

Surprising Submission

Above Politics and Parliaments, Part 3

1 Peter 2:18-20

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

God calls us to live distinct lives by submitting to the authority He places in our lives.

Discussion Points:

Peter commands slaves to be submissive to their masters. Stephen made the point that slavery in the first century was unlike what we know of slavery from more recent centuries.

- Have you had someone tell you that the Bible condones slavery? How does this lesson help you answer that accusation? Is that a justifiable charge?
- How does Deuteronomy 24:7 relate to modern forms of slavery?

God commands servants to submit to masters who are harsh, unkind and difficult.

- What's an example of a time when a person in authority over you was harsh, mean or unjust? What was it like having to be under that kind of authority?
- Compare that to times when a person in authority over you was kind, pleasant and fair. In what ways does submitting to the unreasonable authority give you a better opportunity to reflect Christ? How does that kind of submission prove the transformational power of the gospel?

Stephen referenced the fact modern culture values independence and personal rights. He then said this: "You might be doing something similar with your children; complaining that they don't get better treatment; following up on all their complaints; calling a teacher for not giving your child a better grade; getting on to the coach for not giving them more playing time or a better role in the school play."

- How do these comments strike you?
- Make a list of some possible benefits for children who grow up learning how to respond biblically to unjust treatment.

Discussion Guide cont.

We saw that the only way this kind of surprising submission is possible is if we remain continually aware of God's presence in our lives.

- Why is that true?
- How does being mindful of God help keep you focused on obedience to God?

Gospel Connection:

When God saves us, he changes us and helps us reflect him well. This lesson provides you with an opportunity to live out the gospel, and reflect the gospel to those who observe you.

Practical Implications:

Think: Who is the person or entity in your life that that gives you the opportunity to reflect Christ well because of your surprising submission to authority?

Pray: Ask God to give you the fortitude you need to respond in humility when you are treated unjustly.

Respond: Seek to reflect God this week by submitting graciously and humbly to the authority in your life, even if that means you are taken advantage of and mistreated.

Surprising Submission

Above Politics and Parliaments, Part 3

1 Peter 2:18-20

One of the surprising things about the Bible is that nowhere does it promise you that God will settle the score in your favor sometime during your lifetime.

Nowhere does the Bible promise you that you will be vindicated this side of heaven; or that your culture around you will wake up and begin supporting and defending what you know and believe to be the truth.

At the same time, it's rather surprising that the Bible doesn't give the believer the right to abandon culture and head for some mountaintop Commune.

Instead, the inspired letters of Christ, through His Apostles, to the church, literally command us to unpack our lives, right in the middle of our culture.

Where we're told never to expect anything in return for our godly demeanor or standards of excellence and purity – but actually to expect fiery trials to develop us – and we shouldn't be so surprised when they show up (1 Peter 4).

What was surprising, I'm sure, were the commands delivered by God through the Apostle Peter to the New Testament believer in how to how to act and how to respond in the middle of a pagan culture.

I don't think anything would have been more surprising than Peter's commands in his first letter – and especially at chapter 2, where we rejoin our study.

I imagine all the believers in all the churches where this letter would eventually be read in the first century, covering their mouths with their hands in amazement; blinking hard two or three times, and maybe even hearing a gasp or two among them upon hearing at verse **13**, ***Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him . . .***

Wait a second, Jesus was crucified just a few decades earlier by the institution of government. Along with the institution of the governing Jewish Supreme court – they had all betrayed their role to uphold justice.

In fact, the last governor Jesus saw before he was brutally executed on a cross was a political weasel washing his hands in a bowl of water as if to signify that he had nothing to do with the injustice that he was, in fact, allowing.

And not long after the church was birthed months later, on the Day of Pentecost, when King Herod put one church leader to death he saw that it pleased his constituents – in other words, his approval ratings shot way up – and so, Acts 12 tells us that he planned to arrest and kill Peter also. Peter, did you forget about that king?

