's whims. In 2:16 Peter has just referred to all Christians as slaves (*douloi*) of God, introducing this concept as a way Christians are to understand themselves. The word also connects to Peter's Christology, for Isa. 53:11 LXX refers to the suffering of the servant (παῖς, *pais*, 52:13 LXX) by using a participle of the cognate verb δουλεύω (*douleuō*, serve as a slave). The indirect nature of the associations between Isa. 53 and the passion of Jesus in Mark's Gospel is what might be expected if mediated by Peter, the only NT writer who explicitly identifies Jesus with the Suffering Servant (see Watts: 1998).

Christian slaves may have wondered, or perhaps even wishfully hoped, that their new birth into a living hope would relieve them from the oppressive social expectations of their station. Peter affirms that they are now indeed free people but also that this freedom does not entitle them to rebel against their masters, whether those masters be good and considerate or harsh. Apparently harsh treatment of slaves was socially acceptable and perhaps even expected by the Romans. Seneca, a Roman Stoic philosopher writing about the same time the books of the NT were being composed, criticizes those in power for being "excessively haughty, cruel, and insulting" toward their slaves, whom they should instead view as fully human and to be treated as friends (*Ep.* 47.12).

Even in such a harsh situation, the Christian slave is to submit to the master's authority and to bear up under unjust treatment because of a consciousness of God. The fact that Peter describes such suffering as "unjust"

(ἀδίκως, *adikōs*) also implies an unprecedented status for the slave, to whom, according to Aristotle, no true injustice can be done (Balch 1984: 164; Volf 1994: 23).

Because the slave functions rhetorically as the paradigm for all believers, this specific exhortation to bear unjust treatment moves Peter's argument to its most controversial level as he addresses the heart of the problem faced by his readers. The issue of accepting unjust suffering would trigger a range of responses, as even classroom discussion of this passage demonstrates today. Peter both accommodates and subverts the existing social structures. Neither he nor any other NT writer mounts a frontal attack on the social structures of the time, such as slavery. But as Volf (1994: 23) observes:

The call to follow the crucified Messiah was, in the long run, much more effective in changing the unjust political, economic, and familial structures than direct exhortations to revolutionize them would ever have been. For an allegiance to the crucified Messiah—indeed, worship of a crucified God—is an eminently political act that subverts a politics of dominion at its very core.

As Christians live out their calling in obedience to God even within unjust social structures, they are subverting the status quo and opening a new way of thinking.

Peter's instruction is consistent with the Hellenistic concept that it is morally better to suffer as not guilty than as guilty. But one of the ideals of Christianity is to right injustice, which seems to argue against the Christian community simply accepting unjust treatment of its members. However, when facing the enormity of the first-century Greco-Roman establishment, none of the NT writers holds out much hope for changing the ways of the world. Instead, they exhort the transformation of Christ's people, making the holy nation a colony in this fallen world. Because Peter's readers presumably want God in Christ to be glorified, they are asked to submit even to unjust suffering because, as Christ himself has demonstrated, this is the way to break the world's ways and perhaps one day bring unbelievers to praise and glorify God themselves.

The participle ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hypotassomenoi*, submit) in 1 Pet. 2:18 is the first of four participles in this section that could be labeled imperatival, for it is in the nominative case and not syntactically subordinated to a finite verb (see additional note on 2:18). It could, however, be thought of as the explicit component of a periphrastic expression in which the verb "be" (*eimi* or *ginomai*) is implied. The middle voice of the participle in conjunction with an implied imperatival form of *eimi* or *ginomai* yields "be subject." This is probably the preferable construal here as well as in 3:1.

The command to submit is qualified by the adverbial prepositional phrase "in all fear" (ἐν παντί φόβῳ, *en panti phobō*), which is repeated in the instructions to both wives (3:1) and husbands (3:7) by the adverb ὁμοίως (*homoiōs*, in the same way). This reference to fear echoes the exhortation of 1:17 that fear of God is to be the Christian's motivation. Peter therefore understands all Christian members of the household, regardless of their station, to be joined by the common motivation based on their relationship with God.

Aristotle (*Oeconomica* 3.3) defines a distinction between the two kinds of fear recognized by the Greek word φόβος (*phobos*):

The fear which virtuous and honorable sons feel towards their fathers, and loyal citizens towards right-minded rulers, has for its companions reverence and modesty; but the other kind, felt by slaves for masters and by subjects for despots who treat them with injustice and wrong, is associated with hostility and hatred.

