

Introduction

Hello again. As you just saw, we are in a series through First Peter called "Tested." Peter wrote this letter to believers who, many of who were physically scattered about, and so they were literal geographical exiles, not amongst their own people or in a place they would call their homeland but also because all believers are exiles in this world, surrounded by unbelievers in a world that is fallen. So we look at the truths in this letter, and we say, "How do we as believers live as exiles, foreigners, in a world that is fallen and broken?" Our citizenship is in heaven, the Lord is our King, so that is the government, that's where our allegiance is as believers, ultimately. We believe that the truths here in First Peter apply to that aspect of our lives. We talk about being tested and the trials of life, we want to look at what the biblical response is for us... the faith response as believers should be to these types of things. Let me pray for us and our time in God's Word that He would use that for His glory and His purposes.

"God, thank you again for a time and a place to gather in Your Name. We do thank You for the grace that You have shown our country to have the freedom to gather in Your Name, God, and to do so openly. God, I pray that we would be able to celebrate that, but celebrate that in light of You as the Giver of that good gift to us, to remember that so many around our world, as Roy said earlier, do not have that freedom, and yet You are still God and You are still good. Help us to navigate those things together. God, as we look at this Scripture this morning, I pray that Your Holy Spirit would declare this truth and work this truth as Your Word is living and active... that it would stir our hearts and our minds to know You more, to surrender to Your will for our lives, and to understand what You have called us to walk through as your followers. We ask these things in the name of Jesus... Amen."

So this morning the passage is actually the second half of chapter 2 and the first few verses of chapter 3... so quite a few verses that I am going to read. They will, I believe, be on the screens. There is also a copy of the Scriptures in the seat tray in front of you, if you don't have one. We would hope that you would find a copy of the Scriptures to read along with, to dive into, to examine on your own as well. This is First Peter chapter 2, starting in verse 13:

"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a coverup for evil but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 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. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree; that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the Word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

A light and easy passage to walk through this morning... (Laughter) ...surely received and welcomed by all with open hearts and minds and smiles on our faces. I know that this passage, particularly chapter 3, verses 1 through 7, raises a lot of questions for us. There are a lot of interesting phrases in there and things to unpack and discover. This may, in your mind, be a copout, but because we have the end of chapter 2 to talk about as well, today’s topic is more zoomed out than that. I want to try to address some of those things, but I think the broader theme of authority and submission is in view here. Peter himself connects those verses in chapter 3 to the end of chapter 2 when he says “Likewise...” so that’s the theme that we are going to look at today, and I just don’t have time to dig into all those fun topics, like women being weaker vessels and men being understanding and all that kind of stuff. I believe that God has a plan for that, and I could tell you what I think about that, but that is not what I have time for this morning. I apologize for that... not too apologetically... but I do apologize for that. (Laughter) Trust me... in preparation for today, I was like, “Well... what about this? How do I explain...?” I just don’t have time to get into all of those things. The grander theme here, the meta-narrative of these two passages together... the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3... is connected. Peter does connect chapter 3 to chapter 2 when he says “Likewise.” It’s this continuation of this theme of subjecting oneself to authority and being in submission to the authorities in our lives.

I want to first establish this idea that we understand that in a broken and fallen world for the last thousands of years, that authority has been misused and abused. We understand that a fallen, sinful person does not naturally want to submit to authority... whether just or unjust. We have to try to get our minds into, “What is God’s perspective on authority and submission because the world and sinful man has really hijacked the topic and really hijacked those relationships to where they leave a bad taste in our mouth. They make us angry to think about and to consider, and we equate authority with evil or abuse and domineering, and that is not what God has intended. We want to denounce that. I want to publicly say that that is not what we’re saying God endorses or condones... that authority in itself is not evil... but we do understand that it has been abused. So if you are a victim of that... I’m sorry for that. That is not what God wants for you. That is not what God deems good for you. It’s tough to navigate. There are some sensitive topics within these things, but we have to try to get out of the worldly definitions of authority and submission to see what God has for us today. That’s my prayer as we start to look at this. Again, authority has been abused for years and years and years, so we have negative connotations with that. And on the flip side of that, we have negative connotations with submission, but we are not trying to say that that is the ideal scenario... that that is how God intends authority and submission to be.

