

**STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST PETER**  
**SUBMITTING AND SUFFERING LIKE JESUS!**

Read 1 Peter 2:11-23

**Introduction.**

Peter has just reminded his readers of who they are: a chosen people, a royal nation, a holy priesthood, living stones built into a spiritual temple, citizens of the Kingdom of God, who for a little while are living in exile in a foreign land. We have been exhorted to live such good lives among the pagans that they will glorify God because of our good deeds. Now Peter begins to flesh out just what kinds of lives we are called to live in this world. In a word, lives of humble submission in an unjust world, following the pattern of Christ himself.

**Abstain from Fleshly Lusts.**

*“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (vv11-12)*

We can only abstain from fleshly lusts as we live as sojourners and pilgrims, as those who recognize that this world is not their home, and that they have a home and a citizenship in heaven. Peter understands that these fleshly lusts... war against the soul. To be a Christian means to fight against the lusts of the flesh, and the battle continues as long as we live in this flesh.

It is easy to see how the pursuit of fleshly lusts can destroy our physical body. Just ask the alcoholic dying of liver disease or ask the sexually immoral person or one of the 350,000 people on this earth who contracted a sexually transmitted disease in the last 24 hours. But Peter reminds us that fleshly lusts also war against the soul. Some escape disease in the physical body when they sin, but the disease and death of the inner man is a penalty that no one given over to the flesh escapes.

This kind of godly living makes our conduct honourable among those who don't know God yet. Though we can expect that they will speak against you as evildoers, they can still be brought to glorify God by seeing our godly conduct.

The day of visitation is probably a reference to their ultimate meeting with God, either when they go to meet Him or when He comes to meet them. The idea is that the Gentiles might be persuaded to become Christians by seeing the lives of other Christians, and that they would glorify God when they meet Him instead of cowering before His holy judgment. Without a doubt, that the day of visitation means a time in which punishment should be inflicted, is plain from Isaiah 10:3: *And what will ye do in the DAY of VISITATION, and in the desolation which shall come from afar? To whom will ye flee for help? And where will ye leave your glory?*

**Submission to the Government**

*“Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.” (vv13-14)*

Christians are called upon to submit to the constituted civil authorities on earth. "Submit yourselves" (NIV, KJV) or "accept the authority of" (NRSV) is the Greek verb *hypotassō*, which means "to subject oneself, to be subservient, to submit voluntarily."

Why should we submit? Peter now points to the theological basis of our submission: "For the Lord's sake" Why is the Lord interested in our submission? For two reasons:

1. **He has set in place civil institutions to govern and order society.** God has placed people in authority to punish wrong behaviour and encourage right behaviour, that is, to set up just societies. See more about this in Romans 13:1-6.
2. **How we act as Christians reflects directly upon Jesus and his reputation.**

If all Christians had been rebels, Christianity would soon have been crushed as against society. If it became known that Christian slaves were unreliable and unusable, it would reflect upon Christ himself. Peter wrote this in the days of the Roman Empire, which was not a democracy and no special friend to Christians. Yet he still recognized the legitimate authority of the Roman government.

### **Do Good as Servants of God**

*"For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God." (vv15-16)*

*"Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order. It is God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules. Treat everyone you meet with dignity. Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government." (vv15-17 MSG)*

Christians were often a misunderstood group in the first century Roman empire. Sometimes they were confused with Jews, who had acquired certain rights. But sometimes they were despised as atheists because they refused to acknowledge or worship the Roman deities -- including the emperor. People who refused to worship the state's gods could be viewed as either scum, subversive, or even against the state. Ignorant talk about Christians abounded in some quarters. When Rome caught fire in 65 AD, Emperor Nero blamed the Christians, since he thought the populace would believe it. Christians had a long way to go in earning a reputation for right living hence Peter commands.

As much as Peter is commanding that we be submissive, he also points out that we are free people, but we choose voluntarily to obey God. We are free from sin's oppression and penalty. Free from guilt. Free from a hopeless quest to live such perfect lives that we might somehow achieve righteousness on our own. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

There are always some Christians who misinterpret Christian freedom as license to do whatever they like, an excuse to live any old way. Peter warns against using Christian freedom as a "cover-up" (NIV), "cloak" (KJV), or "pretext" (NRSV). But the way to experience this freedom is not through independence of Jesus, but obedience to Jesus and trust in him, Peter reminds us. We are "bondservants of God." "Bondservants" is the Greek noun *doulos*, "slave," denoting compulsory service.