This distinction was also known to Hellenistic Judaism (Daube 1956: 130). The Greek word *phobos* is used frequently in the LXX to refer to a reverent stance toward God that motivates right behavior (e.g., Gen. 31:42, 53; Exod. 20:20; Neh. 5:9; Prov. 1:7, 29; 8:13; 9:10; 19:23; 23:17). Proverbs 1:29 is particularly instructive because it refers to the "fear of the LORD" as something that may be chosen rather than an emotion that is simply evoked: "Since they hated knowledge and did not *choose* to fear the LORD ..." (NIV, emphasis added).

Although both slaves and wives may indeed be terrified of what their master and husband might do to them, the sense of "reverence" is intended here (also applied to the instructions to husbands through the adverb *homoiōs*, "in the same way," 1 Pet. 3:7). Rather than cowering in terror before harsh masters and tyrannical husbands, Christians are to conduct themselves "with all godly reverence" (Achtmeier 1996: 189), "with all due reverence [to God]" (Davids 1990: 105), "with all reverence" (J. H. Elliott 2000: 511), "with deep

reverence” (Michaels 1988: 133). They are to choose to fear God by behaving in their relationships in a manner that expresses obedience to him.

However, the other side of the reverence in view is to recognize that the God they revere is also the God who judges impartially (1:17). The station code expounds on 1:17 by setting out how the fear of God’s impartial judgment motivates one’s demeanor in life’s most basic relationships. To submit “in all fear” (2:18, a literal reading of the Greek) means that one’s reverence for God translates into “respect” for both good and harsh masters and, in 3:2, respect for unbelieving husbands, while recognizing that God will judge the behavior of the harsh master and unbelieving husband (Sylva 1983: 147). But God will also judge the Christian’s disobedience. In 3:7 married men are to live with their women “in the same way” that slaves and wives are to submit, with fear of the One who judges them. Therefore, Christian slaves, wives, and husbands are to conduct themselves respectfully within the social expectations of their day—as modified by Peter’s instructions—because of the reverence for God their new life in Christ demands.

The direct transformation of society’s structures, even those that are patently unjust, does not seem to be the goal of the NT writers. Rather, it is the transformation of the believer regardless of one’s situation that is the primary concern. In fact, Peter seems intent on making sure that Christians do not directly confront the status quo even while he subverts it. The implied assumptions of Peter’s teaching (e.g., directly addressing slaves and wives as heirs of the grace of God in Christ who have moral authority over their own lives equal to that of free men), if followed to their logical extent by a society committed to such teaching, will indeed restructure that society.

But Peter is not optimistic about reforming the world. In fact, he assumes that injustice will reign until the Lord’s return and that to bear up under unjust suffering without sinning is in fact the calling of every believer regardless of social status. Peter is clear that he is not speaking of suffering caused by one’s own misbehavior (2:20; 4:15). But when Christians suffer unjustly and do not sin in response, this is χάρις (*charis*, grace, 2:19) before God. Many commentators understand this phrase in 2:19–20 to mean that God looks with favor (grace) upon a righteous response to unjust suffering (Achtmeier 1996: 189; Davids 1990: 105; J. H. Elliott 2000: 511). The TNIV translates the phrase as “is commendable before God” (2:20). Goppelt (1993: 200) explains how the word *charis*, widely used in secular Greek literature, became a technical theological term in Paul for “God’s bestowal of himself through Jesus’ work of redemption, the bestowal that bears and shapes the destiny of the person who gives himself or herself over to it.” While it may not be assumed that one NT writer uses a term in exactly the same sense as another, Peter does use the word *charis* in 5:12 to sum up the entire content of the letter: “This is the true grace of God.” Goppelt (1993: 200) explains: “The author wants to assure the readers that the existence into which they have been placed through Christ is truly grace. Even proper conduct in one’s station in this world and especially the suffering connected with it are indeed, grace.” Responding righteously to unjust suffering is commendable in God’s sight, but *charis* in this context also implies that God’s special favor rests upon the righteous sufferer of injustice, further enabling that one to behave in a manner that is commendable by God. Peter makes this point more explicitly in 4:14: “If you are vilified because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

iii. Peter’s Christology and the Christian’s Calling to Unjust Suffering (2:21b–25)

