

## 1 Peter 2:18-3:22 – Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

As we saw in our study last week, Peter wrote this to Christians who were experiencing a measure of persecution – but he knew the fires would only get hotter.

Whether Peter was enlightened by a word of prophecy that things would heat up even more, or he could simply see the way the political winds were blowing, he knew difficult days were coming and wrote to encourage believers *not to push back* when they were being pressed.

They needed to trust God and look beyond the circumstance of persecution to the over-ruling sovereignty and purposes of God behind it.

So a main theme of this letter is *submission*.

We see that as we pick it up in v. 18 of chapter 2

### CHAPTER 2

**18** **Servants, be submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.**

A little background on slavery would be helpful at this point.

It's an interesting note that the vast majority of Christians for the first couple hundred years of the Church were *slaves*.

In fact, this is one of the reasons why the gospel received so much opposition in some areas of the Empire, it was seen as a religious for slaves and the under-classes.

There were a handful of the elite; of aristocrats and nobility, that were numbered among the disciples – but they were by far the minority.

While slavery had always been a fixture in the ancient world, it exploded during the Roman Empire.

It's estimated that during the span of the Empire, there were some 60 million slaves!

60 MILLION! Considering the total population of the world at that time, that's a vast number.

The reason why there were so many slaves is because of Rome's

avaricious appetite for territory, luxury and plunder.  
Whenever they conquered a new region, a large portion of the population was converted to *slavery* – people of conquered lands were seen as spoils.  
These slaves were then transported to some other region where they were sold as servants to the nobility and aristocracy there.  
The slave market was a major industry and slave labor was crucial to the economic strength of Rome.  
But don't think of slaves as performing only menial labor.  
Slaves fulfilled virtually every kind of occupation.  
They were doctors, (Luke for example), teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, and stewards who were put over the affairs of *entire* estates.  
The common word for slave was *douloi*, but Peter uses the less common word for a *domestic* servant here – *oiketai*.  
By the time Peter wrote, most landowners had slaves.  
Slaves did the work of Rome.  
The Roman attitude was that there was no point in being master of the world if you had to labor with your own hands.  
Let the slaves do the work and let the citizens live in pampered idleness.

The thought was that the supply of slaves would never run out. [1]  
This helps explain the cause for the collapse of Rome.  
For historians are pretty much agreed that Rome didn't fall to conquest from without so much as it fell from the rot of moral and political decay within!  
When those who rule are *idle* and possess too much wealth and power, it is inevitable that they will become corrupt.  
The immorality and debauchery of the elite of Rome has become proverbial.  
The sin the upper classes sank to is so wretched it beggars description.  
In fact, the corruption of Roman morals stands as the epitome of history's most vile and wicked moment – although there are some who would say we are rapidly moving to surpass them in our own day.  
Under Roman law, slaves had no rights; they were the possession of

their masters.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle had said that slaves were nothing more than “living tools” and Rome included this line of reasoning in their legal code.

Chrysologus summed up Rome’s legal posture toward slaves this way; “Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice, and law.”<sup>[2]</sup>

The master’s will, even his or her caprice was the only law for a slave.

Slaves weren’t allowed to marry – only to cohabit; and any children born to them were not theirs but the property of their master, no different from their flocks or herds.

Into this situation came Christianity with its message that every man, woman, and child was precious and equal before God!

The result was that in the Church, social barriers and the status quo was overthrown.

Callistus, one of the first bishops of Rome was a slave.

Perpetua, an aristocrat, was martyred hand in hand with Felicitas, a slave-girl.

It was not uncommon that when the local church met, a slave would be the pastor while his master would be just one of the members of the congregation.

You can see the problems this might mean for the emerging movement.

It was a revolutionary situation and the potential for abuse was ever present.

So Peter writes counsel that’s aimed at ensuring the continued success of the gospel among the peoples of the Empire.

Peter could see two great dangers:

1) Suppose both master and slave became Christians.

The danger was that the slave might be *tempted to presume* on his/her master and shirk his/her duty.

While slavery is certainly an unjust situation, it’s nevertheless a reality that has to be dealt with – and if a person finds him

or herself a slave, they ought to be diligent in their work.

