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The Missing Masters of 1 Peter

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Abstract

One of the intriguing features of the Petrine household code (1 Pet 2.18–3.7) is the lack of instructions to masters. A common view claims that there are no instructions because there were no Christian masters in the community. This view, however, is textually and historically unlikely. This essay, rather, considers how the instructions to enslaved persons and the lack of instructions to masters might have been heard from the perspective of a Christian master. The first part of the essay highlights some features of literature on household management and perceptions of enslaved persons' moral competency. The essay then turns to 1 Peter to analyse the theological perspective of the household code and the description of enslaved persons. I propose that the author has intentionally ignored masters as part of his defining the house of God.

Keywords: agency; Aristotle; household codes; household management; master; slavery

1 Introduction

Because the family formed the foundation of ancient society, authors were concerned with describing the duties of each member of the family. In comedy, the duties are parodied; agricultural manuals outline the duties of managers and enslaved persons; philosophers reflect on all conditions of the family; and a specific genre devoted to 'household management' arises. The 'household codes' found in the New Testament are versions of this genre (Col 3.18–4.1; Eph 5.22–6.9; 1 Pet 2.18–3.7).

My focus in this study is the Petrine code (2.18–3.7), particularly the lack of instructions to masters. A very common view among Petrine scholars is that the author does not address masters because there are no Christian masters in the community. S. T. J. Smith states, 'Masters are not a part of this particular Christian membership conglomerate, and there is no way for the letter writer to intervene or respond directly to masters who treat Christian servants with kindness or malevolence.'[1] E. G. Selwyn uses the distinction drawn by the Petrine author between good and cruel masters (τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς καὶ ἐπιεικέσιν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς σκολιοῖς; 2.18) as evidence that 'St. Peter has in mind mainly heathen householders.'[2] Some scholars claim these must be enslaved persons of non-Christian masters because this best parallels the situation of the whole community, which finds itself being oppressed by its non-Christian neighbours.[3] Another idea often promoted is that these enslaved persons (and wives) have come to faith apart from their masters (or husbands). This abandonment

[1] S. T. J. Smith, *Strangers to Family: Diaspora and 1 Peter's Invention of God's Household* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016) 72. Cf. J. R. Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015) 138.

[2] E. G. Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: MacMillan, 1961) 175.

[3] M. E. Boring, *1 Peter* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011) 117.

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of the household religious practices in favour of Christianity may have led masters and husbands to be suspicious of their slaves and wives, who could be construed as rejecting their subordinate position within the household.[4]

Despite the popularity of this view, there are good reasons to doubt the claim that there were no Christian masters. First, other NT documents testify to the presence of masters in the Christian movement in the first century. Of particular note are Colossians and Ephesians, since they were written to cities within the areas designated as recipients of 1 Peter (1.1; specifically Asia) and include instructions to masters in their household codes (Col 4.1; Eph 6.9; cf. Philemon).[5] Additionally, a parallel can be drawn with the Pastoral Epistles, which also contain instructions to enslaved persons and household-heads but without explicit instructions to masters (1 Tim 6.1–2; Tit 2.9–10).[6] That some of the household-heads were slave owners seems likely from 1 Timothy 3.12.[7] Thus it is possible that some of the 'elders' addressed in 1 Peter 5.1–4 were household-heads and also masters.

Second, although household management literature is written to and from the perspective of males, owning and managing slaves was not limited exclusively to males. Many females owned slaves, and house slaves were often under the purview of wives.[8] Christianity attracted many women, including some with the financial resources and positions within society where slave ownership would be normal.[9] Claims that there were no masters among the recipients of the letter do not take account of the wide variety of potential owners in society, including Christian wives with unbelieving husbands who may have joined the community and brought their slaves with them.

Third, the argument for a parallel situation between enslaved persons and the larger community has a nice fit to it. However, it presumes precisely what must be proven, namely, that the lack of instructions to masters necessitates that the enslaved belong to non-Christian masters. It also misconstrues the point of the connection between the enslaved and the community: the enslaved persons are examples of faithful obedience in the face of unjust suffering, regardless of the religion of their masters.

Fourth, there is no obvious reason to assume that the distinction between 'good and kind' and 'cruel' masters indicates non-Christian masters. One might assume that the language of 'cruel' is more applicable to non-believers, but nothing in the text suggests that. The history of slavery (ancient and modern) suggests that this term could be applied to plenty of masters who also claimed the name Christian. Additionally, given the importance of the term 'good' (ἀγαθός) for the ethics of 1 Peter, one wonders if the 'good and kind' masters are believers.

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[4] D. L. Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* (SBLMS 26; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981) 96–7; I. H. Marshall, *1 Peter* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991) 87–8; J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 516; R. Feldmeier, *Der erste Brief des Petrus* (THKNT 15/1; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2005) 102–4, 113; R. Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008) 152–5, 169; D. F. Watson, 'First Peter', *First and Second Peter* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012) 63.

[5] P. J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 192.

[6] For this suggestion see D. G. Horrell, *Becoming Christian: Essays on 1 Peter and the Making of Christian Identity* (LNTS 394; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013) 124, 128. Also, T. B. Williams and D. G. Horrell, *1 Peter: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary: Volume 1: Chapters 1-2* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2023) 780; T. B. Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter: Differentiating and Contextualizing Early Christian Suffering* (NovTSup 145; Leiden: Brill, 2012) 117 n. 80.

[7] τῶν ἰδίων οἴκων likely indicates enslaved persons. See I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2000) 495.

[8] As noted by P. Perkins, E. Rosenblatt and P. McDonald, *1-2 Peter and Jude* (Wisdom Commentary; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2022) 51–2.

[9] Additionally, while the enslaved were at the bottom of the social hierarchy, owning slaves was not limited to the wealthy or elite. Slaves were owned by persons at every level of the financial pyramid and social ladder. This increases the potential that masters were among the Petrine communities. See n. 16 for sources on ancient slavery.

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Fifth, there is merit to the observation that some enslaved persons and wives came to Christianity apart from their masters and husbands. The address to wives in the next passage of 1 Peter indicates that this was in fact the case: 'Likewise, wives, submit to your own husband in order that if any do not obey the word they may be won through the lifestyle of the wives without words' (1 Pet 3.1). Caution must be exercised here, however: the conditions of one group should not be imposed onto all others.[10] The address to husbands in 3.7 indicates that not all wives joined apart from their husbands. There were Christian wives and husbands within the community, which indicates that the audience was diverse. Given that the author felt the need to refer to unbelieving husbands, one might have expected him to include a similar remark to the enslaved if he was addressing enslaved persons of non-Christian masters.

