



# Ambassadors of Heaven

## Part II

Sunday February 14<sup>th</sup> 2021

1 Peter 2:11-20 (ESV) Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

<sup>18</sup> Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. <sup>19</sup> For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> 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.

**Introduction:** Peter was eager for God's people to demonstrate distinctive, obedient behavior in order to convince critics of their faith. In this passage he addresses the importance of submission to those in authority even when they treat us unfairly.

The first thing I want you to notice is that Peter is not writing this to challenge or change cultural norms, many of which he disagreed with. He wrote to encourage the believers to conduct themselves as Christ followers even when they find themselves in situations and systems that are difficult and unfair.

They could do this if they looked to Jesus as a role model.

### **Jesus suffered unfairly.**

1 Peter 2:21-23 (ESV) 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. <sup>22</sup>He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup>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.

Jesus suffered unfairly at the hands of jealous Jewish religious leaders who falsely accused Him of blasphemy against God, and of leading a rebellion against Caesar. He also suffered unfairly at hands of the Roman governmental leaders who sentenced him to be beaten and crucified. Yet, he didn't fight, he didn't sin, he didn't curse people out, He simply entrusted Himself to God who judges justly.

If we are to represent Christ as ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven then we must learn to maintain Christlikeness even when we find ourselves under leadership and systems that are unfair or unjust.

Peter writes that we are called to respond in Christlike manner, for the Lord's sake.

### **We are to be subject for the Lord's sake to authorities**

1 Peter 2:13-15 (ESV) Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup>or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup>For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

Keep in mind that when Peter writes this, it is in context of the reign of Nero, the emperor of Rome. Nero's name has become synonymous with evil, as historic accounts have accused him of killing his stepbrother, his wife and his mother, as well persecuting Christians and instigating the devastating Great Fire of Rome in AD64.

Nevertheless, Peter is stating clearly that we should do all that we can to obey civil authorities for the Lord's sake. However, this doesn't mean that we violate the "higher laws" of God nor the lordship of Jesus Christ. It was Peter himself when standing on trial before the Sanhedrin who said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)

When man's laws come into conflict with God's laws, we must always go with God. Jesus is our Lord and King. We are His servants. We are citizens and ambassadors of His kingdom.

Peter himself would eventually, not long after writing this letter be martyred in Rome for the sake of Christ.

We are not called to arm ourselves and start a revolution against the government we are called to dress ourselves in Christlikeness and spread the gospel of the kingdom. We are called to honor, obey and pray for those in authority. This is the will of God.

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1 Timothy 2:1-4 (ESV) First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

### **Live as people who are free**

1 Peter 2:16 (ESV) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

We must not use the liberty Christ gave us to do things that subvert and hinder the advancement of the gospel. We are first and foremost kingdom citizens, ambassadors of heaven who are called to effect change in the world by putting on Christ and employing ourselves to preaching of the gospel.

The second thing Peter addresses in this passage is the issue of those believers who have experienced Christ but find themselves under the power of unfair masters.

### **Be subject to your masters with all respect**

1 Peter 2:18-19 (ESV) Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. <sup>19</sup> For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

Peter insists that God's will for servants is the same as His will for everyone under any kind of human authority: Don't make it about your master; make it about God.

Remember that his goal in writing is not, to start a revolution by challenging the political or social systems of their time but, to encourage the believers to represent Christ as ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven, even when they find themselves under leadership and systems that are unfair or unjust.

### **The Christian tradition regarding slavery finds its earliest expression in Paul:**

*In Christ, all distinctions of race, gender, and social status have been rendered nonexistent.*

Galatians 3:28 (ESV) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 12:13 (ESV) For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 7:22 (ESV) For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise, he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ.

The gospel is not for the elite or the underprivileged, it is not for a specific race or nation, it is not for the affluent or poor, it is not for the black or the white, it is for all the world (John 3:16).

The Gospel impacts lives at every level in society and brings freedom to all who place their faith in Christ.

### **Because of the power of the Gospel we are not who we used to be.**

1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This message of hope is the one that changed the lives of those who found themselves under the service of a task master. For the people coming to faith and understanding their freedom in Christ, there was a potential for rebellion. "I am now free; I don't have to do that anymore."

As a matter of fact, a lot of the slander that Peter referred to had to do with the idea that Christians were being accused of being rebellious against government and leadership.

This is why Peter wrote, *"Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God."* (1 Peter 2:16)

Peter is saying to them, "Yes, it is true you are free in Christ, but you are not free to sin; you are not free to rebel. You are free to be a bondservant to Christ." Therefore, conduct yourselves as a representative and ambassador of Christ.

The point is not social conformity; the point he is making is to live in this world to the extent that is possible without compromising faith. Yet, in those situations where our Christian calling goes against social customs and political expectations, then we are to be ready to suffer, as Jesus did, rather than to forsake the faith.

1 Peter 2:19-20 (ESV) For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup>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.

As followers of Christ we are to respond rightly, not only to those that are kind and gentle, that's easy to do. We are to respond rightly to those that treat us unfairly. A Christlike response reflects the reality of the grace story in our own lives.

Peter is saying, if you are conscious of what God did for you, then he is asking you to offer the same to those that treat you unfairly.

1 Peter 2:21-23 (Living Bible) This suffering is all part of the work God has given you. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps: <sup>22</sup>He never sinned, never told a lie, <sup>23</sup>never answered back when insulted; when he suffered he did not threaten to get even; he left his case in the hands of God who always judges fairly.

**Application:** Most of us are subordinates at our jobs. The scriptures teach that we are to be submissive to those who are over us whether they are kind or unkind. As employees we should do our job with honor and integrity.

Remember that your relationship with God is far more important than your relationship with your boss. There may be times that you are treated unfairly. Human tendency is to fight back and to demand our rights. But that is the natural response of the unsaved person. Although we may exercise our rights to report and stand against bias and prejudice, that doesn't give us the right to behave in an unchristian manner.

**As Christ followers we must do much more than those who are not.**

Luke 6:32-33 (NLT) "If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! <sup>33</sup>And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much!

Anybody can fight back; it takes a Spirit-filled Christian to submit and let God fight his battles.

Romans 12:16-21 (NLT) Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! <sup>17</sup>Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. <sup>18</sup>Do all that you can to

live in peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. <sup>20</sup> Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." <sup>21</sup> Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

**Conclusion:** If we are to represent Christ as ambassadors of the kingdom of heaven then we must learn to maintain Christlikeness even when we find ourselves under leadership and systems that are unfair or unjust.

As followers of Christ we are to respond rightly, not only to those that are kind and gentle, that's easy to do. We are to respond rightly to those that treat us unfairly. A Christlike response reflects the reality of the grace story in our own lives.

1 Peter 2:24-25 (ESV) 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. <sup>25</sup> For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.