And then you barely get over your surprise and you get to **1 Peter 2:17** . . . it starts out understandably . . . ***Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God . . . honor the king . . .*** Wait, what?

Show respect to the one in authority over you – even that kind of king? That would be surprising submission.

The Apostle Paul earlier informed us that kings and rulers have actually been appointed by God.

In other words, God isn't surprised by their rise to power; He, in fact, put them there.¹

You see, Peter is elevating our perspective to an understanding that there is Someone higher and greater than the politics and parliaments of earth.

And *that* "Someone" happens to be a sovereign God who happens to be in charge of every election and every appointment and every judge and every governmental institution of authority on the planet.

So, show them every courtesy and respect and honor you can – other passages tell us to pray for them (1 Timothy 2) as if to remind us that no matter what they do and what they get away with and what they sign into law – one day they are going to stand before the eternal Judge of the Universe – and that's a far greater issue.

We've got to see beyond politics and parliaments if we want to have the right perspective in our world today.

Now, it would have been a stretch for the church in the first Century to really believe that God was indeed sovereign while Nero was sitting on the throne.

I mean, it's one thing to write *verses 13 to 17*, which we studied in our last session; it's one thing to submit to a wicked governor or emperor you really don't like but you're probably never going to run into them at Food Lion anyway and feel bad about what you said about them; but it's another thing entirely for Peter to write what comes next. *Verse 18. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect.* Now this is really surprising submission!

Now before we dive in here, let's make a few observations. If you can imagine it, when Peter wrote this letter there was an estimated 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. Slaves were basically all the people who had not either purchased their Roman citizenship or had the privilege of being born a Roman.

In order to understand this command, you need to understand, first of all, that slavery in the Roman world was based on social and economic and political status rather than race or ethnicity.ⁱⁱ

Roman slaves were simply the non-Roman citizens – they were the lower, working class who basically did everything, one author wrote, while the Roman citizens lived in pampered idleness – which, by the way, ultimately helped lead to their downfall.

During the days of Peter, 60 million slaves did virtually everything. They were the ditch diggers, the miners, the field workers and the cooks. But they were also the teachers, the musicians, the actors, the artists, the doctors and the secretaries.

If you had surgery in the first century, it would have been performed by a servant.

When we hear the word slave, or servant, we immediately travel in our minds to the slave trade of the 1700's and 1800's – to that horrible enterprise in our country which was finally outlawed in 1865.

Through the efforts of Christians, primarily – if not exclusively – in Great Britain and in America, the spread of and the preaching of and the application of the gospel saw the seed of the gospel bear fruit by teaching that everyone was made in the image of God and that every believer, no matter what their race or station in life, was equal in Christ – *whether slave or free (Galatians 3:28)*. That was revolutionary teaching.

Imagine Peter writing this letter to churches where the slave was the leading elder and the master was the member. Callistus, one of the early church leaders was a slave; Perpetua, an aristocratic woman in the early church was also a slave – and she became a martyr for her faith around 100 years after Peter wrote this letter.

Imagine the dynamic this issue would make in the 1st century church. It will be the gospel that will create a brand new culture.

By the way, that atheist or professor who tells you that the Bible justifies slavery and, at least, refuses to condemn slavery because of texts like these – keep in mind that the slavery in first century Rome was very different than the 18th century. Slaves were not bought and sold against their will; they were not kidnapped by their own countrymen and then sold to other nations.

In fact, if the Bible had simply been followed in Great Britain and America, according to the Law of Moses, the kind of slavery you and I think of, would never have existed.

Moses delivered the law that stated, *If a man is caught kidnapping any of his countrymen . . . and he deals with him violently or sells him, then that thief shall die, so you shall purge this evil from among you (Deuteronomy 24:7)*

So, according to the law, God made it clear that the buying and selling of kidnapped or abducted human beings was an evil deserving of capital punishment.