It is possible that there were no masters – whether Christian or not – in the communities originally addressed by the letter. Yet, such a position seems highly unlikely given the social constitution of the Christian communities in the first century. Far more likely is that there were enslaved persons with non-Christian masters and enslaved persons with Christian masters in the audience, and therefore that there were masters present when 1 Peter was read to the community. The following study considers how the instructions to the enslaved and the lack of instructions to masters might have been heard from the perspective of a Christian master. The next part of the essay highlights some features of literature on household management and how authors described slaves. The essay then turns to 1 Peter, where I contrast Peter's instructions to the enslaved with the issues raised in the previous section.[11]

2 Household Management and the Nature of Slaves

Ancient texts on household management were concerned primarily with the duties of various members of the household and how those duties related to others within the household.[12] This section draws attention to two features of literature on household management. It then turns to Aristotle's perspective on enslaved persons. These elements provide a context in which to interpret the Petrine instructions to the enslaved.

2.1 The Structure of Household Codes

Aristotle's discussion of the household sets the trajectory for other discussions. He situates his analysis within the context of the state. The household proper consists of three relational pairs: the master-enslaved, husband-wife, and father-children, to which Aristotle adds the topic of wealth (*Pol.* 1253b1–14; cf. 1259a37–40). Notably, each of these relational pairs consists of a superior and subordinate/inferior figure. Subsequent works share features of the Aristotelian pattern but also reflect the individuality of their authors. Arius

[10] Cf. N. Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (EKKNT 21; Zürich: Neukirchener, 1979) 126. On the matter of believing wives married to unbelieving husbands, see e.g. M. Y. MacDonald, 'Early Christian Women Married to Unbelievers', *Feminist Companion to Paul: Deutero-Pauline Writings* (ed. A.-J. Levine with M. Blickenstaff; London: Continuum, 2003) 14–28; C. E. Johnson Hodge, 'Married to an Unbeliever: Households, Hierarchies, and Holiness in 1 Corinthians 7:12–16', *HTR* 103.1 (2010) 1–25.

[11] For simplicity, I will refer to the author of 1 Peter as Peter. Nothing is implied regarding the identity of the actual author.

[12] Introductions to the household codes can be found in all the major 1 Peter commentaries. See also the influential work of Balch, especially, *Let Wives be Submissive*; cf. also 'Household Ethical Codes in Peripatetic, Neopythagorean and Early Christian Moralists', *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 11 (1977) 397–404; 'Neopythagorean Moralists and the New Testament Household Codes', *ANRW* (26/1; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992) 380–411; 'Household Codes', *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres* (ed. D. E. Aune; Atlanta: SBL Press, 1988) 25–50.

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Didymus produces a succinct statement reflecting Aristotle's view. The household and city are co-ordinated, and within the household the free man rules. Like Aristotle, the household consists of 'fatherhood, marriage, being a master, and money-making' (149.10–11).[13] Ps.-Aristotle, *Oeconomica*, situates the household in connection to the state. For this author 'The component parts of a household are (1) human beings (ἄνθρωπός), and (2) goods and chattels (κτῆσις)' (Ps.-Aristotle, *Oec.* 1343a18 (Tredennick and Armstrong, LCL)). In the following sections, he describes the duties for husbands and wives and then, within the context of remarks about property, the master-slave relationship. One should note the flexibility in the discussion as the father-child pairing has been dropped.[14] Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* presents a dialogue about how to manage a household after describing the benefits of farming. Seneca (*Ep.* 49.1), like Colossians and Ephesians, orders the relationships beginning with marriage followed by the parental and then the master-enslaved.

While there were certain topics addressed in discussions about the household, the variety in order and content indicates that authors had freedom in how they approached the topic. The presence or absence of certain elements, then, may reflect a conscious decision by an author. Thus, interpreters should consider the potential motivations behind why an author includes or excludes certain relationships and identities, particularly when one of the excluded identities is the superior figure.

A second feature of household management literature is that the authors, writing from the perspective of the elite, address the superior figure within the relational pairings. Aristotle's *Politics* is written from the perspective of the elite male who sits at the top of the hierarchy. He does not instruct the subordinate in how to act, but rather guides the superior in how to manage the subordinate. A disproportionate amount of material is given to slavery, as Aristotle argues that slavery is natural. The argument is made for the elite male in order to reassure him that his action of enslaving another is justifiable and in accordance with nature itself.

While the household texts contain remarks about the respective duties of the subordinate person, these remarks are provided so that the superior figure knows how an ideal slave/wife/child should conduct themselves. For example, in Ps-Aristotle, *Oeconomica* 1344a13–17, the author instructs husbands regarding how they should relate to their wives. He remarks, 'As regards the intercourse of marriage, wives should neither importune their husbands, nor be restless in their absence.' The next instruction makes clear that the author thinks it is the husband's responsibility to lead his wife to this behaviour: 'but a man should accustom his wife to be content whether he is at home or away. Good also is the advice of Hesiod: "Take a maiden to marry, and teach her ways of discretion"' (Tredennick and Armstrong, LCL, slightly modified).[15] When the same author turns to the enslaved, he directs his attention to the role of the master. The master must ensure appropriate treatment of the enslaved by providing work, punishment and food. He must offer the enslaved an enticement to do the work as this motivates the enslaved person. The interest here is the master's role in overseeing the enslaved, for the enslaved person is not addressed as an independent agent.

The only active agent in these instructions is the superior figure, the master/husband/father. The household codes are addressed to this person (by a person in the same

[13] Translation by Balch, 'Household Codes', 42.

[14] Similarly, in his discussion of the 'house', Hierocles the Stoic takes as his starting theme marriage where he reflects on the duties of husbands and wife. He follows this with reflections on parents and, finally, siblings. In additional reflections on the 'house', he describes the marriage partnership. Whether he included comments on the other pairs is unknown due to the surviving evidence. See I. Ramelli, *Hierocles the Stoic: Elements of Ethics, Fragments and Excerpts* (trans. D. Konstan; Writings from the Greco-Roman World; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009) 73–95.

[15] Quoting Hesiod, *Works and Days* 699.

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position) and provide him with directions about how to manage the house, and particularly the figures in the house. The master/husband/father is responsible for ensuring that the enslaved/wife/child understands their respective duties within the house. The lack of directions to the subordinate figures is a key feature to note.

2.2 The Depiction of Slaves in Ancient Society

The Roman world was a slave society.[16] While it is difficult to estimate accurately the number of enslaved persons in the Empire, slaves were found all across the Empire in every province and among every ethnic group.[17] There were some regional differences in how slavery was perceived, the tasks assigned to the enslaved and how they were treated, but across the board, slavery was accepted, and enslaved humans were viewed and thus treated as inferior figures. The depiction of the enslaved as lowlifes, untrustworthy, rotten figures is consistent in all periods from Aristotle to the late Roman Empire and in all forms of literature. Aristotle's description in his *Politics* provides a clear statement of how the enslaved were viewed. His remarks are particularly relevant because they come in his discussion of household management.

