

HoliMess
Making the Most of Messy Relationships!

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: 1 Peter 2:13a; 2:18-3:7

Introduction

The most basic unit in Graeco-Roman society was the *oikos* or “household.” Even the pagan world valued the proper management of persons living under the same roof. Two kinds of households could be meant by the same Greek term: 1) the biologically related members of a single family; 2) biological relations *plus* servants of various kinds who were not related by blood. Normally, #2 was intended, and that is what we find in 1 Peter 2:18-3:7. Roman society did not look favorably on newcomers to their cities who held a different understanding of how households were to be organized. Deviations from the accepted practices potentially threatened order and stability. Households were not seen as purely private groups as they are in most Western cultures today. What happened in a Roman household affected the Empire in general. One might say that violations of the social norms for households were a matter of national security.

Christians walked a tightrope when it came to social ethics. Already, they were at odds with the majority society because they refused to worship the Graeco-Roman deities. Asia Minor was no exception. Persons living there had a general understanding of propriety between husbands, wives, children, slaves, and master. If foreigners came into their midst, they were judged in terms of compliance with the expectations for *oikos* relationships.¹ The Jews had some first-hand experience with this dynamic, and writers like Josephus went out of their way to answer their critics and assure them that Judaism complied, in the main, with social order in the Empire.² On the whole, Josephus was successful. On the other hand, the Egyptian goddess Isis’ religion raised eyebrows and criticism by advocating that women could wield authority over their husbands.³ And her cult was the major competitor to Christianity in the Empire. How would the Christian leaders, like Peter, counsel the young churches to respond?

The phrase “household of faith” appears in Galatians 6:10, where Paul counsels the churches in Asia Minor to “do good to everyone, especially those who are of the household of faith.” Elsewhere we read of “the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15). Peter himself uses this latter designation in 1 Peter 4:17. Even the Gentile god-fearer, Cornelius, was head of a household who feared God and gave generously to the people (Acts 10:2), and his whole household would be saved under the preaching of — that’s right — Peter (Acts 11:14). Such household conversions were common in the Gentile mission (Acts 16:15, 31, 34; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15; 2 Timothy 1:16; 4:19). Surprisingly, the Christian message reached even the “household of Caesar” (Philippians 4:22). If the household was the most basic unit for the Roman Empire, it surely was equally so for the Christian community. The household of Christian leaders was supposed to be a visible model for that institution when it had been impacted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 3:4-5; 3:15; 5:4, 8).

¹ Jobes, p. 183.

² This is seen in his apologetic work, *Against Apion*, 2.158, 193, 220, 225, 235, 293.

³ Sharon Kelly Heyob, *Isis Among Women in the Greco-Roman* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); Stavros Frangoulidis, *Witches, Isis and Narrative: Approaches to Magic in Apuleius’ Metamorphoses* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women’s Religions Among the Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

The households in Peter’s audience were, however, faced by a special problem: believers and non-believers belonged to the same household in many cases. This was especially difficult when the main power-holder (husbands, masters) was the non-Christian, leaving the weaker partner to grapple with being a Christian in an even more alien setting — one so near to home. It’s one thing to live as a Christian resident alien household within an Asiatic city, but quite another to belong to a household where you wake up every day lying next to someone who does not share your faith, or where you take orders from someone whose sense of justice is not the same as yours.

Whereas the household codes in Paul’s letters tend to focus on Christian households where partners are both believers, Peter recognizes the dilemmas described in our remarks above and counsels his readers to grapple with life under the unequal yoke. This, then, is the focus of 1 Peter 2:18-3:7, and will be the basis for our study this week.

We will be considering the material in 1 Peter 2-3 in two discontinuous sections, not because Peter wrote it that way, but to focus first, this week, on the issue of living in divided households. Previously, in our introductory study, we paid attention to the idea of the alien status of Christians in Asia Minor and examined 1 Peter 1:2-3 and 2:9-12 together. Some very key material appears in 2:4-8, 13-17 which we will combine with similar material in 3:8-22 next week — all having to do with Christian values in a pagan world. However, even in that material there is the theme of “submission” to alien authority (2:13-17) which precedes this week’s passage. We’d like to lift 2:13a and treat it as the true preface to our study this week:

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human creature⁴.”

A helpful graph for understanding 2:13-3:12 comes from Joel Green’s commentary on *1 Peter*:⁵

A 2:13-17: instruction for everyone
B 2:18-20: instruction for slaves
C 2:21-25: the example of Christ
B' 3:1-7: instruction for wives and husbands
A' 3:8-12: instruction for everyone

Our focus this week will be on the inner portion of this chiasmus where *the example of Christ* occupies the central hinge.

We will start with a few remarks about the leading instruction in 2:13a.

Submission for the Lord’s Sake

In the Greco-Roman world, the order of society was, *de facto*, the order of the gods. Of course for some, the gods included the Emperor himself and the well-oiled military machine which supported the peace-keeping administration of the various provinces. Backed by several generations of famous literary figures, contemporary pagan society looked to the man to be the sign of human authority, aligning all other parties in the household to his will. As we noted in the case of the Isis cult, established rulers took a dim view of female-led social structures. True, women might act as patrons on their husbands’ behalf or as widows to wealthy families acting as matriarchs in their deceased spouses’ name. But the real power lay with the male, and only in pockets of social resistance can we find evidence to the contrary. Was there submission in Greco-Roman order? Without a doubt, anybody coming under the reach of a household would automatically assume that the man was in charge, whether a wife, child or slave.

⁴ This translation will be explained in the subsequent discussion where we consider the meaning of the Greek term *ktisis* as it applies to the process of submission. Unlike some translations, we don’t see the meaning as “authority, institution, ordinance” — terms which find no support in the ancient literature where *ktisis* is used.

⁵ Green, p. 72.

