

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: Submission and the Example of Christ

1 Peter 2:13–25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 2:13–25 weaves together two themes that the modern heart resists: submission to authority and patient endurance of unjust suffering. Doctrinally, be ready to teach a biblical view of civil government as ordained by God (echoing Romans 13), the nature of Christian freedom as freedom to serve rather than license to sin, and, at the climax, the sinlessness, substitutionary suffering, and exemplary patience of Christ drawn straight from Isaiah 53. Verse 24, “he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,” is one of the clearest substitutionary atonement statements in the New Testament, and it sits right beside the call to imitate Christ’s example. Hold both together: Jesus is Savior before He is model, and only those He has saved can truly follow His steps.

Pastorally, this is a passage for the powerless and the wronged, and most of your students carry some unfair burden, a difficult boss, a hard marriage, a wound nursed in silence. Peter does not minimize the injustice; he reframes it as part of our calling and points to the Shepherd who walked the road first. The aim is not to produce passive people who never address wrong, but to form people who can entrust themselves to the God who judges justly instead of taking vengeance into their own hands. This is some of the deepest soul work in the letter.

So aim to leave students both clearer and braver: clearer that government, freedom, and suffering all find their place under the lordship of Christ, and braver to absorb an injustice the way Jesus did, trusting the Father rather than retaliating. The disciple we are forming is a free servant of God who has stopped needing to win every fight because he is following a Shepherd who already won the only fight that matters.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter says to “be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” and to governing authorities (vv. 13–14). What does this teach about the Christian’s relationship to civil government, and what is the stated purpose of such authorities according to Peter?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the political context. Peter writes under Roman emperors who were no friends of the church; within a few years many of these very readers may have suffered under Nero. Yet Peter says, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.” Submission to government is grounded not in the worthiness of the rulers but in the will of the Lord who stands above them.

State the purpose Peter gives: authorities exist “to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.” God has ordained human government as a restraint on evil and a support of order, even when particular governments do their job badly. This matches Paul in Romans 13: the governing authority is God’s servant for good.

Mark the limits without overstating them. Christian submission to government is real but not absolute; when rulers command what God forbids, the believer must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). But Peter’s emphasis here is the opposite of rebellion: a quiet, honorable submission that adorns the gospel and removes any just charge against the church. Keep the weight where Peter puts it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Civil government as ordained by God (Romans 13:1–7)
- Submission grounded in the lordship of Christ, not the merit of rulers
- The God-given purpose of government: to restrain evil and uphold good
- The limit of submission: obey God rather than men when they conflict (Acts 5:29)

Discussion Prompts

- How does grounding submission “for the Lord’s sake” change the way you view authority?
- What is the difference between honorable submission and blind compliance?
- Where is the line between submitting to government and obeying God first?

Question 2

Student Question:

Submitting to authority is rarely our first instinct, especially when we disagree with those in charge. Where in your life, at work, in the church, under the law, do you find submission hardest, and what would it look like to submit there “for the Lord’s sake”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes submission personal, because it is easy to affirm in theory and hard in practice. Submission grates against the self most when we believe we are right and the one in charge is wrong. Peter knew that and still said, submit, for the Lord’s sake.

Help students locate their hardest arena honestly, whether it is a boss whose decisions they resent, the elders of the church, the law of the land, or simply anyone who tells them what to do. The phrase “for the Lord’s sake” reframes the whole struggle: I am not ultimately submitting to this flawed person but to the Lord who placed me here.

Distinguish submission from agreement and from silence. Submitting for the Lord’s sake does not mean never raising a concern or never appealing; it means doing so with a respectful, non-

rebellious spirit, trusting God with the outcome. Ask students for one specific relationship where this attitude needs to grow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Submission as a heart posture, not mere external compliance
- Reframing submission as ultimately to the Lord
- The difference between submission and agreement or silence
- Trusting God with outcomes we cannot control

Discussion Prompts

- Where is submission hardest for you, and why?
- How would 'for the Lord's sake' change your attitude toward that authority?
- What does respectful disagreement look like without a rebellious spirit?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter says, "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God" (v. 16). How does Peter hold together Christian freedom and willing service, and what does it mean that the truly free person is the one who has become a servant of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter holds together two things our culture sees as opposites: freedom and servanthood. "Live as people who are free... living as servants of God." In Christ we have been set free from sin, guilt, and the tyranny of the world's opinion. But that freedom is not a license to do whatever we want; it is freedom to finally do what we were made for, to serve God gladly.

Expose the counterfeit Peter names: using freedom "as a cover-up for evil." There is a false Christian liberty that treats grace as permission to sin, that hides selfishness behind the language of freedom. Peter slams that door. The truly free person is not the one with no master but the one whose Master is God.