Aristotle argues that the enslaved is a living tool and a 'live article of property' (κτῆμά τι ἔμψυχον; 1253b33) and therefore belongs to the master.[18] He identifies 'the nature of the slave' as follows: 'one who is a human being belonging by nature not to himself but to another is by nature a slave' (1254a14–16).[19] The enslaved, in other words, is any human who is owned by another in the same way that one might own an ox or any other living or non-living tool.[20] Much later, Dio summarises popular opinion in a similar way: 'when anyone gets possession of a human being, in the strict meaning of that term, just as he might of any item of his goods or cattle, so as to have the right to use him as he likes, then that man is both correctly called and in fact is a slave of the man into whose possession he has come' (15.24 (Cohoon, LCL)).[21]

[16] There are a number of excellent overviews of ancient slavery available now, such as: K. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Key Themes in Ancient History; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); K. Bradley and P. Cartledge, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: Volume 1, The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); S. Forsdyke, *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); P. Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); S. Hodkinson, M. Kleijwegt and K. Vlassopoulos, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Slaveries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, in process); P. Hunt, *Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018); S. R. Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). A convenient starting point is the lengthy summary with extensive references to primary texts by C. S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 2: 3:1-14:28* (vol. 2; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) 1906–42.

[17] The vast majority of slaves were located in Rome or the Italian peninsula, and it is difficult to be certain how many slaves were in the provinces. Nevertheless, slavery was certainly known and practised throughout the entire Roman world. For a recent discussion of the size of the slave population in the Roman Empire, see W. Scheidel, 'The Roman Slave Supply', *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: Volume 1, The Ancient Mediterranean World* (ed. K. Bradley and P. Cartledge; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 287–310.

[18] All translations of Aristotle, *Politics* are from Rackham, LCL.

[19] ὁ γὰρ μὴ αὑτοῦ φύσει ἀλλ' ἄλλου ἄνθρωπος ὤν, οὗτος φύσει δοῦλός ἐστιν, ἄλλου δ' ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος ὃς ἂν κτῆμα ᾖ ἄνθρωπος ὤν.

[20] Cf. Aristotle *Pol.* 1252b10–12 (quoting Hesiod, *Works and Days* 405): '"First and foremost a house and a wife and an ox for the ploughing"— for the ox serves instead of a servant (οἰκέτου) for the poor.'

[21] καὶ ἐδόκει αὐτοῖς, ὃν ἄν τις κεκτημένος κυρίως, ὥσπερ ἄλλο τι τῶν αὑτοῦ χρημάτων ἢ βοσκημάτων, ὥστε ἐξεῖναι αὐτῷ χρῆσθαι ὅ τι βούλεται, οὗτος ὀρθῶς λέγεσθαί τε καὶ εἶναι δοῦλος τοῦ κεκτημένου.

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The mere assertion of possession, however, is insufficient as one could be taken into captivity for unjust reasons.[22] Aristotle, therefore, argues that 'authority and subordination' are normal, for some are marked as rulers and others as subjects. The normalcy of this structure is evident in the very constitution of humanity. The soul rules 'by nature' (φύσις) over the body (1254a35–b9), the intellect over the emotions. For Aristotle, this, naturally, means that the male rules over the female, and the follow-on is that some men will rule over others: 'therefore all men that differ as widely as the soul does from the body and the human being from the lower animal ... these are by nature slaves, for whom to be governed by this kind of authority is advantageous' (1254b16–20).[23] Additionally, Aristotle argues that the bodies of the enslaved and freemen are different. The enslaved person's body is 'strong for necessary service', while the body of the master is 'erect and ... serviceable for a life of citizenship' (1254b27–31).[24] Aristotle is forced to acknowledge that this perspective on the body does not always bear out, so he resorts to the nature of the soul (1254b32–4).

We see in this argument the principle that underlies Aristotle's position, namely, the master is distinguished from the enslaved by his capacity to reason.[25] For Aristotle, there is a sliding scale relating to one's capacity to reason: the animal is governed by feelings, the master by possessing reason, and the enslaved person lies between. The enslaved person is able to apprehend reason (and thus is above the animals), but lacks the ability to possess it (and thus is below the master). This perspective is re-stated later when Aristotle explains why it is the man who is superior in the three relations:

> Hence there are by nature (φύσει) various classes of rulers and ruled. For the free (τὸ ἐλεύθερον) rules the slave (τοῦ δούλου), the male the female (τὸ ἄρρεν τοῦ θήλεος), and the man the child (ἀνὴρ παιδός) in a different way. And all possess the various parts of the soul, but possess them in different ways; for the slave has not got the deliberative part at all, and the female has it, but without full authority, while the child has it, but in an undeveloped form (ὁ μὲν γὰρ δοῦλος ὅλως οὐκ ἔχει τὸ βουλευτικόν, τὸ δὲ θῆλυ ἔχει μέν, ἀλλ᾽ ἄκυρον, ὁ δὲ παῖς ἔχει μέν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀτελές). Hence the ruler must possess intellectual virtue in completeness (for any work, taken absolutely, belongs to the master-craftsman, and rational principle is a master-craftsman); while each of the other parties must have that share of this virtue which is appropriate to them. We must suppose therefore that the same necessarily holds good of the moral virtues: all must partake of them, but not in the same way, but in such measure as is proper to each in relation to his own function. (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1260a8–20)[26]

Aristotle constructs a scale built on the distinction between those who rule and the ruled. The distinction expresses itself in one's possession of the deliberative part of the soul. The

[22] This point is crucial to Dio's account (15.25–8). This should not be misunderstood: the most basic feature of slavery (ancient and modern) is possession, being owned by another person (regardless of how one was acquired). Replacing the language of 'slave' with 'servant' or, even more reprehensible, 'employee' might make the passage more palatable (e.g. W. A. Grudem, *1 Peter* (TNTC; Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2015) 123–4), but it comes at the price of historical and theological accuracy.

[23] Cf. Plato, *Laws* 777a-b.

[24] Cf. Arius Didymus II.149.1–2: 'a slave by nature (strong in body for service, but stupid and unable to live by himself, for whom slavery is beneficial)' (translated by Balch, 'Household Codes', 42).

[25] W. H. P. Thompson, *Pauline Slave Welfare in Historical Context: An Equality Analysis* (WUNT 2.570; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023) 87. The arguments about the ability of masters to reason and the design of slave's bodies come together in 1252a31–4.

