

Radical Submission 1 Peter 2:13-25

1 Peter 2:13-25 Introduction

A synopsis of the Emperor Nero's life:

- He was born in 37 A.D. His great-uncle Claudius was the emperor. After his father's death, his mother married her uncle, the emperor Claudius. She persuaded him to name Nero his successor rather than his own son. When Claudius died, it was thought that she had him poisoned.
- Nero ascended to the throne at 17, repeatedly resisted his controlling mother and ultimately had her killed. He spent extravagantly on his own artistic pursuits and behaved in ways thought inappropriate, even by the tolerant standards allowed to Roman emperors.
- He soon began executing opponents. One army commander was executed for speaking badly of him at a party. Another politician was sent into exile after he wrote a book that was critical of the Senate. More rivals were executed as Nero worked to advance his own powerful position.
- Christians then fell into his disfavor, so he began torturing and executing them as well.
- Peter and Paul were both among his victims. In due course, the empire revolted.
- Nero took his own life in the year 68 at the tender age of 30.
- In this passage we will hear Peter's instructions regarding the Christian attitude toward authority – and it is extremely instructive to us. Writing from Rome, and living under the tyranny of a maniac who would later literally crucify him, he tells us to submit.

Submission should be our default attitude, but not because we are weak, inferior, or fearful. We submit because we are followers of Christ.

1 Peter 2:13-25 Outline

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Submit to Authority 2:13-17

- 2:13-14 ordinance of man The translation "institution" as in the NKJV footnote is better. Equally good are:
 - Human institution ESV, NASB
 - Human authority NLT, NIV, HCSB

- 2:13-14 ordinance of man The translation “institution” as in the NKJV footnote is better.
- The Greek word *ktisis* refers to anything that is created, founded or formed.
- An *ordinance* is something more like a rule, law or regulation.
- The distinction is important, as governments sometimes outlaw the Bible, worship of God, preaching or teaching about Jesus, etc.
- We submit to institutions and authorities, not because they are always in the right, but *for the Lord’s sake*. We do it for Jesus, not for the authority itself.
- The “king” Peter refers to would have been the emperor Nero, the man we talked about earlier, the one who put Peter to death for no particular reason outside his own hatred.
- The “governors” would have been the rulers out in the provinces – where Peter’s first readers were living at the time. One key responsibility of these lesser ruling officials was to maintain the public order in the name of Rome.
- Maintaining order is, of course, a primary function of government even today.
- 2:15-16 Peter assumes rightly that Christians will be criticized simply for who they are and what they believe. Ignorant people will inevitably say foolish things about us.
- Our good orderly submissive behavior is designed to keep such criticism from ever gaining any traction.
- As far as this world is concerned, we are totally free, but we should consider ourselves slaves to God. Again, we are not inferior people. Remember what Peter just told us back in 2:9-10.
- The Palestinian zealots of this day said they served God alone and used this as a pretext to kill Roman soldiers and collaborating Jews.
- The ancient stoics sought freedom from the pains and pleasures of life.
- Buddhists, who already existed by this time in Asia, seek freedom from earthly desires.
- There are those who are generally just rebels who seek freedom, but soon end up in bondage to their own impulses. Peter would have us use our freedom to freely become slaves of God.
- Paul says something very similar.
 - See Gal 5:13-14
- 2:17 Peter’s choice of words here is very subtle, so pay attention.
- All people deserve honor or esteem. Fellow Christians especially deserve our love.
- God alone should be feared.
- The king, or emperor, should be honored, just like everyone else – not especially feared or loved. This puts the king on the level of other humans – in a day when non-Christians viewed him as at least semi-divine. Submission to the king is based not on fear of him, but on fear of God who appoints kings.

Submit to Your Boss 2:18-20

- 2:18 Back in v.16 Peter just told us that we should all consider ourselves slaves of God.
- The word he uses for servant here is different, and points to those who serve in a house.
- Peter makes a distinction, using the stronger word for slavery towards God.
- In that culture slaves were the largest social class, but Peter sees God as the highest authority.

- To be fair, most slaves in the Roman world were better off than slaves in the pre-Civil War American south. They included not only those with lower duties, but many people that we would consider managers, professionals and government civil servants. Their service was still involuntary and they were not always treated well.

