**Week 5**

***Submission – Part 1***

***1 Peter 2:13-25***

**9-10 May 2022**

**Review –** Last week we looked at the first half of chapter two and saw that we are living stones, being built together into a dwelling place for the Spirit of the Lord. At the end of that passage we saw how Peter set us up for what we will discuss for the next three weeks, the idea of being in submission—ultimately to God, but to other forms of authority as well when you are living in a culture that is hostile to your beliefs.

**To Women, for Women Only? –** There is a pronounced tendency in our Christian subculture today to believe that submission is something that is reserved for women and not for *every* follower of Christ. Jen’s hope for the upcoming weeks is that we would gain a truer understanding of what submission means for all of us and yes, for women in particular as well. This week we will look at what submission looks like within **society** and within the **workplace**. As we progress, we will look at what it looks like within the **home** and within the **church**. We are going to take our time with it.

**Actions Speak Louder Than Words –** In verse 12 of chapter 2 Peter reminded us that we need to keep our conduct honorable among unbelievers so they would see our good deeds and glorify God. Notice that he *didn’t* say, “…so they would *hear* our good *words*…” Peter is reiterating what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Let your *actions* shout the gospel.” It isn’t that we never proclaim the gospel verbally, but unbelievers will notice our actions first and discover that we are different from the others around us. At that point they will either ask you questions about why this is so…or they will reject you as they did Christ.

**Submission in General –** The dictionary says that the word “submission” means *to yield yourself to the authority or the will of another.* It means to *permit yourself to be subjected to something*, i.e. *to defer to OR consent to OR abide by the opinion or the authority of another*. We need to understand what biblical submission looks like. There are different forms of submission: there is submission to *authority* and also the general submission *one to another* that we are all called to. It is important to know in any given context which form of submission we are talking about.

**Biblical Submission –** The biblical concept of submitting to authority is connected to a literal word picture of arranging things in formation under a military commander. But biblical submission is also ALWAYS willing; it is NEVER under compulsion. That is, we willingly set ourselves under the authority of someone else. In that sense, it is very similar to the concept of obedience in our lives. We are not forced to obey God’s Law, but in joyful gratitude we can’t wait to obey Him. So when God sets an authority over us, we can’t wait to get in the right place so that we can operate as we were intended to under it. ***So a biblical definition of submission is to willingly set aside your own desires or needs to honor the desires or needs of another.*** This definition sounds very much like the first and greatest commandment, to love our neighbor as ourselves. We all want to be loved *preferentially*, beyond what we deserve. So that is what we are doing when we submit to someone else, i.e. loving them preferentially or giving them preference over ourselves.

**Common Misunderstandings About Submission –** It is just as important to know what submission is NOT. For example, *submission is* ***not******powerlessness*.** Authority is not about having power; it is about having the final say on something. Many times those in authority will delegate responsibility to those arrayed under them and may even defer to someone with less authority but more knowledge in a given area. When we say that someone is under someone else’s authority, we are not making a value statement or a power statement per se.

We also need to understand that *submission is* ***not weakness***. Jesus is the prime example of this truth. He demonstrated a perfect meekness that was neither powerlessness nor weakness, but ***strength under control***.

*Submission is* ***not blind****, and it is* ***not indiscriminate***. We are not called to submit to an authority over us who flouts God’s authority.

**Submission Within Society –** Peter begins his teaching on biblical submission with the statement that we are to “submit for the Lord’s sake to *every* human institution.” Remember that Peter was writing to new converts who were living in Asia Minor, part of the Roman empire. They lived soon after the large fire had started in Rome which Nero blamed on the Christians, so it was a very tense time. They lived among people who not only did not believe what they believed, but also saw their beliefs as an active threat to the government and to order within society.

**Two Reasons for Submitting to Governing Authorities –** The first reason is found in verse 13: we are to submit *“for the Lord’s sake.”* Too often people submit to authority because they think there is something in it for themselves. But who puts these institutions in place? Romans 13:1 tells us that it is God Himself who sets up governments.

The second reason we submit is because *it is the will of God* for us to do so. We need to recognize that God has instituted these leaders and governments for the good of society in general.

**Live as People Who Are Free –** Peter has already indicated that we should let our actions “shout the gospel;” he now reiterates that idea in verse 15 and reinforces it in verse 16: “live as people who are free.” He is *not* talking about the kind of freedom that was touted by the flower children in the ‘60’s where you can just do whatever you want if it makes you feel good. That is not Christian freedom. **The kind of freedom believers have is freedom FROM sin’s condemnation . . . and** **freedom TO serve Christ.** Romans 6:16-17 tells us that we are *all* slaves to something—either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness, joyfully obedient to the law of love. So our freedom is not freedom to be self-determined, but freedom to obey.

**Freedom Misused as a Cover-up for Evil –** Some people use “freedom” for their own ends, as a cover-up for evil. They keep looking for how close to the line they can get, thinking “it won’t hurt me”. But they don’t realize that we are involved in a spiritual *war.* These things are waging war against our soul, so we can’t dress and act and look like everybody else; we need to be dressed for *battle*.

**Live as Servants of God –** The word translated “servants” in verse 16 is literally *bond-servants* or *bond-slaves*. Peter is making the radical statement that we need to consider ourselves bond-servants, not just to Christ, but to everyone we meet. We are called to show preferential love to everyone and to go lower than they are.