These broken mindsets are the biggest obstacles we face as Christians when we are seeking to honor the Lord and His designs for human relationships, when it comes to authority and submission. If you’re still really hoping that we are going to dive into that husband/wife relationship and what that submission

means and doesn't mean, particularly in that relationship, let me recommend a resource to you that is not super-exhaustive, but it is a good resource that I found in preparation for today. Pastor John Piper wrote a lesson... or it's a sermon... It may be in two or three different forms, but the same outline is there, if you search on the internet... if you're familiar with the internet, and you search for "Six Things Submission Is Not" by John Piper. It is very helpful. Sometimes we get in our minds that submission means this when that is not what God has intended for submission, particularly in the husband and wife relationship. I found that to be a good resource; I wanted to recommend that to you.

As a quick example of trying to set that baseline of not all authority is evil... not all submission is bad or a sign of less value in the person who is submitting. Just to consider... you guys know Pastor Steve... right? ...A pretty good guy... He is my pastor as well. He is also my boss... as I am on staff here, and he is over the staff here. While he is in those positions of authority, he doesn't rule over me. He doesn't domineer in that relationship. He is a good example of what authority can be wielded to honor the Lord because the person or position of authority seeks the good of those over whom they have authority. That is a godly and righteous way of exercising authority because it's not a relationship where I constantly am wanting to defy what he wants and his will and his direction because he leads well. He leads graciously. He leads with, "I want what's best for you." The same way that I believe he leads the congregation when he is pastor. I believe Scripture has given him spiritual authority. God has given him spiritual authority over us as the congregation. I would hope that none of us would say, "Man... he is just a tyrant. He rules over us in a domineering and abusive way," because he wields authority, I believe, in a godly fashion. So authority in itself is not evil; it's how we use it. Submitting to authority is not weakness or an admission that we are lesser than someone else. It's just the response by faith to the role that we play in response to authority. I don't know if that helps give a baseline or not, but I hope it does.

I do believe God has assigned and ordained authority to different roles in society... government, the Church, and family. I think Scripture is consistent in this design that God has for human institutions, as we read here in First Peter. It is also consistent that all men and women are created equally in the image of God. We are all image-bearers of God to the same degree... to the same level. There is no superior or inferior in how God sees us as His creation. This very passage says, "Men and women are coheirs to God's grace." The challenge then is how do we harmonize this idea of being equal in worth and value, and yet in some relationships we are to submit to authority and follow direction and leadership when someone has authority over us. So that's the challenge. It's not an admission of saying that they are better than or more than me, but they have authority over me... so how do we do that in a godly fashion? I think that is what God has designed for us.

When we walk in this harmony... when we finally, by faith, can figure that out and do that, it declares a powerful testimony to who God is and to what He has set up in these human institutions. I'm going to look at three aspects of this godly submission that we see here in First Peter.

1. Godly Submission Is Supernatural.

The first one is that godly submission is supernatural. The submission we see commanded here in First Peter, when he says, "...be this, or do this..." that's read as an imperative... to do these things. That doesn't sound voluntary, and yet "be subject." Any command of God... We think, "Well... a command is not voluntary," but it's an opportunity to obey the Lord or disobey the Lord when He has told us to do something. That's the Christian life: pursuing God's commands by faith. When we submit by faith to God's will and do what He desires instead of what we desire, we're walking in step with the Holy Spirit and not

our flesh... which Paul writes about in Galatians. We are to walk in step with the Holy Spirit, and in doing so we won't gratify what our flesh desires. That is what we do when we obey the Lord and follow His commands.

Another grammatical thing that I would like to dive into just a little bit is that the verbs here that Peter uses here in this letter are passive. I know it's summertime, but follow me a little bit with this grammar lesson... it's that a passive verb means that we are to subject ourselves willingly to something that we receive. Passive means that the authority is exercised over us, and we submit to that. It is a passive verb and yet we are willingly surrendering. It's not that someone is forcing their will or agenda upon us with authority but that we receive and submit to that authority out of faith in the Lord.

When I say it's supernatural, you can see in verse 13 it says, submission is *"...for the Lord's sake..."* In verse 15, *"...it is the will of God..."* In verse 16, *"...it serves the Lord..."* In verses 19 and 20 *...this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.* What I mean by supernatural... sometimes we hear the word "supernatural" and we think, "We're parting the Red Sea... the earth is shaking... or we're going to convert water into wine... or the river turns to blood." We think about all of these terrific, fantastical, meta-physical signs and wonders. But supernatural really just means "God is doing something, and we are not doing it." It's not a human effort, it's a God effort. So really, the Christian life is full of millions and millions of supernatural things that God is working in us and through us. We talk about this in our Spiritual Gifts class... that a word spoken to encourage someone by faith... that stirs their faith toward Jesus is supernatural because God is using your work to work in someone else. That is only a work that He can do. So that is a supernatural effect when we do things by faith and God works.