The presence of a passage about Christ’s suffering in 2:21b–25 is unexpected in a discussion about slaves, wives, and husbands. The concept of suffering does not appear in pagan household codes and is unique to Peter’s purposes (Thompson 1966: 73). Peter claims that slaves, and by extension all Christians (3:9), are called both to suffer unjustly and to continue to do right as they follow the example of Jesus Christ in his passion. Although this call is embedded in instructions addressed to slaves, Peter has previously referred to all Christians as slaves of God (2:16) and restates the principle explicitly for all his readers in 3:9. First Peter 2:21–25 forms the heart of 1 Peter’s Christology, joining ethics to theology in a profoundly convincing way. Ironically, the suffering of Christ has become central to the Christology of the apostle who most strongly objected to Jesus’ prediction of his death (Matt. 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–33).

The suffering to which slaves, and by extension all Christians, are called is not suffering caused by the human condition, such as illness, aging, and death. Nor is it suffering that is the consequence of one’s own sin and poor judgment. Peter’s call is to suffer unjustly, to suffer even though one has done nothing to provoke or

deserve it, simply because one is a Christian. The challenge of the call does not stop there; Peter further exhorts the Christian to keep on doing good even when unjust suffering continues to be the result.

The identity of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant poignantly yet enigmatically portrayed in Isaiah 53 is well known in Christian tradition. What may be more surprising is that the church owes this insight to the apostle Peter alone, for it is only here in the NT that Christ's passion is discussed in terms of Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant. There are six direct quotations of Isa. 53 in the NT (Matt. 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32–33; Rom. 10:16; 15:21), but surprisingly only two of them are used in reference to Jesus. The other four quotations of Isa. 53 in the NT apply elements of that vision to aspects of Christian missions and evangelism but not to the person of Christ himself. John 12:38 quotes Isa. 53:1, "Lord, who has believed our message?" as the prophecy fulfilled when the Jews still would not believe in Jesus after seeing his many signs. In Matthew's Gospel (8:17), Jesus' miracles of healing are said to be the fulfillment of Isa. 53:4, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases"—quite a different understanding than the vicarious bearing of our infirmities and diseases on the cross that Peter presents. In Luke 22:37 Jesus quotes Isa. 53:12, "He was numbered with the transgressors," as justification for his order that his disciples sell their cloak and buy a sword.

Paul uses the Isaiah passage not in reference to Jesus at all but as a prophetic prediction of his own ministry. He quotes Isa. 52:15 in Rom. 15:21, "Those who were not told about him will see," as a prophetic justification of his own mission to the Gentiles. Paul takes Isa. 53 to mean that although God sent him, his apostolic message would be rejected, and in Rom. 10:15–16, he quotes both Isa. 52:7, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" and Isa. 53:1, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

Other than 1 Peter 2:21–25, the closest christological use of Isa. 53 is found in Acts 8:35, where the eunuch is reading from that prophecy and Philip begins there to tell the eunuch the good news about Jesus, but there is no actual exposition in that passage of the specific elements of Isa. 53 as they relate to Jesus. We are thus indebted to the apostle Peter alone for his distinctive christological use of the Suffering Servant passage to interpret the significance of the suffering and death of Jesus. The Suffering Servant Christology may have even originated with Peter, possibly based on Jesus' teaching. Of the five NT verses referring to Jesus as the servant (*παῖς*, *pais*) of God, two occur in a speech attributed to Peter (Acts 3:13, 26) and two in a prayer of the early Jerusalem church when Peter is in leadership (Acts 4:27, 30). (The fifth passage is Matt. 12:18, which quotes Isa. 42:1–4 in reference to the healings Jesus performed.)

Luke's passing reference to the identification of Jesus and the Suffering Servant suggests that the identification was already well established in Christian tradition by the time Luke is writing, perhaps as early as AD 60–62. Therefore, if 1 Peter is the source of this tradition, the epistle would have to be dated in the 50s or earlier. It is debated whether Jesus himself used the Suffering Servant passage of Isa. 53 to explain his ministry (Hooker 1998). But even those who deny that Jesus saw himself in these terms admit that the identification of Jesus with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah must have emerged in the very early church (e.g., Hillyer 1969b: 144).

