



Slaves for Jesus
MATT BLACK, Sun, Sept 10, 2017
1 Peter 3:18-21, "Living as Lights" series

Introduction: Open your Bible to 1 Peter 2:11-12. We are continuing in a series in 1 Peter called "Living as Lights." This morning's study is entitled: "Slaves for Jesus."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. **Welcome to our Visitors!**
2. **Small Groups** are starting today and all week.

"Just as a servant knows that he must first obey his master in all things, so the surrender to an implicit and unquestionable obedience must become the essential characteristic of our lives."

~ **Andrew Murray**

Introduction

The entire book of 1 Peter is about living as lights in a pagan world. **1 Peter 2:9** – "We are called out of darkness into His marvelous light." Today's message is dealing with how we can be lights in the most extreme situations in this world. Peter talks about various areas. Last week we talked about pagan government, and this week we are talking about slavery.

What Will Our Kids Grow Up to Be?

When our children are young, we wonder, what will they be when they grow up. We dream about it. In modern America, it's usually whatever the child chooses.

In our passage, Peter addresses slaves, servants. Many people in Peter's day did not have a choice regarding slavery. Some were born into it. Many were forced into it by defeat of war. Others actually wanted to become slaves because it was a legitimate pathway to Roman citizenship. After serving as a slave, many people would gain their freedom by the age of 30.

Moravian Slaves

There is a popular story about Christian Missions which describes how two young Moravian Brethren from Herrnhut, Germany were called in 1732 to minister to the African slaves on the Caribbean islands of St. Thomas and St. Croix. When they were told that they would not be allowed to do such a thing, the young men sold themselves to a slave owner and boarded a ship bound for the West Indies. As the ship pulled away from the docks, it is said that they called out to their loved ones on shore, "May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering!"

The Supernatural Response to Unjust Treatment

What do we do when you are in a life situation that is unjust? When someone slanders our reputation, gossips behind our back, or threatens our livelihood, things can get pretty nasty. In my experience, our knee-jerk reactions to unfair treatment generally fall into one of three categories.

First, we may adopt the aggressive pattern of **blaming & bitterness**, focusing on the person who did us wrong and doing whatever it takes to exact revenge. Other times we can turn to **self-pity and complaining**.

Or a second way perhaps, we **pretend everything is ok**, but we are dying inside and seething beneath a calm surface. I'm probably most like that. Hiding and acting like everything is ok. Those are all our natural and human responses.

Peter gives us here in 1 Peter 18-21, a supernatural response to being treated unjustly. He calls on slaves to remember that **they belong to Jesus**, and they are to **follow in his steps**. And remember this morning that we are more than slaves and servants of Christ. We are that, but we are much more than that. We are sons and daughters of the living God.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Scripture

1 Peter 2:18-21, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

Peter says, household servants, fall in line with what your master says. Treat him respectfully, regardless or not if he deserves it. Why, because “it is a gracious thing” (vs. 19, 20) for you to endure unjust suffering. Why, because you are following in the steps of Jesus.

Peter addresses slaves, and we are going to find out that whatever low position you are in, God is calling us out of the slavery of sin and into sonship and adoption with him.

But first let's consider what Peter says to servants in verse 18.

I. An inward call for **grace** in our work, vs. 18-20 –Be subject, for grace's sake.

1 Peter 2:18-20, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.”

Why does Peter address slavery? Why doesn't he just say: “Slavery is wrong – do away with it” and have a slave result?

He does something even more radical. He asks household slaves to do something radical (this is a different word than doulos) – domestic servants (sometimes this was hire help and sometimes it was servitude). He asks them to do “a gracious thing.”

He asks slaves to be subject to their masters / employers for the sake of grace. He says, “It's a gracious thing.”

This is a vital passage in the book of 1 Peter, because slaves made up around half of the Roman empire at the time this was written.

Different from the Modern Slave Trade in England and North America

The slavery in Rome was different from the modern slave trade that occurred in the US and England and many other places around the world.

