

XX. I Peter in Biblical Perspective
The Elect in the Exile
“The Sojourner’s Journey—Submission, Part 2”
I Peter 2:18–21
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Our study will be in I Peter 2:18–21 but I want to set the context by going back to the beginning of this series of Gospel commands that begin in verse 11. I Peter 2:11–17 says [11] *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. [12] 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.*

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

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The year is 1986 and Briarwood had just sent me to Charlotte, North Carolina to plant a presbytery and later we started another one and were thinking about a third because of the growth of the university there. I received a phone call from an elder at an independent church who had been listening to our radio program ‘In Perspective’ and he wanted to know how their church could come into the PCA. As a result God gave us a second church plant through that but initially he wanted me to come over and talk to their church and their elders. Our church gave me permission to go over and preach one Sunday and then have a Q&A afterwards but something happened while I was preaching.

I began to notice a man who seemed to be hiding from me but he would peek around the corner every so often. I did notice he had a beard but I could tell he was purposefully hiding from me. The service ended and then it was time for the Q&A. During this time the man raised his hand and said “Harry L. Reeder the third.” I said ‘Yes sir.’ He said ‘Are you Ike Reeder?’ As soon as he said that I knew it was a blast from the past and I recognized him. It was one of my football coaches and also my geometry teacher where I learned things like axioms. After I told him I was Ike Reeder he said ‘What happened to you?’ That was an interesting moment where I got to tell him what happened to me with amazing grace.

Doesn’t that kind of touch something for all of us? It did for me that day. We have been talking about having a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship and we have said don’t go immediately into telling and selling but start by asking questions and listen but let’s go a step further. What kind of a life might the Lord give us in His grace where we don’t even have to ask the questions but they will ask us? Like when this coach said to me ‘what happened to you?’

I know that when we get converted there are some significant changes that happen in us and one of those things is the joy of the Lord – the joy of salvation, the joy of eternal life, the joy of a changed life, the joy of being with the Lord, the joy of all those Gospel blessings. This joy starts working in a powerful way where we just want to tell everybody but something else

happens. That is, now we know that our life counts for something. It is no longer vanity or emptiness but it really counts for something. We want God to use us to make an impact but to make a difference you have to be different. That's what makes salt, salt. If salt is just like what you are putting it in then it's no good. Salt is something different.

To be different doesn't mean we have to isolate ourselves from the world. We are supposed to be in the world but we're not supposed to let the world into us. Where it is in us we're supposed to start taking it out in our lives by God's grace and for His glory. This isn't to be saved but we do it because we love our Savior. God make us different. I want to be in the world but not like the world. It is where we are different that causes people to ask us 'why do you respond differently to this in the office than everyone else' or 'why do you conduct yourself differently on the athletic team?' or 'why are you different in a response to a teacher when asked a question?' or 'why are you different when you hold an office of leadership in some organization?' 'What is it that makes you different?'

This is exactly where Peter is aiming, even though he is writing from Rome, never met these people but responding to their request and 3 to 5 years away from his death. But he knows who Jesus is, who they are and what Jesus will do in them because of what Jesus had done in him. So Peter is discipling them through this letter and we see it by the first word from the text which was 'beloved' and that was short for elect exiles which he used in the previous chapter. He tells them who they are in Christ and what God has called them to do for Him as they are exiles in this world. He has transferred them out of this world into His Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Now they are being placed in the dispersion among all the nations.

He then tells them how to live for Him. He first tells them they are loved by God and they are to obey Him because they love Him. He tells them just how much the love of God has been poured out upon them through the Gospel blessings he gives them in I Peter 1. You have been born again by an imperishable Seed, the Son of God and justified by the imperishable blood of Christ. You have a great inheritance that is being kept for you and He is keeping you for the inheritance. He throws upon them all the Gospel blessings that are theirs in Christ as their foundation.

Then Peter tells them what the Savior calls them to do while on their way to glory. He does this by giving them Gospel commands of which we have identified five of them. The first one was a call to a personal pursuit of pervasive holiness in life. You are uniquely His and He is uniquely yours. You belong to Him because you have been bought with a price. You don't belong to the world. You are not by yourself in this life. The second command is the call to a sincere and heartfelt love for one another on this journey together. The third command is a call to cultivating an appetite for God's Word. Get rid of all appetite suppressants. God's Word is how you are maintained and motivated.

