

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter

Lesson 4: Submission and the Example of Christ -- 1 Peter 2:13-25

There is a kind of strength the world rarely recognizes because it looks, at first glance, like weakness. It is the strength of a person who could strike back and chooses not to, who has every right to demand and instead serves, who absorbs an injustice without passing it on. We admire it when we see it in a Martin Luther King or a quiet grandmother who forgave the unforgivable, but we are slow to want it for ourselves. Peter is about to commend exactly that strength to a roomful of believers who were being treated unfairly, and he will tell them it is not weakness at all. It is the way of Christ.

Peter writes to people with very little power. Many of them were household slaves; almost all of them were a despised minority in an empire that could make their lives miserable on a whim. To people like that the world says, fight or grovel. Peter says something different. Submit, for the Lord's sake, to the governing authorities. Honor everyone. Live as free people who use their freedom not as a cover-up for evil but as servants of God. He is not telling them they are doormats. He is telling them they are free people who have chosen whose servants they will be.

Then he reaches the hardest case. What about the servant with a harsh and unjust master? What about suffering you did nothing to deserve? Here Peter does not offer a clever escape. He offers a Person. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." And he draws the most tender portrait of the suffering Savior in the whole letter: a Lamb who did not revile when reviled, who did not threaten when He suffered, who entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly, who carried our sins in His own body to the tree.

So this passage asks something costly of us, but it never asks it alone. It always points to the Shepherd who walked the road first. Read it slowly, especially if you are carrying an unfair burden right now, a difficult boss, a hard marriage, a wound someone gave you that they have never owned. Peter will not tell you it does not hurt. He will tell you that the One who bore the worst injustice in history is walking just ahead of you, and that following in His steps is the path that leads home.

Group Discussion: Peter tells believers to submit to human authorities "for the Lord's sake" and to live "as servants of God" (vv. 13, 16). Why do you think Peter grounds submission in our relationship to God rather than in whether the authorities deserve it? Where do people today most struggle with the idea of submitting to any authority, and why?

Personal Reflection: Peter holds up Christ, who "when he was reviled, did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (v. 23). Think of a recent situation where you were treated unfairly. How did you respond, and what would it have looked like to entrust yourself to God the way Jesus did?

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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”?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Isaiah 53:4-9, the suffering Servant whom Peter quotes throughout this passage; Romans 13:1-7, submission to governing authorities as established by God; Matthew 5:38-48, loving enemies and not repaying evil for evil; Philippians 2:5-11, the mind of Christ who humbled Himself and was exalted; Romans 6:1-11, dying to sin and living to righteousness with Christ