In 1 Corinthians Paul exhorts slaves to diligence and not to spend the time they ought to be obeying their masters worrying about how to escape their bonds.

He tells them if they can obtain their freedom, great – but in the pursuit of freedom, they must never lag in diligence as slaves.

It's like a believer being married to an unbeliever – this is a less than ideal situation, but if a Christian finds him or herself there, they are not to seek out of the marital bond; they are to stay and diligently fulfill their roles as a husband or wife.

You know, it's sad when someone else's Faith in God becomes an excuse for indolence or laziness.

We regularly get calls from people who make the rounds from church to church looking for a handout.

They know that churches are supposed to be gracious and benevolent so they play off this when in fact they're just being lazy and refusing to work.

Not a few times, when we've turned down a request for assistance, we've been cursed and our charity called into question.

That reaction proves they were counting on our Faith as the answer to their need.

They weren't looking to the Lord – they were presuming on US.

But we see this kind of attitude in the church as well – when someone volunteers to do something, but then doesn't follow through.

They know that Christians are supposed to be gracious and forgiving, so when their commitment is deemed too costly and they don't feel like following through on what they've promised, they bail – and presume on the grace and forgiveness of those they've let down.

We are all slaves of Jesus Christ and must never presume on each other's faith.

Instead, we must be diligent as stewards to serve one another carefully and diligently!

The relationship between Christian and Christian does not

abolish the relationship between man and man. <sup>[3]</sup>

2) There was the danger that the new dignity afforded slaves might lead to a revolt.

So Peter reminds them to pour their energy into service and not revolution.

The Bible is often faulted by its critics for the lack of rhetoric calling slaves to rise up and throw off their bonds.

But they're judging Scripture and the wisdom of God from the perspective of their own limited and narrow views.

The fact of the matter is, it's precisely *because* of the Bible's message that slavery has been banned in the modern world.

Peter & the other NT writers were simply being realists!

They had seen first hand how Rome dealt with slave revolts; they were short lived and bloody.

And Christianity wasn't merely an anti-slavery political movement; it was a whole worldview.

The Apostles knew the best and only way to end slavery was for the leaven of the gospel to infiltrate all of society.

Men's *hearts* have to change before their *minds* will.

Since Christianity was *already* being marked in some quarters as a slave movement, Peter knew if it turned into a political force, it would suffer a swift and brutal fate.

So he told slaves to manifest the sincerity of their faith in God in the calling as servants.

**18** Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear,

They are to maintain an attitude of diligent respect and obedience.

**not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.**

It's easy to obey a *kind* master, but even those who are *mean* must be obeyed.

**19** For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, -- suffering wrongfully.

Peter tells slaves to look to God and let their service be to *Him* rather than to their masters.

If their master is harsh, they ought to just count it as part of their

service to the Lord.

**20** **For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good -- and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God.**

It's one thing to be punished for disobedience – we deserve that.

But when someone is punished unjustly – well, that's the opportunity to show the radical difference Christ has made in our lives.

**21** **For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:**

Jesus suffered unjustly.

He was arrested, tried, and convicted for what crime?

He was whipped, beaten, wounded and crucified for what?

Yet He patiently submitted, and His suffering became the means of our redemption!

Peter tells us to follow His example – and as we do, even our suffering can accomplish a redemptive purpose.

When Stephen was stoned to death in the Book of Acts, Paul stood by and witnessed his final submission.

Later, on the road to Damascus when Jesus appeared to him, He said, “Paul, it is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

What were those goads but the example of Stephen's faithful martyrdom?

Church history is filled with the stories of how the death of the martyrs in the theaters and arenas moved many more to faith in Christ.

Even today, dozens of missionaries who are held hostage bear evidence of the power of the gospel to change a life and bring hope in a hopeless situation.

**21** **For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:**

Then Peter speaks of the example of Jesus -

**22** ***“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His***

*mouth”;*

**23**who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; **24**who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. **25**For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Peter’s point is to direct them to look at what Christ endured so that their salvation might be accomplished.

He went through so much for them. His suffering proved redemptive.

Though it was do hideous and brutal, it became the means of life and relief for us.