[26] Cf. Arius Didymus II.149.5–8: 'The man has the rule of his household by nature. For the deliberative faculty in a woman is inferior, in children it does not yet exist, and in the case of slaves, it is completely absent' (Τούτου δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν κατὰ φύσιν ἔχειν τὸν ἄνδρα. Τὸ γὰρ βουλευτικὸν ἐν γυναικὶ μὲν χεῖρον, ἐν παισὶ δ᾽ οὐδέπω, περὶ δούλος <δ᾽> οὐδ᾽ ὅλως) (translation from Balch, 'Household Codes', 42).

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enslaved person does not possess any element of the deliberative part. In a similar manner, while all have some aspect of the moral virtues, each only possesses what is necessary to their station.

Aristotle's statement is his conclusion to the question of whether the enslaved person has any moral virtues. A straightforward 'yes' challenges Aristotle's claim that there is a qualitative difference between the free man and the enslaved, but a simple 'no' leads to the conclusion that the enslaved would not be 'human beings and participate in reason' (ὄντων ἀνθρώπων καὶ λόγου κοινωνούντων; *Pol.* 1259b27–8).[27] The enslaved must be capable of participating in reason so that they can understand the instructions given by their masters and act accordingly. Yet, Aristotle concludes, 'clearly [the slave] needs only a small amount of virtue, in fact just enough to prevent him from failing in his tasks owing to intemperance and cowardice … It is manifest therefore that the master ought to be the cause to the slave of the virtue proper to a slave, but not as possessing that art of mastership which teaches a slave his tasks' (*Pol.* 1260a33–6, 1260b3–5). The enslaved person's virtue and reason, therefore, are a by-product of his or her master's rule.

By the first century AD, Aristotle's importance in philosophical circles had waned, and his arguments for natural slavery did not find wide support among Roman authors. Romans, instead, recognised the full humanity of enslaved persons and generally attributed their condition as enslaved to Fortune (e.g. Seneca, *Ben.* 3.20). Their enslaved state was not due to something inherent to their nature. This shift, however, did nothing to improve the conditions or popular perceptions of the enslaved.[28] They were still viewed as morally corrupt and given to laziness, thievery and generally untrustworthy (Columella, *On Agr.* 1.7.6; 1.8.2.).[29] Cicero argues that the rule of the mind over the base elements is like that of the master over the enslaved (*Rep.* 3.37), a comparison that only works when the enslaved human is perceived as morally corrupt. Too much time in the presence of the enslaved (or freedpersons) would corrupt a free person (e.g. Dio, *Roman History*, 60.2.4–7, on Claudius). While the enslaved person is no longer regarded as being in this position 'by nature', their servile condition identified them as inferior to free persons. The negative judgement of the enslaved, particularly regarding morality, thus, remains firmly in place. The enslaved bear the stain of their station in society, a stain that cannot be entirely escaped.

2.3 Summary

In summary, household management focuses on the superior figure, the master/husband/father, by providing this figure with directions about how to govern those in his home. The subordinate figures, the enslaved/wife/children, are not treated as independent agents but inferiors who must be instructed and guided by the superior. Secondly, the enslaved exemplify the inferior person, for they not only are denied freedom, but, whether by nature or Fortune, have been formed into beings to be ruled by others. In Aristotle's view, they lack the deliberative faculty and rely entirely on their master to instruct them. They have no agency. For later Romans, they are corrupt by virtue of their station in life. From either perspective, the enslaved are morally incompetent.

[27] On the tension in Aristotle's account, see Forsdyke, *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greece*, 22–31.

[28] The following draws from H. Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 14–35.

[29] Testimony from an enslaved person was taken only under torture because slaves were considered liars (Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 165–71).

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3 The Petrine Household Code

Similar to Aristotle's placement of household management in the larger context of the state, the Petrine author's instructions to the enslaved, wives and husbands can be understood as specific applications of the author's instructions regarding the duty of Christians in wider society (2.13–17). The term 'submit' (ὑποτάσσω) that heads the instructions to the enslaved (2.18) and wives (3.1) recalls the initial instruction in 2.13 ('submit to every human authority').[30] The Petrine code shares, at least on the surface, a similar hierarchical construction as Aristotle and the Greco-Roman tradition. Yet, there are important differences which indicate that the Petrine household code offers an alternative perspective.[31] This section addresses first the significance of the lack of any instructions to fathers and children, and second how the description of the enslaved differs from the Aristotelian perspective.

3.1 The Theological Context of the Household Code

The Petrine code only includes two pairs: master-enslaved and husband-wife. No directions are provided to fathers or children about how they should act within the household. The silence is odd since the purpose of the marriage relationship, according to many, was for begetting children.[32] This relationship is not overlooked, but explained by Peter's ecclesiology.

One strategy that the author employs to help his readers navigate their social isolation is to present the Christian community as the house of God. In 4.17, the author identifies the community as 'the household of God' (τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ θεοῦ).[33] The phrase recalls the fuller description in 2.4–10 where the author writes about the community, 'and you, as living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house (οἶκος πνευματικός) to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (2.5). The description of the community as the οἶκος of God is further developed in the author's depiction of God as Father and the audience as his children.[34] Right from the start of the letter, the author describes God as Father. In 1.2, he asserts that the audience's election is 'according to the foreknowledge of God the Father'. In 1.3, he states that 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' should be praised because of the salvific work he is doing. God's fatherhood is seen especially in the act of regeneration (1.3) by the 'imperishable seed' (1.23). Believers are called 'obedient children' (1.14), and the impartial judge is the Father himself (1.17). While the metaphor of God as Father is not explicitly drawn upon in later chapters of the letter, its place in the opening chapter sets the context for the rest of the letter. In the image of the household of God that the author is developing, the depiction of God as Father and believers as children is crucial. In essence, the entire letter of 1 Peter provides the instructions about how believers as God's children relate to God as Father. It is for this reason that the author

[30] C. G. Müller, *Der Erste Petrusbrief* (EKKNT 21; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022) 245.

[31] On the household code broadly, see C. Münch, 'Geschwister in der Fremde: Zur Ethik des Ersten Petrusbriefes', *Hoffnung in Bedrängnis: Studien zum Ersten Petrusbrief* (ed. T. Söding; SBS 216; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009) 151–2.

[32] Aristotle, *Pol.* 1252a26–30; Arius Didymus 148.19–21.

[33] On the importance of the 'house' theme in 1 Peter, see J. H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Social-Scientific Criticism of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990[2]); and throughout Elliott, *1 Peter*. He argues that the author uses this theme to counter the homelessness of the audience, as seen in the description of them as παροίκοι καὶ παρεπιδήμοι (1.1; 2.11). Elliott helpfully highlights the importance of this theme in the letter, although his view that the readers were strangers and aliens prior to becoming Christians is doubtful. This matter, however, is not pertinent to my point here.