Therefore, when Peter begins 2:13a with the words *hupotagēte*, “submit,” he opens with an instruction — an imperative aorist form of the verb *hupotassō*, he is being wholly consistent with what the general society might expect from a law-abiding foreign group coming to live in one of the provinces of Rome. Christians were not radical trouble-makers who set their sites on overthrowing all order in the Roman world. Had they attempted to do so, they would have been routed much as the Jewish radicals would later be in 70 C.E. The Greek word literally means “to place or arrange under, post under, subject.” Nobody would misread Peter’s words, since he wrote in familiar terminology.

Still, there is a shift in emphasis, and it might well have been read ambiguously by a government official, like the later Pliny the Younger⁶, who would be suspicious of a new sect arriving in the province. The key phrase is *dia ton kurion*, translated as “for the Lord’s sake,” literally, “because of the Lord.” A word like *kurios* had applications across the political spectrum. More than likely, a non-Christian would refer to Caesar in this way, and perhaps also to lesser rulers under whose authority his household resided. The real question facing a household was “who is Lord?” Looked at in this way, separating belief and politics in the ancient world was utterly impossible, if not absurd. A pagan might declare Zeus to be god (*theos*) and Caesar to be Lord (*kurios*). Christians didn’t have that luxury if they were to remain loyal to their calling as followers of Jesus. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar is not. Peter makes clear that “the Lord Jesus” is the real standard for “submitting” to other human beings. We have no doubt who the Lord is for Peter, but would the non-Christian reader of this letter see it in the same way? The point at issue for 2:13a is that Christians accept *the principle of human authority*, even when they don’t always agree with the way it is executed. What we must stress here is that Roman forms of government allowed no room for democratic innovations. It wasn’t as if the Christians in an Asiatic city could write their local magistrate and seek changes in public policy for handling church-state matters. Even when Paul, for example, had issues with the way he was beaten without trial, though he was a Roman citizen, he had to appeal his case through the court system all the way to the Emperor to find redress.

Peter refers to human social arrangements with the phrase *pasē anthrōpinē ktisei*, “every human creation.” The usual meaning of *ktisis* is “creation,” making the writer’s use of it here somewhat unusual.⁷ Translations tend to handle this by using the words “institution, ordinance, authority.” However, what may be meant is simpler still. Since *ktisis* has to do with the *created order*, we might be better off taking this to mean “every human *creature* within the created order,” which is the suggestion Witherington offers.⁸ In other words, Peter does not use any of the ordinary terms for describing institutional social structures, but prefers a word which suggests that all such relationships are between *creatures of God*, and we ought to relate to them in that way. For Peter’s Christian audience, that would make sense in light of their understanding of the phrase “for the Lord’s sake,” i.e. for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Nothing in the human institutions commands the submission of Christians. What matters are the *people* involved not the *structures*. Peter is essentially saying, “Let’s not forget that human beings make up social units. Structures are made by human beings. God created human beings, and so, out of deference to Him, we will concern ourselves with human beings in our social ethics.”

The humanization of households was a bold step for the Christian apostle to take. Skillfully, this approach avoided the need to critique directly human institutions while still putting a human face on the difficulties faced by the people involved — husbands, wives, children and slaves. In order to honor God the Creator of all things, the Christian apostle goes directly to the heart of alienation within society, and treats his audience, not as a cog in the cultural machine, but as persons made in the image of God — as *human creatures*.

⁶ See the first week in this series, *Background Notes*, April 17/18, 2010, especially the text of Pliny’s letter, pp. 2-3.

⁷ Werner Foerster, “*ktizō ktisis, ktisma, ktistēs*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 1000-1035.

⁸ Witherington, pp. 141-142.

In next week's study we will focus on the more general role of human beings within civil society as Peter explains in 2:13b-17. The reason we defer that study is to focus instead on the more basic social unit within Greco-Roman society — the household, the *oikos*. Because of the special emphasis this weekend, we are making this adjustment to the material. However, Peter actually begins his discussion with *everyone in general* before he arrives at the household level. It could be argued that the appeal of the Gospel always has the *kingdom of God* in mind, and the kingdom extends beyond the narrower limits of single domestic groups to the welfare of the whole world — in this case the Roman Empire. Christian values — our concern next week — derive their force from the place of the kingdom in God's long-term program and grand narrative as found in Scripture. Questions about the "will of God" (2:15), human "freedom" (2:16a), and living as "servants of God" (2:16b) under the rule of love (2:17) — these dominate the landscape of the first section which begins with "submit..." To those matters we will turn next week.

Christian Servants and Their Masters (2:18-20)

¹⁸ 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 (1 Peter 2:18-20)

Anyone familiar with household codes would have reason to pause at the sequence of relationships Peter uses. Had this been a strictly hierarchical code book, setting forth the order of society with men at the top, we would have been reading first of all about *the man* as husband, father and master of the *oikos*. That's not what we find in this case. Almost as if to subvert the ordinary viewpoint, Peter begins with the primary role of the slave. It's as if Peter turned the whole household code on its head, shaking loose the preconceptions about how authority and power flow in society. So while he is willing to use the word "submit" to introduce these sections, he does so in ways which don't look like the normal Greco-Roman social architecture. Why would he put slaves first?

In truth, the answer lies within the section which follows this one — a supporting argument for how slaves ought to conduct themselves. At the heart of that argument (2:21-25) is the pure example of Jesus Christ who is "the suffering *servant* of the Lord." What the writer does is begin with the lowliest and most painful of the human relationships — slave-to-master — and then give to it a supreme place within the Christian social order. Anyone familiar with the teachings of Jesus would not be surprised by this strategy. Consider, for example, this passage:

42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

Peter learned from Jesus that *the first* must be *slave* of all, and he takes that sequence to heart when he crafts his household codes.

What is the real force of *submit* as it appears throughout this section (2:13-3:7)? If we take a cue from our earlier remarks on 2:13a, then the meaning should be along the lines of "subject yourself, that is, show deference and respect to every human creature." At the outset, it cannot mean, however, just doing whatever another human being tells a person to do, since the real "Lord" is Jesus and not some human authority. What we do must be done "for the Lord's sake" (Romans 13:1-17; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Titus 3:1-3). By using the aorist tense of *hupotassō*, the writer implies the *start* or *decision* to act this way, affirming that freedom of choice is involved (2:16). Green is helpful when he sees the word "submit" as the negative to "withdraw," referring rather to "Finding and occupying responsibly one's place in society..."⁹ That is, submission means "active engagement" with the social relationships in which Christians find themselves, and not a passive flight of emigration. Peter tells his audience, starting with slaves, "enlist yourselves..." in the social process.