In the New Testament record, Paul is listing sins that are especially corrupt and perverse and in the middle of the list he includes enslavers (*1 Timothy 1:10*). Those who kidnap for the purpose of enslaving another human being.

Listen, slavery – as we think of it in the 18th and 19th centuries– existed not because of the Bible, but in spite of the Bible.

But what's fascinating is that wherever the gospel finds a hearing, it continues to make a difference in this regard. But in countries that forbid the gospel, take a closer look . . . this evil is hard to eliminate.

In his book entitled, *How Christianity Changed the World*, author Alvin Schmidt recorded this in detail . . . but I will summarize to mention quickly that in the African nation of Ethiopia, slavery was finally outlawed in 1942; in Saudi Arabia, slavery was outlawed in 1962; slavery was finally outlawed in India in 1976.ⁱⁱⁱ

It will be the revolutionary, transforming truth of the gospel that will challenge the presuppositions and institutions of the world.

Let me make one more very important observation here; Peter doesn't use the normal word for slave here. He uses a word found only three other times in the New Testament and it refers to household servants – what we would call domestic servants.^{iv}

While they didn't have the rights of Roman citizenship, depending on their master, they might receive an education, enter a profession such as medicine or music and even represent their household in a variety of ways.

Think of the household staff of Downton Abby where they do all the work, and the family of the house spends all day drinking tea and changing clothes.

This was the life of Joseph, who literally became the household administrator for Potiphar.

However, like Joseph – and unlike the butler at Downton Abby, the first century servant in Rome still had no legal standing. His world could change at the whim of his master. His household might be brutal or benevolent.

And Peter will address them both. Let's go back to the basic command in verse 18 – ***Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect.***

This text is easy to apply in the 21st century as many commentators I've read do in the relationship of an employee to an employer.^v

In fact, the point could be made that if a servant without any personal rights or benefit packages was commanded to show respect to his master, what excuse do any of us have to disrespect and disobey those in authority over us, given all our rights and benefits?

But maybe you're saying to yourself, "Stephen obviously doesn't know anything about my boss . . . or my teacher . . . or my supervisor . . . I mean, you have no idea how unreasonable they are!"

Well, Peter knew you'd be thinking that – notice further, in ***verse 18; be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.***

What fun is that?! The word for unreasonable is *skolios* – which means crooked or hard to deal with; we use the noun for words like scoliosis of the spine – a crooked spine that is hard to live with.^{vi}

Let's face it, we naturally show respect to the manager who is easy to work for; we will submit to the supervisor who seems to appreciate our worth; we will submit to a boss who doesn't put on us more than we want.

Look, you don't need a command to do that:

- to love the loving and
- to respect the respectful and
- to be kind to the kindhearted and
- to work hard out of appreciation for those who appreciate you; you don't need help with that.

What's not so easy is when you feel trapped – perhaps at this very moment – that's how you feel about your job; there is no respect; you are constantly belittled; in fact you might be serving a boss who's entire thinking patterns are bent – they're skewed – and he's hard to deal with.

And nothing you do ever receives one word of commendation.

I read one author who recounted the time when he worked in a hotel as an assistant to the man who supervised all food operations.

His name was George and he was hardworking, but loud and critical – he played favorites and divided everyone between friends and enemies. The main baker was one of his enemies – for some unknown reason. Nothing she did pleased him. One day she made apple cinnamon pancakes and George sent his assistant – this author I was reading – to bring him some batter to approve. He tasted some and then said, "It's not sweet enough – send it back." I ran the batter back to the baker and she added some sweetener to it and I ran it back to George who tasted it and then thundered, "It's too sweet . . . send it back." The third time, she stood there and fumed – then shook an empty container over the batter, waved her spoon around and told me to take it back . . . and after George sampled it again, he said to me, "There now . . . it's perfect!"^{vii}

Maybe I've just described your boss! I hope I didn't just describe you!