[34] See K. Marcar, *Divine Regeneration and Ethnic Identity in 1 Peter: Mapping Metaphors of Family, Race, and Nation* (SNTSMS 180; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

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does not include instructions to children and fathers in the household code. A theological perspective on the family results in a different construction of the household code.

The lack of direction to fathers and children is not because there were none in the community.[35] The father-children pairing is dropped from the household code because within the Christian community this relationship is not created by biology (or human adoption) but divine begetting (1.3). This explanation points toward a theological motivation behind the structure and statements found in the Petrine household code.[36] Peter has adopted a common Christian perspective on the church, namely, as the house of God, and a common Greco-Roman perspective on household management, but he has modified the conventions to suit his theological and pastoral objectives. Such a move indicates that the Petrine household code must be interpreted not only from a historical perspective but also from theological and pastoral perspectives.

The author's decision to alter the typical household code structure by leaving out the father-child pairing suggests that something else might be at work in the lack of instructions to masters. Rather than interpreting the changes to the household code as an indication that there are no masters in the community,[37] it is perhaps more fitting to understand the lack of instructions as theologically motivated. In the previous paragraph, he identifies all believers as 'God's servants' (θεοῦ δοῦλοι; 2.16) and God as 'Lord' (κύριος; 2.13).[38] These descriptors provide a theological frame for the instructions to individual groups and place each member of the Christian household under God himself. The honour typically due to human masters has already been relativised, and the decision not to provide instructions to them continues in this trajectory.[39]

3.2 Peter's Enslaved Persons

Like Aristotle, Peter begins his instructions on the household with the master-enslaved pairing. The similarity between Aristotle and Peter, however, stops here. Peter views the enslaved as morally competent agents, that is, humans who can both know what is good or virtuous and actually do it. Peter goes one step further for, when he connects the enslaved with the practices of Jesus, he elevates their social standing by giving them dignity and honour. Both positions challenge common perceptions of enslaved humans.

3.2.1 Slaves as Morally Competent Agents

Picking up the key term 'submit' from 2.13, the author instructs the enslaved to 'submit in all fear to (your) masters, not only the good and decent, but also the crooked' (2.18).[40] The term 'submit' recognises the lower position of the enslaved person in the hierarchical relationship of the master and enslaved. Moreover, submission is given to any master, not merely the one who is kind. Peter's instructions, at first, seem merely to reaffirm the enslaved

[35] Nor is it because Peter is addressing only 'the least powerful adults' in the community, as suggested by K. H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Baker Academic, 2022[2]) 188.

[36] To be clear, I am not upholding a distinction between theology and social conditions, as if Peter's claims are not motivated at some level by the social realities of his audience. Rather, I am suggesting that he takes the social situation seriously, and, like any good pastor, he draws from the deep wells of his understanding of God to provide his audience guidance about how to navigate their situation.

[37] So S. R. Bechtler, *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998) 165.

[38] D. M. Shaw suggests θεοῦ δοῦλοι (2.16) functions as 'an umbrella term' for the household code (*Narrative, Calling, and Missional Identity in 1 Peter: Between Promise and Inheritance* (BIS 216; Leiden: Brill, 2023) 130–1).

[39] The term δεσπότης (2.18) is used for human masters, which distinguishes their role from God's.

[40] The participle ὑποτασσόμενοι functions imperatively (so most commentators). This is a common (although disputed) use of participles in 1 Peter (e.g. 1.14; 2.1; 3.1, 7).

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person's second-class status by perpetuating the dehumanised outlook of Aristotle and his followers. There are, however, important differences.

As noted above, in wider literature, the enslaved are not viewed as agents in their own right. The household literature is addressed to the superior male, and the enslaved person's agency is derivative of their master's. Peter firmly rejects this view, however, when he speaks directly to those in slavery (and wives in 3.1–6).[41] The enslaved do not need a human master to instruct them.[42] While the exhortation to 'submit' recognises the position of the enslaved person within the social hierarchy, the decision to address the enslaved directly disrupts the social perspective of an enslaved person's capacity.

Following from this, against views that enslaved humans have no understanding of virtue, Peter contends that the enslaved can know what is 'good'. The term 'good' serves as the summary ethical term in 1 Peter, although it remains frustratingly undefined by the author. The good contrasts with 'evil' (3.11), is reflected in appropriate speech (3.10), parallels with 'righteousness' (3.14) and doing good likely results in suffering (3.17). Doing good is an expression of one's connection with Christ and contrasts with one's behaviour before becoming a follower of Christ:

> 3.16: 'the good conduct in Christ' (τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστροφήν)
>
> 1.18: 'the foolish conduct of your ancestors' (ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου)

In the context of 1.13–20, the 'foolish conduct of your ancestors' contrasts with the holiness of God, which believers are called to imitate.

Despite the ongoing debate about whether the 'good' is a way of living that aligns with the practices of wider society or is distinctively Christian, the key point, for my purpose, is that Peter indicates that enslaved humans are able to know what the good is and do it.[43] Peter regards the enslaved as possessing within themselves the moral faculty necessary to understand and do what is good. For the author, the enslaved (and wives) do not need a superior figure (whether the master or the husband) to instruct them in what is good and right, for they are agents endowed with the ability to know God's will and enact it.[44]

Peter's address directly to the enslaved is a reversal of Aristotle's view of slaves. It is closer to that of Seneca. Seneca challenges common notions about enslaved humans when, against the cry 'They are slaves', he counters 'they are men', 'comrades', 'unpretentious friends', even 'our fellow-slaves' (*Ep.* 47.1 (Gummere, LCL)). He uses the context of the banquet to expound on how masters should engage with their slaves. Against the practice of silencing slaves at a banquet, he advises that one engage with their slaves by inviting them

[41] Cf. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 513; Smith, *Strangers to Family*, 72.

[42] Balch suggests Dionysius Hal. *Rom. Ant.* II.25.4 as a parallel to the early Christian focus on the subordinate figures (Balch, *Let Wives be Submissive*, 96). However, the parallel is inaccurate. Dionysius is remarking about the duties performed by wives, whereas the early Christian texts address wives and slaves with instructions and treat them as agents independent of the superior figure. Similarly, J.A. Harrill's claim that the Christian household codes (particularly Colossians and Ephesians, although 1 Peter is not discussed) find their closest parallel in the description of the 'overseer' (*vilicus*) of the agricultural handbooks is mistaken (*Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) 85–117). The attempt to parallel the Christian master with the 'overseer' is unconvincing. Additionally, while the overseer is portrayed as a more competent slave than the average slave in the agricultural handbooks, Harrill does not give enough attention to the audience of the agricultural handbooks (namely, the elite owner of the farm) nor that the Christian household codes directly address the average enslaved person.