⁹ Green, p. 73. He also cites Meeks, *Morality*, pp. 38-39 and Goppelt, *Theology*, p. 168.

If Roman society you were either “slave or free,” a distinction noted in the New Testament (Ephesians 6:8; Revelation 13:16; Galatians 3:28; John 8:33).¹⁰ Freedom was, however, with qualifications. Persons doing whatever they wanted would, in secular terms, be free, yet the state required something more: acting lawfully for the good of the social order. The best person would be one whose desires were so oriented toward the social good that whatever he desired also turned out to be what was good for all. This assumes, of course, that a person was either born into freedom or, as a slave some time later who purchased it.

The Jewish understanding of freedom was a bit different, though it shared in the slave/free polarity. Basic to Jewish history was the Exodus when the slave people Israel became a free nation. Tested in the crucible of Egyptian oppression, the people of God left behind their slavery, led by Moses to the foot of Mount Sinai where they would receive the Torah. They were simultaneously the children of God and also His servants. Such thinking colored the language of New Testament theology. We are both *free* and *the servants* of God; free, yet the servants of all.

Peter uses the Greek word *oiketai* (from *oiketēs*) to identify the slaves/servants of 2:18-20. This term refers to *household* or *domestic* slaves who, in this case, stand in relationship to non-Christian masters (see 1 Timothy 6:1-2). We have the vocative case which means the writer is addressing himself to the slaves, not just talking about them in the third person. This was a bit unusual, since the extant sources didn’t use first person language in their household codes.¹¹ Slaves are treated here as persons with moral capacity and not mere property. This is important. They are creatures of God, worthy of respect as human beings. Whereas, as we learn shortly, masters might beat their slaves unjustly, Peter the apostle will, in his letter, treat them quite differently — noting the fact of this injustice without in the least sanctioning it.¹²

In summarizing his findings on domestic slavery in the first century, Witherington concludes:

...slavery was seen as a mere human institution, not one ordained of God, which Christians may have to endure while passing through this life. Its force was seen as mitigated if one was in Christ and in his community. It was at times seen as a lesser of two evils-if poverty was the other option. Nevertheless, it was well known that slaves could be and were abused physically and sexually by brutal masters (Seneca *Ep.* 47), and slaves were basically viewed as property without rights. This was far from ideal; indeed, it was the parade example of a fallen, all-too-human institution.¹³

Given these cursory facts, the way Peter converses with slaves in his letter is remarkable. He doesn’t merely talk *about* them, he talks *to* them, and he seeks ways whereby they might live realistically within the heart of an unjust institution while upholding their Christian witness. He could hardly ask them to rise up in rebellion: Rome would strike them down without mercy. Yet, by nurturing the fundamental humanity of both master and slave, Peter sought to apply the Christian Gospel in ways which stood a chance of breaking down the barriers.

A few comments about “servant” and “slave” as they apply here. Slavery, as practiced in the American past, was not the same sort of institution as practiced within the Roman Empire. Persons would become slaves in ancient times through debt, war or birth. In some instances, these were relationships lasting for a term, followed by a contractual manumission. That said, abuse by masters against their slaves (see above) reinforced the tenuous status of slaves as persons. However, such persons performed important functions as *oiketai*: wet nurses, wool spinners, and the like. Plato, in his *Laws*, echoes popular perceptions within Greek society about slaves:

...that there is no health in the soul of the slave, and that the sensible man must never trust slaves an inch. The wisest of all our poets gives the opinion, speaking for Zeus, that “Zeus who sounds afar takes away half a man’s wits when they are taken into slavery.” Everyone takes a different understanding of these things, and some do not

¹⁰ The Roman jurist Gaius in his *Institutiones* 1.9.

¹¹ Witherington, p. 147.

¹² For a synopsis of “Domestic Slavery and 1 Peter” see Witherington, pp. 148-151.

¹³ *Op. Cit.*, p. 151.

trust the pack of servant (*oiketai*) at all, and like those of the nature of beasts, with goads and whips make the souls of servants (*oiketai*) not just thrice but many times as slavish as they were, while others do the opposite of all this.¹⁴

Extant sources suggest that the Roman Empire had at least 60,000,000 slaves. Rees remarks:

It was a world made to measure for patricians and masters, who saw no point in working when there were these “chattels” who could do everything for them. While not all by far were chained to menial tasks — there were doctor-slaves, teacher-slaves, actor-slaves and so on — there was one thing that all had in common: they were devoid of rights.

To be sure, not all masters took advantage of their powers of life and death over their slaves. Some were even fond of their servants, in that condescending way in which conscious superiors look down, benevolently bemused, on their hopeless inferiors! At best, however, the slave’s lot was one in which he was not a person but a thing. For him the most simple human rights did not exist.¹⁵

As Aristotle argued:

There can be no friendship nor justice toward inanimate things, indeed, not even toward a horse or an ox, not yet toward a slave as a slave. For master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.¹⁶

“Respect” (from the Greek *phobos*, “fear”) was the starting point. Ideally speaking there was no good reason for a slave to respect his master, particularly when the master’s treatment of the slave was brutal and injurious. Peter uses the term *despotēs*, a common way of designating “the master of a house.” While the same word can mean “despot” in the more dramatic sense of a political ruler who exercises excessive power and uses extreme measure to govern, that is not its sense in 2:18. “Owner” also figures into the meaning, reminding the slave that he himself was, in fact, property. The radical notion that a slave should respect his master, even if he were *bad*, climaxes the thought of the verse. Masters fall into two categories:

1. “The good and gentle” (*agathos* and *epieikēs*). Slaves of Christian households, presumably, would have masters who treated them well. However, we know from Paul’s instructions that it was necessary, even in the case of Christian masters, to tell them how to treat their slaves. So whether the “good and gentle” are Christians or are just decent human beings is not clear from the text. Peter’s point is to deal with the second category ...
2. “The harsh” (*skolios*). This Greek word means “crooked, perverse, and dishonest.” Word choice in this case goes beyond the more general *kakos*, “evil,” and fingers downright disgusting conduct. Our popular term “bent” probably fits the description. There is also a medical use of this term — scoliosis — the curvature of a backbone. The New Testament finds this term in Isaiah’s prophecy (40) about the crooked road being made straight when the Lord finally returns to Zion (Luke 3:5). Peter employed the expression in his Pentecost speech when he asked his audience to save themselves from the current “crooked” generation (Acts 2:40). Paul used similar language (Philippians 2:15).