After giving us those Peter then goes back to the foundation by pouring in 13 statements of Gospel blessings to us in I Peter 2:4-10. Things like you're a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a holy nation and tells us this is who we are in Christ. Then he gives two more Gospel commands for us. The fourth one is a call for us to develop a lifestyle of obedience stimulating praise to God where we kill sinful desires and keep our conduct excellent among the Gentiles. When God visits in judgment or salvation they will give praise to God for what they now call evil in their life because of the way you lived and spoke before them.

Sin is the product of a sinful desire and an external temptation so you flee temptation and kill sinful desires. The commission of the sin is not only a sin but the want to for the sin is a sin. You want to make a difference and when God makes you different for His glory by His grace for

the Savior then it will stimulate praise to God. What makes you different is the grace of God, even in all of its imperfections.

The fifth command is a call to subjection to every human institution silencing the ignorance of foolish men. Just like your obedience stimulates a lifestyle of praise to God, your obedience to every human institution will silence the foolishness of men who speak against God by the way you live in humility. What is the one thing that Peter knows about the human institutions these people reside in as he writes to these churches in Asia Minor? It is that every single one of them are either citizens or subjects to the Roman Empire. So he takes that one on first in I Peter 2:13–14.

The emperor during this time in Nero, who will kill Peter in 3 to 5 years from the time he is writing this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Nero is already known for his immorality, his tyranny, his oppressiveness, his violence, etc. Governors back then would have been people like Pontius Pilot, Festus, Felix, Agrippa and others. Peter is calling the people to be in subjection to them and Peter knows they will need help to do this so he gives them some other commands.

One is that he tells them they are not in this alone so honor everyone. If it is such tyranny in the Roman Empire then so is everybody else so honor them as well and realize they are all made in the image of God. In particular you are to love the brotherhood as well so that we can encourage one another. To live this life for Christ in this world you need wisdom and the beginning step of wisdom is the fear of God. Say what you mean, mean what you say and never be mean when and how you say it. Show respect, show custom, show honor in all you do.

I know some are thinking ‘are there any exceptions to subjections’ and yes there are, but Peter doesn’t go into the exceptions because he wants you to feel the weight of the call to be in subjection. You know there are exceptions because Peter himself practiced an exception. Peter and John had been arrested, set free and then told not to obey the Great Commission by preaching in the name of Jesus but they went out and preached in the name of Jesus, saying we must obey God. So if the government in which I’m in subjection gives a law that causes me to transgress God’s law then I have to obey God’s law but yet they were still in submission for they willingly took the punishment and turned themselves over to the God who would protect them.

More than likely most who are hearing this letter back then are slaves. The number one demographic there in that church in Asia Minor is probably a clear majority of slaves. The next section we’ll cover in this study is I Peter 2:18–21 which says *[18] Servants (slaves), be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. [19] For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. [20] 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. [21] 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.*

So here is the call for slaves to be in subjection to master. Everyone is in subjection to the government. We don’t have a Caesar in our country but our Caesar is the constitution and there are governors that are elected by the constitution so this plays out in our own setting to live this way. I think the reason Peter takes this on is that he is a good pastor and he is not going to dodge a difficult situation when it comes to slaves and masters. Back then there probably would have been around 110 million to 140 million in the Roman Empire. It is estimates by historians that over 60 million were slaves. The Roman Empire was a slave empire but it wasn’t slavery

based on racial divisions, ethnic yes but racial no for that came when the Darwinian world and life view came.

I want to explain to you what slavery is here. It is one human being assuming absolute ownership, authority and rights over another human being. That person is their property. Chattel slavery was the Roman Empire. Almost all of the teachers were slaves. The Roman Empire was practically run by slaves. Peter uses the word servant here and it's a hard word to translate because it's not the normal word for slave that is used. The normal word used for slave is *doulos* of a person who is under the authority of another but the word they are using here is *oikete* which mean house servant. This is not a maid or butler for those were temporary positions but these are people that are owned and the people who own them are called *despotees*, masters and we get the word despite from this word.