**Honor the Emperor –** Verse 17 is a kind of summary statement for what Peter has just said, but it also sets the stage for him to explain that submitting to everyone *does not look the same* for everyone. He begins with “honor the emperor”. Do we do that? Living in a democracy like the USA tends to cloud this issue. It is easy for us to think that if we *didn’t* vote for the current President, then we don’t have to listen to him and we can slander him all over our Facebook page. Or if we *did* vote for him, then he had better listen to us and bend to our will (or the collective will of all the people we get to write him letters of advice). But remember that God has put the government in place. This (the USA) is not our nation: we are part of a “holy nation”. And God still sits between the cherubim, and He is not shocked at all by who sits in the White House. As the children of God, it doesn’t mean that we agree with everything that our government does. But Peter is saying that when we do disagree, we do so in a way that “honors the emperor”. There are some guidelines around how we would express our disfavor publicly. But how do we “honor the emperor” privately, when no one sees? We probably spend a lot of our time airing our grievances publicly, but **how much time do we spend on our knees in prayer**, begging God to grant wisdom and grace to those He has placed in authority over us? This is the call of the believer and our sovereign duty!

**Christ’s Example –** No one could ever accuse Jesus of not being bold in His speech and actions. He had a healing ministry; He rebuked those in the religious community for their blindness; He was not slow to tell you what He thought. But what did He NOT do? He did not stage a rebellion against the government. He did not try to overthrow Rome. He never weighed in on *anything* political during His ministry. He had a heavenly focus. Remember the time when Peter chopped off the servant’s ear as Jesus was being arrested? Jesus first calmly picked up the ear and miraculously reattached it, but then He turned to Peter and said, “Peter, no! Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.” He was quoting the law to Peter. He was saying in effect, “We will abide by the authorities that God has placed over us. This is not the place, the time, or the way for you to defend Me.” (Luke 22:50-51; John 18:10)

**Application to Us Today –** So we here in America must rethink this issue. We live in a democracy that gives us a lot of rights, and we should be grateful for that gift. The people of Peter’s day had to be very guarded in their speech lest they be mistreated. We would do well to be more guarded in how we speak as well. Are our actions shouting the gospel, or are they shouting our thinly veiled fear that we are inhabitants of a different nation than the one Peter has been talking about?

**Application to Bond Servants –** Peter moves on to address actual slaves or bond servants. The fact that Peter just seems to accept that there are slaves bothers some people. Why is he telling them how to deal with mistreatment instead of just getting rid of slavery altogether? When the Bible gives laws regarding slavery, we must remember that it was not yet time for that institution to be overturned. There is coming a day when ALL slavery will end, and Peter alludes to that. But for now the Bible puts in place measures for protecting those who are perhaps unprotected by human law. These measures give dignity to servants.

We in the USA today do not understand the *difference* between the slavery of Peter’s day and the slavery that was part of our own national history. Slavery as it existed in America involved theft of people and taking them somewhere against their will. But a bond servant in Peter’s day was someone who was bonded to a master for a set period of time. Such servants had rights under Roman law. Peter is addressing those servants who had converted to Christianity and were probably serving an unbelieving master. They had to be very careful because their beliefs could bring dishonor upon their masters. Peter has just told them that they are free spiritually, but he recognizes that they are NOT free *socially*. He realizes that they are very vulnerable, and he wants them to be able to navigate this situation.

**Christ-Like Ones –** In verses 18-20 Peter is elevating these servants by reminding them that of all the people Peter addresses, they are the ones most like Christ in the way they endure. These people had set aside their rights, and they couldn’t get them back. So the way they endured could be very Christ-like, since He was the ultimate bond servant who suffered injustice.

**Our Speech –** Peter then paints a picture of just how Christ endured His suffering. Notice how much of this picture involves *speech*. He did not *lie*. He did not *revile*. He did not *threaten*. When someone mistreats us or misrepresents us, these are precisely the three things we most want to do. We want to embellish the truth (lie) so that our side of the story looks better than it is. We want to tear the other person down with our words (revile). We want to cause division by rallying people to our side (threaten our opponent with harm). We need to remember that *any* time we have been treated unjustly, there was some other time when we got better than we deserved. We are not completely guiltless by any means, even if we are blameless in a given situation. Yet Christ was totally guiltless—and He said *nothing* when He was accused. And have you ever noticed that the more someone tries to justify herself when accused of wrong-doing, the more guilty she sounds? So Peter is giving very wise counsel here. We will often look back with regret when we have opened our mouths and tried to defend ourselves, but we will *never* look back and regret holding our tongues.

**God Will Judge Justly –** We may never get resolution, but we really don’t need it. We can entrust ourselves to the One who—unlike us—judges *justly* in every situation. We can take comfort in the fact that our Heavenly Father knows our side of the story—and that He also knows the other side far better than we do. Christ calls us to humility, so we need to **“own what’s ours and let the rest go.”** We need to remember that *no one* goes unpunished. No one! Every sin I ever committed was punished on the cross of Christ; He bore the penalty for it. And the lost? They will bear the punishment for every sin they ever commit. That fact does not give me cause to celebrate. It causes me to hold my tongue publicly, and to pray fervently for my offenders privately.

**Our Calling –** We need to find ways to honor those who govern us in society, and we need to find ways to honor those who govern us in the workplace. We also need to stop shaving the corners on “little laws” that we think do not really matter: speed limits, copyrights, taking workplace pens, talking about the boss with someone we know will agree with us, etc. ***We should be above reproach in absolutely every area of our lives and let our actions “shout the gospel”.***