The “bent” masters were no different than the surrounding culture, Peter is telling the slaves. Consistent with his preaching at Pentecost, Peter obviously wants both slaves and masters to find rescue from such perversity in their generation. This isn’t just about saving slaves from nasty masters, as if the masters ceased to be human beings because they were wicked persons. They too stand in need of salvation. The moral burden for the restoration of a fallen world — including crooked masters — rests squarely on the shoulders of the slaves. Left on their own, masters will not likely mend their ways or “straighten up.” In that sense, the masters are no different from the world of lost human beings. Left on its own, humanity was slowly but surely making its way down the broad road to destruction.

¹⁴ *Laws*, 776e-777a.

¹⁵ Rees, p. 60.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII, 11, Trans. By W.D. Ross.

How will slaves shoulder their moral challenge and bring the kingdom into the midst of a crooked human relationship like slavery? The next statement is rich with meaning but tricky to translate (2:19):

Touto gar charis ei dia suneidēsin theou hupopherei tis lupas paschōn adikōs.

“For this [is] grace if, because of a consciousness of God, someone bears up under pain, suffering unjustly.”

The best translations don’t try to mute the Greek word *charis* (grace) when putting the idea into English, but allow the word have its full force. Here’s the gist of the statement:

**This is grace in its purest form
when we consciously see God present and at work
on behalf of those who bear up
painfully in the face of injustice.**

Not all suffering is good, nor is suffering good *in itself*. Some suffering is gratuitous and serves no greater good — it is something to be eliminated. However, the Christian slave is asked to consider if God might be truly present in the midst of the pain of unjust treatment by a master.

Christians ought always to be on the lookout for ways to unleash the power of grace where it is needed most. This requires something which Peter calls *suneidēsis theou* — God-consciousness. The word *suneidēsis* is usually translated as “conscience.” In many contexts that makes perfect sense. Classical usage includes: 1) moral awareness or reminder of one’s own bad deeds; 2) knowledge or experience of the distressing situation of life; 3) the active faculty of memory which hearers have in common with a speaker; 4) self-consciousness.¹⁷ In the present context, the meaning comes closest to #3, where God and the slave share a common knowledge about what is happening in the unjust master-slave relationship. We might imagine God saying to the slave “You and I both know what’s happening here. Now what good thing shall we make happen to replace the injustice?” Such a fresh understanding satisfies the notion of *suneidēsis*.

What might be the natural response of a slave to an unjust beating, except to strike back and seek to settle the score. No doubt such reactions happened, and slaves began acting in ways which looked more like the crookedness of their masters. They became like them. In 2:20, Peter counsels a different approach. He shows the utter inconsistency of acting badly while claiming to be a Christian. The resulting punishment of the slave, even if endured, would hardly be to the “credit” of his Christian faith. The Greek word for “credit” is *kleos* which normally meant “report, news, fame, glory, or repute.” Perhaps the better translation would be “For what sort of reputation would you get if you endure suffering for having sinned?” Peter uses the common verb for “sin,” *hamartanō* (“to miss the mark”). Slave sins and master sins are both Sin. Paul would have added, “The wage of Sin is death” (Romans 6:23). In the world of crooked masters, death might come indeed to a slave who retaliated!

There’s a better way, Peter tells the suffering slaves. Turn grace loose by doing good in the face of evil. Reverse the course of personal retribution by revealing what God’s grace can do when we always live as Christ did. The Greek here is concise: *touto charis para theou*; literally, “this [is] grace from God!” Release the grace of God into the slave-master relationship by putting shoe leather on the teaching of Jesus:

³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. ⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax

¹⁷ Christian Maurer, “*sunoida, suneidēsis*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. X (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 898-919.

collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:39-48).

Paul agrees:

²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:20-21).

His image of "burning coals" is not intended to suggest vengeance, but is a quote from Proverbs 25:21-22 where it likely meant "bring a flush to his face," — that is real shame for having treated the other person so badly. The goal of such shame would be, of course, real repentance.

By returning good for evil, the slave gains the moral high ground. He also creates moral space for change to occur on the part of the master. Should that take place, then grace will have broken through in the bright light of God's redeeming love. Such a turn-about is the purpose of preaching the Gospel, and in the case of the slave, his actions (more than his words) might have resulted in the salvation of his master. Enduring suffering for good reason, Peter reminds us, is a good thing; the salvation of the master is a good thing.

