

RESILIENT HOPE // Submission & Servanthood

Today, we're covering government, slavery, and marriage. There have been so many misinterpretations and misapplications of this text, and scriptures like it. They've been manipulated to justify all kinds of horrific injustices and institutions in the world. For example: "the divine right of Kings," meaning that kings were appointed by God and therefore above criticism or accountability to their subjects. Or used to justify the institution of slavery in our recent history as a country. Or in marriage, Christian men leveraging their God-given role in the home as a license to Lord over their family like domineering tyrants.

In verse 12, Peter begins a new section in his letter to scattered Christians. He is telling them to keep their conduct honorable, holy before unbelievers, and in vs 13, he gives us three specific case studies on what that conduct looks like in multiple complex relationships. Peter talks about submission and subjection to authority as citizens, servants, and spouses.

CITIZENS

1 Peter 2:13-17, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

During this time-period, Emperor Nero and the Roman Empire was third in a trio of truly horrifically evil rulers; It started with Caligula, who was a total nutjob. 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 later promoted him to consul. 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.

And after this, was Claudius who was appointed as Caesar, after Caligula's murder, and may have been a hair less crazy than Caligula but was every bit as cruel. And then

he handed the throne over to Nero. When I say he “handed over,” I mean that Nero’s mom killed Claudius in his sleep so that her son could replace him.

Nero turned out to be the worst of the three. He was one of the cruelest, most sadistic tyrants in history! He intentionally set fire to Rome, stood on his balcony, and played his harp while watching the city burn, 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.” In fact, Peter the author of this letter, was eventually killed at the hands of Nero.

What does that look like to submit to that kind of authority? How do you do that? And is Peter saying, no matter what? Are there any exceptions?

Briefly, from God’s perspective, here’s what Peter is telling us.

1. Respect the Office

Even when we disagree with policies or don’t like the person, Christians are called to respect the office as a God-ordained institution. That’s what Peter is doing here. He’s not saying, “Nero is a tyrant so he’s not my emperor.” He recognizes that the government and the enforcement of laws were God-ordained institutions and should be respected because of it.

2. Revere God

As a Christian, you and I are ultimately under the authority of no one other than God. Peter says in **1 Peter 2:16**, “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil but living as servants of God.”

In other words, in our God-given freedom, we’re still servants of Christ, and God wants us to submit to human authority knowing that ultimately, we’re submitting to Him.

3. Resist Evil

There are certain lines we should not and cannot ever cross as followers of Christ. If our government ever says that we cannot preach Jesus as the only way of salvation, just like the example set by the early church, we will humbly disobey. If our

government ever again says that the church isn't essential and we can no longer gather together, we will humbly disobey. If there are ever legal repercussions for not performing certain types of weddings, we will humbly disobey. We will fight for the sanctity of life, and as citizens of heaven, it's our responsibility to fight for the ways of God in culture because we believe that God's original design for human beings is what lead to human flourishing.

As I shared a few weeks ago, when a government commands us to do something God forbids, or forbids us from doing something God commands, our responsibility as followers of Jesus is to humbly, and respectfully, resist and disobey those commands.

The second case study Peter gives us is submission and subjection to authority as...

SERVANTS

1 Peter 2:18-20, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."

First, the slavery Peter was referring to was nothing like slavery in the United States. In the U.S., slavery was tied to ethnicity, and, even worse, a theory of superiority based on ethnicity. It was very different in Rome.

A person became a slave in the Roman Empire in one of two ways. In Rome, you became a slave either because Rome conquered your nation in war, or 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, of course, this system was rife with corruption and injustice as well. 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.

Exodus 21:16, "Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death."

And in **1 Timothy 1**, Paul puts slave traders in the same category as those who murder their parents. Nowhere in the entire Bible do you find any support for any version of slavery. Just because the Bible reports it, it doesn't mean that it supports it.

