

Col 3, Eph 6; 1Ti 6, Titus 2; 1Pe 2

Servant Passages of the New Testament

Within the New Testament's epistolary household codes (haustafeln), five passages¹ address servants (δοῦλοι/οἰκέται) in their relation to their masters (κύριοις/δεσπόταις).

In New Testament cultures, slaves and servants comprised from one-third to one-half of the population, often performing economic roles roughly paralleled by a modern nation's employees. Most of us would have been slaves. These instructions to servants, therefore, provide valuable perspective for our own actions and attitudes while in the work force. Believers listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches can learn to "bring Christ to work."

Finding and living by this kind of significance is simply part of being a Christian — following the example of our Lord (κύριος) by allowing Him to build in us a vision for evangelism and follow-up. Christ can then use us, making our workplace a place of victory rather than a place of defeat, permitting us to return home "bouncing off the walls," eager to share stories that will encourage others in the church.

¹The order of the passages reflects both their date of composition and the grouping of the two Prison and two Pastoral epistles: Colossians 3.22-25, Ephesians 6.5-8; 1 Timothy 6.1-2, Titus 2.9-10; 1 Peter 2.18-20.

As an appendix on the example of Christ, 1 Peter 2.21-25 provides perspective on Him as the suffering servant, accomplishing His Father's redemptive purpose. This perspective applies not just to 1 Peter, but to all five of the servant passages.

Colossians 3.22-25. ²² **Slaves** [δοῦλοι], in all things obey those who are your **masters** [κύριοις] on earth, not with external service [ὀφθαλμοδουλίᾳ], as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the **Lord** [κύριον]. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the **Lord** [κυρίῳ] rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the **Lord** [κυρίου] you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the **Lord** [κυρίῳ] Christ whom you **serve** [δουλεύετε]. ²⁵ For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

Ephesians 6.5-8. ⁵ **Slaves** [δοῦλοι], be obedient to those who are your **masters** [κύριοις] according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not by way of **eyeservice** [ὀφθαλμοδουλίαν], as men-pleasers, but as **slaves** [δοῦλοι] of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. ⁷ With good will **render service** [δουλεύοντες], as to the **Lord** [κυρίῳ], and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the **Lord** [κυρίου], whether **slave** [δούλος] or free.

1 Timothy 6.1-2. ¹ All who are under the yoke as **slaves** [δοῦλοι] are to regard their own **masters** [δεσπότας] as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and *our* doctrine will not be spoken against. ² Those who have believers as their **masters** [δεσπότας] must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must **serve** [δουλεύεσθαι] them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these *principles*.

Titus 2.9-10. ⁹ **Urge bondslaves** [δούλους] to be subject to their own **masters** [δεσπόταις] in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

1 Peter 2.18-20. ¹⁸ **Servants** [οἰκέται], be submissive to your **masters** [δεσπόταις] with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. ¹⁹ For this *finds* favor; if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God.