On the other hand, if 1 Peter is drawing on a preexisting Christ-hymn that would have also been available to Luke, the absence of this material in its hymnic form in the earlier writings of the NT is somewhat surprising. Most interpreters today have backed away from the claim that this passage was a preexisting hymn that Peter adapted for his purposes. The tradition began with Windisch (1930), was taken up by Bultmann in 1947 (cited by J. H. Elliott 2000: 548n156), and was the consensus opinion until the 1980s, when the work of Best (1971), Osborne (1983), and Michaels (1988) offered better explanations. J. H. Elliott (1985), for instance, once espoused this theory but has retracted it in his most recent work (2000: 548–50). Three observations on 1 Pet. 2:21–25 were once offered to show that it was from a preexisting hymn: (1) the shift from second person to third person and back, (2) the repeated use of the relative pronoun *ὃς* (*hos*, who), and (3) the shift from material addressed to slaves to christological material relevant to all readers. As Achtemeier (1993: 178) counters, (1) the shift in person would be expected from the use of any source, including a direct use of Isa. 53 LXX; (2) the relative pronoun *hos* is used repeatedly throughout the epistle in places that are clearly not hymnic; and (3) even the material explicitly addressed to slaves is in fact implicitly addressed to the entire community, because the slave, as the least empowered member of society, was to be the paradigm for all believers. The direct use of Isa. 53 LXX provides sufficient explanation of the source material.

As the heart of 1 Peter's Christology, 2:21–25 is worth lingering over. In a notably creative use of OT material, elements of Christ's passion are interwoven with phrases and allusions from Isa. 53 LXX that interpret aspects of his trial and suffering. As Hooker (1998: 93) notes, Peter does not use Isa. 53 as a proof text, but his use of this material has moved beyond a "simple appeal to 'what is written' to the explanation of its *significance*" (emphasis original). This translation of 1 Pet. 2:21–25 highlights the extensive and creative use of Isa. 53 LXX by showing quotations of it in boldface and allusions to it in italics:

- 2:20b Rather, if because of doing good you suffer and endure it, this is grace before God.
- 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered on your behalf, leaving you an example in order that you might follow in his footsteps.
- 2:22 [He,] who **did not commit sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth** [Isa. 53:9];
- 2:23 [He,] who when reviled *did not retaliate*, when he suffered *he did not make threats* [Isa. 53:7c–d], but instead *trusted* [Isa. 53:6c, 12] *the one who judges justly* [Isa 53:8a];
- 2:24 [He,] who **himself bore our sins** [Isa. 53:4a, 12] in his body upon the tree, so that being separated from sins we might live to righteousness;
- [He,] **by whose wounds you are healed** [Isa. 53:5d].
- 2:25 For **you were like wandering sheep** [Isa. 53:6a], but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

As Achtemeier (1993: 180) observes, Peter uses the language of Isa. 53, but the order of 1 Pet. 2:22–25 follows the sequence of events in the passion of Jesus, with 2:22 and 2:23 alluding to the trial, and verse 24 to the crucifixion. Goppelt (1993: 211) also points out that this passage reflects three fundamental aspects of the passion narrative as described in Mark's Gospel:

1. Verbal abuse refers to slander by the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:65), ridicule by the Roman guards (Mark 15:12–20), and derision by the crucified thief (Mark 15:29–32).
2. Jesus accepts injustice without retaliating; in fact, he accepts it in silence (Mark 14:61; 15:5). His silence can be compared with the loud threats made by previous Jewish martyrs in 2 Macc. 7:17, 19, 31, 35, and 4 Macc. 10:1–3.
3. Jesus entrusted judgment to God, thereby leaving the preservation of justice to God the Father alone (Mark 14:62).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was not only a historical event but also a hermeneutical event that allowed new understandings of the OT. Reciprocally, the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection is interpreted through the OT, possibly with the aid of insight imparted to Peter by Jesus before his death. Peter does not start with Isa. 53; rather, he begins with the fact of Jesus' suffering and death and searches the OT to understand its significance (cf. Luke 24:25–27, 44–48). First Peter 2:21–25 is a remembrance of Jesus' suffering, explained and interpreted by the prophecy provided by Isaiah that allowed Peter to make sense of the sufferings of the Christ. But Jesus' suffering also allowed the apostle to make new sense of Isa. 53. As Peter has already explained in 1:10–12, it was the Spirit of Christ who revealed to Isaiah and other prophets the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow, and this was done as a ministry for the generations who would look back on the Messiah's death and need an explanation of its meaning. Because Jesus suffered a death reserved for slaves under Roman law, his identity as Isaiah's Suffering Servant (slave) is corroborated. Furthermore, this mode of death, which the Romans reserved for slaves and others lacking Roman citizenship, strengthens the identification between the plight of the "servants" Peter addresses in 2:18 and the Suffering Servant.