[43] See now T. B. Williams, *Good Works in 1 Peter: Negotiating Social Conflict and Christian Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (WUNT 337; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

[44] Cf. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 185–6.

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to the dinner table and conversing with them (47.13–15). He advocates for this because slavery is not natural but a consequence of Fortune. The enslaved person's character, then, is not determined by his or her status but by his or her own actions: 'Each man acquires his character for himself, but accident assigns his duties' (47.15 (Gummere, LCL)).

Seneca's view provides an important counter to notions found in wider society that enslaved persons were inherently dumb and mirrors those advocated by early Christians. But there may be a difference between Seneca and 1 Peter: Seneca's concern is not with the status and value of an enslaved human; he is certainly not interested in undoing the slave system itself (47.18–19). Rather, his concern is with the actions and attitude of the master. He is cautioning against acting like masters who fail to recognise their own enslaved natures and who lose control over their actions (whether in excessive feasting, sexual acts or anger). In fact, while he recognises that enslaved humans are agents, he holds that the master has some role in encouraging and developing them. He encourages Lucilius, 'Invite some to your table because they deserve the honour, and others that they may come to deserve it. For if there is any slavish quality in them as the result of their low associations, it will be shaken off by intercourse with men of gentler breeding' (47.15 (Gummere, LCL)). In the end, being a slave has an inherent danger to it, for the person's character may align with their duties; therefore, spending time in the presence of a 'good' master can help the enslaved person overcome 'any slavish quality'.

Seneca and Peter share similar perspectives about the ability of enslaved humans to receive instruction. Both treat the enslaved as 'agents'. Seneca, however, does not go as far as Peter in his elevation of the enslaved human. While Seneca advocates for a much fairer treatment of those in slavery and views them in a much better light than Aristotle, he nonetheless keeps his interest on the masters by viewing them as the ones most directly worthy of his philosophical efforts.[45] Peter, by contrast, ignores the master entirely by addressing only the enslaved person. Where Aristotle and Seneca speak to the master, Peter speaks to the enslaved human.

3.2.2 Slaves and Christ

While Peter's portrayal of the enslaved as morally competent agents stands against the Aristotelian portrait, that is not the most significant feature of his remarks to the enslaved. Even more striking is the connection he draws between enslaved persons and Christ as humans who suffer unjustly for following God: 'For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps' (2.21). This statement provides a Christological motivation for the enslaved to continue doing good even if it results in suffering. First, Christ himself has suffered for them, and, second, he has provided them with a model for how to endure unjust suffering.[46] The situation the enslaved find themselves in is the same as that of Christ.

A direct connection to the situation of the enslaved is found in the word 'suffer' (πάσχω). The term 'suffer', an important word for Peter's description of Christ, refers broadly to the suffering that Jesus endured throughout his life.[47] The Christological story can be compressed to two features: 'the sufferings coming to the Christ and the glories after these' (1.11; cf. 5.1). In this condensed narrative, Christ's entire human existence is

[45] Seneca's optimism regarding the moral capacity of enslaved humans is a significant step beyond Aristotle. One should not, however, overemphasise his optimism, for he still views the enslaved as generally morally deficient. For assessments of Seneca's perspective, see Thompson, *Pauline Slave Welfare*, 129–36; K. R. Bradley, 'Seneca and Slavery', *Seneca* (ed. J. G. Fitch; Oxford Readings in Classical Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 335–47, and the literature cited by them.

[46] L. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 202; cf. F. Vouga, 'La Christologie de la Première de Pierre', *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition* (ed. J. Schlosser; BETL 176; Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 319–20.

[47] See M. Vahrenhorst, *Der erste Brief des Petrus* (ThKNT 19; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2016) 124–5.

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indicated by the term 'sufferings', while the term 'glories' points to his eternal reign and second coming. By describing Christ's earthly life as one of suffering, the author draws a direct connection with his audience, particularly the enslaved. The bodies of the enslaved were subjected to extreme forms of abuse beginning in the slave market and extending throughout the time of their enslavement.[48] In the marketplace, the enslaved were stripped naked and chained together. Their bodies would be examined for defects, even their breath being smelled. When purchased and taken to their master's home, many enslaved persons lived in terrible conditions as they were confined to small rooms and long days at work. They could be beaten for the smallest of mistakes, and sexual abuse was common. While not all enslaved persons endured the worst conditions, all enslaved were subject to humiliation by virtue of their station in life. Authors often warn against over-beating one's slaves. Plato instructs:

> and the other is to accord them proper treatment, and that not only for their sakes, but still more for the sake of ourselves. Proper treatment of servants (οἰκέτας) consists in using no violence towards them, and in hurting them even less, if possible, than our own equals. For it is his way of dealing with men whom it is easy for him to wrong that shows most clearly whether a man is genuine or hypocritical in his reverence for justice and hatred of injustice. He, therefore, that in dealing with slaves (δούλων) proves himself, in his character and action, undefiled by what is unholy or unjust will best be able to sow a crop of goodness. (*Laws* 777d-e (Bury, LCL))

Seneca directs that one should use speech to correct a slave rather than the rod, for the rod is suitable to animals, not humans: 'I hold that you are entirely right ... in lashing them merely with the tongue; only dumb animals need the thong' (*Ep.* 47.19 (Gummere, LCL)). Such cautions about the mistreatment of slaves reveal the extent to which such abuses were occurring and the inherent tension at the heart of slavery. At the same time, the instructions are limited in their goal: the concern of Plato, Seneca and others is not the welfare of the enslaved but the moral quality of the master. Excessive abuse of slaves reveals that the master has not attained self-mastery over his own passions.

The Petrine author remarks on the mistreatment of the enslaved when he instructs them to obey not only good masters but also crooked ones (2.18). This would include masters who are not merely dishonest, but those who beat and torture slaves. The author recognises that such treatment is 'unjust' (2.19), and it is here that the connection with Christ is made.[49] Jesus is the exemplar of the innocent sufferer, the one who endures excessive abuse and death despite committing no wrongdoing (2.22). He returns no evil word nor reacts in violence, but instead 'gives himself to the one who judges justly' (2.23). He was subjected to unjust punishment through bodily beatings and execution on a cross (2.24), yet through it all, he continued to do good by not retaliating. Jesus' actions provide a model for the enslaved to follow when they endure beatings for doing what is good.[50]

[48] See e.g. Forsdyke, *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greece*, 52–89; Joshel, *Slavery in the Roman World*, 78–110, 119–29.