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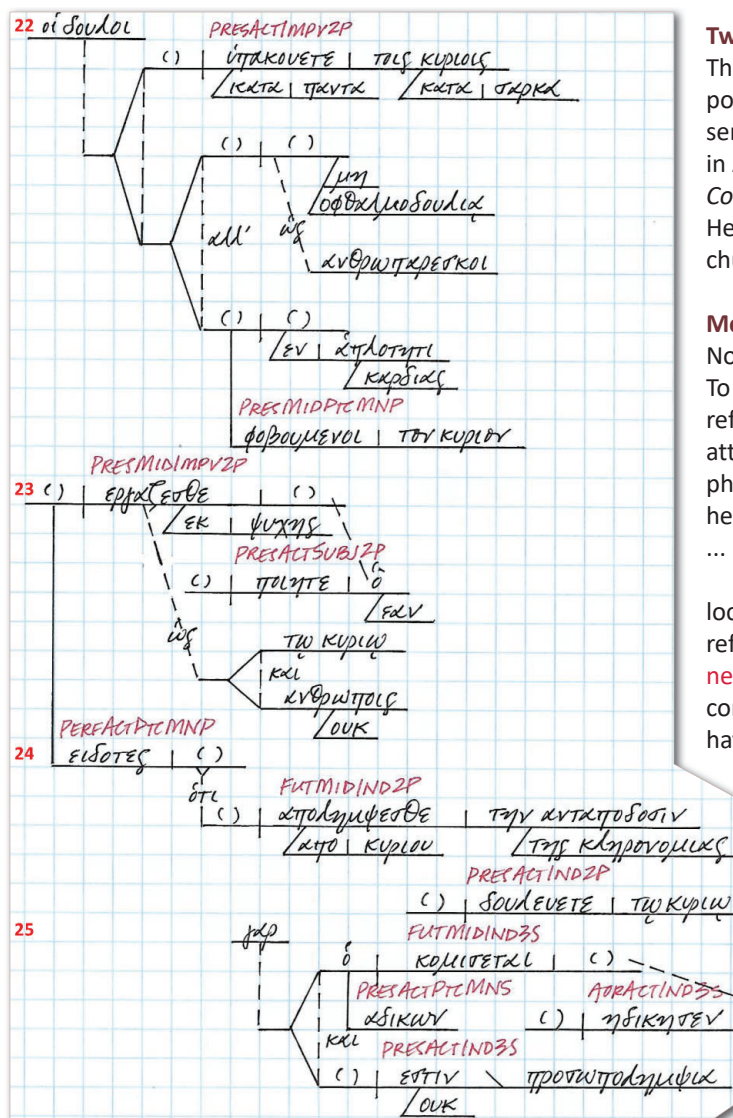
As an appendix applicable to all of the servant passages, consider how Peter presents Christ as the **example of a suffering/redemptive servant**:

1 Peter 2.21-25. ²¹ For you have been **called for this purpose**, since **Christ** also suffered for you, leaving you **an example for you to follow in His steps**, ²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. ²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Colossians 3.22-25

- ²² **Slaves**, in all things **obey**
those who are your **masters** on earth,
not with external service,
as those who *merely* please men,
but with sincerity of heart,
fearing the Lord.
- ²³ Whatever you do, do your work **heartily**,
as for the Lord
rather than for men,
- ²⁴ **knowing** that from the **Lord** you will receive
the reward of the inheritance.
It is the **Lord** Christ whom you **serve**.
- ²⁵ For he who does wrong **will receive the consequences**
of the wrong which he has done,
and that without partiality.

- ²² Οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε κατὰ πάντα
τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις,
μὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοδουλίᾳ
ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι,
ἀλλ' ἐν ἀπλότῃ καρδίᾳ
φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον.
- ²³ ὃ ἐὰν ποιῇτε, ἐκ ψυχῆς ἐργάζεσθε
ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ
καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις,
- ²⁴ εἰδότες ὅτι ἀπὸ κυρίου ἀπολήμψεσθε
τὴν ἀνταπόδοσιν τῆς κληρονομίας.
τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε·
- ²⁵ ὃ γὰρ ἀδικῶν κομίζεται
ὃ ἡδίκησεν,
καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν προσωποληψία.



Two Prison Epistles: Colossians and Ephesians

The first two passages can be studied together. Paul composed *Colossians*, followed within months by *Ephesians*, sending them to Colossae, Ephesus, and other churches in Asia Minor. Each addresses the mystery of the church: *Colossians* lays the ground by stressing Christ as the church's Head and Lord; *Ephesians* further develops the nature of the church and its implications for the growth of every member.

Meaning (cf. both Col. and Eph.)

Note the many similarities in *Colossians* and *Ephesians*. To 'be obedient' or 'obey' (ὑπακούετε), lit., to hear under, refers to a readiness to respond. Behind this readiness is an attitude so critical that Paul expresses it using a variety of phrases: 'with fear and trembling,' 'in the sincerity of your heart,' 'as to Christ,' 'not by way of eyeservice, pleasing men' ... 'but from the heart.'

Note a few differences. *Colossians*, addressing the more localized need brought on by false teaching, has two more references to Christ as 'Lord' (κύριος) and emphasizes the **negative consequences** ('he who does **wrong** will receive the consequences of the **wrong** which he has done'). *Ephesians*, having a more general audience, elaborates on vv. 5-6 in vv.

7-8, emphasizing a quickness to help, out of a **positive good will** (cf. 'with **good** will render service' and 'whatever **good** thing each one does').

Significance (Col. and Eph.)