Godly submission is supernatural in the sense that it doesn't make sense for us to submit to authority. It is not natural in our human nature and inclination to submit to authority, so when we do that it's an act of faith... meaning God is working. We are trusting the Lord to use that work and do something that He wants to do, and then it becomes a supernatural effort with a supernatural effect. It doesn't have to mean meta-physical signs and wonders. It just means God is doing something, and we aren't doing something on our own power.

Verses 18 through 21 really highlight this because he talks about the kind of submission that is not what the world would expect... as I mentioned. Peter says, "Subject ourselves even to unjust leaders." That explains the testimony of unjust suffering. This is that third way or Gospel way of living that I've talked about before where the world would say, "Okay... it's binary. If someone asks you to go a mile, you go the mile or you don't go the mile." But the Gospel response... the third way... is "Go the mile plus an extra mile." That's not a reaction the world would come up with. That is what God has called us to. Submission to authority often plays the same role... especially if it's an authority that doesn't deserve respect and honor.

So we're not calling on Christians... I don't believe we are called to sin, to violate the commands or will of God in submitting to authority, if that's what the authority is asking of us. But in just submitting to the leadership and authority that someone imposes over us... even though they are not deserving of respect... that is faith in God and that is a supernatural act when we participate in that. The will of the Lord always supersedes the will of the authorities He has placed over us. I'm not saying that if an authority tells you to sin you do that and that's honoring to God... we're not saying that at all... but to respect the authority that God has placed over you... just like He calls us to love our enemies and bless those who persecute us, and

all these things that people are not deserving of, and yet God has called us to a Gospel way of life that is supernatural and proclaims who He is.

2. Godly Submission Makes Us More Like Jesus.

So when we do this and we live this way, it's part of our sanctification. Sanctification is a big fancy word that just means that we are becoming more like Jesus. If you are alive in Christ, from the moment that you become a believer to the moment God calls you home, there is a process of sanctification where He is transforming us and conforming us more and more into the likeness of Jesus. So every opportunity for faithful obedience is an opportunity to become more like Jesus... because He lived a life of perfect faithful obedience. So when we live by faith, we become more like Jesus. We identify more with who He is... relying and trusting in the Lord. So if godly submission makes us more like Jesus, Peter says that we have been called to this kind of life and uses Jesus as the example. He says, "...that you might follow in His steps." To follow in the steps of Jesus... to go where Jesus went, we need to follow in His footsteps. We will not endure the wrath of God that Jesus took in our place on the cross, but this life will still be subject to suffering. You see, Jesus subjected Himself to earthly authorities in the punishment and the death physically on the cross, and that's the faith He has called us to and the steps He has called us to walk in.

Jesus also surrendered Himself to the wrath of God on the cross. Now that is the wrath that we don't endure as believers. But the submission to the earthly suffering that we might encounter... we are still called to. I think sometimes we get focused on the idea that Christ has won victory for us. He has... praise God and amen... but He also has called us to a life of persecution and taking up our cross daily to follow Him. So it's really tempting... there are a lot of false gospels being preached out there... to say God has won victory for us... Jesus is wearing a crown and you get that crown as well, but we miss sight of "Oh... the crown of thorns that God has called us to, as we walk that path until He calls us home."

I don't know what those people do with a Book like First Peter where it talks about "You will face trials... you will be persecuted... you will suffer..." and so a faith response is what we are called to do. It's not, "You will avoid all of this... Here's how you avoid trials and tribulation and suffering." No... it's, "How do you press into it? How do you walk through it by faith, knowing that God has a bigger plan for you and will ultimately, eternally rescue you from the effects of that suffering and persecution." But for the here and now, we walk through it. We endure it.

Often... again... we get sidetracked by the glory, the reigning with Jesus, and the inheritance that are all promised to us. Even His own closest disciples were wondering, right? "Who gets to sit at Your right hand? Who is closest to You in the Kingdom that we might reign and rule with You? We're really excited about that part." And Jesus was saying, "Do you want to walk where I'm walking? Do you understand what you're asking? Can you go where I'm going? You have to walk in My steps to get to where I am going. You will be there with Me, but you have to walk where I've walked to get there." They had lost sight of the journey and were just focusing on the end destination.