What makes a mark for the gospel is living out this text with surprising submission to a man like George:

- loving the unloving;
- respecting the disrespectful;
- being kind to the unkind and
- working hard for someone who will never offer a kind word in return

That is surprising submission. And that kind of work ethic – in the 1st century to this 21st century – will do more to prove the transformational power of the gospel than a thousand gospel tracts and invitations to church.

You're working out there in a world that treasures independence and autonomy and personal rights and it loves to criticize the authority – whoever it happens to be for the day.^{viii}

The work force is filled with complainers and demanders; people asserting their rights and arguing about their assignments; the question Peter would ask here is, are you one of them?

You see you happen to know right now who it is in your workplace who is chasing the promotion – and you'd better not get in their way; you know who undercuts the other employees; criticizes the management; is constantly self-promoting and self-advancing and self-praising.

Their favorite topic of conversation is the deal they made and the success they are.

Has it ever occurred to you that you might be doing something similar with your children; complaining when they don't get put at the head of the line; following up on all their little complaints; calling that teacher for not giving your child a better grade; getting on to the coach for not giving them more playing time or a better role in the school play.

My child should have been Hansel or Gretel . . . not a sunflower standing there in a field of first grade sunflowers. Or worse yet, a vegetable – my child should have been the lead character.

Beloved, you are teaching them to grasp for the wrong glory . . . to pursue the wrong person . . . and you know what else? You're teaching them to grow up and then never be able to see beyond politics and parliaments.

Teach them now to demonstrate submission and respect to those in authority – whether it's a coach or a teacher – even when they might be unkind and unreasonable . . .

That's Peter's point; let's learn to demonstrate respectful deference and humility on that playing field or in that classroom or in that boardroom or in that work room; to respond with this surprising – I mean it *really is* a surprising submission.

If this wasn't such a daunting command, every believer would be doing it.

Peter now hints at the resource that makes this surprising submission possible. Notice *verse 19*. ***For this finds favor – that is, for this is***

commendable – if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

How are you going to bear up under the sorrow of suffering unjustly?

Notice - your conscience is turned toward God. The construction here “of God, or “toward God” can be understood to mean that the believer is able to bear up under sorrows because he is conscious of God.

You could render it, ***Because he is conscious of God.***^{ix} In other words, you are conscious of the fact that your boss isn't George . . . it's God.

And notice, ***You bear up under the sorrow*** – that compound verb conveys a picture of something sustaining a weight that is placed on it – not succumbing to the load.^x

How? You are working under that load, with an awareness of God's presence. ***You are carrying a load, realizing He is carrying you.***

And don't miss it – you *are* suffering, Peter writes at the end of *verse 19 – unjustly*.

This is reality . . . you are suffering unjustly. It's undeserved treatment . . . it's unwarranted . . . it's unjustified . . . it's unfair.

And *that's* when submission is the most surprising.

And might I add, when Christ-likeness is most obvious. In fact, Peter is going to spend the next paragraph identifying the believer who responds in humility and respect even though suffering unjustly with none-other than Jesus Christ Himself.

But for our study today, ***notice verse 20. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?***

This is in contrast to ***suffering unjustly***; it's one thing, Peter writes, to suffer unjustly and it's another thing to be punished for wrong doing.

Listen, when you get pulled over for running a red light after church today – that is not persecution. You're not suffering for your faith. You can't connect church and a speeding ticket just because they happened on the same day.

There is a big difference between persecution for doing the right thing and punishment for doing the wrong thing.

When I was a kid – around the age of 12 or 13 – during in the summer time, my friend in the neighborhood and I used to spend hours exploring in the woods near our subdivision until it grew dark.

There was an apartment complex at the edge of the wooded area, on our way home, and in the open area downstairs, which we used to cut through, there was a big gray electrical box that ran all the electricity for the entire apartment building – and it was controlled by this big gray handle that just sort of slammed down. It wasn't locked in the upright position – because 40 years ago – there wasn't a need to do that. We would change that for the rest of human history.

