

Submission - Witness to our World

1 Peter 2:13-3:12

Pastor Tim Nixon

In the short book, “Found: God’s Will” we read the story of a young man.

Picture a young man was very earnestly wanting to know God’s will for his life’s work. He’s so dedicated to God that he’s even willing to become a missionary, which seems to be the ultimate sacrifice in the eyes of some people.

But our young friend, despite his dedication, has some problems. He is a little headstrong. He seems to have trouble getting along with those in authority over him. His reasons for rebellion are very good, of course, at least in his eyes.

Finally, our young seeker – after – God’s will takes his problem to a wise pastor. “I believe God wants me to be a missionary,” he says, “but I’m not sure whether he wants me to be a home missionary or a foreign missionary.”

The pastor looks him straight in the eye. “Young man,” he says, “what you need to be first of all is a **submissionary**. You need to learn what submission means.”¹

Hard words? Perhaps. But true. But this is the point of our text this evening

Submission is a difficult topic for many, not the least is in being submissive to the Bible. We often come to the Bible as a way to proof text our own beliefs. But the wise believer always enters his Bible study with a posture of submission. We read the Bible in order to submit to it.

The Greek word translated submit is a military term that means “to fall in rank under an authority.” In the context of this evening’s passage it conveys the idea of subjecting oneself or placing oneself under another. This recognition of existing authority, coupled with a willingness to set aside one’s own personal desires, shows a deep dependence upon God, as we will see in verse 23. This submission to authority is not only in respect to God, the foremost human authority but to those appointed by him in authority.²

Let’s begin to work through this text together beginning in 1 Peter 2:13-15 in relationship to our government.

Peter does not say sue them, or protest against them. He says silence the critics by your good deeds. What is it that God calls us to do here? Submit. Scripture outlines several kinds of submission including to parents and other believers. But here Peter calls specifically for the kind of submission that makes you the best possible citizen in the society in which we live.

¹ John MacArthur, *Found: God’s Will*, Victor Books, 39-40

² Charles Swindoll, *Hope In Hurtful Times*. Word Publishing, 47-48

Peter is not simply talking about a simple submission to governments laws like do not steal and do not speed. Peter is referencing back to the Emperor Nero who burnt down 70% of the homes around his palace to build a more spacious one, and then blamed the Christians. This created an intense unjust persecution for the Christians at the hands of others. Nero ordered that many Christians be rounded up and killed. At his worst, Nero would dip Christians in tar put them on posts and light them on fire while they were still alive to light his gardens and paths. This is the perspective that Peter brings to the idea of suffering rightly at the hands of government.

Who is it that we are trying to reach? The world. If we are not the epitome of what a citizen should be in the world, we will certainly harm our testimonies. God not only commands our submission to those in authority, but he clearly tells us the reason in verse 15.

“Do you know what the critics of Christ look for in Christians? Faults! How are we going to prevent them from finding faults? Eliminate faults. We need to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

How are you going to silence your critics? By living an exemplary life within society. That is Peter’s point. The Christian is not a revolutionary. If there is a lawful way to make needed change, he takes that route. He works. He strives to be the best person he can be and to make the best contribution to society can make, but he does it within the law.

Don’t ever abuse your freedom he says in verse 16. Some of you might say that you don’t believe in that restriction. That God has told you in your heart that’s if something is wrong you need to break the law or resist that rule. But verse 17 is clear. The Bible says not to hide your maliciousness under the blanket of Christian liberty or conviction.”³

So, behave well among the world, not indulging in fleshly desires, but doing good so that even those who are inclined to slander may instead glorify God. Your behavior is observed. You may never say, “Nobody cares about what I do.” You are wrong. Someone is always observing you. And what they see may or may not lead them either toward or away from God. Much is riding on your submission to authority.

The word honor means to show outward respect in our words and deeds. This means we must guard what we say about our government leaders.

In verse 18-20 Peter moves from submission to government to submission to first century masters and for us, employers.

William Barclay sheds some historical light on first century slavery to help us understand how his readers would’ve understood these verses. He writes:

“In the time of the early church... There were as many as 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire... It was by no means only menial tasks which were performed by slaves. Doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards, or slaves. In fact, all the work of Rome was done by slaves. Slaves were not allowed to marry; but they cohabitated; and the children born of such a partnership where the property of the master, not the parents, just as the lambs born to the sheep belong to the owner of the flock, and not to the sheep.

³ John MacArthur, *Found: God’s Will*, Victor Books, 41

It would be wrong to think that the lot of slaves was always wretched and unhappy, and that they were always treated with cruelty. Many slaves were loved and trusted members of the family; but one great inescapable fact dominated the whole situation. In Roman law a slave was not a person but a thing; and he had absolutely no legal rights whatsoever. For that reason, there could be no such thing as justice where slave was concerned... Whatever a master does to a slave, undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law. His master's will was the only law.⁴

I think it would've been easy for slaves who would become Christians to think that their freedom in Christ also gave them freedom to break away from their masters. Even though Christianity gradually pervaded the culture and overcame slavery it had not done so at the time of this writing. And so Peter's letter, and other Scriptures, weren't necessarily concerned with changing the law. They were more concerned with the ultimate priority of changing the human heart. And, of course, our natural tendency is to fight back against what we consider to be unfair treatment, or those sinning against us. That attitude, however, takes away the trust in the Lordship of Christ and puts it on our own shoulders.