The Example of Jesus: Redemptive Relationship (2:21-25)

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. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:21-25)

By using the word "for" (Greek: *gar*) Peter closely connects this new section with his instructions to the Christian slaves. A unique calling goes out to Christ followers who are slaves. Pointed language expresses this: "to this you have been called" (*eis touto eklēthēte*). The aorist tense of the verb "to call" places the action decisively in the past, suggesting that, at their conversion, household slaves entered into a unique redemptive opportunity because they were slaves. More than any of the other relationships in this extended section, the slaves mirror the suffering and death of the Messiah who suffered for them. Drawing from the prophecies of the Old Testament, this passage takes its themes from Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the familiar Suffering Servant oracle. That significant text begins "Behold, my servant shall act wisely...", and that is precisely what Peter wishes for his readers as they daily struggle with unjust masters in an alien culture. Yet, they cannot go it alone, but must read the Isaiah prophecy as showing them the way of the cross along the path of suffering. Comparing the Isaiah "Servant Song" with our text shows the following verbal affinities:

1. 2:22 and Isaiah 53:9
2. 2:24 and 53:11
3. 2:25 and 53:5, 6

John H. Elliott explains the connections:

The innocent suffering of the Christian servants was a problem to which the innocent suffering of Jesus Christ, described in the language of the Isaianic servant of God, was designed to apply a justification and a point of comparison. As the Christ suffered, though innocent, so they also who bear his name (cf. 1 Peter 4:12-16). As they are but humble servants, so also was he.¹⁸

Personalizing his message, Peter tells the slaves that "Christ also suffered for *you*..." While their suffering is real, it is not solitary: "Christ *also* suffered..." — the words ring true in their painful situation. A unique word

¹⁸ Elliott, pp. 258-259.

for “example” appears in this regard: *hupogrammos* which refers to a schoolboy’s practice-book where outlines of the letters were copied below (*hupo*) by students who were learning to write.¹⁹ Cunningham makes the application and says that

I Peter 2:21 describes Christ as a text, a piece of writing, a *hupogrammos* – that is, that line of writing written out by the Greek schoolboy at the top of the schoolboy’s wax writing tablet for him to keep copying out as handwriting practice. The *hupogrammos* included all the letters of the Greek alphabet so that Christ is envisioned as an alphabetic, textual entity – the whole of language’s potential – and the entire alphabet from alpha to omega. The *hupogrammos* was frequently a sentence composed by the schoolmaster for practice in the formation of letters as opposed to the study of their sense.²⁰

In this case, the suffering of Christ on the cross, in all of its varying nuances, is to be imitated by the slaves. The word “follow” is *epakaloutheō*, a compound verb consisting of the ordinary word “to follow” prefixed by the intensifier pronoun *epi*. Those who would share in the sufferings of Christ must pay close attention to the manner in which he suffered and learn from his passion how to suffer under their own unique circumstances. Peter carefully enumerates the features of Christ’s suffering:

1. **He suffered for us.**
2. **He committed no sin nor spoke deceit.**
3. **He did not answer his revilers in kind nor threaten when he was made to suffer.**
4. **He entrusted himself to God who judges justly.**
5. **He bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.**
6. **His wounds result in our healing.**
7. **He has brought us home as a Shepherd care for his flock, so God oversees our souls.**

The central axis of this enumeration is #4: *paredidou de tō krinonti dikaiōs*. The underlying word for “entrusted” literally means “hand over, deliver, pass on, or commit.” Such language appears in the Gospel narratives which tell of the handing over of Jesus to the Roman authorities (Matthew 27:2-4; 18, 26). Also, the term was applied to Judas’ betrayal of Jesus, as well as to other forms of betrayal by family members or close friends (Mark 14:10-11, 18, 21, 41-42). By contrast, in this case, Jesus is said to hand *himself* over to God the righteous judge who will adjudicate his case fairly. How does Jesus find vindication from the righteous Judge? Clearly, the evidence points to his resurrection from the dead. In his exalted role at the Father’s right hand, the risen Jesus becomes for his followers their “Shepherd and Overseer.” For the writer to the Hebrews this translates into a majestic benediction:

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:20-21).

The benefit to the Christian flock appears later in Peter’s letter: “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).

With this attitude, Peter desires that the slaves in his audience entrust themselves to God while they seek to follow Christ in his sufferings. Redemptive suffering yields positive results for others. Wounds are healed, sins are dealt a death blow, righteousness lives, and lost sheep find their way home. Slaves are able to live redemptively, in hope that their masters may find their way home to God and His just ways. The redemption of the masters will become liberation for their slaves. Peter’s approach toward the slaves’ condition is a cavalier blessing but a deeply rooted sense of providence: God will transform the suffering of the Christian slave with resurrection life.

¹⁹ Examples include 2 Maccabees 2:28; Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromata* 5.8.49. The image as metaphor for moral model or example occurs in post-New Testament literature: 1 Clement 16:17; 33:8. For a technical discussion see G. Schrenk in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 772-773.

²⁰ Valentine Cunningham, “Renovating That Bible: The Absolute Text of (Post) Modernism,” *The Theory of Reading*, Ed. Frank Gloversmith (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984), 1-52.

Husbands and Wives (3:1-17)

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives- 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 3 Do not let your adorning be external- the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing- 4 but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. 5 For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. 7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Echoing our comments from the previous section, “be subject, be submissive” (from *hupotassō*) has to do more with involvement and engagement in the process than with a regimented subservience of one human being to another. Remember the controlling text of this whole section (2:13a):

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human creature²¹.”

Wives

In this case, the immediate setting is a Christian wife living within a household headed by a non-Christian husband. Therefore, we must not assume that Peter’s teaching in this instance parallels what we might find in Paul’s letters where Christian families are the audience for his teaching. As with the situation involving slaves and masters, the non-Christian wife was immediately at a disadvantage of power with respect to her husband. The wives Peter addresses here no doubt became Christians after marrying their non-Christian husbands. This conversion put the wife at odds with her husband within that culture. How? According to Plutarch, Greco-Roman writer (46-120 C.E.) known for his *Lives* and *Moralia*, wives were not suppose to have friends of their own, and they were expected to worship the gods of their husbands.

A woman ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband’s friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Hence, it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the door right upon all strange rituals and outlandish superstitions. For with no god so stealthy and secret rites performed by a woman find any favor.²²

For the wife to become a Christian potentially introduced disorder into the Greco-Roman household something which might also disturb the surrounding society. Contemporary sources show that Christians were often blamed for public disasters because they had brought a new god into the established order of things, making the other gods unhappy.²³

Public knowledge of the wife’s conversion also led to shame for the husband who would suffer criticism for not keeping his household in order, affecting his social standing and future potential for holding office. Moreover, Christian fellowship as part of the local church could be interpreted as having friends outside her husband’s circle.²⁴

Wisely, Peter does not impose on Christian wives rules which would worsen her already tenuous situation. However, he does address the wives directly — a bold move with subversive overtones. Instruction of the wife by Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ, tampered with the prerogative of the husband to instruct his own wife. At the same time, it elevated the woman by affirming her role as a moral decision maker, a role normally left to the husband.