There's a little school in Scooba, Mississippi... population 732... called East Mississippi Community College. East Mississippi Community College also sometimes is called "Last Chance U" and because it is a football program where players... gifted and talented players from other programs who have been kicked out of those programs... will go to try to get back on track and pursue their athletic dreams. There's a documentary about this school, and it follows some of the student athletes that attend there. Basically, it's guys who either didn't keep up with their studies or they got into trouble with the school officials or even

sometimes the law... so they have been kicked out of the bigger, more prestigious programs that they are athletically inclined to play for, but they have not been disciplined enough to do what it takes to stay in that program. So more often than not, the common theme with these guys is they want the glory of being a star athlete at a big school, but they don't want to walk the hard path of the day-in and day-out work and discipline of going to class and doing homework and staying out of trouble. I think I can see that in us as Christians where we say, "Yeah... I want the glory of the Kingdom of Jesus, and I get to sit at the right hand and inherit all the things that He has promised me, and yet I don't want to walk the path of the cross and take it up daily to follow Him through whatever suffering that might entail." But that is what God has called us to, and we become more like Jesus when we do that.

As Peter gives the example of Christ, he says that Jesus suffered but didn't threaten. He was reviled but didn't revile in return. He continued in trusting Himself to Him who judges justly. So this faith in God by submitting to authority shows that He trusts in God's plan over His circumstances. Though we may not understand it... though it is difficult and trying and hard... that when we walk through it by faith, we are trusting in the Lord and saying that we trust His plans for us and that He is still good despite our circumstances.

To read about this truth being embraced, consider Paul... because we think, "I don't naturally desire to suffer." I don't think, "Oh man... that would be so cool if I could just go through some really, really hard stuff. That's what I want to do." That's not me... maybe that's you... But when we see this level of faith in Paul who wrote about his desire to share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings because he knew that it would be an opportunity to respond in faith to what God had called him to and an opportunity to identify with His Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So that as Christ suffered, Paul said, "Man... when I suffer by faith, trusting in the Lord... whatever I submit myself to that is hard, I know that I'm becoming more like Jesus. Any opportunity to press into Jesus and to know Him more and to let Him be glorified, I rejoice in that." That is an extreme level of faith, but I believe that is what God can do in us, as we walk by faith in Him, through whatever He calls us to. And that's Jesus who deserved zero suffering and endured the utmost suffering. So when we suffer, especially unjustly, we have opportunity to display the character of our Savior Jesus Christ. He could have called down armies of angels to destroy His persecutors and set up shop with that earthly Kingdom, and yet He subjected Himself to suffering as a means of faith in God, trusting Himself to Him who is superior to those who were persecuting Him. So this life of suffering and humility is an expression of trust in God... the Father's will being greater than our will, as we defer to that.

3. Godly Submission Points People To God.

Peter here is calling us to Christ-likeness and subjecting ourselves to authority as an act of faith. If God has called us to this submission, our submission shows we trust His plans over ours. Trusting in the authority of headship of others is an act of faith that says, "We trust God's omniscience in allowing that authority in our lives.

I got to officiate a wedding yesterday, and we went through that passage in Ephesians 5 that talks about wives submitting to husbands and husbands being the head over their wives. It doesn't mean that husbands get to rule over their wives or domineer or dominate their wives. It means that they lead by serving first. They take the hits for the family. It doesn't mean that they are more capable or better or worth more or more valuable than their wives. It just means that in the family ... the marriage relationship... God has called husbands to lead by serving first. When a wife submits and recognizes that leadership, that headship, it's an act of faith saying, "Well... I may not see, God, what Your plan is in this, but as You have

ordained it, my faith in trusting my husband is actually faith in You, God... in the relationship that You have ordained between us."

When we display these lives of faith, when we walk by faith and do these things, we are going to point people to God. Godly submission points people to God. It's a testimony that we proclaim, any time that we live by faith. We proclaim His power to transform others just as He has transformed us.