As mature members of Christ's body, equipped for service, all Christians, in every time and place, will find themselves growing within the church in the kind of love that also "brings Christ to work." We will find ourselves changing in ...

Actions: Effort from the heart

Attitudes: Humility to instruct

Relations: Good will with all men

Ephesians 6.5-8

⁵ Slaves, be obedient

to those who are your **masters** according to the flesh,
with **fear and trembling**,
in the **sincerity of your heart**,
as to **Christ**;

⁶ not by way of eyeservice,

as men-pleasers,

but as **slaves** of Christ,

doing the will of God **from the heart**.

⁷ With good will render service,

as to the **Lord**,

and not to men,

⁸ knowing that whatever good thing each one does,

this **he will receive back** from the **Lord**,

whether **slave** or free.

⁵ Οἱ δοῦλοι, ὑπακούετε

τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις

μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου

ἐν ἀπλότῃ τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν

ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ,

⁶ μὴ κατ' ὀφθαλμοδουλίαν

ὡς ἀνθρωπάρεσκοι

ἀλλ' ὡς **δοῦλοι** Χριστοῦ

ποιῶντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκ ψυχῆς,

⁷ μετ' εὐνοίας δουλεύοντες

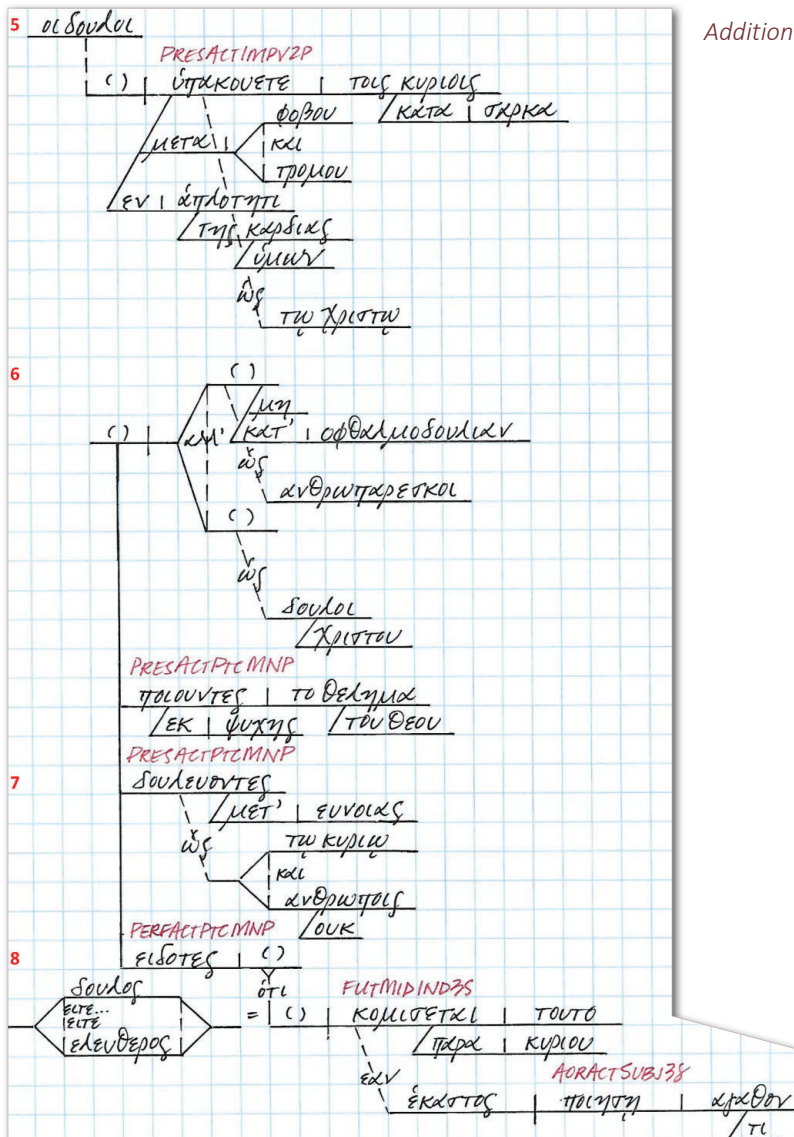
ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ

καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώποις,

⁸ εἰδότες ὅτι ἕκαστος ἐάν τι ποιῇ ἀγαθόν,

τοῦτο **κομίσεται** παρὰ κυρίου

εἴτε **δοῦλος** εἴτε ἐλεύθερος.