### **Submission to Masters**

*"Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh." (vv17-18)*

In the first century, slavery was very common. While people weren't as often being taken into slavery in war and conquest, many had been born to slave parents. This meant that they were tied economically to their owners. They would be paid something but were not free to leave unless they could purchase their

full manumission or papers proving their freedom at one time. Many slaves were well-educated and served their masters in highly responsible trades and professions.

The command to submit to masters isn't just to those who work for masters that are good and gentle, but also to those who are harsh. If we must endure hardship because of our Christian standards, it is then commendable before God.

### Submission to Unjust Employers

*“Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.” (vv18-20)*

Things are pretty easy when your boss is wise and honest. But what about the fool, the incompetent, and the morally bankrupt? Have you ever worked for one of them? I don't think Peter is talking especially about physically violent bosses, though he mentions a beating in verse 20. I think he is talking about those who are cruel, unfair, who don't appreciate your hard work. Bosses who promote their favourites and pass over others. Bosses who take advantage of their authority to intimidate and bombast their workers. Bosses who don't pay fairly. Crooked, morally corrupt bosses.

Peter makes it very clear here that the standard for our attitude and behaviour is God's pleasure. We work for God's delight! "Commendable" (NIV), "thankworthy" (KJV), "a credit to you" (NRSV) is the Greek "*charis*", here signifying "response to generosity or beneficence, thanks, gratitude."

Can we cheat, steal, and lie for our bosses? No. We are to submit to them in those things for which they rightfully direct our actions. But when they ask us to go against our conscience, against God's commands, their authority to command ends. We must humbly decline, no matter what the consequences. We live our lives "conscious of God." With that spiritual awareness of God's presence with us, we can live as children of God in a dark place. We can continue in spite of the pressure. "Bear up under" (NIV) or "endure" (KJV, NRSV) in verse 19 is the Greek noun "*hypopherō*", "bear up under trouble, difficulty, submit to, endure something."

### Christ's Example of Suffering

*“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (vv21-23)*

Jesus is our example as someone who endured punishment unjustly. When He was reviled Jesus did not revile in return, but in His sufferings, He committed Himself to the Father. We are to look at him and then follow in his footprints, his steps. "Steps" is the Greek noun "*ichnos*", "footprint," figuratively, "follow in someone's footsteps."

Exactly what did Jesus do when under the pressure of unjust rulers and soldiers, Pharisees and other religious enemies? What he didn't do is remarkable:

1. **He didn't sin with his words.** That is so incredibly hard to achieve when evil people are badgering us!

2. **He didn't deceive his enemies.** In self-defence, sometimes we resort to half-truths. Not Jesus. He was open and honest under pressure, even though he knew his words would be twisted by his enemies.
3. **He didn't retaliate.** "Retaliate" (NIV) is the Greek verb *antiloideō*, "revile in return." The saying, "turnabout is fair play," doesn't come from the Bible, but from the book of human weakness. There's a great satisfaction in telling someone off. Jesus resisted the temptation.
4. **He didn't threaten.** "Threaten" (KJV, NRSV) is the Greek verb *apeileō*, "threaten, warn someone." I can hear Christians railing after their persecutors -- "God is going to send you to hell for this!" That isn't the Spirit of God, but a spirit of hatred. If we really understand hell, we'll only mention it with tears and sorrow for those who will go there, not gloating. We aren't to threaten, for it brings great disrepute upon the name of Christ!
5. **He did trust his Father.** "Entrusted" (NIV, NRSV) or "committed" (KJV) is the Greek verb *paradidōmi*, "to entrust for care or preservation, give over, commend, commit." Jesus was at peace under pressure, persecution, and suffering because he trusted his Father to right all wrongs, to take care of his spirit, and to bring about the Father's perfect will for all mankind. We must claim that peace that comes only through trust.