Make it concrete. The free servant of God is free from having to retaliate, free from needing everyone's approval, free from the slavery of appetite and image, and therefore free to love, serve, and obey without resentment. Paradoxically, the most liberated people are the most surrendered ones.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christian freedom as freedom from sin, not license to sin (Galatians 5:13)
- The counterfeit liberty that uses grace as a cover for evil
- True freedom found in servanthood to God

- The surrendered life as the genuinely liberated life

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to use 'freedom' as a cover for what you simply want?
- How is serving God actually a form of freedom?
- What would it mean to be free from needing to retaliate or be approved?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter gives four crisp commands: "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor" (v. 17). Which of these four do you find most difficult to practice consistently, and what would obedience look like for you this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 17 is a compact rule of life: "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor." Walk through the four. Honor everyone treats every human being as an image-bearer worthy of respect. Love the brotherhood gives a deeper, family love to fellow believers. Fear God reserves reverent awe for God alone. Honor the emperor extends genuine respect even to a hostile ruler.

Notice the careful gradations. Peter does not say fear the emperor; only God receives fear. Nor does he say love everyone with the family love owed to the brotherhood. He calibrates our obligations precisely: universal honor, family love, reverent fear of God, civic honor for rulers. This is a whole social ethic in four words.

Press for self-examination. Most of us find one of these four hardest. Some struggle to honor difficult people; some find the brotherhood easier to criticize than to love; some have let the fear of God grow casual; some cannot bring themselves to honor leaders they did not choose. Ask which one God is pressing on each student this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Universal human dignity grounded in the image of God (Genesis 1:27)
- The distinct, deeper love owed to the family of believers (John 13:34-35)
- Reverent fear reserved for God alone
- Genuine civic honor even toward hostile authorities

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the four commands in verse 17 is hardest for you?
- Who is someone difficult you are called to honor, and how?
- Where has your fear of God grown too casual?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter says it is “a gracious thing” when, “mindful of God,” one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly, but there is no credit in suffering for doing wrong (vv. 19–20). What is the difference between suffering that honors God and suffering that does not, and why does God find unjust suffering borne patiently to be “gracious” in His sight?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter draws a sharp line. There is no credit in suffering the consequences of our own wrongdoing; if we sin and are punished and endure it, that is simply justice. But to suffer for doing good, and to bear it patiently while “mindful of God,” is “a gracious thing,” literally grace, in His sight.

Explore why God values this so highly. Unjust suffering borne without retaliation reveals a heart that trusts God rather than itself, that believes God sees and will judge justly, that values faithfulness above comfort. It is faith made visible under pressure, and it mirrors the very heart of Christ.

Guard against two distortions. This is not a glorification of suffering for its own sake, nor a command to stay silent in the face of all wrong or abuse. Peter is addressing the unavoidable injustices that come to faithful people in a fallen world, and teaching us to bear them in a way that honors God rather than dishonoring Him through bitterness or vengeance. Help students discern the difference between God-honoring endurance and a passivity that fails to address genuine harm.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between deserved and undeserved suffering
- Patient endurance of unjust suffering as ‘grace’ in God’s sight
- Suffering well as faith made visible under pressure
- The distinction between God-honoring endurance and passivity toward real harm

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God find unjust suffering borne patiently so precious?
- How do you tell the difference between enduring wrong and enabling it?
- When has being ‘mindful of God’ changed the way you bore a hardship?

Question 6

Student Question:

Peter says we were “called” to this pattern of patient endurance (v. 21). When you suffer unfairly, do you tend to see it as an interruption to your Christian life or as part of your calling? How might seeing it as part of your calling change the way you carry it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 21 reframes suffering as vocation: “to this you have been called.” Most of us treat unfair suffering as an interruption to the Christian life, a detour off the real road. Peter calls it part of the road itself. We were called not only to forgiveness and hope but also to follow a suffering Lord.

Help students feel the dignity in this. If suffering is an interruption, it is meaningless time to be endured until normal life resumes. If it is part of our calling, then even the unfair burden becomes a place of fellowship with Christ and formation into His likeness. Nothing is wasted.

Apply it to a present burden. Ask each student to name the unfair thing they are carrying now and to consider what changes if they receive it as part of their calling rather than an obstacle to it. This is not pretending it does not hurt; it is refusing to believe it is pointless.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering as part of the Christian calling, not merely an interruption
- Fellowship with Christ in His sufferings (Philippians 3:10)
- Formation through hardship rather than only despite it
- The meaningfulness of suffering received from God’s hand

Discussion Prompts

- Do you tend to see unfair suffering as an interruption or as part of your calling?
- What changes when you receive a hardship as part of following Christ?
- What burden could you begin to carry differently this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter presents Christ as both example and substitute: He “left you an example, so that you might follow in his steps,” and He “bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (vv. 21, 24). How do these two truths fit together, and why is it important that the Christ we imitate is first the Christ who saves us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question guards a crucial balance. Peter says Christ “left you an example, so that you might follow in his steps,” and in the same breath that He “bore our sins in his body on the tree.” Jesus

is both pattern and substitute, both the One we imitate and the One who saves us. Lose either and the gospel is distorted.

Stress the order. Christ is Savior first, then model. We do not follow His steps in order to earn salvation; we follow His steps because He has already borne our sins and made us His own. An example alone would only condemn us, since we could never match it. A substitute who is also an example gives us both forgiveness and a path to walk.