Additional notes (Col. and Eph.):

1 Timothy 6.1-2

All who are under the yoke as **slaves**

... their own **masters**

as worthy of all honor ... are to regard.

so that the name of God and **our doctrine** will not be spoken against.

² Those who have **believers** as their **masters**

must not be disrespectful to them

because they are **brethren**,

but must **serve them all the more**,

because ... are **believers and beloved** ...

those who partake of the benefit.

Teach and preach these **principles**.

¹ Ὅσοι εἰσὶν ὑπὸ ζυγὸν **δοῦλοι**,

τοὺς ἰδίους **δεσπότας**

πάσης τιμῆς ἀξίους ἡγείσθωσαν,

ἵνα μὴ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ **διδασκαλία** βλασφημῇται.

² οἱ δὲ **πιστοὺς** ἔχοντες **δεσπότας**

μὴ καταφρονεῖτωσαν,

ὅτι **ἀδελφοί** εἰσιν,

ἀλλὰ **μᾶλλον δουλεύετωσαν**,

ὅτι **πιστοὶ** εἰσιν καὶ **ἀγαπητοὶ**

οἱ τῆς εὐεργεσίας ἀντιλαμβανόμενοι.

Ταῦτα **δίδασκε** καὶ **παρακάλει**.

Two Pastoral Epistles: 1 Timothy and Titus

Paul wrote the next two passages for apostolic delegates who were facing false teachers and the resulting disruption in church communities. With a view to protecting the teaching of a number of churches, Paul grounds each of his opening commands in a purpose: **'so that ... doctrine will not be spoken against'; 'so that ... the doctrine ... they will adorn.'** At stake is God's redemptive purpose and gospel message.

Meaning

Paul's letter to Timothy highlights two instructions not found in other servant passages: first, the response of **'those who have believers as their masters'** (cf. **'brethren,' 'believers and beloved'**); second, the need to **'teach and preach'** this instruction regarding serving within all the churches.

Paul now uses **δεσπότης** rather than κύριος to designate the 'master,' stressing ones ownership and legal control over the rights of their slaves. The **'yoke'** acknowledges the difficulties (1Co 7.21: 'be free if you can').

Significance

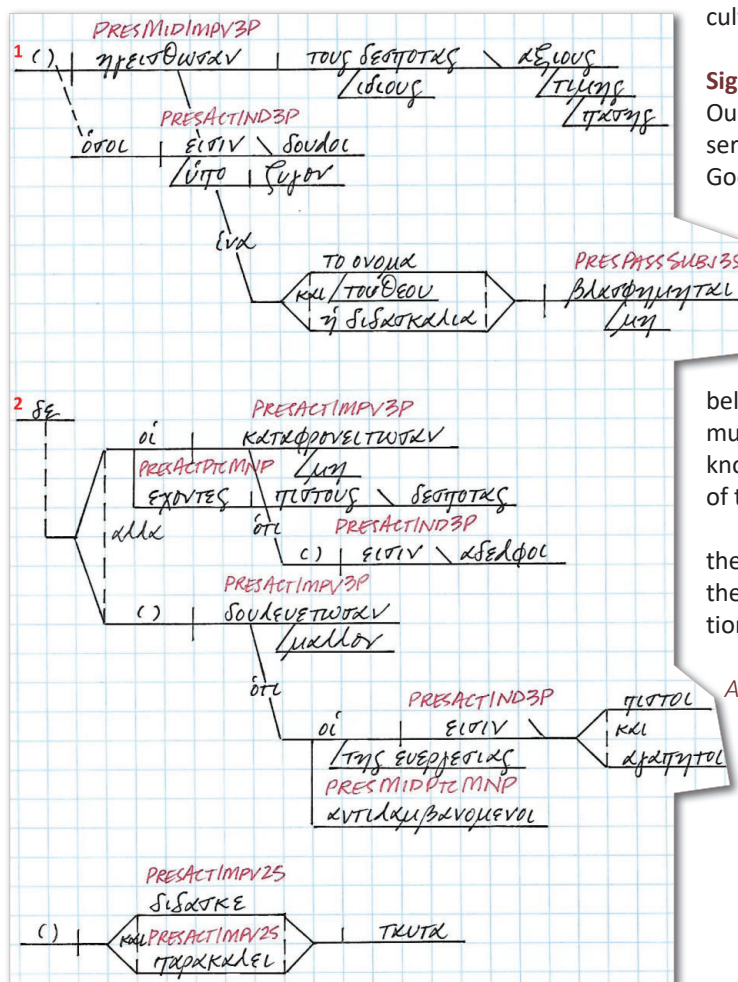
Our attitudes in the workplace are not driven by a self-serving morality, but by the church's fundamental ministry: God's redemptive purpose via the 'doctrine' of the Word.

