

“Submission: Training for Exiles” / 1 Peter 2:13–25

Together We Endure: The Letter of 1 Peter, #5

We’re in a series called Together We Endure, a study through Peter’s first letter to the church, so if you have your Bible, grab it and turn to 1 Peter 2.

Before we get started, I wanted to give you an update on what is going on with our reopening plan. At the end of May, we told you that we were going to have another member meeting around this time to explain our next steps

In light of recent developments in our state we’re going to postpone that update. Our leadership Task Force continues to consult with other like-minded churches, medical professionals, and our elders to make a recommendation on what’s next. Our directional elders will be prayerfully considering those recommendations this next week.

What we do know right now is that, at least through July 4 weekend, we’ll continue to operate online only for our weekend services. Stay tuned at summitchurch.com for info we’ll share with you just as soon as we have it.

We left off last time in chapter 2 where Peter was about to dive into 3 difficult relationships believers in his day often found themselves in: (1) being under the authority of unjust rulers (vv. 13–17) (2) Being under the control of an unjust Master (vv. 18–25); And, (3) being married to an imperfect person (3:1–7)

Now, I’ll be honest: I was really tempted to skip this whole section and see if you didn’t notice, because it just seemed like a hard time to talk about some of these dynamics. The first and third relationships are relevant enough to us--all of us feel the frustration of being under the governance of incompetent and sometimes unjust rulers--Amen? And all of us who are married know what it’s like to be married to an imperfect person. Amen? That sound you just heard was my wife screaming AMEN from somewhere in North Raleigh.

But then you have this relationship in the middle about masters and household servants (or some translations say ‘slaves’), and you are like, “What is that all about?”

So, I was tempted to skip it. But Peter teaches us a principle through these relationships that is incredibly relevant to us, and even though how we think about these relationships has changed, the principle Peter teaches us is still really important.

For Peter, these 3 relationships are merely applications of one single principle he is trying to drill home--and that is that one of the Christian’s primary callings is to patient and faithful endurance in the face of unjust suffering. In how he’s talking about these 3 relationships he’s telling you that God is not blind to your suffering--he will give you justice one day; but in the meantime he is using your suffering as part of redemptive work on earth.

The word Peter uses to introduce each of these 3 relationships is the word "submit." Submit is the first word of vs. 13 and it opens Peter's discussion of each of these three (relationships. Sometimes Christian men wrongly think submission is a women's issue; Peter shows you it is an important part of every Christian's life. It was one of Christ's most dominant characteristics. Yes, God has called us to thrive and soar and rise above, but he's also called us to humble ourselves, to surrender and die to ourselves. To submit.)

And right in the middle of Peter's discussion of these 3 relationships, Peter points us to Christ. Christ is our **guiding example** for how we should approach ANY relationship in which we experience injustice:

21 For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 He did not commit sin, "and no deceit was found in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:9); 23 when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. "By his wounds you have been healed" (Isaiah 53:5)

We looked at this in our last study in 1 Peter, but **what did Christ do in the face of injustice?** We noted 4 things:

1. **He was patient (v. 22).** He knew suffering was an integral part of God's plan of salvation. Some Christians, I explained, have bought into the lie that if you follow Jesus and do right, everything will go smoothly. I don't know what Savior they're following, but it's not Jesus. To follow in his steps means we should expect unjust suffering. Jesus didn't roll into Jerusalem in an Escalade and take up residence in a mansion, he came in on a donkey and died on a cross.
2. **He committed himself to "him who judges justly (v. 23)."** He knew earthly justice may never come, but God would give it to him in his heavenly country.
3. **Jesus kept doing good (v. 23), even when being slandered. Even when others wronged him,** he kept doing the right thing, knowing that in all situations he would respond first and foremost to God and God would vindicate him one day.
4. Jesus rested **in the fact that God was bringing salvation to the world through his wounds (v. 24).** His wounds were the means by which God brought salvation to the world. Peter tells us that in some mysterious way that is true of us, too.

