

Exiles: Finding Hope While Scattered

A Series on the Book of First Peter

Message 3 – “Perspective” (1 Peter 2:13-25)

St. Paul’s United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown

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My name is David Woolverton and I’m one of the pastors here at St. Paul’s Church. It’s my joy to share with you God’s Word for today’s service. As we prepare, would you **join me in prayer...**

Lord, open us up to Your Word, and open Your Word up to us. Teach us

what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples

that You have called us to be. In Jesus’s Name. Amen.

Today’s passage comes to us from 1 Peter 2:13-25 – and it’s a challenging one. I’d like to walk us through this passage, stopping at various points to explore some really important points in this Scripture... points that may challenge us in our walk of faith. So, let’s dive into God’s Word....

Peter starts off in verse 13 --

¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: *whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.*

As you can imagine, this is one of the hardest passages in the Bible for us to follow.

Hang in there with me, now... Let’s look at some of what Peter is teaching us.

First, Peter uses the word, “**Submit.**” Now, that’s a hard word, right? It’s actually a very important word in this letter – and in the entire New Testament. Peter uses it. Paul uses it. Jesus does it. So, it’s an important word for us as followers of Jesus.

The word Peter uses in Greek is the word, **hypotasso**. It’s a combination of two words – “*hypo*” – a prefix that means, “under,” and “*tasso*” – a verb

that means, "to order, place or appoint." The way Peter uses the word, *hypotasso* implies choice – meaning that submitting is based on a choice that we make. And it's in the Imperative tense – which means that Peter is issuing it as a command. In other words, Peter is telling those early believers **to intentionally place themselves – by choice – under those who have authority over us**. To submit is to voluntarily put ourselves under someone else's authority.

Second, notice Peter says that we are to submit ourselves "**for the Lord's sake**." This is so important. It means that our choice to submit ourselves is **not** dependent on the worthiness of the person in authority. Our choice to honor the person in authority is **not** based on their honorable nature or character. Rather, our choice to submit to those in authority is based on **our desire to honor God**. It is "*for the Lord's sake*." We are to put ourselves under the governance of those who are in positions of authority over us – in order for us to honor God.

Third, Peter says that we are to submit to "**every human authority**." In a nutshell, he's saying that to honor God, we need to honor those who are in authority over us. In our context, that means...

- Our teachers
- Our coaches
- Our employers
- Our governors
- Our president

In verse 14, he says, "*whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.*"

Hmmm... Is he crazy? The emperor? He's talking about Emperor Nero who was doing horrible things to Christians! Submit to the Roman governors? The Roman guards? ... Peter knows what he's commanding us to do.

Look at what Peter, himself, does in **Acts 5**. ...starting in verse 17...

¹⁷Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰"Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."

*27The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." 29Peter and the other apostles replied: "**We must obey God rather than human beings!** 30 The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 31God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. 32**We are witnesses of these things**, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."*

Look... Peter is telling us an incredibly important point. Why are we to submit to every human authority – regardless of their character or honor?? He writes in verse 15 –

*15For it is **God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.***

Here's the point. **Our witness of love is more important than anything else.** It's not about the human character of those in authority over us – it's about the character of Almighty God.

There may be some really bad leaders out there. There may be some really poor representatives of authority who are over us. For some, this command of Peter does not make sense. It doesn't make sense to submit ourselves under the authority of people who don't deserve our honor.

But here's the thing.... We serve a God of the Impossible, don't we? God can do whatever God wants to do. Jesus – the Son of God – endured ridicule, slander, abuse, torture, and crucifixion --- all at the hands of authority figures. And He submitted to them in order to honor God's greater purpose. God does not play by the rule book of what makes sense. **The Lord of Life has issued a command. What are we going to do about it?**

As followers of Jesus, our witness of God's love shown on the Cross and the Empty Tomb is more important than anything else.

In his letter, Peter is coaching his readers to remember **who they are, why they're here and where they're going.** They are exiles – scattered in order to be witnesses. We honor God by honoring those who are over us. When we submit to those who are in authority over us, Peter says, we are

submitting to God, to His Lordship. Our lives are to be a living testimony to God's character – not to the character of those human authority figures.

Remember: **Who we are is why we're here.**

Peter now starts to clarify and illustrate his point.

Look at verses 16-17...

1 Peter 2:16-17

¹⁶Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Look at the **contrast** here. "Live as free people." "Live as God's slaves." True freedom for the believer comes when we submit ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As followers of Jesus, we must live differently than those of the world. If, by our behavior, we look like everyone else, like everyone who does not know God... then how will we ever influence others for the gospel?