The Christians attitude is one of submission (v18) that is a gracious thing in the sight of God (v19-20).

“Patience while suffering what we deserve is not particularly commendable. But to graciously and kindly bear up under harsh treatment does please God. We can only do so when we are seeking God's favor. If we are all about defending our rights and standing up for ourselves, we will struggle. God's favor is on those who patiently bear abuse at work.”⁵

Do you have an unjust boss? What are you supposed to do? Submit, lovingly and willingly. There is no room at all for self-pity.

But why must I suffer and submit to the authority of the government and my employer? Peter answers this in verses 21 to 25.

Suffering unjustly is part and parcel of our calling. How do I know this? Because of the example set by Jesus himself. Jesus is this case study per se, a model, an example, a pattern, of whom we are to copy. Jesus Christ left a pattern for handling unjust treatment that involved excruciating suffering. And those who follow him are called to copy this pattern.

Jay Adams writes, “The word copy is a term used of the writings that children used to trace in learning words and writing. God's children are to trace in their lives the pattern Jesus left for them. Here is what Jesus, who steps we must follow did:

1. He committed no sin
2. No deceit was found in his mouth
3. He did not revile those who reviled him
4. He did not threaten
5. He entrusted himself to God, believing that God would treat him righteously.

⁴ William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, Westminster Press, 210-211.

⁵ Russ Kennedy, *The Effective Witness of Submissive People*, preached at Clearcreek Chapel, 28

That is the pattern, pure and simple. There is no doubt then about how Christians must deal with problems at the workplace.”⁶

Jesus always suffered ungodliness in a godly way.

You have been called to this so that you can follow in Jesus’ steps all the way to your own death. The cross is the supreme example of submission and suffering under God’s powerful hand.

And then Peter brings us to possibly the most difficult area of submission in our lives. Referring directly back to what we have just read Peter writes in chapter 3:1-6 that wives must be subject to their own husbands.

In his book, *Secrets to Inner Beauty*, Joe Aldrich writes:

“It doesn’t take long for the newlyweds “to discover that” everything in one person nobodies got.” They soon learned that a marriage license is just a learner’s permit and ask with agony, “Is there life after marriage?”

An old Arab proverb states that marriage begins with a prince kissing an angel and end with a baldheaded man looking across the table at a fat lady.

Socrates told his students, “by all means marry. If you get a good wife, twice blessed you will be. If you get a bad wife, you will become a philosopher.” Count Herman Keyserling said it well when he stated that, “the essential difficulties of life do not end, but rather begin with marriage.”⁷

Verses 3:1-6

The word “therefore” points us backwards to remind us that the overall context here begins in chapter 2:13 and continues through the end of chapter 3.

And so we continue in the context of submitting during suffering. We’ve seen that we submit as citizens in various circumstances, slaves with unfair masters or employers, Christ with unfair accusers, and now wives with unfair husbands.

Remember, submission means to fall and rank under the authority of another or to subject oneself for the purpose of obeying or pleasing another.

So in the six verses we have at least four implied imperatives.

First, in verses one and two, we see that wives must analyze their behavior.

The tendency of many Christian wives is to view their role in a conditional way that depends on the behavior of their husbands. What I mean by that is they will commit to being the kind of life they should be if their husband is the kind of man he should be. That in no way is what this passage is saying. Peter has specifically included disobedient husbands in verse one so he clearly has in mind women whose husbands are falling short of God’s standards.

⁶ Jay Adams, *Christian Counselor’s Commentary on 1 Peter*, Timeless Texts, 259

⁷ Joseph Aldrich, *Secrets to Inner Beauty*, Vision House Publishers, 87-88.

Charles Swindoll writes, “Having to exhibit godly behavior when their husbands are not, however, sometimes produces another tendency – substituting secret manipulation for a quiet spirit. This manipulation may take many forms: pouting, sulking, scheming, bargaining, nagging, preaching, coercing, humiliating. But wives who use this strategy are not trusting God to change their husband’s lives. They are trusting in themselves.”⁸

Second, in verse 3, strive for modesty in the context of winning their husband. Peter is not prohibiting women from styling their hair, wearing jewelry, or nice clothing. The idea is to bring balance and contrast with the inner adornment that we will see in verse four.

The point is that this was not to be the main concern of their lives in regard to the sinning spouse. In the Greco-Roman culture where this was written, women were devoted to superficial adornment. But these things make no contribution to the spiritual transformation of one’s spouse. Perspective here is key.