- Other similar “duty codes” of that day, such as those of the Stoics, put no moral demands on slaves – only on masters. This is because they didn’t consider slaves full persons and therefore slaves had no real moral responsibility. They obeyed to save their own skin – not out of any perceived reverence toward God.

- For Peter and other Christians, slaves were equal before God with all other people, including their masters, the governors and the emperor. Peter speaks to them as fellow Christians.
- When he speaks of “all fear” he is referring to the fear of God, using the same word for fear he just used in the previous verse.
- Aristotle had argued earlier that injustice could never be done to a slave, for the slave was mere property. Peter sees that a submissive slave may suffer wrongly, but does not counsel rebellion.
- Slaves are to submit to masters not out of the fear of man, but out of conscience before God, even if they suffer as a result.

- Bible commentator Edmund Clowney explains:
 - *“It is the privilege of those who are sons and daughters of the Most High to imitate the magnificence of their Father’s mercy. They rise above simple justice to reflect God’s goodness and love. Unthreatened by evil, they can overcome evil with good, and in the midst of suffering show mercy to those who would show no mercy toward them.”*

- 2:19-20 In a culture like ours, in which people pride themselves on demanding their rights and being assertive is considered a virtue, Peter’s attitude looks positively crazy.
- Consider your own workplace. What if the Christians were all the hardest working people with the highest level of integrity and the greatest loyalty to the boss?

Look to the Example of Christ 2:21-25

- 2:21 This is where the submission becomes truly radical.
- Before we consider this further, we need to remind ourselves that Peter wasn’t born thinking this way. He learned it from Jesus. See Matthew 16:21-27

- The word example that Peter uses refers specifically to a pattern to be traced.
 - It can mean an artist's sketch that was later to be filled in – like a paint-by-number.
 - Most literally, it refers to samples of letters that children would imitate, like a Greek version of the English "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog."
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- Peter is not trying to convince us that unjust suffering is a good thing in itself.
 - It becomes good only in the context of the sufferings of Christ. We gain no merit by suffering unjustly. We gain holiness as we are conformed to the image of Christ.
 - Our goal is not to avoid suffering, but to become as much like Jesus as possible.
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- 2:22-25 This whole section is permeated with references to the prophecies pointing to Christ from Isaiah. We will close with that passage in a little bit.
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- 2:24 This verse contains several important doctrinal truths.
 - Jesus bore our sins in His own body. Theologically this is called substitutionary atonement. We sinned. He died.
 - Peter uses the word tree instead of cross following a Jewish tradition that points to Deuteronomy 21:22-23, where a man hanged on a tree was considered accursed by God.
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- Jesus died not only as our substitute and our example, but as our representative.
 - He died literally *bearing our sins*. We who believe died figuratively *to sins*.
 - Sin no longer has any power over us – except of course that which we give it.
 - Dead slaves no longer have to submit to their old masters.
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- 2:25 Jesus went to the cross suffering quietly like a sheep.
 - We were like sheep as well, but only in that they can easily get lost when they have no one to properly lead them. We have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.
 - This is where we truly belong.

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1 Peter 2:13-25 Conclusions

We submit to authority.

- The position of authority or office deserves our respect even when the official, the one who holds the office, may not. Wayne Grudem explains:
 - *“Though the persons exercising authority in a fallen world are necessarily sinful, such lines of authority have been established by God and must be respected.”*
- Jesus could submit to Pilate to the point of crucifixion, but in so doing He fulfilled the plan of God. Peter practiced what he preached.
- Remember Nero? Origen says: *“Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer.”*

We submit to our boss.

- It would be so terrific if Christians were always thought of as the best employees anyone could ever have. Honesty, integrity, diligence and a good attitude are all things that any employer would be happy to see in employees.
- All of these things are consistent with a biblical approach to our work.

We submit to unjust suffering.

- This is from William Lane Craig:
 - *“This life is but the cramped and narrow foyer opening up into the great hall of God’s eternity ... When God asks His children to bear horrible suffering in this life, it is only with the prospect of a heavenly joy and recompense that is beyond all comprehension.”*

We look to the example of Christ.

- Jesus left us an example of radical submission.
- Peter had a passage from Isaiah in mind when he wrote about Jesus in this chapter.
- Let’s close with Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12.