Attitude to authority in general: Our purpose encourages us to regard all those placed over us as worthy of honor in their positions.

Attitude to believers in particular: Our familiarity with believers can 'breed contempt' at home (and, at work, a false expectation of being treated according to a believer's character). With believers as our employers, mutual love moves us to work harder for their success, knowing it will benefit both parties and further the advance of the gospel.

Responsibility for pastors to teach this perspective: Given the fundamental implications for evangelism and follow-up, there remains a critical need for pastors to give this instruction to the churches of every time and every place.

Additional notes:



Titus 2.9-10

⁹ Urge bondslaves

to be subject to their own **masters** in **everything**,
 to be well-pleasing,
 not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering,
 but
 showing **all** good faith [*every faith showing good*]
so that ... **the doctrine** of God our Savior
 ... **they will adorn** ... in **every** respect.

⁹ δούλους

ιδίοις **δεσπόταις** ὑποτάσσεσθαι ἐν **πᾶσιν**,
 εὐαρέστους εἶναι,
 μὴ ἀντιλέγοντας, ¹⁰ μὴ νοσφιζομένους,
 ἀλλὰ
πᾶσαν πίστιν ἐνδεικνυμένους ἀγαθὴν,
ἵνα τὴν **διδασκαλίαν** τὴν τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ
 κοσμῶσιν ἐν **πᾶσιν**.

Meaning

Paul gave Titus the responsibility of appointing and training leadership for the churches on the island of Crete. In this pleasure-loving culture ('always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons'), those qualified to lead must be ready to 'exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.'

In 2.9-10, note the repetition of **πᾶσιν, πᾶσαν, πᾶσιν**: 'in **everything**,' '**every** act of faith showing good' [vs. NASB; s. diagram], 'adorn in **every** respect.' Unlike the false, the qualified teachers will be able to use the Word to address the entire life, on a deep level. Servants, cooperating with what the Holy Spirit is communicating, become those who truly respect their masters and are '**well-pleasing**' to them: rather than being noted for arguing and stealing, **every act of their faith displays that which is deeply beneficial**.

The purpose is clear: before their employer, the '**doctrine**' of salvation will be '**adorned**' by this attitude and its actions.