If God can do that with the suffering of His Son, how much more can He make our suffering and sorrows redemptive?

### CHAPTER 3

Peter carries on with the theme of submission as he moves now to relationships in the home.

**1**Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, **2**when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear.

This is an echo of what Paul writes to wives in Ephesians 5.

The word “submissive” is *hupotasso* and means *to arrange under*.

Though Peter doesn’t mentioned the reason for submission here, Paul does in his parallel passage when he says that a wife is to submit to her own husband as to the Lord because the husband is the *head of the wife*, just as Christ is the head of the Church. In the marital relationship, God has established the order – it’s not up to us to monkey or fiddle with.

Since God appoints the man as the head, it is the wife’s duty to submit.

Now, I realize this isn’t a popular word today – but frankly I don’t

care!

It's God's Word and since God designed us and sets the parameters for life and living, I think we ought to do what he says.

Note first of all that headship isn't something a man assigns himself – He is assigned that role by God! And it carries with it a huge weight of responsibility!

What's staggering is to realize the social context in which Peter wrote this!

It was accepted and standard that a wife submitted to her husband. While it's true that in the Roman and Greek world the role of women had improved somewhat – they were still only one step above slaves.

That's why Peter deals with wives after speaking to slaves. So writing to them to be submissive to their own husbands was like saying, "Keep breathing."

So—why does he say it?

It's critical we get this – He says this because far from telling women to be second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God or even the realm of men, he's empowering them by *giving them a choice*.

Society already demanded they be submissive in their *behavior*. He's empowering them to take this issue of submission all the way to their hearts.

Submission is to be THEIR choice, not just a form they adopt reluctantly.

What Peter says to wives applies to all people at some point.

For all of us are called to honor those who are in authority over us; at work, in government, in school.

Submission is more than mere behavior, it's a posture of the heart. A wife's submission is special though because it is lived out in the midst of that special relationship of intimacy called marriage.

When a wife is genuinely submissive to her husband – her whole posture toward him changes and becomes something consistent and cheerful.

Her submission isn't an issue of giving in to specific decisions he makes.

It's a whole lifestyle of posture of spirit and attitude that looks to him to be the head of the relationship, whether he's fulfilling it



or not.

So Peter calls Christian wives to be submissive to their husbands, so that even if they are unsaved, they might be won to faith as they see what a difference Christ has made in their lives.

**<sup>3</sup>Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel —<sup>4</sup>rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. <sup>5</sup>For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup>as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.**

As it is in some circles today, during this period, women were trophies men carried around as testimony to their power. A beautiful woman with expensive jewelry, richly coiffed hair and haute couture fashions escorted a man of success and distinction.

It was easy for women of that time, since they weren't usually allowed to engage in important enterprises, to define their lives solely by their appearance.

After all, this seemed to be the one thing men wanted from them, and men were the movers and shakers.

A woman made it up the social ladder by attaching herself to an ambitious man with prospects.

So the way to snag him was by makeup, jewelry, hair, and clothes.

Peter tells women their worth is not determined by what's on the outside but by what's on the inside.

He doesn't tell them to throw out their makeup and jewelry – He simply tells them not to neglect the inner person.

I'll never forget something J. Vernon McGee once said.

Every Saturday on his radio program he used to answer letters that were sent in.

One asked, in light of this passage, if it was okay for a woman to wear makeup.

His reply was classic McGee – “If the barn needs a coat of paint, paint it!”

**7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.**

Regarding the roles of the husband and wife in marriage, I covered this at length in the series we did on marriage some time back.

If you weren't here, I'd encourage you to get a copy of the set. We looked at this verse in particular.

What Peter writes here is simply astonishing considering the social context and customs.

Most men considered their wives as simply a social convention by which to have legitimate heirs to pass their estate on to.

When it came to fun and pleasure, a man kept a mistress or visited the local temple prostitutes who were skilled in the art of sex.

Peter breaks all convention and tells Christian men they are to live with their wives and to make of them the object of the most earnest investigation.

Interesting isn't it that wives are *not* told to understand their husbands.

The reason is because women intuitively know and understand men!

But understanding a woman? Now there is a Herculean task.

In fact, not *even* Hercules was assigned that arduous labor by the gods because it would have overtaxed his abilities!

Women are a mystery – and yet the goal of marriage is become one; to know and be known.

We call this, intimacy and there can be no intimacy where there isn't a growing sense of understanding.

So Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, calls Christian husbands to live with their wives in such a way that that living is marked by a diligent attempt to understand them.

This requires time, it requires communication, it requires a healthy dose of forgiveness and of being sensitive.

When women say they like a sensitive man, they don't mean a weak of touchy guy.

By sensitive they don't mean some guy who breaks down and cries at the drop of a hat.

They mean someone who *really listens* and can look beyond the words to the underlying heart.

The sensitive man knows what questions to ask and then LISTENS to the answer without feeling like he is then duty bound to FIX the problem.

A wife doesn't want to be fixed – she wants to be understood and loved anyway!

But Peter is even more revolutionary when he says,

**. . . giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel . . .**

This pictures someone who is showing great care with a precious and fragile item.

The words literally depict someone who bends over to lift a costly and delicate vase and place it on a pedestal where it can be admired for its beauty and protected from the ravages below.

So, if a wife is to be “under” to her husband, a husband is to “elevate” his wife to a place of honor that allows nothing to demean or take advantage of her, including himself.

Do you catch the picture?

As she *submits* to him, and he *elevates* her, they each go higher and higher in each other's esteem!

It's pointless for a wife to waste her time wishing her husband would honor her, just as it is useless for a husband to wait for his wife to submit to him.

The time and energy we invest in wishing our mate would change out to be spent in doing what the Lord has called us to do.

Interesting isn't it that Peter links effectiveness in prayer to the health of the marital relationship, specifically to the husband's honoring of his wife.

If he can't get that very most basic part of the Christian life down, its unlikely he's got much else together.

**8Finally,**

Notice where this comes – smack dab in the middle of the letter!

Truly Peter was a preacher.

When you hear “finally” in a sermon, it means you are at least half way.

**all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another;**

And of course, as we’re seeing on Sunday mornings, the mind were to have is the mind of Christ, which is to be a servant.

**love as brothers,**

Besides the agape we share as the children of God, we share a family-bond that makes us brothers and sisters in Christ.

**be tenderhearted,**

The Greek word is unusual and used only twice in the NT.

It comes from 2 words; good and spleen.

The people of the ancient world believed different emotions were located in different organs of the body.

That’s why we often encounter the phrase “bowels of mercy.”

The spleen was the locus of tenderness, the sense of wanting to be careful with someone or something lest it be damaged.

Peter is saying we need to be careful with one another so that we don’t hurt each other.

What an important word of counsel.

**be courteous;**

This goes with being tenderhearted; we must be aware of what’s going on around us and show extraordinary care to show people we see and honor them.

I have to admit I all too often blow this one!

People tell me that I often seem pre-occupied.

They will pass me in the hall and think I am mad at them because I fail to say, “Hi.”

Please forgive me and pray for me in this regard because this convicts me I need to be more careful and sensitive to others.

But, let me turn this around a bit – occasionally, someone will come up after service and want to talk to me.

As the conversation goes on, they don’t see a line of 4, 5, or 6 people standing behind them to talk to me as well.

When I move to bring them to the point so we can pray, I am then

labeled as discourteous and that I don't care about them.  
That isn't the case. It's just that after service isn't a good time to start a dialog that could go on for 10 or 15 minutes.

**9** **not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.**

Peter returns here to the challenge of responding to hostility and persecution.

It's so easy when you're pushed to push back.

We must not!

When you are cursed, send back a blessing!

For every blessing you send, you make room for another.

**10** **For [here Peter quotes Psalm 34 (12-14)]**

***“He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. 11 Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”***

Peter sees what he's written in vs. 8 & 9 as merely an application of the Psalm.

**13** **And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?**

Like Paul in Romans 13, Peter knows the government is ordained by God for the punishing of evil-doers and the reward of the righteous.

Persecution is coming, but the author of this persecution will usually not be civil government.

Usually, it is some private citizen or person who stirs up the government to action by perpetrating a lie against believers.

This was certainly the case in the Roman Empire and it was the unbelieving Jews who were often behind the lies and rumors.

Later it was businessmen who stood to lose income because of the

conversion of people to Christianity.

In Philippi, it was two slave-owners who had Paul & Silas beaten and thrown into prison because they cast a demon out of their slave girl who told fortunes.

In Ephesus, it was the silversmiths who told lies and started a riot that got laid on Paul and the Christian church.

Peter tells them to keep doing good, because good will result in the least trouble for them.

**14** But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. *“And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”*

He quotes from the prophet Isaiah who was comforted by God when faced with the hostility of the people for daring to proclaim the Word of God.

**15** But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,

Sanctify is a high-sounding religious word that simply means to set-apart.

Remember the context; He is encouraging them on how to behave in the midst of opposition and persecution.

They must make sure that in the midst of all their suffering and sorrow, they do not blame it all on God.

He is using their suffering, but He is not the Author of it!

No matter what we go through; no matter how deep the water, hot the flame, or dark the night, we must never allow ourselves to slip into the mode of thinking that God is to blame.

We must set Him apart and give Him the highest place and not allow ourselves to think anything that is unworthy of God.

That's our posture toward God when immersed in the depths of suffering – toward man, Peter says -

**and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; <sup>16</sup>having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. <sup>17</sup>For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good**

## than for doing evil.

Nothing will so challenge the presuppositions of the lost that to watch a believer endure suffering with dignity and grace.

Specially when being persecuted and the object of cursing – to send back nothing but blessing is not the way of the world and so it's inevitable that there will be those who say – “How do you do that?”

Peter says that we are to be ready to give an answer to any and everyone who asks us why we believe what we believe.

The word *defense* in v. 15 is the Greek word “*apologia*” from which we get our word apologetics.

Apologetics is the art and science of giving reasoned and articulate proofs for the content of the Christian faith.

Apologetics deals with the proofs for the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, for answering if God is all loving and all powerful, why is there evil in the world – and other such lightweight topics.

The Greek word *apologia* was a *legal term* for the defense strategy a lawyer would put together for someone who was on trial.

It was a well-reasoned and articulate response to the charges with as much evidence as possible.

Peter says we are to have this ready so that when we are put on trial by the Lost, we'll be able to give a good answer for WHY we believe WHAT we believe.

He doesn't view some kind of official court proceeding so much as just the daily opportunities that arise when others ask us about our faith.

You don't have to have a seminary degree or have attended 6 years of theological school in order to answer the vast majority of questions people raise about our Faith.

People tend to hover around the same set of questions.

EVERY Christian ought to be ready to give a solid and convincing answer to these questions and objections. [Tape set]

But notice the character our defense ought to take –

**with meekness and fear; <sup>16</sup>having a good conscience,**

When we give a defense for *why* we believe, it has to be delivered,

not with haughtiness or arrogance, but with gentleness and respect – realizing that some people with good minds don't agree with us. They have real doubts and honest questions that must be addressed *before* they can come to faith.

We mustn't treat unbelievers as *all* universally corrupt and ill-willed.

Some are in fact *going* to be saved and all that stands in the way are some unanswered questions.

It's shocking the way some Christians treat the lost.

They act as though are complete idiots, that there is something mentally deficient with them because if they were just thinking right, then they would reason themselves to faith.

The Christian faith is imminently *reasonable*, but no one can *reason* their way to faith.

It takes the drawing of the Holy Spirit; this is why Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father draw him."

I have been especially concerned the way some well-known radio apologists have come across.

Meekness and respect are conspicuous by their *absence*.

Then again, we must have a good conscience as well –

For what good is it to have a perfect defense of a doctrine when our lifestyle flies in the face of what we say we believe.

If we say Jesus died for our sin, there is no way we can have a cavalier attitude toward it!

**18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.***

Okay – this brings us face to face with a passage of scripture that many argue is the most difficult to interpret and understand in the entire NT.

But oh – look, we're out of time so we'll have to cover it next



week.

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[1] Barclay pg. 210-11

[2] ibid pg. 211

[3] ibid, pg. 212