In actual fact the Bible does condemn, and in no uncertain terms, the slavery practiced in North America. In 1 Timothy 1:8–11 the Apostle Paul makes a list of activities that are “contrary to sound doctrine” (v. 10)—behavior that is against the glorious gospel (v. 10). One activity in the list is the noun translated “enslavers” (v. 10). This word refers to those who would take a person captive in order to sell him or her into slavery.¹

The Bible condemns “enslavers” in **1 Timothy 1:10**, “The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for... enslavers, liars, perjurers...”

The Population of slaves in the Roman Empire

60 million out of 120 million people were slaves. Our passage this morning is addressed to slaves. There were millions of slaves in Romans society. In fact, many of the churches that Paul planted throughout the Roman Empire **were made up of slaves**. Actually, out of the estimated 120 million people in the Roman Empire in Paul’s day, 60 million were slaves. That means that one half of the entire society was enslaved to the other half! We look back at that and can see the depravity of man’s heart.

The horrible degradation of slaves in 19th-century America gives the word ‘slave’ a far worse connotation than is accurate for most of the society to which Peter was writing.² “Most persons in slavery were treated well; they had been born in the house of their owner and they had been trained to perform important domestic, industrial, business, or public tasks.”³

Roman Slave Laws

There is a contrast between Greco-Roman slavery and the American slave trade. The American and British slave trade was essentially kidnapping people from their homeland and forcing human slavery in the most wretched conditions and circumstances.

There was extensive Roman legislation regulating the treatment of slaves. They were normally paid for their services and could expect eventually to purchase their freedom.⁴

Slavery in Israel

There was servitude in Israel, but it was completely different. **No Kidnapping**. Servitude in Israel was very different than the African slave trade that went on in this country. A person could not be forced to go into slavery. He would enter because of his debts. It was a way for him to legitimately pay back anything he owed.

Every 7th Year regardless if your debt was paid, something wonderful occurred. Every 7th year, if you were a Jew, you were set free, and every 50th year, both Jews and Gentile slaves were set free.

The Conditions of Slavery in Rome

Greco-Roman slavery was also quite different.

- By the time of the Christian era and the writing of the letter to Ephesians, sweeping changes had been introduced which radically improved the treatment of slaves.

¹ Helm, D. R. (2008). *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: sharing christ's sufferings* (p. 94). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

² Grudem, W. A. (1988). *1 Peter: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 17, p. 131). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ Scott Barchy, *MALLON CHRÉSAL: First-century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21*, SBL Dissertation Series 11 (Missoula, MT: SBL, 1971) 174.

⁴ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 132.

- Slaves under Roman law in the first century could generally count on eventually being set free. Very few ever reached old age as slaves. Slave owners were releasing slaves at such a rate that Augustus Caesar introduced legal restrictions to curb the trend.
- Almost 50 percent of slaves were freed before the age of thirty.⁵
 1. In the Roman Empire a person might become a slave if he had a great amount debt, so he would sell himself into slavery to pay the debt.
 2. Most slaves though came from the territories Rome conquered, through defeat in war. A person might be a doctor, a teacher, or a merchant, and suddenly, if Rome conquered his land, he could be a slave.
 3. Slavery gave the person a safe place to exist in the Roman Empire. You would have food, clothing, a warm bed.
 4. Slaves could own property and even own other slaves.
 5. While it is true that when a person became a slave, he or she would lose all of his rights. There were laws passed in the days of Paul that allowed for slaves to purchase themselves out of slavery and become citizens.
 6. The only ones that could never become free were slaves that became criminals. They were branded, and they could never have freedom.
 7. Here's something very interesting. According to R. Kent Hughes: "Being a slave did not indicate one's social class. Slaves regularly were accorded the social status of their owners. Regarding outward appearance, it was usually impossible to distinguish a slave from free persons.
 - a. A slave could be a **custodian**, a **salesman**, or a **CEO**. Many slaves lived separately from their owners.
 - b. In fact, **selling oneself into slavery** was commonly used as a means of obtaining Roman citizenship and gaining an entrance into society. If you worked hard, there was a possibility of adoption into the family by the time you were 30, which meant the coveted Roman citizenship.
 - c. Shockingly, Roman slavery in the first century was far more **humane** and **civilized** than the American/African slavery practiced in this country much later. This is a sobering and humbling fact!"⁶

Distinctions in Roman Society

There were various **Distinctions** in Roman society that segregated people. We'll look into these more in depth later, but let me say there were differences between men and women.