Peter presents the unjust suffering of slaves as the calling of all Christians because Jesus was called to suffer unjustly, he "who suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps" (2:21). This is powerful imagery. The Greek word translated "example" (ὁπογραμμὸν, *hypogrammon*) was used to refer to a pattern of letters of the alphabet over which children learning to write would trace (Achtemeier 1996: 199). It suggests the closest of copies. English words such as "example," "model," or "pattern" are too weak,

for Jesus' suffering is not simply *an* example or pattern or model, as if one of many; he is *the* paradigm by which Christians write large the letters of his gospel in their lives. If Christians are to live as servants of God (2:16), the essence of that identity is a willingness to suffer unjustly as Jesus did, exemplifying in suffering the same attitude and behavior he did. Jesus Christ left us this pattern over which we are to trace out our lives, in order that we might follow in his footsteps. This is a strong image associating the Christian's life with the life of Christ. For one cannot step into the footsteps of Jesus and head off in any other direction than the direction he took, and his footsteps lead to the cross, through the grave, and onward to glory.

The christological paraenesis that follows therefore presumes unjust suffering in the life of the Christian and outlines with what attitude and behavior the Christian is to suffer, thereby following in the footsteps of Jesus. Peter later writes that by following his footsteps, he "leads you to God" (3:18). This imagery of footsteps has likely contributed to the adoption of the Greek verb ἀκολουθέω (*akolouthēō*, follow) to refer to Christian discipleship (e.g., Matt. 4:20; 8:23; 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 5:27; 9:23; John 1:43; 8:12; 10:27; 12:26). Jesus himself used *akolouthēō* frequently to summon and lead his earliest disciples, including Peter.

Peter's Christology is here at the same time paraenetic and pastoral. As Matera (1999: 184) describes it:

The Christology of 1 Peter is a Christology of suffering.... By focusing on the sufferings of Christ, 1 Peter shows the intimate relationship between Christology and the Christian life: the *past* suffering of Christ is the *present* condition of believers, while the *present* glory of Christ is the *future* glory of those who follow in the steps of the suffering Christ. While the Christology of 1 Peter may not be the most developed of the New Testament, it is among the most pastorally sensitive. (emphasis original)

What would it have meant specifically for Peter's first-century readers to follow in Christ's footsteps within their sociopolitical situation? The four relative clauses of 2:21–25 portraying Christ's suffering present the model:

1. Christ, who did not commit sin... ;
2. Christ, who did not retaliate... ;
3. Christ, who bore our sins... ;
4. Christ, by whose wounds you are healed.

First, Jesus Christ "did not commit sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth." Since this is a direct quote from the OT, Hebrew parallelism may suggest that the second phrase is a more specific restatement of the first, indicating that Jesus did not sin by lies and deception. Second, when Christ was reviled he "did not retaliate, when he suffered he did not make threats, but instead trusted the One who judges justly." When his adversaries hurled their insults at Jesus, "he did not retaliate"; when Jesus suffered, "he made no threats in return."

There are many different statements made in Isa. 53 about the Suffering Servant, but Peter emphasizes the verbal aspect of the Servant's behavior as lived out by Jesus. Jesus' speech was not deceptive; he did not revile (speak abusively), and he did not threaten. Peter's readers were on the receiving end of abusive speech, ignorant talk, and the like (2:15; 3:9, 16; 4:14). Perhaps Peter begins to describe the Suffering Servant as a model for Christian behavior with these particular phrases because, when people are treated unjustly, it is most tempting to respond by stretching the truth, putting our opponents in a bad light, speaking abusively of others, or making threats. Following in Jesus' footsteps through this trying situation means not responding in kind to the accusers or using deceit, slander, or threats. Peter says as much in 3:9: "Do not repay ... insult for insult." He advises that in some situations, silence is the best response, as any other response will be turned against them. It is, however, the silence not of passive resignation but of patient confidence (Hill 1982: 55).

After giving the example of what Jesus did not do, Peter reminds his readers of what Jesus did do. Instead of sinning under the pressure of unjust suffering, Jesus continued to trust God. Peter later exhorts his readers to do likewise in 4:19: "So then, let even those who suffer according to the will of God entrust themselves to the faithful Creator by doing good." This is ironic because Christians are to keep on doing good even though the conflict they suffer is being generated because society questions whether a life motivated by faith in Christ is "good." But rather than yield to their adversaries' judgment, Peter's readers are to trust God, who judges justly.

