

THE FUNCTION OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING IN 1 PETER 2:21

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The Haustafel of 1 Pet 2:11-3:12 encourages the slaves on two levels: First, they are exhorted to "submit" to both good and crooked masters; and, second, they are encouraged to do good. The "submission" enjoined upon the slave is not to deter rebellion against, or dissatisfaction with, the system. Rather the paraenesis is to inform the Christian slave to maintain impeccable civic behavior in his situation, whether it be under the hand of a good or of a cruel master. Although punishment is to be expected from improper behavior, nevertheless a Christian slave may be punished for doing good. The slave is therefore admonished to remain in his situation, enduring rather than running from the injustice. Such behavior is "doing good," a word that has not only juridical but Greek philosophical overtones and thus emphasizes the concept of benefaction.

The recipients of this benefit are not the masters but the believing community itself. Such behavior on the part of the slave will help not only to mitigate the rumors of sedition leveled against the church but also to maintain the cohesiveness and solidarity within the church. The slave suffering for doing good has God's benediction, not that suffering *per se* is good or beneficial, but rather because the suffering brings a benefit to someone else.

The call to which the slaves responded consists of the triad **doing good-suffering-enduring**. As they experience doing good on a civic and Christian level, doing good also takes the form of suffering (for the sake of others), and finally enduring (for the sake of others). Thus, their experience is patterned after that of the Lord, who left them an example both in bringing a benefit by suffering, which is not spelled out until verse 24, and in showing how to suffer in an acceptable Christian manner, as verses 22-23 portray. Therefore Christ's suffering ("for you") in verse 21a is not a reference to his atoning death. Rather, it gives the reason for God's blessing on, and acceptance of, the one who suffers unjustly and endures it for others; and it also presents the ultimate Example of this concept.