1. **Women:** Women couldn't own property or vote.
2. **Jews/Gentiles:** There were differences between Jews and Gentiles. They hated each other. There were different classes of society.
3. **Slaves/Masters:** That difference was no more apparent than between slaves and masters.

⁵ Hughes, R. K. (1990). *Ephesians: The mystery of the body of Christ*. Preaching the Word (206). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

⁶ Ibid.

The Ground is Level at the Cross

Paul taught something amazing in his writings. It is especially seen here: he elevated all people. The ground is level at the cross. There is no male or female superiority. No difference between Jews or Gentiles. No superiority between slaves and free people.

Of course, the Cross brings all groups to level ground. We are all equally deserving of hell, and all equally in desperate need for a Savior. It is only Jesus Christ that can take these distinctions and erase them by the Cross. Slaves, which were despised in Roman society are now made equal to their masters. And masters are brought down to be slaves of Jesus Christ.

In fact, it was not uncommon for slaves to be the pastors of churches. In the Body of Christ, it is not social status that is important – it is surrender to Christ!

Suffering with Grace

What do you do if you are a slave in the first century? Unrest among slaves was widespread at this time, and undoubtedly some Christian slaves believed that, having been “bought” by Christ, they had been set free from their earthly masters.⁷

1 Peter 2:18-20, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19 For **this is a gracious thing**, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20 Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.”

A Disposition of Gentleness

We know who is in charge when we are wronged. We understand we are to be gentle and do good when we are wronged.

This was Paul’s attitude among the brothers, “We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children” (1 Thess 2:7).

“By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you” (2 Cor 10:1).

Paul says “this is a gracious thing” to submit and do a good job when you are unjustly treated. How about you? Are you at times unjustly treated at work?

Submit as to Christ

Remember the command of Paul in Ephesians 6:5-8, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. 6 Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. 7 Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 8 Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free.”

II. An upward call to **grow** in our work, vs. 20-21 –Be subject, conformed to Jesus, sanctification.

1 Peter 2:20-21, “For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, **this is a gracious thing** in the sight of God. 21

⁷ Motyer, S. (1995). 1 Peter. In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Vol. 3, p. 1167). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.⁸

And here Peter begins quoting **Isaiah 53**, with Christ as our example. The key to it all, Peter says, is that the crucifixion of the **Messiah** was the most unjust and wicked act the world had ever seen. Here was the one man who deserved nothing but praise and gratitude, and they rejected him, beat him up, and killed him.⁸

1 Peter 2:22b-25, “He never sinned,
nor ever deceived anyone.
23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted,
nor threaten revenge when he suffered.
He left his case in the hands of God,
who always judges fairly.
24 He personally carried our sins
in his body on the cross
so that we can be dead to sin
and live for what is right.
By his wounds
you are healed.
25 Once you were like sheep
who wandered away.
But now you have turned to your Shepherd,
the Guardian of your souls.”

This is one of the clearest statements in the whole New Testament of the fact that Jesus, the Messiah, took upon himself the punishment that his people deserved.⁹

The Call to Suffer

You are called to suffer, to be like our Lord Jesus Christ. You will suffer unjustly often in this life. And it is a “gracious thing” when you endure it.

For this “you have been called” to “follow in his steps.” We are called in suffering to follow in the steps of Christ!

The Upward Call

Upwardly and outwardly we are the body of Christ on this earth. Paul says, “I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us” (Phil 3:14).

We are called to follow in the steps of Jesus!

Consider the Servant’s Attitude that Christ Had

- **Philippians 2:5–8** (ESV), “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,

⁸ Wright, T. (2011). *Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James, Peter, John and Judah* (pp. 70–71). London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox Press.

⁹ Ibid., 71.

being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

- **Jesus said... Matthew 25:40** (ESV), “Truly, I say to you, as much as you’ve done it to one of the least of these my brothers, you you’ve done it to me.” What devotion ought we to have to our employers and our work!
- Christ washed the disciples’ feet! (John 13:1-17)
- He said in **Matthew 20:28** (ESV), “even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

III. A heavenly call to **glory** in God’s work (adoption), various verses.

The Bible often uses slavery to identify the believer.

How are Christians Slaves?