We used to scout around to make sure no one was around downstairs, then we'd pull that lever and take off running as that entire building went dark.

I don't remember how many times we did that – 2 or 3 times – maybe 4 or 5 . . . this was before my conversion, by the way; but I have got to tell you, I do remember the last time.

The last time we ever did that, two guys, one of them dressed in army fatigues, happened to be standing out on the balcony just above where we ran underneath and out into the open.

That night, they heard that electrical lever slam down, they saw the building immediately black out, and two kids sprint out underneath them . . . they put two and two together and I still remember hearing these guys shouting, "Hey you."

I turned around to look just as that guy in the army fatigues jumped over the balcony railing, landing on his feet like Sylvester Stallone . . . and he took off after us. We outran him . . . had we not outrun him, you would have had a different pastor.

If we had been caught by that guy we would not have been persecuted, we would have been tortured . . . I mean punished – and rightly so.

You need to understand the difference between punishment and persecution – make sure you note that in this text – Peter is distinguishing between unjust persecution and just punishment.

If your supervisor is constantly getting on you about the lack of quality in your work or being late all the time or for having a bad attitude at work, or whatever it might be, that isn't unjust persecution . . . that's a fair evaluation.

Peter writes in *verse 20*. ***What credit is there [in that]?*** The word for *credit* is used only here in the entire New Testament – and it's a word that signifies a good report.

Peter is basically saying here, "Listen, you don't get credit for making a nuisance of yourself; you don't get credit for being a lazy, sloppy, tardy,

resentful employee because your boss noticed that you pray before you eat your lunch."

It doesn't work that way. In fact, if that describes your work ethic and attitude, let me encourage you to stop praying before you eat your lunch . . . don't let anybody see you pray. The cause of Christianity is helped when try to represent God for 10 seconds before lunchtime if you don't represent Him well from 9 to 5.

There's no credit in that kind of reputation . . . there's no good report in that.

Notice *verse 20 again* – ***But, if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it . . .***

In other words, when your supervisors or other employees make you the butt of their jokes; when they mock your testimony; when you're always at the other end of their innuendoes; when your hard work is credited to someone else; when the boss plays favorites and you're never included and frankly, all of it is traced to your testimony for Christ and your good attitude and respectful demeanor and kindness without any superiority attitude or pride . . . because in spite of everything you take on the chin with grace . . . you bear up under it and graciously carry the load as you depend on the Lord to carry you . . . because it never really lets up . . .

Peter writes at the end of *verse 20b*. ***This finds favor with God.***

This is the ultimate bonus – this is the greatest payoff – the gracious commendation of God.

F.B. Meyer, a British pastor and author in England during the 1800's commented on this text by writing that whenever there is this kind of submission in the face of unjust persecution, Peter is telling us that there is a thrill of delight in the very heart of God and from the throne, God stoops to say to you, "Thank you."^{xi}

Imagine, God saying "thank you":

- For the way you handle that personal attack
- For the way you respond to that unkind word
- For the way you faithfully work in the face of personal slight
- For the way you treat your supervisor with respect

Thank you for demonstrating what everybody knows is really surprising submission.

And you live that way because you see beyond all the politics and parliaments . . .

You know, ultimately, that you didn't:

- Write that term paper for Professor George
- You didn't work hard and with excellence for Boss man George
- You didn't live with graciousness respectfulness for King George

It was never really about George . . . it was always and ultimately about God.

Let me ask you, who is George in your life? And what are you going to do about him – or her – tomorrow . . . how are you going to act, respond, speak, obey, serve?

When you pillow your head tonight, I want you to hear, Peter writing on behalf of the Lord; I want you to hear God say to you – “Thank you . . . thank you.”

For doing what is right – *for doing what is right and patiently enduring it* . . . this receives from God . . . “Thank you.”

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 04/23/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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