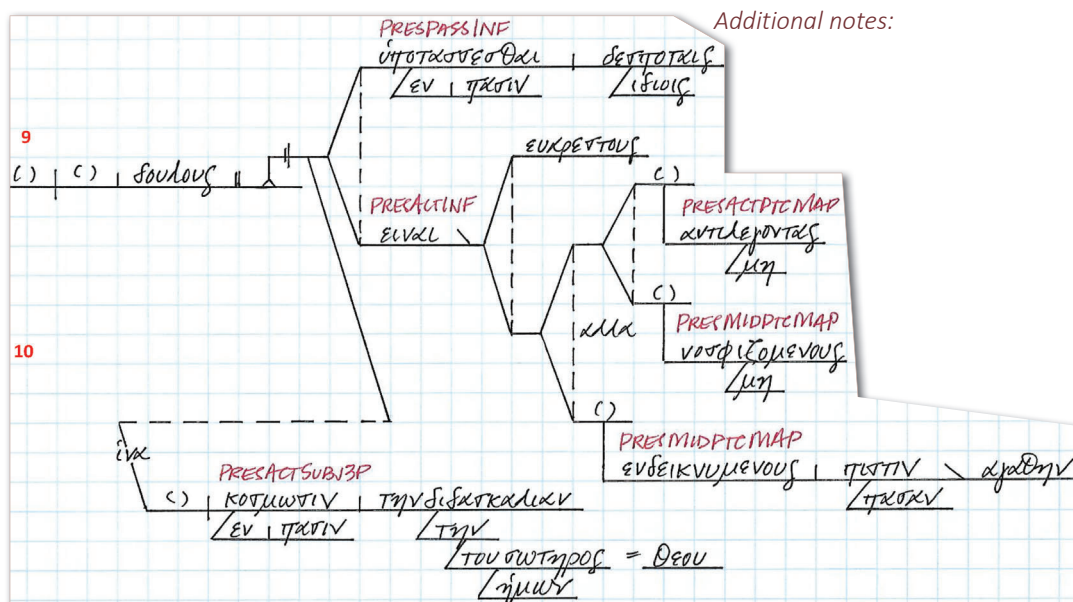
Significance

In our own environment of churches lacking in teachers able to exhort and to refute ...

Depth of our response: 'everything' and 'every' arise from our own personal choices before God.

Measure of our response: those we work for will enjoy discovering how we stand out from others: avoiding the typical resistance to communication and the taking advantage of the system (stealing time, materials, etc.); making choices that are genuinely beneficial. In return, we will notice them going out of their way to accommodate our own desires.

Purpose of our response: 'so that' what we believe is highlighted when others see us being wonderfully personal. Note what follows in 2.11-14: "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation" ... instructing us and purifying us to be "a people for His own possession, zealous for **good** deeds [ζηλωτὴν **καλῶν** ἔργων]." We will display in the workplace a **quality** of response that fills out that of which only a genuine, growing believer is capable.



1 Peter 2.18-20

¹⁸ **Servants**, be submissive

to your **masters** with all respect,
not only to those who are good and gentle,
but also to those who are **unreasonable**.

¹⁹ For this *finds* favor,

if for the sake of conscience toward God
a person bears up under **sorrows**
when **suffering unjustly**.

²⁰ For what credit is there

if, when you sin and are harshly treated,
you endure it with patience?

But

if when you do what is right and **suffer for it**
you patiently endure it,
this *finds* favor with God.

¹⁸ Οἱ οἰκέται ὑποτασσόμενοι

ἐν παντὶ φόβῳ τοῖς **δεσπόταις**,
οὐ μόνον τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς καὶ ἐπιεικέσιν
ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς **σκολοῖς**.

¹⁹ τοῦτο γὰρ χάρις

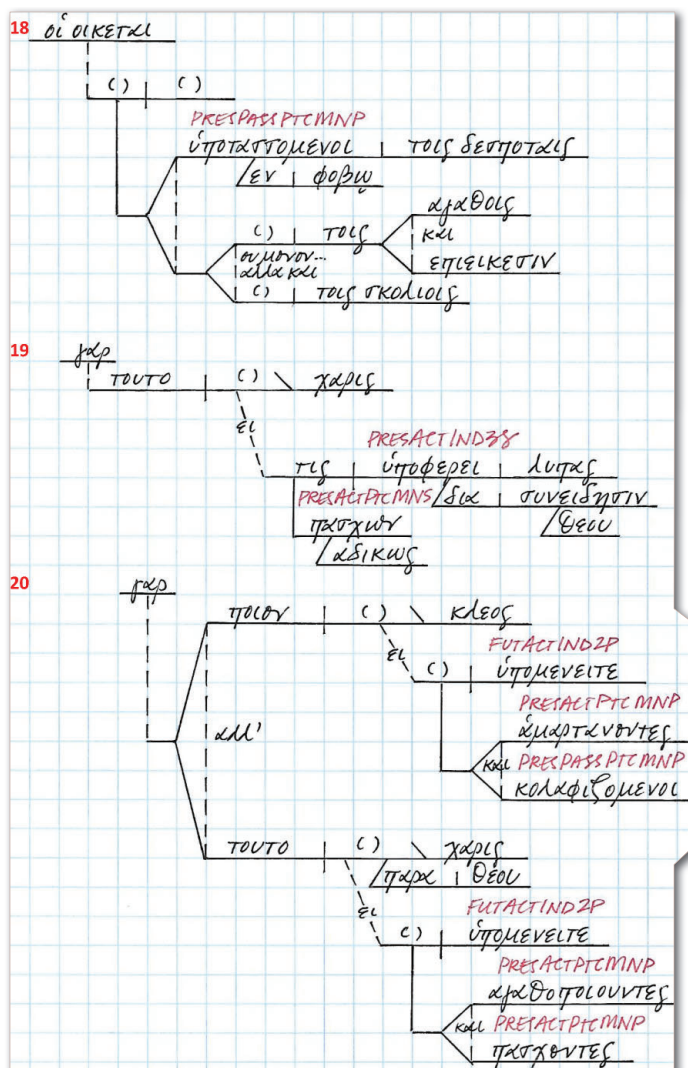
εἰ διὰ συνείδησιν θεοῦ
ὑποφέρει τις **λύπας**
πάσχων ἀδίκως.