It’s interesting, in the Bible whenever you see our obedience mentioned, we are often called to be like slaves – i.e. we are to obey God whether we feel like it or not.

When it comes to life on this earth we are called to deny the flesh and obey Jesus Christ. We are called to be “instruments” or “tools” for God. That’s what a slave is. He is property. He is a human tool. When it comes to our flesh, we are to die to our desires and be an instrument of righteousness for God.

“Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven” (Col 4:1).

The Old Testament Bond Slave, Awl in Ear

In Old Testament days, poverty-stricken Jews would occasionally be forced to sell themselves into service to their fellow Jews. The Law required that all servants were to be treated with justice and that they were to be freed at the end of six years. But in Exodus 21, we find an unusual option for a person who was due to be released from servitude.

Exodus 21:5-6, “But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ 6 then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.”

This wasn’t another six-year stint, but it was permanent, and it meant the servant would be there now for life, belonging to his master. He does it because he loves his master.

Almost all the Apostles open up some of their letters with, “Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:1), “Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus” (2 Pet. 1:1), “James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jms 1:1), and Jude does the same thing (Jude 1:1).

I have come to believe that there is no greater calling than to be marked as Christ’s slave— to give my life in the service of the Master I have grown to know and love and trust.

Let’s pray to the Lord – “Make me a child of God with a hole in my ear. Make me obedient in all things regardless of the circumstances.”

Moravians who sold themselves into slavery - serving a higher master

1. Exclusive Ownership

Roman law considered slaves to be “property in the absolute control of an owner.” Hired servants, like modern employees, could choose their masters and quit if they wanted to do so, but slaves had no such choice.

“Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18-19).

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Though we were born as slaves of sin, having inherited an enslaved state from Adam, we were purchased by Christ through His death on the cross. 10 We were bought with a price; therefore, we are no longer under the authority of sin. Instead we are under the exclusive ownership of God. 11 Christ is our new Master. 12 As Paul told the Romans, “Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6: 17–18).

As Christians, we are part of “a people for His own possession” (Titus 2:14).

Complete Submission/Obedience

Being a slave not only meant belonging to someone else; it also meant being always available to obey that person in every way. The slave’s sole duty was to carry out the master’s wishes, and the faithful slave was eager to do so without hesitation or complaint. After all, “slaves know no law but their master’s word; they have no rights of their own; they are absolute possessions of their master; and they are bound to give their master unquestioning obedience.”

First John 2: 3 is explicit in this regard: “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” As His slaves, we are expected “to obey Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1: 2).

Paul says: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

Singular Devotion

The life of a slave in New Testament times may have been difficult, but it was relatively simple. Slaves had only one primary concern: to carry out the will of the master. In areas where they were given direct commands, they were required to obey. In areas where no direct command was given, they were to find ways to please the master as best they could.

Our greatest concern is summed up in the words of Christ: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30 NKJV).

We have one “ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him” (2 Cor. 5:9).

Total Dependence

As part of the master's household, slaves were completely dependent on their owners for the basic necessities of life, including food and shelter.

Unlike free persons, slaves did not have to worry about finding something to eat or somewhere to sleep. Because their needs were met, they could focus entirely on serving the master. Again, the parallels to the Christian life are striking. As believers, we can focus on the things God has called us to do, trusting Him to meet our needs. “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’” Jesus told His followers. “Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.” (Mt 6:30-33).

But we are more than slaves dear church. We are sons of God!

Simultaneously Slaves and Sons

The marvelous doctrine of adoption assures us that, as believers in Jesus Christ, we are now and forever full-fledged members of God's family. Think of it! The only begotten Son of God took on the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7), so that the slaves of sin might become both slaves of righteousness and sons of God!

How are Christians Sons?

But please, do not stop there. That would be awful. Jesus Christ is our Master, amen?! But he is much more than that. We are adopted into God's family as sons and daughters of the living God.

Romans 8:14-17, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Conclusion: The New Name of Our Master!

Just as first-century slaves would receive new names from their earthly masters, 13 so will we each be given a new name from Christ. He Himself promised in Revelation 3:12, to the one who overcomes, “I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.” Believers in the eternal state will serve the Lord not as mere slaves, but as sons and daughters forever, “and His name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22: 4).