

Life as an Exile: Within Your 'Household'

1 Peter 2:18 – 3:7

Theme

The word household is in scare quotes above. Here is why: *We misread the NT when we equate our modern concept of "family" with the instructions to slaves-masters, children-parents, wives-husbands in Peter and Paul.* To us, a household/family is mom, dad, and the kids; in Greco-Roman culture, a household/family was more like what we identify as a small business or mom-and-pop store or family farm. 1 Peter 2:15 lets us know that some of the hostility Peter's readers were facing had to do with the claim that "freedom" and "status" (cf. 2:9-10) affirmed for believers would make them rebellious, unreliable, and hostile to the family patriarch (their term was *pater familias* or "father of the household") whose civic duty was to keep order and manage his slaves, hired hands, children, and wife with a firm hand and unbending authority.

Dinner Table Questions

- Has work, school, or some other social setting ever put you at unfair disadvantage because of your Christian faith or moral duty? How did you handle the situation?
- Before we celebrate living in a country where slavery is illegal, do you realize that people still work at minimum wage to support their families and have to accept working conditions, tasks, and abusive treatment most of us would not accept?

Open-Bible Questions

The Greco-Roman world was built on *power*. The few who had it usually flourished, and the many who did not were always at their mercy.

- *Slaves* had essentially no rights and were "living tools" (Aristotle). They were owned, had no "right of appeal" to their owners, and were dehumanized daily by abuse we cannot imagine. Peter clearly assumes most of his readers were from this class.
- *Wives* in a Roman family had higher status than a slave, but they typically managed a limited number of household slaves who tended to domestic chores.
- *Husbands* ruled households on the model of the emperor (cf. 2:13) and had unlimited rights over not only their own persons but also their slaves, children, and wives.
- *Use your "biblical imagination" to describe two or three situations in which a Christian could be put into an unjust situation and exploited by an unbeliever.*

Christians in Peter's time had no option for changing their social structures and the injustices they generated. So the apostle used great wisdom to teach them how to react. Follow his argument . . .

- Peter uses Isaiah 53 as the basis for his counsel – the "Suffering Servant" passage.
- Pause to read Isaiah 53. Imagine how an abused slave or wife might read his or her name and life situation into this text. *How does Peter make Jesus the model for his readers?*
- Without sanctioning either slavery, male chauvinism, or any other form of abuse, today's text assigns dignity to oppressed people (i.e., they are being treated as Jesus himself was treated!) and planted the seed whose fruit (i.e., human rights) we still reap.

Monday Morning Questions

- What insight from this text can help you this week in dealing with some slight or insult?
- What insight can help you treat others as you want to be treated in their situation?