The idea that misfortune indicates divine displeasure was perhaps more prevalent in the ancient world than it is today. Peter reminds his readers that Jesus' unjust suffering did not mean that God had abandoned him; to

the contrary, unjust suffering was God's mysterious way to accomplish the redemption of humanity. Jesus' trust was well placed, despite the circumstances that ended in his death. Peter encourages his readers to recognize that their unjust suffering does not mean that the gospel is untrue or that God is displeased with them. To suffer for following Christ is to share the nature of Jesus' suffering in that it is undeserved. It is caused by the world's hostility to Christian allegiance to God, but it will nevertheless accomplish God's purposes.

In 2:24 Peter continues to explain the significance of Jesus' undeserved capital punishment by conflating a phrase from Isa. 53:12 LXX, "He himself bore" (αὐτὸς ... ἀνήνεγκεν, *autos* . . . *anēnenken*), with a phrase from 53:4 LXX, "our sins" (τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, *tas hamartias hēmōn*). Peter personalizes the quotation for the Christian community by taking "our sins" from 53:4 in place of "the sins of many" in 53:12. Thus, Peter speaks to his readers as those for whom Isaiah's Suffering Servant bore sin. And just so there will be no misunderstanding about specifically how Jesus Christ has borne our sins, Peter adds two prepositional phrases, "in his body" and "on the tree," an explicit reference to the death of Jesus by crucifixion. The latter phrase may be an allusion to Deut. 21:23, where God's curse is invoked on the one who is hung on a tree (probably, in the historical context of Deuteronomy, a reference to being impaled for display, not crucified; cf. 2 Sam. 21:9). In the context of Roman practices, the reference to crucifixion is a reminder that Jesus was executed unjustly as a criminal; Peter's readers might be similarly accused. The purpose of Christ's vicarious bearing of the judgment for sin has ethical implications for the lives of Peter's readers: "so that having no part in sins, we might live in righteousness" (2:24). Peter's understanding of Christian ethics is thoroughly grounded in the Christology of suffering.

In the fourth relative pronoun in this passage, Peter writes, "You are healed" (2:24), where both the LXX and the Hebrew have "We are healed" (Isa. 53:5). The use of the second-person plural pronoun, "you," is characteristic of the style of 1 Peter, occurring 83 times in 1 Peter, with the first plural, "we/our/us," used only 4 times (1:3 [2x]; 2:24; 4:17). This disproportionate use of the second-person plural pronoun can be compared with 2 Peter, where the first plural occurs 15 times and the second plural 21 times. In the epistles that bear Paul's name, the first plural occurs 400 times and the second plural 713 times. As a matter of style, Peter seems deliberately to change the pronouns from the wording of Isa. 53:5 LXX, which he otherwise follows. If his readers are primarily Gentiles, perhaps he is underscoring their inclusion in the people of God by excluding himself as a Jew. In other words, Peter is saying, "The Suffering Servant died not just for *us* Jews, but also for *you* Gentiles." On the other hand, in this occurrence Peter may simply revert back to the second-person plural pronoun to signal his return to the household code, since the description of Christ's suffering is introduced by the thought of *you* slaves being beaten unjustly (2:20). The fatal, physical wounds of the Suffering Servant that heal fatal, spiritual wounds become the transition back to the present perspective of Peter's readers.

The thought in Isa. 53:5 that the wounds of the Suffering Servant heal is followed in 53:6 by the statement "We all have wandered like sheep..." Peter picks up the same imagery in the same sequence, but again changes the first-person plural pronoun to second-person plural: "For you were like sheep going astray..." However, those wandering sheep have now returned to the Shepherd (ποιμήν, *poimēn*) and Overseer (ἐπίσκοπος, *episkopos*) of their souls. A reference to the Shepherd also occurs in Isa. 40:10–11 LXX, where the Shepherd is none other than the Lord himself:

See, the Lord comes with strength,
and his arm with authority;
see, his reward is with him,
and his work before him.
He will tend his flock like a shepherd,
and gather lambs with his arm,
and comfort those that are with young. (Isa. 40:10–11 *NETS*)

The joining of shepherding and overseeing in the context of Diaspora is also found in Ezek. 34:11–13 LXX, where God promises:

I will seek out my sheep and will oversee [*episkepsomai*] them. As the shepherd seeks his sheep in the day on which there is darkness and cloud, ... so I will seek my sheep, and I will bring them back from every place where they were scattered [*διεσπάρησαν, diasparēsan*]. ... And I will bring them out from the Gentiles.