Peter now calls them to be in subjection to your masters both good and unjust (perverse). This word used for unjust/perverse is where we derive the word scoliosis: the crookedness of a spine. The vast majority of the Christians in the first century were slaves. Nine of the epistles in the Bible deal with the issue of slavery. In the epistle of I Corinthians he talks about how the Christians are the chosen of God and how God has chosen the base things, the foolish things, the cast away things to confound the wise and the powerful. Those words he used in describing the elect of God would have been words they would have used in the first century when referring to slaves. There were some cities where over 50 percent of the population were slaves. So the Apostle Peter is taking this issue head on.

Also note that this is not Old Testament slavery. There were two types of Old Testament slavery. One was an economic provision of what we would call today indentured servitude. That is for the sake of paying a debt or securing funds you sign yourself over as a servant or slave to someone for seven years. It is a temporary status. On the seventh year, the Sabbath year they had to free all those who had put themselves in this position due to a debt they had to pay. The other kind of slavery was Divine appointment. When God appointed His people to go into slavery in Egypt in order to mature them and make them a nation they would come out and be used as a hand of judgment among the Canaanite nations in the Promised Land. Then God put His people temporarily into slavery for 70 years in Babylon as He was disciplining them.

What Peter is referring to in I Peter 2 is imperial slavery. This is what the Old Testament forbids – man stealing. It is in the history of our country. The slavery that is here in the New Testament will be eradicated under the influence of Christians. There is a whole book in the Bible calling a Christian slave owner to emancipate his slave and that book is Philemon. That influence of Christianity as they did a lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship will eradicate slavery in the Roman Empire by the 4th century. They used to throw children in the river if they didn't want them and then there was the abandonment of widows. They had gladiator entertainment and slavery and under the influence of Christianity all this had been removed from Rome by the 4th century.

I praise the Lord for that but what breaks my heart is that under the days of colonial empires these nations that were influenced by Christianity began to make the deals with the slave makers of the Islamic kings of Africa and provide the slave traders from Europe to bring slave owners to America and the Caribbean. The same church that God has used to get rid of slavery as an institution in Rome was not only silent but actually participated in it, even among our own forbearers. We have the best preachers in the 19th century but instead of dealing with chattel slavery the way it should have been dealt with as man stealing, they found a way to either avoid it or support it.

If the Lord had raised up in our country someone like a John Newton who would speak to the issue and disciple someone like a William Wilberforce who put his nose to the plow for 49 years and got rid of the institution of slavery in England, it might have saved 700,000 lives from 1860 to 1865. But praise the Lord it was eradicated over a period of about a couple hundred years. With Christian influence marital anarchy, sexual anarchy, abandonment of children, establishment of the family, the care for widows and eradication of slavery all took place all took place by the 4th century under the lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship. They confronted paganism with a Biblical world and life view and Christians made a difference because they lived differently as men and women are being brought to Christ.

Now we are descending back into marital anarchy, sexual immorality, sexual perversion, the destruction of children with a loss of the dignity of humanity made in the image of God and it pains my heart that the church is as silent in the 21st century as it was in the 18th century and allowed the reestablishment of the slave trade. God has called us to speak truth and act in love. He has called us to act differently.

Now I'd like to give you four incentives from the text Peter gives us to be in subjection to everyone and how this makes us different as Christians called of God. The first incentive is it is an exhibition of the power of God's grace. In I Peter 2:19 it starts off 'For...' and Peter is clueing us in on the incentives to being in subjection whether it's a good or unjust master. So this first one according to verse 19 is your subjection is a 'gracious thing' and when you're in submission to that master you are making manifestation of the power of God's grace. That master will see that you are different than the other slaves by how you submit. Peter mentions this two times that this is an exhibition of God's grace, in verse 19 and 20.

One of my heroes in life is Booker T. Washington. He and George Washington Carver had done this extraordinary work at Tuskegee University which is not far from here. I was reading in a book titled Unshakeable Faith; Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver by John Perry, about the underpinnings of Christianity in the life of Booker T. Washington and in it there is a moment where someone asked him "Mr. Washington how do you handle the hate that is in your heart toward the racists when they manifest their bigotry?" He responded "That's simple for as a Christian I don't hate them. I'm called to do what my Savior is called to do. I love them. Besides, why should I give them that much control over my life? I will love them, is what I'll do to them." The man said "Man, with all that you have suffered, how are you able to do this?" It is an exhibition of the power of God's grace.