So now, with that as our example, let's look at the first 2 of these 3 relationships we submit in:

1. The 'Emperor' and Every Human Authority

vs 13: Submit to EVERY human authority (BTW, which human authorities? "Every human authority" means anyone in a rightful place of authority over you. And do that) because of the Lord (IOW, you are responding first and foremost not to them, but to HIM), whether to the emperor as the supreme authority 14 or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. (IOW, even when the people who occupy the office are fallible, the office is one appointed by God. You respect the office even when you don't agree with the person. 15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. 16 Submit as free people (IOW, you are submitting not because they are better than you, or because they own you--YOUR only real authority is God. But you choose to submit to these governors for his sake), not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves. 17 Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

OK, so the big question, of course: How do you submit to government leaders when there's so much about their lives, beliefs, and policies that you disagree with?

Well first, realize that Peter would not have approved of or endorsed the vast majority of what the governing leaders of his day did. And I'm pretty sure that had there been a free election they probably would not have voted for any of Caesars. We have reason to complain about our leaders; Peter had even more.

This letter was written around 60 A.D., which means that the Emperor whom Peter is talking about is NERO. Nero was 3rd in a trio of truly terrible Caesars; a Caesarial coo-coo train that started with Caligula and ended with Nero.

Caligula, I've told you, was unfit to keep a pet, let alone run an Empire.

- Shortly after becoming Caesar, he had his mom and brother killed to make sure they didn't ever challenge his right to the throne
- He openly committed incest with three of his sisters
- He frequently cross-dressed and went out in public.
- He installed his favorite horse, Incitatus, as a senator--and then PROMOTED him later to consul. I have to ask: What had the horse done as Senator to earn that promotion? How does a horse even vote in the Senate? All in favor? Aye. All opposed? Neigh.
- Caligula once got mad at the weather and declared war on Neptune, the Roman god of the sea. He ordered his soldiers to take whips into the water and beat the waves for punishment and bring home seashells to symbolize taking plunder from his domain.
- He had the heads of statues of deities removed--and replaced them a bust of his own. Imagine if our President superimposed his face on every statue of Jesus in Washington. You say, "Well, that doesn't sound far fetched." I haven't heard of that happening yet.
- And after this you have Claudius, who may have been a hair less crazy than Caligula but was every bit as cruel. And then he handed the throne over to Nero. By the way, when I say he "handed over" the throne, I mean Nero's mom killed Claudius in his sleep so that her son could replace him.
- Nero turned out to be the worst of the 3; one of the cruelest, most sadistic Christian-hater of all time! He intentionally set fire to Rome (or at least it was believed he did it intentionally); then he stood on his balcony, watching it, and playing his harp like he was some kind of tragic poet, then blamed the whole thing on the Christians and used it as a pretext to have them rounded up and fed to the lions.

This is the Emperor whom Peter is talking about when he says, "Submit to every human authority," and "honor the Emperor." Tim Keller concludes here: "The increasingly secular West is only just beginning to experience the level of hostility that first-century believers faced; the 21st-century persecuted church experiences it every day. It is this type of 'state' which (the Apostles) tell the Christian to submit to."

Peter tells us four things about our submission to rulers like this:

- **(1) Always with respect and honor (vs. 17).** Even when we don't agree with them, or even personally dislike them, we can respect the office they occupy as God-given and worthy of our respect. That's what Peter does here. Peter was not part of some "#notmyEmperor Facebook group. He recognizes God has established government and police forces as a gift to humanity and that office should be respected.
- **(vs. 16) (2) "As free men"**—again, not because they are superior to you or own us. As a Christian, you are under the authority and control of NO ONE but God. But in that freedom you are still God's servant, and he wants you to submit to them for his glory and the cause of Christ. **'not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves'... 15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.**
- But that means **(3) In submitting to authority, we never disobey the commands of God.** There are certain lines we can never and should never cross. If our government one day tells us that we can't preach Jesus as the only way of salvation, by God's grace we won't change our message one bit. We have to honor

what God says about the sanctity of marriage in this community and the sanctity of life regardless of what the government says. There are certain kinds of marriages we will not--we cannot perform in this church. We can never pay for abortions for our employees. Nor can we go along with any kind of systemic injustice or discrimination. In the last few weeks it has come out that there are certain discriminatory practices still on the book in some of our cities. Which is disheartening and infuriating, and we are bound by God to oppose those and speak out against them. And that leads to:

- **(4) Honoring Emperors does not preclude speaking out against evil.** Notice: "Honor the Emperor" is only one of 4 commands in that final verse: **17 Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.** Honoring everyone and loving the brothers and sisters means speaking up for their suffering. Right? Furthermore, we live in a country where peaceful protest is a Constitutional right, AND we get to choose our own Emperors. Over the last couple of weeks, we've seen some protests in our country trying to do just that. While we should deplore all violence and looting, we also recognize that many people are grieving and are rightfully angry at injustice and needless loss of life. And those of us not affected as directly not only want to support their right to draw our attention to that in a moment like this one, but also to seek to understand why they are and sometimes even protesting with them. This is part of honoring them. Listening to them is honoring them.

Honor the Emperor AND love one another. Those are 2 things you have to balance. I do think Dr. King balanced it well, expressed in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, which I'd encourage all of you to read. He encouraged his movement to obey every law they could and only disobey laws that were egregiously unjust, and even then to do it as peaceably as they could.

King said, "One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws..." He explained: **Laws that lift up the (sanctity of human life) are just. Laws that degrade it are unjust.** And he said that peaceful protests are designed to force conversations on those issues when society refuses to have them.¹

Honoring the emperor; speaking up for others. Living with this tension is going to make you ODD. Right? Because people want us to be all on one side or the other. They want you to be either pro-Emperor or anti-Emperor. But a Christian is not captive to any Emperor. And that means we honor them all and critique them all. Christians today should therefore not be owned by any political party. We critique them all. It's like I've told you--we are not the tribe of the donkey or the elephant but of the LAMB. Now, to be clear, I'm NOT saying all voting choices are equal, or that elections don't matter; I'm not saying you shouldn't belong to a political party, but at our core we should stand above and apart from all of them, willing to honor and praise rulers from both parties where we can, and critique them where we must.

Here's a real practical way of seeing if you have captured this balance: **If you criticize the bad, do you also praise the good? Or, if you praise the good, do you also criticize the bad?** If you are someone who supports the current administration because it seemed the best choice given the alternatives, do you also speak out clearly when it comes to the bad they do? Or, if you hate the current administration, are you praising them in the good things you see them do? If you have mastered Peter's balance here, I believe your Facebook page will have both praise for the good and criticism for the bad.

And I ASSURE YOU, this will make you odd on FB--and that's Peter's point. I know from experience that people will come at you from both sides. But, it will point people to Jesus, to your true King and your true Country.

¹ Martin Luther King, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

Summit: Life is too short and eternity too long make political identity my primary identity. I want my life to point to Jesus. I understand some believers are called into politics. I also know that good politics is a way of loving our neighbors which is why it is important to get involved. But as Pastor Bryan said last week: I never want to become so obsessed with changing the government that I neglect the primary thing God has called me to—getting the life-changing message of the gospel to our neighbors. Our lives should point to Jesus much more than they do a particular political approach.

So 4 ways you relate to an imperfect and fallible government: 1. Always with respect and honor; 2. As free men and women; 3. Never in disobedience to God; 4. Speaking out against evil anywhere.

And what happens when you do this? People see Christ. They see someone who is confident that politics and earthly judges don't have the last word, people who belong to a heavenly Kingdom with a perfect King. **15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.**

This was the most notable posture about early Christians, and it made their gospel incredibly powerful. It's like Lesslie Newbigin said, **"The victory of the Church over (corrupt Roman power) did not come by seizing the levers of power: it was won when the victims knelt down in the Colosseum and prayed in the name of Jesus for the Emperor... in so doing, the entire mystique of the Empire, its spiritual power, was unmasked, disarmed, and rendered powerless."**

Summit, how do you think we're doing on this? Some of us need God's help here, right (smile). I think we should pray, and listen, I know this thought--of honoring and praying for gov't authorities--is probably very unpopular right now for a lot of you. But that's what being a Christian is... being unpopular toward the things of the world. So I'm gonna ask that we all pray this, out loud, together:

PRAYER TIME: "God, help us to honor our authorities, speak out for truth and justice, and point people to Jesus. Give us a humble and submissive heart for your sake. Help our leaders make wise decisions and please bring them to faith in Jesus."