[49] C. Wolff, 'Christ und Welt im 1 Petrusbrief', *ThLZ* 100 5 (1975) 340; B. Bauman-Martin, 'Feminist Theologies of Suffering and Current Interpretation of 1 Peter 2.18-3.9', *A Feminist Companion to the Catholic Epistles and Hebrews* (ed. A.-J. Levine with M. M. Robins; London: T&T Clark, 2004) 72; J. Schlosser, *La première épître de Pierre* (Commentaire biblique: Nouveau Testament 21; Paris: Cerf, 2011) 170.

[50] T. P. Osborne, 'Guide Lines for Christian Suffering: A Source-Critical and Theological Study of 1 Peter 2:21-25', *Bib* 64 (1983) 381–408.

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The description of Christ in 2.22–5 employs the language of Isaiah 53 to describe Christ's actions, while also making connections to the Jesus traditions, particularly the Passion narratives.[51] While the author draws on these sources to provide a vocabulary for describing the actions of Christ, his recounting of the Christ story centres on those actions and experiences that most closely associate Jesus with the experiences of the enslaved.[52] He is not merely retelling what Christ experienced and how he responded; rather, the author directly correlates the story of Christ with that of enslaved humans in the Christian community. This act of portraying Christ as among the lowest in society has the effect not of bringing Christ down, but of bringing the lowest up.

The author's exhortation to endure unjust suffering seems to justify the actions of crooked masters, thereby reinforcing the social status of enslaved humans as lesser beings, mere property to be used as one pleases.[53] This kind of interpretation, however, misconstrues the author's point of connecting the enslaved with Jesus and advising the enslaved person to do good even if it results in unjust suffering. For the author of 1 Peter, the moral life is of greater significance than escaping verbal or bodily suffering. This is not a dualistic notion (as if the material world does not matter), but a recognition that there is a telos to one's actions that overcomes the present experience.[54] The statement that Jesus 'handed himself/his cause over to the one who judges justly' (2.23) is crucial to the author's perspective.[55] The enslaved person, like Jesus, is called to see beyond the immediate age, for the Father has 'begot us anew into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ' (1.3). An eschatological perspective undergirds the author's instructions: the present is not the end, for the present life is lived in hope for the coming of salvation (1.9). The enslaved person looks forward to the return of Christ (1.5) and the final judgement when the impartial

[51] On the use of Isaiah 53, see e.g. P. J. Achtemeier, 'Suffering Servant and Suffering Christ in 1 Peter', *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leander E Keck* (ed. A. J. Malherbe and W. A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993) 176–88; C. Wolff, 'In der Nachfolge des leidenden Christus: Exegetische Überlegungen zur Sklavenparänese I Petr 2,18-25', *Exegese vor Ort: Festschrift für Peter Welten zum 65. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2001) 432–8; V. Gäckle, 'Jesus, the Slaves, and the Servant(s) in 1 Peter 2:18–25', *Isaiah's Servants in Early Judaism and Christianity: The Isaian Servant and the Exegetical Formation of Community Identity* (ed. Michael A. Lyons and Jacob Stromberg; WUNT 2.554; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021) 273–93. For connections to the Jesus traditions, see e.g. D. G. Horrell, 'Jesus Remembered in 1 Peter? Early Jesus Traditions, Isaiah 53, and 1 Peter 2.21–25', *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Early Jesus Traditions* (ed. A. J. Batten and J. S. Kloppenborg; London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 123–50; T. E. Miller, *Echoes of Jesus in the First Epistle of Peter* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2022).

[52] D. G. Horrell, 'The Image of Jesus in 1 Peter and its Paradigmatic Significance: Sociological and Psychological Correlations', in *Jesus – Gestalt und Gestaltungen: Rezeptionen des Galiläers in Wissenschaft, Kirche und Gesellschaft* (ed. P. von Gemünden, D. G. Horrell and M. Küchler; NTOA/StUNT 100; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 306–7; J. A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2024[2]) 221–4. The suggestion is often made that the term μώλωψ (2.24), which recalls the whipping Jesus endured according to the Passion narratives, also refers to the type of injury the enslaved were likely to have (A. Weihs, 'Teilhabe an den Leiden Christi. Zur Soteriologie des Ersten Petrusbriefe', *Hoffnung in Bedrängnis: Studien zum Ersten Petrusbrief* (ed. T. Söding; SBS 216; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009) 72; Horrell, 'Image of Jesus', 306–7). Jesus' death by crucifixion may also enhance the connection to the enslaved (W. L. Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition in I Peter* (WUNT 2.30; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989) 142–3).

[53] So H. Moxnes, 'The Beaten Body of Christ: Reading and Empowering Slave Bodies in 1 Peter', *R&T* 21.1–2 (2014) 135. Moxnes (p.134) asserts, 'Since there is no parallel admonition to the masters the exhortation amounts to a full scale acceptance of the slave system even in its perverted form.' The silence hardly justifies this conclusion.

[54] Glancy (*Slavery*, 222) rightly notes that Peter values the body in a way that others, such as Epictetus, did not. Yet, she misses the eschatological aspect of the passage and as a result cannot fully explain how suffering functions within the passage.

[55] Moxnes, 'The Beaten Body of Christ', 138; G. Wagner and F. Vouga, *Der erste Brief des Petrus* (HNT 15/II; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020) 95. There is no direct object for the verb παρεδίδου, which has led to a variety of suggestions. See the review of options in Williams and Horrell, *1 Peter*, 1.830–2.

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Father will judge justly (1.17).[56] The enslaved person, then, can endure unjust beatings for doing what is good because, like Christ, they have entrusted themselves to a loving Father.[57]

As many scholars note, enslaved persons serve a paradigmatic role for the community.[58] As social outsiders, enslaved persons exist in the social space that the entire Christian community now resides in. They, therefore, model how to live in a hostile world. The paradigmatic role of enslaved humans becomes clear in 3.8–10, when the author turns his attention from select groups within the community to the community broadly. He repeats the same terms and images used in his account of Christ to the enslaved:

> εἰς τοῦτο ἐκλήθητε (2.21; 3.9)
> λοιδορούμενος οὐκ ἀντελοιδόρει (2.23) = λοιδορίαν ἀντὶ λοιδορίας (3.9)
> οὐδὲ εὑρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ (2.22) = καὶ χείλη τοῦ μὴ λαλῆσαι δόλον (3.10).

Similarly, in 3.14–18, the author returns to the idea of suffering for doing good (2.19–20; 3.13–16) and connects the unjust suffering of his audience with Christ's suffering and redemptive work (2.21–5; 3.17–18).[59]

While it is correct to identify a paradigmatic role for enslaved humans, the author's decision to connect Christ's suffering directly to the experiences of those in slavery suggests more is going on. By linking the enslaved directly with the pattern of Christ's life, the author additionally disrupts the social perception of slaves.[60] Rather than being at the bottom of the social hierarchy, the enslaved rise to the top in the Christian community. They gain an honour and dignity within the Christian community that is denied to them in wider society. The Aristotelian model of the household is turned upside down.[61]

3.2.3 Summary

The lack of directions to fathers and children indicates that the Petrine household code is theologically constructed. While Peter is no doubt directing his words to real persons in real situations, he does so from the perspective of God's household. He is reframing his audience's understanding of authority and honour according to the way things work in God's household.