Peter says that we are first and foremost "slaves" [Greek – *doulos*] to God. We need to change the way we look at ourselves too. To use the apostle Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "*we have been bought with a price.*" That price was the precious blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross. God went to great lengths to entrust to us His message of hope and new life. We need to do as the Master has taught us.

In 1 Peter 2:18-19, Peter uses the language of slavery once more to illustrate his point. He writes:

¹⁸Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.

Here, he talks about slaves submitting to their masters. A lot of Bible commentators say that this passage is an illustration of what they call, "**household codes**" – and according to these commentators, Peter, and Paul, as well as others, use these codes to describe Christian conduct within different classes of people – adults, children, slaves, masters, husbands, wives. That's all fine and good – and those Bible scholars are a lot smarter

than I am. But I personally think that Peter is doing something more basic than that...

Slavery back in the days of Peter and Paul was not like the slavery in our African-American history here in America. We might feel the internal pressure to push back against Peter's words because it sounds like he is condoning – or at least not condemning – slavery. But it's important that we don't read into this passage meaning from our own American history. Especially since I believe Peter's actually using this illustration in a different way than we think.

I think he's actually using the relationship between household slaves and their masters as an illustration to teach ALL believers what it means to submit. By doing so, he's actually elevating in importance the role of the household slave.

More specifically, I don't think the point of this passage is about giving instruction TO household servants. I think Peter's using the slave-to-master relationship as an illustration of submission that is meant for ALL who are followers of Christ. In other words, I think Peter is reminding ALL Jesus followers that we are to see everyone else as more important than ourselves. He knows that how we treat others, especially those who abuse us or treat us unfairly, becomes our testimony for Jesus.

This is kind of like what Jesus did in the Upper Room in John 13 when He took off his clothes, put on the towel of a household servant and washed the feet of the disciples... INCLUDING JUDAS. I think Peter is remembering Jesus's words to him when He said, "*Peter, unless you let me wash your feet, you have no part with me*" (v. 8).

I think Peter is doing the same thing here in his letter – reminding the readers (including us) that we need to do the same thing that Jesus did. In John 13:15-17, Jesus told Peter and the other disciples,

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant [Greek – doulos] is greater than his master... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

In his letter, Peter brings his point back around to Jesus...

Look at verses 21-24...

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22"He

committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” ²³When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, **he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.** ²⁴“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, **so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness;** “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵For “you were like sheep going astray,” **but now** you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

This is the paradoxical teaching of Jesus – filtered through Peter, the guy who was quick to react, ready to jump in and fight... the guy who, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the guards were trying to arrest Jesus, pulled out a sword and lopped off a man’s ear.

But, you see, Jesus is calling His followers **to live differently....** To face into persecution and suffering with a view of ourselves as slaves of God’s love -- sent to people who don’t deserve that love – but to whom God is sending love through us.

Why? Peter is teaching us what he himself learned the hard way --
Changed People, Change People.

Peter’s primary concern is not about making life in the neighborhood better. His primary concern is about the transformation of the people in their relationship to Jesus. When Jesus changes a life, that changed person goes on to change how they live in the world. The witness of a life changed by Jesus is what goes on to change other people.

We are exiles here. Our “home” is in heaven. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God. So, what’s critical here on this earth, is for **our lives to testify** --- to tell the world – that **who we are in Christ is why we’re here....** that it’s not about our rights, our entitlements, or what we deserve... it’s not even about our freedoms, the freedoms we have in Christ **Rather, it’s about being light in the darkness,** a people who give ourselves away for those who have not yet experienced that gift of grace.

So, what if our governing authorities are evil? What if what they are doing goes against God’s agenda? --- Peter is not telling us to blindly obey those in charge. Just as Peter did in Acts 5, there may be times when those in authority over us may ask us to do something that violates what we believe as followers of Jesus. In those moments, we may be called upon to prayerfully choose our response of faith regardless of the ramifications – but always in light of our witness to Christ.

Peter is telling us to **obey God** – and to remember that what happened to Jesus may happen to us. When responding to our governing authorities, especially when we disagree with them, Peter is asking us to consider something very important: **“What will our actions tell others about Jesus?”**

I challenge you this week... When you feel angry at the government officials or local authorities, or even at your boss, I challenge you to ask, **“How might I respond so that my actions will testify to the love of Jesus and not just to my own opinions or wants?”**

I also challenge you this week to pray for those who are in authority over you. Our witness is vitally important. How we respond to our circumstances is telling others about Jesus. But only God can change a heart.

We honor God by honoring every human authority over us – whether or not they deserve it.

This is hard stuff. We may not like it. We may want to push back at it because we think it doesn't make sense.

But, we must remember that God does not play by the rule book of what makes sense. **The Lord of Life has issued a command. What are we going to do about it?**