The second incentive is that you are not under the eye of the master but you are under the eye of your great Master, God and Peter mentions this two times as well, in I Peter 2:19 (mindful of God – *corem deo* – under the eye of God) and verse 20 (in the sight of God). So each morning the Christian slave says "God, help me to live in the power of Your grace today to do my work under the eye of the Lord and respond under the eye of the Lord."

The third incentive is that you have been called to serve and to suffer. My Savior suffered. I suffer. My Savior was reviled and beaten, why? It was because He was righteous and not because He had done evil. My Savior endured and I have been called to endure suffering. It has not only been granted unto me to believe in Him but also to suffer for His sake (Philippians 1:29).

Peter's fourth incentive is that we have been given an example to follow in Christ. I Peter 2:21 says [21] *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.*

When my dad was in the Carolina league of baseball we lived in Greensboro, North Carolina and I was in the first grade. I can't remember my teacher's name but she was a wonderful teacher and we were her first class as a new teacher. I remember looking up at the blackboard and seeing right above it a whole list of the alphabet starting with a capital A and then a little 'a,' then a capital B and a little 'b' and so forth. We were told to write like that but then I remembered what my teacher would do. She would come to my desk and write out on a piece of paper a capital A and a small 'a,' a capital B and a small 'b' etc. and then put another piece of paper over it. Then she would say to me 'now trace the way I write, trace it out.' That is the way I learned to write my letters.

That is what Peter is telling us here. Here is Jesus who for your sake became a servant and when He was reviled He did not revile in return. When He was beaten He gave Himself and entrusted Himself to the Father. Now put your life on Him and trace it out. Watch what happens! Even as the Savior saved us through His suffering watch what happens to you and through you as you suffer even for righteousness sake.

Here is the takeaway. The maturation of motivation of elect exiles to live God-exalting and effective lives for Christ, *rests fully* upon a relentless communication and saturation of a Christ-focused and sin-defeating Gospel of grace and glory. Peter doesn't tell us that in our subjection we will eradicate slavery or that God will give you extra rewards. Peter fixes their eyes on Jesus. He fixes their mind on the glory of God. He calls them to exhibit a power of the grace of God. He tells them to trace out the life of Jesus. Peter has infused, suffused and immersed them in the Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ, who Christ is, what Christ has done and therefore to the slave who has heard this letter from Peter will go home and ask 'who am I?'

This slave knows what the world is saying – you're foolish, a cast-off, owned, you're nothing. But Peter has poured into them that they are in Christ and Christ is in you. You are a free man in Christ. Christ has set you free from the persuasion, power, and the penalty of sin and I am setting you free from the practice of sin. One day I will set you free from the very presence of sin so when you leave your home let the world say what it desire's to say about you for I, the Lord, tells you who you are. Hear the chains breaking. Hear Hope calling. Hear the dawning of life in Jesus Christ for that's who you are, now live as free men that they may see Christ in you for you are different!

When the world sees that difference you will not only silence foolishness, stimulate praise but they will be surprised and in their surprise they will say "What happened to you?" You will tell them "It's not just what happened to me but it's Who happened to me – Jesus! And He can happen to you." Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments in Your Word. I would pray Holy Spirit that You would speak to our hearts. If men and women are able to respond to Your grace in something like chattel slavery and all of its horror then how should we respond in our jobs with employees, employers and customers. Here we are in contracts that we can walk away from eventually but if You were able by Your grace to do this in the lives of these and You have done it throughout history then what could You do in our life so that when others see our subjection and our submission they would see the surprising work of Your grace. Then we could tell them 'I am what I am by the grace of God and you can be also.' Hope dawning, salvation rising, chains breaking, Christ exalted, in Jesus' glorious, beautiful, powerful, wonderful Name, Amen.

Power Point

GOSPEL COMMANDS FOR ELECT EXILES

1. Personal pursuit of a pervasive holiness in life
2. Sincere and heart-felt love for one another
3. Cultivation of an appetite for God's Word
4. A lifestyle of obedience stimulating praise to God
5. Subjection to every human institution silencing the ignorance of foolishness men

A GOSPEL COMMAND FOR CHRISTIAN CITIZENS AND SLAVES

WHAT?

WHO?–WHOM?

WHY?

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The maturation and motivation of Elect Exiles to live God-exalting and effective lives for Christ rests fully upon a relentless communication and saturation of a Christ-focused and sin-defeating Gospel of Grace and Glory.