²¹ This translation will be explained in the subsequent discussion where we consider the meaning of the Greek term *ktisis* as it applies to the process of submission. Unlike some translations, we don’t see the meaning as “authority, institution, ordinance” — terms which find no support in the ancient literature where *ktisis* is used.

²² Plutarch, *Advice* 19; *Moralia* 140D.

²³ Without citing each fact, the background for this material is found in G. T. Oborn, "Economic Factors in the Persecution of the Christians to AD 260," *Environmental Factors in Christian History* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1939), 131-148.

²⁴ Jobes, p. 203.

By counseling submission, Peter is actually urging continuing engagement between wife and husband, as opposed to secrecy or isolation of her faith from the household. A witness without words takes the place of direct evangelism: the hope is for a wife's Christian virtues to so impact her husband that he will be "won" over to faith by those actions. The silent witness works well within the structures of Asiatic society, since the wife does not presume to "teach her husband" something, but lives out the Gospel message instead. Submission, in this case, means cultural accommodation to marital expectations with a clear missional purpose.

Conduct (Greek:*anastrophē*) has two virtuous qualities: respectful and good. This would be fully in line with contemporary norms. The wife would honor her husband's role within the household, doing nothing which would publicly humiliate him or challenge his authority. Again, remember we are talking about a Christian wife in relationship to a non-Christian husband who held all the power in the household. Her *goodness* had to do with her *character* as a faithful wife within her marriage. Peter unpacks this a bit by drawing attention to how the wife presented herself to others through certain forms of grooming: hair, jewelry and clothing.

1. The mere fact that a woman could afford such accessories implies that she had wealth available to her by virtue of her husband's social situation.
2. Wearing makeup, braiding hair, and wearing jewelry when she went outside her household alone would have been signs to other men that she was flirting and seducing. Again, we have Plutarch's observations about this.²⁵ Jobes comments that if a Christian wife attended Christian worship without her husband present, she needed to avoid the appearance of impropriety, and so Peter counsels wives on their dress code.²⁶

In support of his teaching, Peter reaches into the history of Israel, choosing the first wife and mother of the Jewish people, Sarah. The relevance of Abraham and Sarah's story is found in their "alien" status, as seen in such passages as Genesis 12:11-20 and Genesis 20. Those narratives cast Abraham in the role of an unjust husband who lies about Sarah's true status as his wife to the Pharaoh of Egypt and later to Abimelech king of Gerar. Abraham's duplicity placed Sarah in harm's way, yet she patiently goes along with both schemes which are eventually exposed. God overrules possible negative outcomes and rescues His people.²⁷

Peter draws attention to Genesis 18:12 where Sarah in her *private thoughts* refers to Abraham as "lord." What interests Peter is not that Sarah addressed Abraham as "lord" out loud, but that she nurtured an inner respect for him and showed it by her actions — which I take to be the intent of the statement "she obeyed him." Again, the notion of obedience in ancient Asiatic society was commonplace for wives toward husbands. In this respect, the text does not introduce distinctively Christian values into an otherwise egalitarian household but rather offers guidance to Christian wives who are trying to make their marriages work in the face of potentially conflicted values. By citing Sarah, the writer simply wants to show latter-day believers how the female founders of their faith worked out their marriages under difficult circumstances. Put crassly, "If it was good enough for Sarah, it's good enough for me..."

Pressing the argument further, Peter honors the wives in his audience by calling them "daughters of Sarah."²⁸ His choice of words has significance, since Christian wives in a non-Christian household struggled daily with identity issues, especially since their new-found faith gave them an alien status in the culture. Perhaps for many such wives, they felt they were no longer daughters of anyone. However, Peter assures them that respectful behavior toward others and exhibiting genuinely good character would carry wives a long way in combating their sense of "fear" or "fright" as a result of their changed environment.

²⁵ *Advice* 30. See also Proverbs 31:30 on charm and beauty; 1 Samuel 16:7 on the shallowness of outward appearance. On women's dress as seduction in Jewish thought, see Philo, *On the Virtues* 7.39.

²⁶ Jobes, p. 204-205.

²⁷ See Green, pp. 96-97.

²⁸ In the mid-1970's Nancy Hardesty and others helped found a Christian journal, *Daughters of Sarah* which was in continuous publication until 1995. Their focus was on the ideals of Christian feminism which they saw having roots in the revivalism of Charles Finney and the Wesleyan holiness movement. Later, their efforts became the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus.

By way of summary, Peter offers counsel to Christian wives in non-Christian households. Recognizing their potentially fearful situation, he offers guidance which keeps them true to their roots (“daughters of Sarah”) and yet protected from slander by their husband’s peers. Ultimately, their silent witness looks hopefully to the eventual salvation of their husbands (“win them over”). What is not true is that Peter is providing a blueprint for interaction between Christian spouses where a much higher standard of relationship is possible, and where mutual submission replaces the household male-dominated hierarchy.

Husbands

What happens when a husband becomes a Christian within the Greco-Roman household? Part of the answer has already been given in our research above. By societal convention, a husband’s gods were to become the gods of his wife, and the friends of the husband became his wife’s friends. As we have noted, whole households became Christian when the head of the household converted. So what are the dynamics of such a conversion? We are inclined to think in terms of Western society where the conversion of persons is highly individualistic. There is no social rule which says that religious conversion happens to whole households. Often that is not the case, since we appeal to individuals to make a *personal decision* to receive Christ. By contrast, New Testament conversions frequently happened without the consent of every member of the household — each member of the household followed the direction of the husband, father, or master. The examples of Cornelius (Acts 10-11) and the jailer at Philippi (Acts 16) come to mind in this regard.

