

Studies in I Peter (35)

The Exhortation of Salvation -- Servants Obey Your Masters

Introduction

- A. The grace of God brings a radical transformation into the life of the believer. We are made -- inwardly -- a new person (II Corinthians 5:17), and given the ability to live a new life (Romans 6:4-13).
- B. Because we still have a fleshly "nature," live in a fallen world, and are under the constant attack of Satan - we often find ourselves struggling to live in harmony with the Word of God -- and our salvation.
- C. To be a slave, as a Christian, would involve one in such a struggle -- a very difficult struggle!

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. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. 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. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. I Peter 2:18-21 NIV

I. The Content of the Exhortation: "Servants, submit yourselves to your Masters."

- A. What the servant is to do -- Be submissive to your masters.

The word "servant" was used for household slaves. The Lord, through Peter, was concerned for them - the lowest class of society. To be born, or sold into slavery, would mean living out one's life without rights or personal values of any type. The slave was bought and sold with the house and land. To be lazy or rebellious brought punishment. Such a person was totally controlled by the master and had to do whatever the master wanted. It is hard to imagine a worse condition.

In this difficult situation the Christian slave is exhorted by God to submit to his or her master. This does not mean divine approval of slavery. Because the economy and social life were interwoven with slavery - abolition of the slave trade would have to be a gradual process. The Christian slave is here shown a way to transcend his hated and unjust bondage.

- B. How the servant is to submit -- With all respect.

The emphasis here is on living a life of reverence for God -- wanting to do that which would please Him. Peter is applying the principle he stated in V13 -- "submit for the Lord's sake." The truth here is of vital importance for every believer. The slave may be owned by someone -- but the real control of life is found in God. The Biblical understanding of the sovereignty of God and His plan for the daily life as seen in Romans 8:28,29 -- will lead even a slave into spiritual freedom. The final issues of this life are to be settled in eternity -- not here. 2 Corinthians 5:10

II. The Explanation of the Exhortation.

- A. The extent of submission -- Not only to those ... good and considerate ... but the harsh. V18

Many slave masters were undoubtedly good to their servants. However, the possibility of being treated as a non-person, with cruelty and exploitation was always present. The word "harsh" means "crooked or bent" and signifies a person who is unfair, unjust, and morally perverse.

- B. The responsibility in submission -- Unjust suffering or doing wrong? Vs 19,20

Peter now gives the first step in transcending slavery. It is the question of the pattern of daily life. "Am I causing my own trials by wrong-doing or am I suffering because I am doing right?" The obvious question here is -- "Why should I submit to my master when it is wrong for him to own me and treat me as he does?"

1. Not to do so would be to act in unbelief and take vengeance into our own hands: "I'll give him what he deserves." God has promised to avenge the wronged believer (Romans 12:19-21).
2. Not to do so is to allow our conduct to be dictated by others. If I am treated poorly -- and respond in kind -- then I am living in harmony with my oppressor and not God.

- C. The value of submission -- Living under God's commendation. Vs 19,20

The emphasis here is on the believer practicing the grace of God. The Christian slave can make a choice of faith -- and that is the key to the whole situation -- a choice to do what is right.

The Biblical principle developed here by Peter is that of practicing the truth. The slave could rebel against God for treating him poorly and rebel against his master and live a life of sullen defiance. What would be the result of such a life? The answer is obvious.

Every Christian has areas of life in which we feel "caught." The key to the situation is the same as for the Christian slave. We can accept what cannot be changed, cope with it, and transcend it

III. The Example Behind the Exhortation: "Jesus Christ is our example." V 21

- A. The slave is given a calling of dignity -- "Suffer as the Jesus Christ suffered."

Suffering is the result of sin. Many of our problems in life have no answer -- except in the return of the Savior. The believer should not think of himself as exempt from suffering. The real question is how are we responding? We can choose our response.

- B. The slave is given a calling of purpose -- "Follow Christ's Example."

The believer is not above his Master. The Savior overcame the unjust suffering He received by submitting Himself to His Father and His will -- we must do the same.

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