While 1 Peter shares with other household management literature a hierarchical structure, it addresses the subordinate directly. Enslaved humans are viewed as agents capable of receiving instruction and acting upon it. They do not need a superior figure, that is, a master, to teach them what is good and how to accomplish it. This difference between 1 Peter and other texts on household management should not be minimised: the author breaks with convention by treating enslaved humans as competent moral agents.

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[56] Cf. Vahrenhorst, *Der erste Brief des Petrus*, 127.

[57] R. A. Reese states the point nicely: 'They are no longer simply slaves, living tools with limited capacities. Rather, they are the newborn children of God who are looking forward to their inheritance and who are confident in their status as those who are redeemed and made holy like their true Father, the merciful and just God' (*1 Peter* (NCBC; Cambridge University Press, 2022) 153).

[58] E.g. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 205–7; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 513–14; Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief*, 128–9; J. B. Green, *1 Peter* (THNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 77–8; J. G. Nordling, 'A More Positive View of Slavery: Establishing Servile Identity in the Christian Assemblies', *BBR* 19 (2009) 70–1; W. Eisele, 'Alles in Ordnung? Strukturen und Ziele der Paraklese in 1 Petr 2,11-4,11', *Der Erste Petrusbrief: Frühchristliche Identität im Wandel* (ed. M. Ebner, G. Häfner, and K. Huber; QD 269; Freiburg: Herder, 2015) 133–4.

[59] For more detail see Eisele, 'Alles in Ordnung?', 133.

[60] Cf. L. W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016) 177–9.

[61] Contra S. Carter, *Restored Order: Subordination and Freedom in 1 Peter* (StBibLit 175; New York: Peter Lang, 2021).

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Peter presents enslaved humans as the exemplars of how to follow Christ in a hostile world. The refusal of the enslaved to seek retaliation for the verbal abuse they endure and the beatings given to their bodies shows to others how to endure unjust sufferings by their neighbours. The enslaved person embodies the hope and faith of Peter's gospel message by demonstrating that this age is not the final one. At the same time, the link drawn between enslaved humans and Christ upends typical social structures. When the author associates Christ directly with the experiences of enslaved humans, he ascribes to the enslaved honour and dignity within the Christian community. The author fronts enslaved persons not only because they are the exemplars of living the Christian life, but because he is making a statement about who is deserving of honour and dignity in the house of God.

The main ideas of this section can be summarised in four points:

1. The Petrine household code is not merely a social text. It is constructed from a theological vantage point.
2. In contrast to other household codes that emphasise the superior figure in the pairing, Peter focuses on the inferior slave.
3. In his focus on the inferior slave, Peter ascribes to the enslaved an agency that is denied to them by others. He views them as morally competent humans.
4. Perhaps most striking, Peter ascribes to enslaved persons honour and dignity when he identifies them as the Christ follower par excellence.

4. The Silencing of the Masters

One can imagine a scenario in which a master enters the Christian gathering to hear the newly arrived letter from Peter. This master knows of his social importance: whether poor or rich, he occupies a space above his slave and wife and children. Even the slaves, wives and children belonging to men higher than him on the social ladder are, in many senses, still inferior to him. This master, however, has adopted some aspects of the Christian perspective on the equality of all humans, and he recognises that he should treat others, including his slaves, better.

This master hears the instructions in 2.13–17 and finds nothing too shocking. He knows the traditions about Israel as a 'slave of God' and of Paul's notion that Christians are slaves. As 2.18 is read out, he senses some awkwardness since Peter speaks directly to the enslaved. His initial concern increases when the line about the enslaved following in Jesus' footsteps is read. But our master is not too bothered, for he anticipates that Peter will give some instruction to him about being kind to his slaves, which he is already doing – he is certainly not one of the crooked masters.

Yet, the instruction to the master never arrives. Peter moves on to wives, addresses them in a similar manner as slaves and encourages them in their faithful obedience to God. Our master is now bewildered, struck by the silence of the Petrine text. While he is addressed as a husband, the role of master, which gives him significant prestige in society, is disregarded. His position of honour has been overlooked; in fact, not merely overlooked, but given to another, a slave.

This master will no doubt wonder why Peter has ignored him. I suggest that Peter intentionally ignores the masters. The Petrine silence denies to masters any space within the house of God. The author removes the authority and prestige normally given to masters, and calls into question their identity and status as masters. The honour normally ascribed

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to masters is denied; indeed, by ignoring them, the author may actually be ascribing to them shame.[62]

5. Conclusion

Peter's household code is a deeply theological text, for he views the Christian community as the house of God. In contrast to widely held ideas about enslaved humans as incompetent and morally deficient, 1 Peter presents the enslaved as morally competent humans. Moreover, the author presents enslaved persons as the best examples of how Christ himself lived, for they – like him – remain obedient despite unjust suffering. They have fully entrusted themselves to the Father and display in their actions the letter's eschatological vision. The result is that the enslaved are ascribed honour and dignity in the Christian home.[63]

While one cannot prove conclusively that there were masters in the Petrine communities, the textual and historical evidence suggests that there would have been masters. In light of this, the lack of instructions to masters takes on greater significance. It further enhances the author's vision of the enslaved and the Christian community by undercutting the honour accorded masters by wider society. In the Christian community created by the Petrine author, masters are rendered silent.[64]

[62] My fictitious story here takes the perspective of a male master, but the implications would be little changed if imagined from the lens of a female master. She would fare better as Peter turns to instructing wives because she would gain agency and dignity denied to her in other household management literature. Her important role as master, however, is still undercut by Peter's silence.

[63] In this study I have not attempted to resolve all the issues that arise with the Petrine household code generally, or the issue of slavery specifically. For example, a fuller assessment would need to address the use of 'submission' (ὑποτάσσω), which has often been interpreted as evidence that the Petrine author embraces and promotes the devaluing of the enslaved person (cf. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 149–93). Recognising the ways in which the Petrine author reworks the household management instructions to elevate enslaved humans suggests, however, that 'submission' would not carry the same negative connotations found in other writers. Similarly, while the Petrine author does not issue an explicit demand for the end of slavery, one should not overlook the ways in which he challenges and undermines the social hierarchies and expectations of his day. See the helpful study by Thompson, *Pauline Slave Welfare*.

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