Second, the entire message of the gospel subverts the very idea of slavery. The gospel teaches that all people are made in the image of God, united by the common problem of sin with a common hope – the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In Christ, we are brothers and sisters in one family. The gospel levels the playing field of life. The poor and the rich are equal; the Jews and Greeks are equal. We've become a chosen race, a new humanity, and in the Kingdom of God, the slave is the equal of the master. This was radical and completely countercultural. And the gospel is what eventually led to the abolition of slavery in the West through people like John Wesley and William Wilberforce.

Peter's purpose in writing this is not to evaluate the merits of the societal institutions at the time, but to encourage Christians who were experiencing injustice within those unjust and broken systems of society. He says be subject to the good and gentle and also unjust masters.

1 Peter 2:19, "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly."

We live in a world where at some point, 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.

Maybe you're facing something right now. The Apostles were not immune to this. Paul writes about his own hardships.

2 Timothy 4:10, 14, "...Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me... Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm..."

Peter's point is that even in these moments, you can 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 through you for the sake of others just like He used Christ's unjust suffering to work salvation for you!

Lastly, submission as...

SPOUSES

1 Peter 3:1-6, "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening."

What's foremost in Peter's mind is a wife with a husband who is an unbeliever. This was incredibly common in the early church as people were coming to Christ, and we have people in our church in that situation, too. That's why he says those who do not obey will be "won over without a word through your conduct." In other words, a transformed life is the evidence God in your life.

But even if both spouses are Christians, there are going to be moments of frustration, where your spouse disappoints you, even just flat out wrongs you. How do we respond like Christ in those moment?

Peter's first question is to Wives. How do you submit to your husband in a Christlike way?

1 Peter 3:7, "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."

Men, the question for us is: How do you honor your wife in a Christlike way?

Peter is writing about submission and servanthood in the context of the home. Both husbands and wives have power in the relationship. Peter's helping us understand how that power should be used.

Men usually have physical power. Typically, they are bigger and stronger. That's primarily what Peter means in v. 7 when he calls her the "weaker vessel." But it also refers to the fact that in Rome, women had very little social power. Men could divorce

their wives for no reason. Women couldn't divorce their husbands. Men could have, in fact were expected to, have affairs. Women could be sentenced to death if they did. It was a horrifically unjust system. The wife was in a weaker position legally.

Positionally in the home, Christ has appointed men as the head of the household. This is actually an incredibly beautiful think contrary to what the culture might want to tell us. There is this idea that has become prevalent that anything masculine is bad. The words "toxic" and "masculinity" have become synonymous with one another, but everything God created is good. In fact, when God created men and women, he said it's not just "good" but "very good." The world needs men to be masculine. Biblically, masculinity represents strength, courage, compassion, selflessness, humility, self-sacrificing, self-control, an eagerness to step into responsibility, to provide for and protect their families, to treasure their wife and lead the family in following Jesus. This is how God made men, and the world needs men to be men! Because biblical masculinity is not just good but "very good."

But none of these things mean in any way that the wife is inferior. That's what Peter is saying. **1 Peter 3:7**, "...they are **heirs with you** of the grace of life," right alongside you.

Peter says that whatever power men have in the relationship should be used to honor love, cherish, and treasure their wife. To live with her in an understanding way means to be attentive, considerate of, and selfless toward her. To treasure her and care for her. One of the most wicked things in the world is when a man uses his physical power to dominate or abuse his wife. But what's worse is when a man uses the "Christian teaching on submission" to justify it. That is wicked.

Anyone that leverages any form of power to manipulate, harm, abuse, threaten or subjugate someone else is not serving Christ, they're using Christ to serve themselves at the expense of others and one day will be held to account before the judgment seat of God. Men, love your wife, serve your wife, honor and respect your wife. Love your wife as Christ loved the Church and laid down His life for her. That's your model. He's your example. Because Peter says if you fail to do this, your prayers to God will be hindered. Because a man's leadership in the marriage is not a license to do whatever he wants to do, but empowerment to do what he ought to do.

