

A verse that puts the brakes on

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It's only in the last few years that I've felt free to resist a biblical text, free to accept that such resistance is "allowed." It still isn't something that comes easily for me, given my particular seminary training--not to mention my fundamentalist upbringing.

I suppose my attempt to find some good news in the text, rather than simply dismissing it out of hand, comes in part from that old baggage. While I'm as prone as the next person to picking and choosing my good news, I do have a high regard for the canon--even those bits of it that I don't like, or that seem weird or impossible to defend. It's the book I've been given, and I figure I need to make the best of it.

Verses like 1 Peter 2:18, which sets up this week's assigned reading but is omitted from it, reveal the strangeness of the Bible:

Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh.

This strangeness is often lost because of our familiarity with and domestication of the scripture. We often cross the gap between contexts too casually--and make assumptions about what the text is saying just as casually. This verse puts the brakes on, even against our will, and makes plain that our world and Peter's are not one and the same.

This in turn demands that we do some background work before deciding what Peter has to say to us. In this sense, I am glad to have verse 18 in my Bible.