Verse 4 contrasts this external adornment with an inner attitude. While the external adorning is nice, the gentle and quiet spirit is eternal. Jay Adams writes, “some wives think they can win their husbands by their outward adornment, by dressing up and looking sexy. This is a fallacy. To win a husband, it is not outward adornment that will do the job; that can soon grow old. She should concentrate your efforts on beautifying the inner person. That is what will give the strength that we mentioned earlier, and that is what will enable her to submit during what often may be miserable conditions. These qualities, unlike jewelry, fine clothes or the latest hairstyle, are lasting, incorruptible. And every woman may have them regardless of the money she may or may not possess.”⁹

Finally, in verses 5-6, the wife should assess her attentions and affections. In Old Testament days many believing women exemplified these principles of submissive and modest godliness. Think of Ruth. Think of the Proverbs 31 woman. Peter says they adorned themselves by being submissive to their own husbands. Here Peter specifically uses Sarah as an example. The phrase “calling him Lord” simply indicates Sarah’s continual attitude of respect toward her husband Abraham.

The holy women of old put their hope in God. It is not impossible to submit to difficult and sinning husbands.

Again, Jay Adams write, “If the holy women of the past could do it, so can you. These women beautified themselves inwardly by putting their hope in God. And that is the secret of their success. Instead of fearing that the family won’t have enough to eat because the husband wastes their money, she must hope in God to provide. Instead of arguing and fighting with him about the ways in which he fails to discipline her children, she does what she is obligated to do and put your trust and hope in God to overcome any deficiencies. Instead of the fretting, handwringing, frustration, anger and tears that may have accompanied sinful behavior on the part of her husband in the past, she now entrusts herself and her family to God, placing hope not of herself,

⁸ Charles Swindoll, *Hope In Hurtful Times*. Word Publishing, 56

⁹ Jay Adams, *Christian Counselor’s Commentary on 1 Peter*, Timeless Texts, 263

her husband, or anyone else, but in God alone. This is how holy women in Old Testament times became the women they turned out to be.”¹⁰

And then in verse 7 Peter has strong words for the husband. Notice that verse seven begins with the word likewise, or “in the same way.” It refers back again to the duty of submission. But this time it is the believing husband submitting to serve his wife. Husbands submit to that duty by obeying three commands listed here:

1. **Live with your wife.** Husbands, you are responsible for the close togetherness in your relationship. Providing a good living should never become a substitute for sharing deeply in life. You must understand every room in your wife’s heart and be sensitive to her needs.
2. **Know your wife.** Husband is exhorted to live with his wife in an understanding way. The phrase literally means, “according to knowledge.” This doesn’t refer to an academic knowledge of her, but to a deep understanding of how she is put together. It involves perceiving her innermost makeup, discerning her deep-seated concerns and fears, and helping her work through them in the safety and security of your love.
3. **Honor your wife.** To grant her honor is to assign her a place of honor. That’s how husbands are to treat their wives, to honor them by assigning them the top priority on their list of human relationships, in their schedules, and most importantly in their hearts.

If for no other reason, then your prayers will be hindered if you don’t.

We end this evening with verses 8-12.

Peter concludes his point in verses 8-9 of 1 Peter 3, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”

A certain conduct is expected for the submissive Christian whether they are suffering or not. Paul has listed heart attitudes that affect our behavior and care for others. Our lives are to promote harmony. We are working toward a mindset that makes our submission to the Word and to the Lord a joy. We sympathize with a heart that identifies the suffering and struggles for those who are responsible for our own suffering. We submit with brotherly love. We are to be tenderhearted. A calloused hard heart will be unwilling to submit to the Holy Spirit’s leading and will be hostile toward others. And we do this with all humility. We look at ourselves from a Matthew 7, log and spec, point of view. Paul has warned us about how we are to respond when we are being attacked.

We are to follow the example of Christ.

We do not repay in-kind. This means when we are being sinned against, we do not respond by sinning against the other. Other people’s sins do not excuse our responses. We are not permitted to respond sinfully no matter what the aggravation. We do not revile or return insults to the one

¹⁰ Jay Adams, *Christian Counselor’s Commentary on 1 Peter*, Timeless Texts, 264

who is personally attacking us. Godly submission must put away all forms of the ungodly talk and behavior, even when we feel it is justified.

Rather, we are to respond positively, and bless. This is a very frustrating teaching for those who are being persecuted. Yet in what we do and what we say our goal is always the good of the other. Even in the midst of being sinned against, we point them, through our actions and our words, to the good God who has promised, and the glory he has assured. We do all of this so that we may inherit a blessing. And so, we will live together, as much as is up to us, in a godly humble way, with a heart for others.

Therefore, this will require us to have careful, measured responses to the unjust treatment from others and it may well require a Christlike sacrifice of self in submission to the will of God. When sinned against and afflicted by others, we must respond with grace to evil and insults.

We may summarize Peter's text this evening by reminding ourselves that our submission is designed to deliver us from sin and to set us free to live in a way that pleases God. We may not be driven by our desires and affections for justice, relief, revenge, and understanding. Instead we must be determined to see and obey God's will. We must desire God so much that we will not be shaped by our own sinful desires. And we always remember that all of life is to bring praise and glory to God.