Now, I want you to take 30 seconds in silence to personalize it.

OK, relationship #2:

2. An Unjust Earthly "Master"

18 Household slaves, submit to your masters with all reverence not only to the good and gentle ones but also to the cruel. 19 For it brings favor if, because of a consciousness of God, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is there if when you do wrong and are beaten, you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.

And you thought the first section was challenging! Let me acknowledge--this passage has been twisted and manipulated to justify institutions like slavery or to minimize its injustices. But reading this say Peter is supporting slavery is a severe misreading of this passage.

First, let's be clear: The slavery in Rome Peter was referring to was not exactly like slavery in the US. In the US, slavery was tied to ethnicity, and, even worse, a theory of superiority based on ethnicity. You became a slave in the Roman Empire in 1 of 2 ways. In Rome, you became a slave either because a) Rome conquered your nation in war or b) You sold yourself into slavery to pay off a debt. Slavery in Rome was not tied to ethnicity; many slaves would have looked just like Romans. And generally, you were emancipated by the age of 30. 60 million people were enslaved in these ways throughout the Empire. Now, this system was rife with injustice,

too. **Aristotle**, for example, said, “There can be no friendship nor justice given to inanimate things. Just as you cannot be friends or give justice to a horse or an ox, so friendship and justice cannot be extended towards a slave, as a slave and master and slave have nothing in common; a slave is but a living tool.”

Neither Peter nor Scripture is condoning even this version of slavery. In fact, Scripture strictly condemns it. Slavery that involves taking someone captive by force is explicitly condemned in the Bible: **“Anyone who kidnaps another and sells him must be put to death” (Ex. 21:16)**, and in 1 Tim 1 Paul puts slave traders in the same category as those who kill their parents. BTW, slave kidnapping is one of the few things in the OT for which the death penalty is prescribed!

Second, the entire message of the gospel subverts the idea of slavery. The gospel teaches that all people are made in the image of God, united by a common problem, sin; with a common hope, the blood of Jesus. In Christ, we are brothers and sisters in one family. The poor sits down in equality with the rich; in the Kingdom of God the slave is the equal of the master. (BTW, that’s the significance of Paul telling them to “greet one another with a holy kiss” in church. I know that sounds like a crazy violation of social distancing today, but a kiss was a sign of equality. Masters in church would kiss slaves as their equals! Even in this passage, Peter tells to honor everyone as an equal son or daughter of God. This would undo the entire system, right?

Which is why everywhere throughout history this gospel has been preached and taken seriously, societal revolution has been the result.

- D.A. Carson says that the best work on slavery is by an African-American scholar named Thomas Sowell. Massive: 3 vols. He points out slavery was universal. The terrible European slave trade trafficked 11 million Africans; but twice that many were bought and sold on the Arabian Peninsula during that same time period. So, in other words, slavery was a nearly universal problem. Yet you have an enormous amount of guilt literature coming out of the West, but none out of Arabia. And the efforts to stop slavery came from the Christianized West. Why, he asks? Slavery is universal, but what stopped slavery in the West? His answer? Undeniably, the Great Awakening: The preaching of men like John Wesley and the reforms of Christian statesman William Wilberforce. The two were connected. The gospel plants seeds that ultimately undid the broken systems of the world from within. When Christians seriously reckoned with the gospel (as in the Great Awakening), it brought the entire system of slavery down on its head!
- Look, I’ll be totally frank with you--when I read passages like this I want Peter to be more direct in his condemnation. I want him to say, “This whole system is bad and should be rejected immediately.” But evidently God thought a more effective way was to plant the seeds for transformation from within. You have to wonder, had Peter or Paul merely issued a political manifesto here, believers may have focused exclusively on political action to the neglect of the more permanent, lasting change that would come through the preaching of the gospel. Yes, we want to be involved in justice, we must be involved in it, but the most important thing the church can do is preach the gospel. It is the preaching of John Wesley that creates the reforms of a William Wilberforce.