Elements of this passage from Ezekiel correlate so well with elements of 1 Peter that it is tempting to conclude that Peter deliberately alludes to Ezekiel here and elsewhere in his letter. The exact language of shepherding and overseeing is again picked up in 1 Pet. 5:2 to describe the ministry of elders (see comments on 5:1–6). The motif of scattered Christians (cf. 1:1), converted from the Gentiles (cf. 1:2), who were sought after by the Shepherd and who have returned to the *episkopos* of their souls (2:25), aptly echoes Ezekiel’s prophecy. This is probably a further example of how Peter understands the purpose of prophecy given by the Spirit of Christ in relation to the Christian church (cf. 1:10–12).

The imagery of sheep following after the shepherd, following in his footsteps so to speak, forms a conceptual inclusio with 2:21, framing the entire christological exposition with the image that walking in Jesus’ footsteps, even through unjust suffering, is nevertheless the Shepherd’s path of safety, protection, and deliverance.

Peter’s insight that unjust suffering is to be expected by the Christian community also finds grounding in Isaiah’s prophecy. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah has often been interpreted not as one person but collectively as the people of Israel. In fact, Isa. 41:8–11 LXX identifies the nation of Israel as Yahweh’s Suffering Servant:

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, *whom I have chosen*, the offspring of Abraam, whom I have loved; *you whom I took hold of from the ends of the earth*, and I called you from its mountain peaks, and I said to you, “You are my servant [*pais*], I have chosen you and not forsaken you.” Do not fear, for I am with you; do not wander off, for I am your God, who has strengthened you; I have helped you and I have made you secure with my righteous right hand. See all who oppose you shall be ashamed and disgraced; for they shall be as though they were not, and all your adversaries shall perish. (*NETS*, emphasis added)

The fluid image of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant allows its different elements to be identified with both the nation and an individual (Isa. 52:13–53:12). This is congenial to Peter’s insight into the nature of unjust Christian suffering as that of a kind with Christ’s suffering. Peter identifies the Christian community as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession” (2:9)—phrases used in the OT to refer to the nation of Israel in Isaiah. Both the obedient Servant and the holy nation suffer.

Once Peter has realized that Jesus is the Suffering Servant of Isa. 53, he finds in the corporate elements of Isaiah’s prophecy the justification that allows him also to identify the Christians to whom he writes as members of the corporate Suffering Servant of Isa. 41. Interpreters have long puzzled over whether Peter’s original readers were Gentiles or Jews who had become Christians. Although most today believe the original readers were predominantly Gentile, Peter speaks to his readers as if they are Jews. Because Peter sees the Christians of Asia Minor to be part of the suffering nation of God, he addresses them throughout without differentiating their background or origin. If Peter is indifferent to whether his readers are Jewish or Gentile converts, it is a consequence of his understanding that it was the Spirit of Christ who mediated the prophetic revelation of the OT (1 Pet. 1:11). Therefore, the language used to describe Israel served as a proleptic description of the Christian church. As Achtemeier (1993: 187) points out, Peter’s “total appropriation of the language of Israel” for Christians is quite a different use of the OT than the prefiguration of Hebrews, the typological events found in Paul, or specific examples of the life of Christ fulfilling prophecies as found in Matthew.

Peter uses Isaiah’s words to explain that suffering unjustly because of faithfulness to Christ is actually evidence that, like the Messiah, they have been chosen of God. If Isaiah’s words can be interpreted as speaking directly to Christians, God says to Peter’s readers through the words of Isa. 41:8–11, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not forsaken you. Do not fear, for I am with you; do not wander off, for I am your God, who has strengthened you, and I have made you secure” (Isa. 41:9 *NETS*). What words of exhortation and encouragement for the Asian Christians facing threat from a world that would grow increasingly hostile to Christianity! Peter lets Isaiah speak directly to their situation. Don’t be afraid of the unjust suffering you are experiencing. It is not evidence that God has forsaken you; to the contrary, it is evidence that God has chosen you. Do not wander off from Christ, for God will strengthen you to face life as a Christian. God has made you secure because Jesus has suffered the ultimate injustice and yet he lives. You have been bo¹

¹ Jobes, K. H. (2005). [*1 Peter*](#) (pp. 174–200). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.