In this specific passage in chapter 3 of First Peter, he is talking about a believing wife... a Christian wife... who has an unbelieving husband. His instruction to her is not to get out of the marriage as quickly as possible or to abandon that marriage but to stay in that relationship, that your life of faith might draw your husband to the Lord. That is a level of faith that proclaims, again, the testimony of what God can do in our lives. Now hear me... this is not an endorsement to stay in an abusive relationship. This is an exhortation to commit to winning your lost spouse. A hard truth that I believe Scripture points us to is that an unhappy marriage is not a licence to leave the marriage. I can't make that call for you about where the unhappiness is coming from, but it might be a form of testing to be endured as an opportunity to become more like Jesus. If you think you are in that situation... if you think that might apply to you, please confide in trusted believers or biblical counselors to help you evaluate that because this could go a lot of different directions. Conflict in marriage may come from a million different things, and if you have kids or pets or a job or a bank account... a million and five different things. But I don't think we are called to tolerate abuse and to press into that as if that is good for us. That's not what I'm saying at all. Some of the conflicts may be on us... they may be our own responsibility. So... before you hear this passage and try to apply it to your situation and say, "My marriage troubles are just unjust suffering that I've been called to walk through, and I am the Christ figure... the martyr... in this relationship." Explore that a little bit. Again, seek counsel on that... seek the Lord on that, that you might walk through that.

What Peter is saying here is that the converted spouse married to the unbelieving spouse is "salt and light." And in that relationship, the believer is a missionary to the unbeliever. God has called all of us as believers to be missionaries to the lost. God has called all of us as believers to be ministers to fellow believers. We are salt and light... missionaries and ministers... depending on the relationship that God has allowed us to be a part of. They are all opportunity to point people to God... all of our relationships. If we live by faith, if we do what God has called us to in interacting with others, it's an opportunity to point people to Him... that they might be drawn to Him. Before we become missionaries or ministers, we have to be alive in Christ. There's a lot of temptation sometimes to try to transform the behavior of our lives, to line it up with a church culture or moral lifestyle. That is not a life of faith. It's not a life of transformation. When we talk about submitting to authorities by faith, an act of faith in God, we need to make sure that we've established that first ultimate submission to the authority of Jesus Christ in our lives... that we have been born again... that we have been given life by the Holy Spirit... that we've been regenerated, as we read in Scripture, by the power that only God has to do in our lives. So when it comes time to consider submission to authority and submitting and surrendering to those who are over us, the first question you have to ask is "Have I surrendered to the Lord? Have I ever placed faith in Him? Have I ever trusted my life over to Him to say, 'God you are the ultimate authority... I have no hope in this life or the next apart from Jesus Christ.' I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. I believe He lived a perfect, sinless life. I believe that His death on the cross pays for sin like mine, and if I trust in Him and believe in that, not just in word only but I believe in that in my heart of hearts, I will be saved. I am no longer condemned. I will spend eternity in the presence of God and fellowshiping with Him, even though I still may walk a path of suffering and persecution in this life." That is the first step of submission to authority. Yet for the believer, we are still called to faith, to surrender daily to what God has called us to. When Christ said, "Take up your cross daily." So as believers

we are still by faith to return to the cross every day... not to seek salvation again, as we did for the first time, but to be reminded that it's not us who live but Christ who lives in us. It's only by His grace and power that we can endure and face the rest of our days. So faith is the call to unbelievers and believers alike... "Will I surrender to God's will for my life? Will I, by faith, entrust my plans, my will, my aspirations to God and what He has done... knowing that I cannot but knowing that God can and has in Jesus Christ." That is faith. That is faith that saves and faith that perseveres for those who are saved. And that's the call today. Who do you need to submit to today? Who do you need to surrender to today? I pray that you would submit and surrender to who that is. Let's pray.

"God, I believe Your Word is clear and plain on the fact that we have no hope in this life or the next apart from Jesus Christ. God, it's my prayer that if there is anyone in here who has not surrendered their life to You... has not initiated a relationship with You... has not been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, by faith in Jesus Christ, God, that today would be the day of salvation for them... that You would stir in their heart... God that You would draw them to Yourself, that they might begin this walk that we talked about today. Not a walk that is easy... it may be difficult and hard, and yet we can still proclaim at the end of it all, "It is well with my soul." Physically I may be hurt... I may be harmed... financially, I may be struggling. The circumstances of this world are still real and still devastating, and yet in Christ we can still claim, "It is well with my soul." That, God, is what we believe matters above all. I pray Lord that You would work in our hearts and minds. Reveal to us where we need to surrender. Give us the faith to respond. Amen."