Warn against the two ditches. The liberal error reduces Jesus to a moral example and loses the cross as atonement. A shallow evangelical error embraces the cross as substitute but ignores the call to imitate Him, treating discipleship as optional. Peter will not let us separate them: the Christ who carried our sins is the Christ whose steps we now walk.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as both substitute and example (1 Peter 2:21, 24)
- The proper order: Savior first, model second
- Imitation flowing from salvation, not earning it
- Against reducing Jesus to a mere moral example, and against divorcing the cross from discipleship

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that Jesus is Savior before He is our example?
- What goes wrong if we keep only one of these two truths?
- How does being already saved free you to follow His steps?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter says Christ bore our sins “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness,” and that “by his wounds you have been healed” (v. 24). In what specific area is God calling you to “die to sin and live to righteousness” right now, and how does Christ’s wounded love make that death possible?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 24 is intensely personal: Christ bore our sins “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” The purpose of the cross was not only to forgive us but to free us, to break sin’s grip so we could live a new kind of life. Forgiveness and transformation are not separate packages.

Help students name the specific place where this dying and living must happen. “Die to sin” is not abstract; it means a particular sin actually loses its rule, a habit is put to death, an old way of

reacting is buried. Ask each student to name the one area where God is now calling them to die to sin and live to righteousness.

Anchor the power in Christ's wounds. "By his wounds you have been healed." The strength to die to sin does not come from willpower or self-loathing but from the wounded love of Christ. When we see what our sin cost Him and how much He loves us, sin loses some of its appeal and obedience becomes a response of love rather than mere duty.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross aimed at transformation, not only forgiveness (Romans 6:1-11)
- Dying to sin and living to righteousness as the goal of redemption
- Christ's wounds as the source of our healing and power
- Obedience as a response of love to the crucified Christ

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific area is God calling you to die to sin right now?
- How does seeing what your sin cost Christ weaken its appeal?
- What would 'living to righteousness' look like in that area this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter describes Christ in the language of Isaiah 53: He "committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth," and when reviled and suffering He "continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (vv. 22-23). What does this portrait teach about the sinlessness of Jesus, the nature of His suffering, and the way He trusted the Father, and how does it deepen your understanding of the cross?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal summit of the lesson, drawn almost entirely from Isaiah 53, so handle it richly. Peter presents three things about Christ. First, His sinlessness: "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth." Jesus is the spotless Lamb, the only human being who never sinned in deed or in word, the qualified substitute who needed no atonement of His own.

Second, His suffering. "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten." The mockery, the blows, the false accusations, the cross, all of it fell on One who could have called legions of angels and instead stayed silent. This is not weakness but sovereign, self-controlled love.

Third, His trust. "He continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." The secret of Jesus' patience was His confidence in the Father. He did not need to vindicate Himself because He

knew the Father would. He committed His cause to the righteous Judge and left the outcome in His hands. This is the very thing Peter wants his suffering readers to learn to do.

Bring it to the cross with verse 24: this sinless, silent, trusting Sufferer “bore our sins in his body on the tree.” The example becomes atonement. He did not merely show us how to suffer; He suffered in our place, carrying the guilt that was ours. Let students gaze at this portrait until it does two things at once: assures them of a salvation they could never earn, and gives them courage to entrust their own injustices to the same righteous Judge.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sinlessness of Christ as the qualified substitute (Isaiah 53:9; Hebrews 4:15)
- Christ's silent, self-controlled suffering as sovereign love, not weakness
- Entrusting oneself to God who judges justly as the heart of patient endurance
- Substitutionary atonement: He bore our sins in His body on the tree (Isaiah 53:4–6)
- The shepherd-overseer of our souls to whom we have returned (v. 25)

Discussion Prompts

- What strikes you most about how Jesus responded to injustice?
- How did His trust in the Father make His patience possible?
- How does this portrait both save you and shape how you suffer?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Peter moves from submission to authorities, to the freedom of God's servants, to unjust suffering, to the suffering and sin-bearing Christ who is our Shepherd. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through these verses. What single truth from 1 Peter 2:13–25 do you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the threads. Peter has led us from submission to government, through the freedom of God's servants, into the hard country of unjust suffering, and finally to the Shepherd who suffered first and bore our sins. The whole passage trains us to live under authority and under injustice the way Christ did.

Press for one concrete point of formation. This passage is too costly to leave at the level of admiration. Ask each student to name the single truth they most need and one place it will reshape their week, especially any unfair burden they are carrying.

Close at the last image of the chapter: “you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” Whatever injustice we walk through, we are not

wandering alone; we have a Shepherd who knows the road because He walked it ahead of us. Send students out following in His steps.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of submission, suffering, and the example of Christ
- Christ as both Savior and pattern for the suffering disciple
- The Shepherd and Overseer of our souls who guards us through hardship

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from this passage do you most need this week?
- Where do you sense Jesus forming you through 1 Peter 2:13-25?
- What unfair burden will you entrust to the righteous Judge this week?