²⁰ ποῖον γὰρ κλέος

εἰ ἀμαρτάνοντες καὶ κολαφιζόμενοι
ὑπομενεῖτε;

ἀλλ'

εἰ ἀγαθοποιοῦντες καὶ **πάσχοντες**
ὑπομενεῖτε,
τοῦτο χάρις παρὰ θεῶ.

**Meaning**

Peter writes to strengthen Gentiles in their identity as the people of God in order that they can undergo, with dignity, persecution in an environment of social hostility. To this end, the church as a whole has been reminded of their royal status: like a temple built upon the rejected foundation stone, Christ, Peter urges them as 'aliens and strangers' to be set apart in order to 'proclaim the excellencies' of Him who called them.

A 'servant' is now called an οἰκέτης (cf. οἶκος, house) in place of the more general δοῦλος. οἱ οἰκέται are the **household/domestic servants**. In this case, picture them **suffering under an unjust δεσπότης** and note the extent of the circumstances in which the command is for respect: working under the unreasonable, under sorrows, doing what is right and unjustly suffering for it. **The explanation:** choosing OPENNESS out of a sensitive 'conscience toward God' finds favor with Him because it advances the gospel. The word 'credit' (κλέος; related to *aretē*) refers to renowned reputation; 'endure' (ὑπομένω) is used of the heroic survival of hard conditions.

Significance

Command is to respect even the most unreasonable:

Submission always involves respect, but it is most easily tested by our responses to the 'unreasonable.'

Explanation for this kind of response: Cannot be performed by one out to further their own advantage; only by one furthering the advance of the gospel.

Credited with honor worthy of a hero: Earthly 'masters' may not always see that which always 'finds favor with God.'

Additional notes:

Appendix: 1 Peter 2:21-25 ... the example of Christ

- ²¹ For you have been called for this purpose,
since **Christ also suffered for you,**
leaving you an example
for you to follow in His steps,
- ²² WHO COMMITTED NO SIN,
NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;
- ²³ and while being reviled,
He did not revile in return;
while suffering, He uttered no threats,
but kept entrusting *Himself*
to Him who judges righteously;
- ²⁴ and He Himself bore our sins
in His body on the cross,
so that we might die to sin
and live to righteousness;
for by His wounds you were healed.
- ²⁵ For you were continually straying like sheep,
but now you have returned
to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.
- ²¹ εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκλήθητε,
ὅτι **καὶ Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν**
ὑμῖν ὑπολιμπάνων ὑπογραμμὸν
ἵνα ἐπακολουθήσητε τοῖς ἵχνεσιν αὐτοῦ,
- ²² ὃς ἁμαρτίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν
οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ,
- ²³ ὃς λοιδορούμενος
οὐκ ἀντελοιδόρει
πάσχων οὐκ ἠπείλει,
παρεδίδου δὲ
τῷ κρίνοντι δικαίως·
- ²⁴ ὃς τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς ἀνήνεγκεν
ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον,
ἵνα ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἀπογενόμενοι
τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ ζήσωμεν,
οὗ τῷ μῶλωπι ἰάθητε.
- ²⁵ ἦτε γὰρ ὡς πρόβατα πλανώμενοι,
ἀλλὰ ἐπεστράφητε νῦν
ἐπὶ τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν.

Meaning and Significance

Like Christ, our suffering has meaning because we follow Him, living purposely, according to the pattern of His own redemptive purpose. Like Him, we have been called to a servant-like response to our Father's desires.

Additional notes:

