

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

1 Peter 02: 18-25

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 18 to 25.

The hope of Christians is in heaven, but today we are still living on earth. How should we live as sojourners in this world? The background of Peter's writing of the First Epistle of Peter was during the reign of the brutal Nero, when Christians were widely persecuted. Therefore, Peter encourages the saints in distress to, firstly, exhibit good conduct among the suffering ones and use their good behavior to proclaim the gospel. Secondly, for the sake of the Lord, they should submit to the governing authorities and do good deeds. At first glance, Peter's teachings may seem ordinary, even somewhat clichéd. However, if you delve deeply into Peter's choice of words, you will find something quite different, shining with special insights born from life experiences. For example, having a good character is not merely mimicking outward behavior, but rather a result of overcoming desires within the soul. Likewise, submitting to human institutions is for the Lord's sake, to serve as the Lord's servants. Servants are to obey their masters' will, and the Lord's will is for people to submit to the governing authorities, as all authority comes from God. Peter appears to discuss everyday behavioral standards, but what he truly cares about is living out these standards with the underlying motivation that comes from spiritual growth—this growth is our deposit into the hope of the future. Today, let's examine the third scenario Peter addresses: being a servant. Peter uses the same approach; even if you are not a servant, you can learn lessons in obedience from this.

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

The term "servant" specifically refers to household servants. At that time, society permitted slavery, and according to the previous principles of obeying all human institutions, God did not require Christians to revolt or change human systems. Instead, they were to live lives of high moral character within existing systems to glorify God, recognizing that we are temporary residents in this world.

As for the progression of human history and the evolution of political systems, these are under God's control, and God has His timely arrangements. If you are a servant, you should submit to your master with a reverent attitude. During that time, servants were the property of their masters and had no personal freedom of action. Most servants who heard the gospel and believed in Jesus were likely owned by Christian masters themselves. Since they were all Christians, they were brothers and sisters in the Lord, but some servants may have thought they could be on equal footing with their masters. Therefore, Peter specifically instructs those who are servants not to forget their identity in Christ. Servants should obey their masters with a reverent attitude—not fearing the masters themselves, but fearing God. This concept will be further elaborated in the next section.

Therefore, Peter says that not only should servants obey good and gentle masters, but also those who are harsh and difficult. Generally, it's easier to obey a good master and harder to obey a bad one. However, Peter tells us that servants should obey their masters because their position is that of a servant, unrelated to the goodness or badness of the master—it's God's ordained arrangement within that context. When a person finds themselves in the role of a servant, they should respect God's arrangement and obey their master, whether they are kind and gentle or harsh.

In today's society, while slavery systems largely no longer exist, from an authority perspective, the relationship between working saints during work hours and their bosses resembles the master-servant relationship. When encountering a difficult boss, one should also learn to obey with a reverent heart. Here we see Peter's explanation of the master-servant relationship aligns completely with Paul's. However, Paul's discourse is more comprehensive. In Colossians 3:22-25, Paul instructs servants to obey their earthly masters in everything, not just when being

watched, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. Then in Colossians 4:1, Paul addresses masters, saying, "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven." Therefore, whether you are a servant or a master, you are to do everything in the presence of the Lord in heaven.

In terms of doctrinal discourse, Paul is much more comprehensive. However, the precious aspect of Peter's writings lies not so much in the discourse itself but in his explanations behind the discourse. Peter's perspective is entirely shaped by his own life experiences, and thus his interpretation differs from Paul's. Personally, I believe Peter's explanations are actually deeper. However, the challenge with Peter's explanations is that they are not easily understood, and to make it easier for readers to grasp, translations often include some modifications.

Let's first read the translated text below to understand Peter's general meaning. Afterward, we'll return to the Greek words used by Peter and attempt to restore his original intent.

Verse 19: "For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully."

This sentence isn't easy to understand. Let's first focus on the part that's easier to grasp, which is that enduring suffering unjustly is commendable. Following the context from the previous passage, this likely refers to encountering a harsh master, enduring undeserved suffering, and finding it commendable. This meaning isn't difficult to understand. The challenge arises with why one would be willing to endure unjust treatment. In the Chinese Union Version (CUV) translation, it is rendered as "so that those who suffer according to God's will." What does it mean to suffer according to God's will? This is unclear. Let's look at the English translations first. The New International Version (NIV) translates it as "for conscious of God," indicating awareness of God's existence and presence. The King James Version (KJV)

translates it more closely to the original Greek as "for conscious toward God," implying enduring suffering for the sake of a conscience toward God. This still might be challenging to understand, mainly because our general understanding of conscience is rooted in the idea that it is an innate sense of right and wrong within us. However, this notion of conscience has already been influenced by the knowledge of good and evil, much like what is described in the story of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

According to the concept that we are having a spirit, soul, and body; our outward senses perceive the physical body, and deep inside us is a part that can communicate with and touch God—that part is the spirit. Between the spirit and the body lies our soul, which includes our minds, emotions, and will—how we think about things, what we enjoy, and the decisions we make. These are functions of our soul.

Within our spirit, we have intuition, fellowship, and conscience, with conscience being a window or channel between the spirit and soul. The true definition of conscience is a channel between the spirit and soul. Through intuition, we understand God's will, and through fellowship with God, we embrace His will. This will of God can only influence our soul through our conscience. Therefore, through conscience, we sense God's presence, understand His will, and feel His thoughts. From this perspective, the NIV translation of "conscious of God" is not incorrect. Conscience is an important means by which we understand God's will and embrace it, independent of good or evil, but as a conduit for fellowshiping with God. God's will is always good and will shape our conventional understanding of conscience.

Because conscience is so important, Paul emphasizes in 1 Timothy 1:5, 1:19, and 3:9 that we should have a clean conscience and a clear conscience. If our conscience is burdened, we must confess and avail ourselves of the precious blood of Jesus Christ to remove any barriers between us and God, allowing our conscience to be cleansed once again. When our conscience is clean, the channel between spirit and soul is open, allowing God's wonderful will to flow through our conscience into our soul. This enables us to endure unjust suffering, which is what Peter originally meant.

Peter says this is commendable. In the King James Version (KJV), it is translated as "thanks worthy," and in the New International Version (NIV), it is translated as "commendable." If we understand it as "commendable," the Greek word used is "charis." The word "charis" appears many times in the New Testament and is almost always translated as "grace." Verse 19, when translated directly from Greek to Chinese, can be understood as "For this is grace: when a person endures unjust suffering for the sake of a conscience toward God." The ability to endure unjust suffering is a matter of the soul. Why can someone endure it? Because their conscience toward God is open, and God is a God full of grace. This grace flows through the conscience into our soul, enabling us to endure suffering within our soul. In the eyes of others, we testify to grace by enduring suffering, and this is grace.

Considering how much unjust suffering Peter endured in the latter part of his life while serving God, especially when caught between James and Paul, he bore many crosses, but his conscience remained clean. He experienced God's grace and lived out a testimony of grace. Therefore, he could declare, "This is grace."

Verse 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."

When a person commits a crime and is punished, that is what they deserve. If you endure punishment for wrongdoing, it's merely what's expected, so what's there to boast about? But if you endure suffering for doing good and still persevere, this is commendable in God's sight. The term "commendable" here is the same Greek word "charis" used in verse 19, so it can also be translated as "a display of grace in the eyes of God." Dear brothers and sisters, we must have a renewed understanding of grace. We often think that God gives us blessings we don't deserve, and we receive them freely, so we call it grace. Here, Peter tells us that when we endure unjust suffering, enduring what we shouldn't have to endure, and we still persevere,

this demonstrates God's grace upon us and testifies to grace. This is what grace truly is.

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

Peter's proclamation here is very bold, saying that you were called for this very purpose—meaning you were called to experience grace and testify to grace, especially when you do good and endure suffering with patience. Such testimony is the purpose of our calling. Indeed, Peter is a hopeful apostle who truly understands that the cross is the path to glory. He says we were called for this purpose because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us a beautiful example.

The word "example" used by Peter is a very special Greek word that appears only once in the entire Bible. Its original meaning is "writing copy," which refers to when a teacher teaches a child to write letters by providing a pattern for the child to imitate on paper. Jesus Christ has left us a beautiful pattern to follow. Particularly in the four Gospels, His life, words, and actions are our patterns. We are to walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Verse 22-23: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; 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”

Peter tells us that as Christians, enduring suffering for doing good and enduring unjust suffering while being grateful and testifying to God is indeed the purpose of our calling, and Jesus has provided us with the best example. In just two verses, Peter vividly portrays the example of Jesus' suffering. Jesus did not commit any sin; He was completely without blemish, and deceit was not found in His mouth. He was utterly honest; He did not retaliate when insulted, and He did not threaten revenge

when He suffered. Instead, He quietly endured all kinds of mistreatment and entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly.

Peter seems to emphasize Jesus' attitude during suffering here because Jesus knew that God is the righteous Judge. Therefore, Jesus did not defend Himself or seek to justify Himself; instead, He fully entrusted Himself into God's hands. To what extent? Even unto death! When Jesus was hanging on the cross, He was mocked and insulted, and others even said that if He could save others, He couldn't save Himself, which seemed completely unjust. In human eyes, it seemed like Jesus had reached the end. But Jesus deeply understood that God's righteousness transcends the boundary of death; God's judgment is not only in this life but also in the life to come, and it is eternal. Therefore, even as His earthly life came to an end and He faced death, He still entrusted Himself to God who judges justly.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we face unjust suffering and unreasonable treatment, can we learn from the example of Jesus Christ and entrust everything to God who judges justly? The righteous judgment may not be in this present age; perhaps it will come when you finish your journey of life and are resurrected at Christ's return, receiving the crown of glory, righteousness, and life. Jesus passed through death, was raised to life, and was exalted by God, given a name above all names. He has set the best example for us to follow in His footsteps.

Verse 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.”

The preceding verses discuss the example of Jesus' suffering, encouraging us to walk in His footsteps. This verse now speaks of the purpose of Jesus' suffering. If Jesus were merely an example of suffering, He would be just a saint, a model for us to emulate. However, the suffering of Jesus Christ has a more profound purpose; He suffered to accomplish redemption. Therefore, we are not only learning from the example of Jesus Christ, but we are also accepting the redemption that Jesus Christ achieved, receiving the grace of forgiveness and the experience of eternal life.

Here, Peter says that Jesus was hung on "a tree," not using the term "cross." This choice of wording refers to Deuteronomy 21:23, which says, "For he who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." Paul also references this verse in Galatians 3:13, stating, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'"

Peter emphasizes that Jesus was hung on a tree for the sake of all of us, bearing the curse due to our sins. We must understand that Jesus, up until the age of thirty, worked as a carpenter in Nazareth. He daily handled wood, crafting various implements, fully aware that one day He would be hung on a tree to bear the sins of humanity and become cursed under God's judgment. His purpose in being hung on a tree was so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. We are dead to sin because the price of our sins has been paid by Jesus Christ, and we have been freed from the power of sin. Since we are no longer under sin's dominion, we should regard ourselves as dead to sin and alive to righteousness.

Living to righteousness has two aspects. First, through Jesus Christ's death and His completed redemption, every person who accepts the grace of Jesus Christ is declared righteous by God. This is a positional truth; it is objective. Once you accept the redemption of Jesus Christ, God declares you righteous. Building upon this foundation of being declared righteous, every saved person must live a righteous life, which is subjective and experiential, manifested in our daily lives.

Peter then mentions, "by His wounds you have been healed." In Mark 15:15-20, when Jesus was flogged by Pilate's soldiers, crowned with thorns, and mocked as the King of the Jews, He suffered both in soul and body. Through His wounds, we receive healing. There are two aspects to this healing: the healing of the soul through the sufferings of Jesus Christ and the potential temporary physical healing we experience today when our bodies suffer. Our ultimate bodily healing awaits Jesus Christ's return when our bodies will be redeemed, experiencing complete healing, receiving a spiritual body.

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

This passage also speaks about the shepherd and overseer of our souls. The word "soul" here, in the original text, is *psuche*, and a more accurate translation would indeed be the shepherd and overseer of our souls. Because the theme of 1 Peter is living hope, Peter focuses on the salvation of our souls. Here, Peter is saying that you were like lost sheep before. This indicates that each of us is lost within our own souls. We often lose ourselves in our thoughts, which are scattered and tangled, unable to find life's priorities or direction; we frequently get lost in our thoughts. We also often lost in our emotions, swept away by the world's waves of trends, each day presenting something new that we desire. The things of the world appear gilded and attractive, yet they are not lasting, still captivating us, leading us to often lose ourselves in emotions. Most of the time, we are lost in our wills, often lingering at crossroads, unable to make decisions. Therefore, we are all lost sheep, losing our way in the wilderness of our souls. But now we belong to the shepherd and overseer of our souls—Jesus Christ is our good shepherd, our great shepherd. As a shepherd, He leads His sheep, guiding them. Jesus Christ is not only the shepherd of our souls but also their overseer. As the sheep grow, the shepherd grants them more freedom, allowing them to learn to think for themselves, to have their own preferences, and make decisions—all necessary for the growth process of each sheep. Throughout this process, He is our overseer, never abandoning us. When we stray too far, He comes to correct us. Dear brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is the shepherd and overseer of our souls; we can find rest in every situation we face.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You for completing redemption on the cross. Through faith in You, our sins are forgiven, and we receive eternal life from God. As we journey towards sanctification and walk on this earth, You are our perfect example, enabling us to follow in Your footsteps. Throughout this process, You are the shepherd and overseer of our souls. We know that one day, we will complete this journey of sanctification, and when You come again, our bodies will be redeemed. We have a glorious hope. Help us to live each day with joy in our hearts. We pray in Jesus Christ's holy name. Amen!