

Christ Our Example **1 Peter 2:18-25**

Introduction

The Psalmist says that God's law is a lamp to his feet and a light to his path. The Bible is full of commands and instructions. Why does God give us commands? He created us. He created the world. He knows how the systems of the world work, and He knows how we are meant to operate within those systems. His commands ultimately are for His glory, but His plan for us is to conform us to the image of Christ to raise us up in glory with Him. This plan is evident in this passage in 1 Peter 2. God has given this command to you as a light to your path as you run the race of your sanctification in being made more like Christ.

The Text

"Servants, be submissive to your masters, with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh...For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps..." – 1 Peter 2:18-25 (NKJV)

Pragmatic and Intrinsic

Understanding the context of Peter's audience is helpful in understanding Peter's point. One commentator notes that Peter has both pragmatic and intrinsic reasons for giving this exhortation. What is pragmatic about the command? As a new Christian, a slave would want to be living to serve God and obey His laws. This would often draw persecution from unbelieving masters, people who increasingly despised Christians and thought of them as rebellious people. When a slave became a Christian, he might think that because of this freedom in Christ, he should throw off his physical chains as well. Peter is warning against this, as does Paul in 1 Cor. 7:20-21. A runaway slave would be in great physical danger. Christians were already thought of as seditious because of their refusal to worship the emperor. Peter doesn't want this newfound freedom to endanger these slaves unnecessarily. So, Peter exhorts the slaves to be submissive towards their masters in every way they can while obeying the commands of God.

There is also an "intrinsic" reason. God is the one who has structured society. Whether masters are kind or harsh, the good works of God's people (including submission to authority) is a witness to the gospel and its power. The apostle wants slaves to recognize that authority structures are part of the way God has made the world. As the gospel reforms society, those authority structures will change. Their submission takes part in effecting that change. So, they should let the gospel do its work and not try to hurry it along by rebelling.

Also to the Harsh

The quality of the one in authority is not a factor in the obedience of the subordinate. This is because this authority is not ultimately something that man earns, but something that the almighty and sovereign God bestows. Submission to those in authority is the result of experiencing the freedom of the gospel (1 Cor. 7:21-22). Having been set free through Christ, you can freely submit to your master or boss or whomever God has placed in authority over you. This is not because God is okay with injustice, but rather because you

put your trust in Him who says, “Vengeance is Mine.” We are to seek peace as much as we can, and one way to do this is to submit to authority (Rom. 12:18-21).

This is related to another principle we see throughout Scripture. Someone else’s sin towards you does not excuse or justify a sinful response. Our obedience to those in authority over us is done in fear of God. He calls us to love our enemies and do good to those who spitefully use us. This passage in 1 Peter is just a more specific application of that principle. Similarly, Jesus says that you cannot serve two masters. When someone in authority over you mistreats you, you have the option to serve your flesh as your master or Jesus as your master. If Jesus is your master, you may not serve your flesh in the way you respond to that mistreatment. Wherever you find yourself in a position under authority, these verses are for you. If your conscience is clean before God and you follow Him, He commends you for patiently enduring unjust suffering. Again, this is simply one area (those under authority) where many of the principles of Christian living that Jesus gave are applied (“do good to those who spitefully use you”, “pray for those who persecute you”, “love your enemies”).

No Deceit in His Mouth

Slaves (and by extension, all Christians under an authority) are called to patient enduring and submission because Jesus also suffered for us and left us an example to follow (v. 21). Peter quotes Isaiah 53:9, describing Jesus as a man without any sin and who had no deceit in His mouth. This passage reminds us of a contrast between Jesus and Peter himself during the Passion account. Unlike Jesus, Peter’s mouth, when threatened with persecution for following Jesus, was full of deceit. Jesus was able to undergo all and did not fear the threats of death, did not fear death itself, because He trusted in His Father, the righteous judge who would vindicate and deliver Him. Peter, on the other hand, did not trust in God to deliver and vindicate him.

Peter’s story doesn’t stop there, though. He is restored to fellowship with Jesus, preaches boldly in the Spirit, and is arrested and beaten. When he is sternly warned and threatened, his response is that He must obey God rather than men (“because of conscience toward God”). And he rejoices that he is counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus (Acts 5:41).

Conclusion

Christ is our example for this. But He is more than just an example of a good man patiently enduring abuse. His suffering was for your sake. And by His suffering, He purchased you, redeemed you, gave you new life, and gives you healing for all your hurts. Jesus is the example for us to follow, but He is also our Redeemer and the One who enables us through His Spirit to follow in His example. Submission to unjust and abusive people is a crazy idea in our minds, especially in a humanistic world. But this world is run and held together by King Jesus. He has provided a new way for people to live. We live in submission to God and to all of His commands, and in doing so, we come to enjoy freedom and contentment and joy that reaches beyond our present circumstances.