

## *A Study of First Peter*

### Thriving in the Midst of Suffering (1 Peter 2:11-25)

“Partial obedience is not obedience at all; to single out easy things that do not oppose our lusts, which are not against our reputation, therein some will do more than they need; but our obedience must be universal to all God's commandments, and that because He commands it. Empty relationships are nothing; if we profess ourselves God's servants and do not honor Him by our obedience, we take but an empty title. ” ~ Richard Sibbes

#### **I. An Introduction**

In the first part of this letter, Peter addressed our glorious salvation and the new identity we have in Christ. He now dedicates the second portion of this letter (2:11-4:11) to highlight ways in which believers live out these truths in a world that is often hostile to the things of the Lord. These practical applications of his theology call for followers of Jesus to persevere in the midst of suffering for God's glory.

#### **II. Living as Saints (2:11-4:11)**

##### A. General Command for Godly Living (2:11-12)

v. 11 - Believers are to refrain from unbridled impulses (James 1:14-15; 2 Pet 2:18). The reference to “fleshly” suggests all that which embodies self-centeredness.

v. 12 - Frequently throughout the New Testament, Christian conduct must be determined, in part, by its effects on non-believers (see Col 4:5; 1 Tim 3:7; 5:14; 6:1). Obedience is for God's glory and for the sake of the Gospel (Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 3:15-16).

As aptly noted by one commentator, “It [this command to maintain a good conduct] requires of Christians that they actively involve themselves in the life of the world rather than that they retreat from it” (Marshall, *1 Peter*, 83).

##### B. Christian Ethics and the State (2:13-17)

vv. 13-14 - The term “submission” implies obedience (see Eph 5:24). The motivation for civil obedience is far from mere self-preservation. This motivation is theologically driven.

The phrase “on account of the Lord” also limits submission, for submission can never be to anything he does not will” (Davids, *1 Peter*, 99). In other words, a Christian is responsible to all forms of rightful human authority, except when the command entails sin (see 1 Peter 3:17).

While Peter does not go as far as Paul in Romans 13, both apostles clearly indicate that public order is God's will, and that a government serves as God's servant.

vv. 15-16 - Our obedience is grounded in the will of God, in the salvation He extended towards us, and in our enslavement to Him.

v. 17 - Peter summarizes this section with four commands. Note the similarities between these commands and those previously cited in 1:13-24:

Commands of Chapter 1	Commands of Chapter 2
“set your hope” - 1:13	“live as freedmen” - 2:16
“be holy in all of your conduct” - 1:15	“honor all people . . . honor the king” - 2:17
“live in reference” - 1:17	“fear God” - 2:17
“love one another” - 1:22	“love the family of believers” - 2:17

### C. Christian Ethics and the Slave (2:18-25)

In order to best understand and apply this section to our lives, we must first address the following:

- *We need to keep in mind that slavery in the Greco-Roman world was not the same as slavery that existed in the United States.* For example, slavery in the first-century was not based upon race; it allowed for slaves to become highly trained and educated, and Roman slavery provided a means for freedom, even citizenship!
- *There are several key reasons why the New Testament writers did not advocate for the abolition of slavery.* Firstly, the early Church was far more concerned with the bigger picture, namely eternity (Rom 8:18-30). Secondly, slavery was part of the Roman legal system—a system that the New Testament writers argued was ordained by God (Rom 13). Thirdly, advocating for the removal of slavery could have resulted in individuals embracing Christianity for the wrong reasons (1 Cor 7:21-23) (see H. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 804).
- *The application of this passage to our present age must be done with caution.* Peter was writing specifically for a society where slavery was a legal institution. However, some general principles can be applied to the employee/employer relationship. Christian employees are called to serve their employers with fear, diligence, integrity, and goodwill as unto the Lord. At the end of the day, both the Christian employer and employee are accountable to a heavenly Master—the Lord. Ultimately, our behavior, whether employer or employee, should bring glory to God.

vv. 18-20 - This unconditional command for slaves to obey their masters is rooted in the promise that God will reward them (e.g., God’s favor). What exactly is the reward Peter is implying?

The term “fear” is used throughout the letter to refer to reverence for God, not human beings (1:17: 3:2, 6, 14, 16). Thus, based upon the use of this term and the immediate context, it seems that Peter is arguing that slaves are to submit to their masters because of their reverence for the Lord.

w. 21-25 - Recognizing that suffering is not a detour, but part of God’s design, Peter turns the readers’ attention to Christ as the ultimate example. One scholar lists the following guidelines from this passage (T. P. Osborne, “Guide Lines for Christian Suffering,” *Bib* 64 [1983], 407):

- He who suffers must be innocent of all wrongdoing, whether in action or word (2:22).
- He must suffer without responding in any refractory manner, thus without cursing or insulting his master (2:23).
- He who suffers unjustly is to entrust his life to Him who judges justly, in contrast to the master who judges unjustly and who inflicts unmerited punishment upon the slave (2:23c).
- He who suffers unjustly is nevertheless to persevere in a life of righteousness and correct action, because Christ’s sufferings have freed him from his former sinful way of life.
- He who suffers should not lose sight of the total confidence which he/she has placed in God—a God who Himself promises to protect them.

### III. Intersect

- A. Our commitment to the Lord must govern our conduct in all earthly relationships. All that we do, or don’t do, is because our focus is on the Lord.

1 Timothy 6:1-2 -

- B. As employees, we are called to serve with singleness of heart, not duplicitous in our disposition and act.

Ephesians 6:5-6 -

- C. Our responses to persecution and suffering speak volumes! Our reactions must display Christ!

1 Timothy 2:1-4 -

“If relief does not come in the way for which you pray, or does not come at all in this lifetime, don’t permit extended hardship to make you bitter and beaten, for it’s God’s purpose to make you better—a better portrayal of Christ, the Suffering Servant we are called to follow.” ~ Al George, “Faith and Fortitude,” 87

**For further thought . . .**

*Based upon our study this morning, you may want to spend some additional time this week reflecting on the following:*

Reread 1 Peter 2:18-25. Identify a boss, coach, or political leader with whom you find difficult submitting to his/her leadership. In what ways could you improve in showing submission to this person? Below are a few passages of Scripture to assist you in your thinking:

Ephesians 6:5-8 -

Colossians 3:22-24 -

1 Timothy 2:1-4 -

1 Timothy 6:1-2 -

2 Timothy 2:24-26 -

Spend some time this week praying for this person. Ask that the Lord grant you strength, grace, wisdom, and courage to submit to his/her leadership.