But what about the case of a wife who belonged to such a household who just “went along” because social convention required it? Her husband would certainly recognize the reluctance of his spouse, even though she went along submissively as her culture required. As a Christian, his responsibilities went much farther than had been the case when he was yet a pagan. His former non-Christian mind-set would have simply blocked out his wife’s sympathies at this point, and he would have expected her to adopt his gods. Under the new model, his heart taught him a whole different way of being human — one which acknowledged his wife’s sensitivities and perhaps gave her room to work out the details of her own salvation. Peter has counsel for the husband, and it unfolds in several ways:

1. **“Live with your wives according to knowledge.”** This instruction invites the Christian husband to “know” (Greek: *gnōsis*) his wife in a loving way. The Biblical concept of “know” when applied to persons goes beyond mere intellectual understanding or perception. When Adam “knew” Eve (Genesis 4), the biblical writer was simply saying he had sexual relations with her. Perhaps the Christian men felt a bit uncertain whether a wife who did not fully accept his faith should really share this intimacy with him. Peter lays aside that reservation. In a deeper sense, the husband is asked to become acquainted with his wife’s needs and to treat her as a partner, encouraging transparency and openness. By doing this, the husband transforms the nature of marriage within the Greco-Roman culture — Christianize it in fresh ways.
2. **“Honor the woman as a weaker vessel.”** This statement isn’t a comment about what women can or cannot do physically or intellectually. Weakness (from *asthenēs*) suggests the limitations affecting the woman, both in terms of her social situation and her lack of opportunities for personal growth within that society. Again, the power rested with the male in that culture, and Peter reminds husbands to “be gentle” in addressing matters of faith to their wives, not forcing this new viewpoint on them.

Against the background of a pagan culture, this Christian attitude is highly enlightened. To offer one example, listen to the *Letter to Aristeas* (a 2nd century B.C.E. document):

The female sex is bold, positively active for something which it desires, easily liable to change its mind because of poor reasoning powers, and of naturally weak constitution.²⁹

3. **“You are both heirs of the grace of life.”** Inheritance, as we noted in earlier studies in this series, largely had to do with property and future possessions. Recipients of an inheritance were beneficiaries of wealth.

²⁹ *Letter to Aristeas* 250 in R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudopigrapha of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963. pp.82-122.

Applying this imagery to Christian's future, Peter makes the radical step of including the wife of a Christian husband in that process. In a real sense, the husband had a wonderful opportunity to use the prerogative of his station in society to bring benefit to his wife in a spiritual sense. On the one hand, the Christian husband had made his commitment to follow Christ, and his household was included in that decision. On the other hand, the wife perhaps still needed to benefit from God's grace in personal terms, and Peter calls upon the husband to treat his wife as a *partner* in grace — *heirs together*, regardless of the stage each one had thus far achieved.³⁰ Lived out consistently, this perspective of joint-inheritance would lead to a radical transformation of *submission* as something *mutual*. Headship had to do with submitting to Christ who is the true source of the Christian's inheritance. Households would look quite different as a result.

4. **“You both need unhindered prayer.”** Mentioning prayer at this point may seem abrupt. However, as Michaels points out, the subject matter of this section suggests that husbands and wives living in Christian households form a *miniature church*.³¹ He recalls for us Matthew 18:20 where two or three gathered in prayer constitutes a sanctuary where he comes “in the midst.” Agreement of two or three was the condition for answered prayer. Failure to express mutuality fractures the “little church,” Peter tells his audience.

Concluding Thoughts

Using the familiar “household codes” pattern, Peter instructs Christian members of largely non-Christian households how to live in redemptive ways. This is consistent with the overall theme of *I Peter* which has to do with Christians as resident aliens in Asiatic society — a status created either by migration or by conversion. The problem existed because of differences of *power* between persons in such households. In the majority of cases Peter cites, the Christian lacks power and thus must find ways to influence the non-Christian household in less verbal ways. The example of the Christian mattered in such instances more than the overt witness. On the other hand, should power shift in the other direction and conversion happened to the male head of the household, a new set of responsibilities fell on him, namely, to deal with sensitivity toward those with less power than society granted him. To quote Lincoln in a different generation, “We hold the power and therefore bear the responsibility.”³² Since Greco-Roman society had its own oppressive social structures, the opportunities for a Christian husband to effect social change were enormous. Here was a chance to help “clean up the mess” in the surrounding culture, albeit every so slowly.

The spirit of Jesus' own teaching pervades this section of *I Peter*, as well as the power of his example. “You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world,” he challenged his followers (Matthew 5:13-14). To them he had entrusted the age-long task of implementing his own future achievements of dying and rising again. Such teaching was dual-pronged. To those *without* power, the *cross* offered hope through redemptive suffering. To those *with* power, the *incarnation* modeled how he who was Lord of all stooped down to become the servant of all. In both cases, human relationships underwent a significant transformation.

John Howard Yoder, in his *Politics of Jesus*, challenges us to fresh thinking in similar directions, as summarized by Ted Grimrud in his “Peace Theology:”

The social ethics of the New Testament have at their heart a call to follow the way of Jesus. This motif of imitation, though, focuses on specific aspects of Jesus' life and teaching, not a general sense of seeing him as a model in all areas of life. The specific point of imitation has to do with the aspects of Jesus' ministry that led him into conflict with the powers that be.

The New Testament presents Jesus' cross as the norm for his followers. This cross is understood in its historical concreteness as the consequence of standing against the status quo of power politics and social hierarchicalism. Jesus' cross represents his social nonconformity, his counter-cultural sensibility, his renouncing of

³⁰ Several years ago, Patricia Gundry published her book *Heirs Together* (1980), currently published by Suitcase Books (1999). In it she mounted an argument for Evangelical Christians that submission in the New Testament must be mutual and not hierarchical.

³¹ Michaels, p. 170-171.

³² Spoken in his annual address to Congress, December 1, 1862, one month before he signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

noninvolvement in the needed social transformation, and his refusal to take up the sword even for seemingly legitimate purposes.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was not truly tempted to withdraw and stay in the wilderness—he understood from the start that he had been called to engage his culture directly and confrontationally. He was not truly tempted to side with the religious powers, the Sadducean establishment and its sense of conservative social responsibility. This path was too strongly implicated in the social injustice Jesus stood foursquare against.