And, to bring it back to Peter’s **main point: Peter’s purpose in writing this is not to evaluate the merits of the current economic system, but to encourage those experiencing injustice.** That’s the whole thrust of this passage: how to respond to injustice. We live in a world where at some point in some situation you are going to be treated unjustly. And no matter how much you speak up, and how much you present your case, at the end of the day things still may not work out fairly. That was true for Christ. And Peter’s point is that in moments like these, you can still respond like Christ. You can entrust yourself to God who judges justly, remind yourself of your heavenly citizenship, and be assured that through your unjust suffering God is working salvation for others just like he used Christ’s unjust suffering to work salvation for you!

Listen, let me bring this around to us: Some of you are experiencing injustice right now. In various ways. I mean, to state the obvious: maybe you are still frustrated with what feels like consistent injustices at work in our legal system. We all should be. Why is it taking us so long to create a society where discrimination and prejudice are a thing of the past, and there is no hint of inequity in the processes of justice?

Or, maybe you're discouraged because a spouse has treated you badly and you've tried to make things right--but your spouse has lied about and slandered you and people are believing them! Maybe you are in a marriage where the other spouse treats you wrongly, or even worse, tears you down to others. And they seem to be winning! You live under the cloud of unfair treatment and slander and you aren't getting justice. Or maybe you've recently been taken advantage of in business. And you fought it in the courts. You tried and you made your case but the other person got their way and injustice prevailed.

You can protest all these things. We should. And we can pray for deliverance. And we can and should keep fighting. But realize that at some level, Peter says about injustice: "we are called to this." We should expect it; it's the path of Jesus.

To be very personal: I have experienced this recently through slander I've had to endure. People lying about me and impugning my motives. (Mean tweets; worst Christian of 2019). **(trophy)** And when it is appropriate, I try to clear it up! But it has helped me to remember that Jesus experienced this and told me to expect it also. I see it in Paul's letters. "Demas/Sosthenes has done me much harm." I'm sure Paul tried to keep that from happening. But he knew it was inevitable; he had been (hold up trophy) "called to this."

So, like Paul, and Peter, I will take my refuge in 1 Peter 2: **21 For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 He did not commit sin, "and no deceit was found in his mouth" (Isaiah 53:9); 23 when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. "By his wounds you have been healed" (Isaiah 53:5)** which means being patient, committing myself to him who judges justly, continuing to do good and resting in the fact that God was bringing salvation to the world through my wounds.

I continually rest in the fact that this world is not my home--I am a stranger and an exile here, and my ultimate justice and reward will be found in the resurrection and my eternal kingdom, and every day I get one day closer to my heavenly home and I can't wait.

I was reminded in all of this of the story of Eric Liddell, the Scottish Olympic runner in the 1920's whose story inspired the movie *Chariots of Fire*.

- We remember Liddell for what the movie depicts—how because of his religious convictions, he refused to race on Sunday. And it is an awesome movie.
- But what we often skip is that after he became an Olympic gold medalist, Liddell left to be a missionary in China in 1925. He worked in one of the poorest provinces in the country, and when war broke out in 1941, the British government ordered all of their citizens to leave China.
- But Liddell stayed, because he knew his ultimate allegiance wasn't to the British government or the Chinese one; it was to God. And when the Japanese army got closer to his city in 1942, he stayed to help the poor Chinese he'd given his life to. And when in 1943 the Japanese took the city, he was sent to an internment camp, where he spent the last two years of his life.
- All who knew him there described him as selfless, loving, and completely focused on others. The Japanese selected a random group to be set free and he was one of them. He gave up his spot to a pregnant woman and was shot. How does one live this way? **Eric Liddell didn't expect England or**

China to be his home; he suffered, thinking of his heavenly home, “entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

Let's rejoice in this promise that God has given us! **15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.** By *his* stripes we are healed, and now mercy should be our song. We would all be hopeless w/o his goodness. We'd all be desperate w/o his love. May we who have received that love and mercy demonstrate it toward others.

Hallelujah for the Cross