Wives, what power does Peter say you have? When Peter says in **vs. [3]**, "**Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear,**" he's not saying you can't braid your hair, and you can only

wear it in a messy-bun. He's saying that the substance of your life should not be external beauty. Early on, women are taught that their value, their worth, and even their power come from their beauty. They are taught by our culture that a woman with great physical beauty will have power to get what she wants and will be greatly valued. Peter says, *"No, even though that may be the case in the culture, what is valuable to God is not external beauty but Christ-like character. A calm, steadfast faith in him."* [4] *"but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious."* A gentle and quiet spirit. This doesn't mean to be introverted and shy, that assertive, extroverted women are offensive to God. "Gentle and quiet spirit" means to be at peace, not trying to use her power to manipulate and control, but to be secure in who God has created her to be with her trust in God. This is very precious to God because that's the spirit Jesus had. To say it simply: Your faith is far more precious to God than your figure.

So, Christlikeness in marriage means you use your "power" to bless and serve, not manipulate and control. Every day, you have an opportunity to either manipulate or minister to your spouse. So, that raises the question: What if you're doing your part and they don't do what they are supposed to do?

Well, in the face of incompetence or injustice, what did Christ do? He committed Himself to Him who judges justly. And then He kept doing good, trusting God with the results, which is the example He uses of Sarah and Abraham.

This is NOT saying spousal abuse is ok or that God wants you to stay in a home where you are being abused and just take it as some expression of Christlikeness. No passage of scripture encourages you to do that. Psalm 11:5 says the Lord hates those who do violence, and you should not subject you or your children to that. You need to protect yourself, your kids, and immediately get out of that situation.

Of course, these situations are so unbelievable confusing and complex for those that are in it. If you have questions about this or think you might be in a relationship like this, let me encourage you to reach out for some help. You could start with our Pastoral Care Team or call the Domestic Violence Hotline.

Care@gracechapel.net
Domestic Violence hotline: 1-800-799-7233

But in all these things, in our relationship to the government, in our work, in our home, how do we patiently and persistently show up in a way that's pleasing to God? How do we honor Christ in all of these incredibly complex and difficult circumstances?

We have to look to the founder of our faith.

1 Peter 2:22-24, "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed."

I was reminded in all of this of the story of Eric Liddell, the Scottish Olympic runner in the 1920s 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 a Sunday. But what we often skip over 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 Chinese people he'd given his life to.

When the Japanese took the city in 1943, 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 (biblical masculinity). 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 he was eventually killed. 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." Liddell followed in the steps of Jesus. Because, by his wounds, we've been healed. Through sacrifice, we've obtained mercy. And we can thank God for it and extend that mercy to those around us.

5 Ways to Pray for Governmental Leaders:

1. **Sense** - Pray that those in governing authority are given wisdom from God to make sound decisions regarding policies and legislation that impact the lives of millions of people across the nation. That God would give governing authorities "an understanding mind to govern the people." (1 Kings 3:9)
2. **Safety** - Pray that God would protect them from lies, division, and deception. Ask God to protect them from corruption and that they would act in the best interest of the people they represent. Pray for God to protect them from all threats and ailments and that they would be granted the resilience to handle the responsibilities and challenges of leadership.
3. **Sympathy** - Ask God to help those in authority to lead with compassion and empathy toward all those who are affected by their decisions. Pray that God would give them understanding of the needs of those are struggling and vulnerable.
4. **Submission** - "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will." (Proverbs 21:1) We can pray that the hearts of our government leaders would be submitted to and guided by God's hand.
5. **Salvation** - It's God's desire that all people would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4) One day, the only kingdom that will be left standing is the Kingdom of God. Ask God to bring those in authority to the knowledge of the truth, "...for there is one God, and there in one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ." (1 Timothy 2:5)