Jesus faced only one genuine social-political temptation. The actual temptation had to do with the lure of transformative social responsibility exercised through the sword, through the use of the means of “justifiable” violence for the sake a valuable ends.

Jesus proclaimed a message of the presence of God’s kingdom. As the metaphor “kingdom” makes clear, his concern centered on political and not purely religious or spiritual elements. When Jesus disavowed Peter’s attempt to defend him with the sword at the time of his arrest, he did so not because Peter got in the way of Jesus’ non-ethical vocation to be a perfect sacrifice for sin. Rather, Jesus rejected Peter’s efforts because he understood his calling as the Son of God to include turning from the use of the sword to further “legitimate” ends.

Following Jesus’ resurrection and the reinstitution of his community as the vanguard of the coming kingdom of God, his followers looked back at the whole of his ministry, death, and resurrection, and confessed him to be the unique manifestation of God in history. Language of incarnation, divinity, and Trinity emerged to name Jesus’ actual identity as God-in-flesh.

Confessing Jesus as God Incarnate speaks to God entering history and defining authentic humanness in terms of this exemplary, Spirit-filled life. Confessing Jesus as the “second person” of the Trinity speaks to the unity of all manifestations of God as harmonious with the life and teaching of this person confessed as God among us.

Jesus did not (mistakenly) proclaim the end of historical existence. His message of the jubilee made present centered on an actual embodiment in time of structured communal life that would shape historical existence. Jesus’ message was not that history was soon to end; he spoke to why history continues. He proclaimed and embodied a way of embracing real life and transforming how it is lived.

The kingdom of God, for Jesus, had to do with visible social life, not invisible “spirituality.” Shaped by Jubilee, confronting injustice, bondage, and oppression, empowered by the presence of God’s Spirit, the actual Kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed as present shows those who become its citizens why life in time matters.

At the heart of Jesus’ message we find clarity that people in power do not represent the divinely endorsed definition of what it means to be “political.” The actual Jesus of the gospel story utterly contradicts the assumptions of mainstream ethics that relegate his concerns to the non-political realm of otherworldly religion. Jesus’ message about politics is clear. Those in power misunderstand the true meaning of politics. If we understand “politics” to have to do, most fundamentally, with how human beings order their social lives, Jesus presented a clear alternative to politics as domination. The politics of domination is a perversion of the intention of God for how we are called to be human beings socially.³³

Perhaps Peter understood better than most the spidery webs of power as they entice human beings on the one hand to “take up the sword” in defense of one’s Lord, only to later abandon him to the wiles of the High Priest and Pilate. Who better to witness the restorative love of redemptive grace than Peter after the resurrection, facing Jesus for the first time, counting fish and learning how Jesus’ love overcomes all barriers to human relationships.

Glory to God! Amen.

³³ A précis of Yoder’s ideas: <http://peacetheology.net/pacifism-with-justice/6-pacifism-and-the-story-of-jesus/>, web page as of April 6, 2010. Primary source: John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972). Of special interest to this study is his chapter, “Christ and Power” (pp. 135-162) and “Revolutionary Subordination” (pp.163-192).

Resources: Brief Bibliography

A number of fine commentaries provide more in-depth discussions of the topics we will discuss in these studies of *1 Peter*. The following list is selective. When referenced throughout these *Notes*, the author's name will appear in the footnotes. Consult this bibliography for full information on the sources.

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Digger Deeper: *HoliMess: Making the Most of Messy Relationships!*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *HoliMess: Making the Most of Messy Relationships!* carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. The text for this week comes from 1 Peter 2:13a, 2:18-3:7, sometimes known as the Household Code section of Peter's letter. Carefully read the passage and develop a basic outline of the material.
2. How is the emphasis of this section consistent with the Christian-as-alien theme of the letter? What specific relationships does Peter identify in which Christians might have special problems? Briefly discuss those problems.
3. What key instruction introduces this section and is repeated throughout (2:13a)?
4. What guidance does Peter offer his readers in working through the different "power-based" relationships in which they find themselves? Note and comment on the uniqueness of each case.
5. Read the following texts which talk about the Christian community as a "household:" Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17. What other uses of this term do we find in the New Testament, what significance does each one have? (Acts 16:15, 31, 34; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15; 2 Timothy 1:16; 4:19; Philippians 4:22). How important was the Christian household to its leaders (1 Timothy 3:4-5; 3:15; 5:4, 8)?
6. How does "submission" function differently in 1) households consistency of both Christian and non-Christian members; 2) entirely Christian households?
7. What special opportunities did a newly converted Christian husband, father and master have in a household consisting of largely non-Christians? What problems did he face? How would this change if the person was a Christian wife? Christian slave? Remember that households in the first century were top-down and power-based.
8. How might that apply today in a highly egalitarian culture where power works differently?
9. According to 2:18-20, what is the supreme model for working out conflict in human relationships? List the ways this model applies to the relationships mentioned in this section of *1 Peter*. Based on this model, why do you suppose Peter began his household code section by talking about the *slaves* (domestic servants)? As you give your answer, refer also to Mark 10:42-45.
10. What opportunity does unjust suffering within a relationship offer to a Christian, according to 1 Peter 2:19? Read this verse in several translations to get the full meaning. Compare this to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:39-48 and Paul's remarks in Romans 12:20-21.
11. What special opportunity did a newly converted Christian wife have in a first century household? What special challenges? Why do you think Peter uses Sarah, Abraham's wife, as an example? Refer to Genesis 12:11-20; 18:12, and Genesis 20 to better understand this reference.
12. What special concerns did a Christian husband need to show his non-Christian wife (3:7)? What opportunities did he have?
13. How did the fact that Christian conversions in the first century often occurred as "whole households" affect individual members? Do we deal with anything like that today? Discuss the implications. How can the church be helpful in these situations?