1 Peter 2:11-17

Key verse: 2:13a

*Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority.*

Introduction: From the previous passage, we learned about our identity as a royal priesthood. We then have a clear purpose that is to declare the praises of God in this dark world. Today’s passage shows how we can make it by submitting ourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority. Matthew 5:16 reads, “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

1. Read verses 11-12. Why did Peter urge the believers to abstain from sinful desires? (11) How could they be a good influence to unbelievers? (12) What contrast can be found in the way unbelievers respond to the lives of believers?

**11** Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. **12** Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

1. Peter urged the believers to abstain from sinful desires, because they are foreigners and exiles and because sinful desires war against the soul.
	1. First, Peter urged believers to abstain from sinful desires, because they are foreigners and exiles in the world. Believers are God’s chosen people. They have their faith and hope in God. They do not belong to this world. As long as they keep this identity, they are able to abstain from sinful desires. In regard to God’s people not belonging to this world, God commanded the patriarch Abraham, saying, *“Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you”* (Gen 12:1), so that *“By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country ...*” (Heb 11:9). God also disciplined his people Israel as slaves in Egypt and twice as captives in foreign lands and God’s servants faced inumerable injustices in this world. God’s people do not belong to this world, but are foreigners and exiles in this world. They should not engage in what the world does; or in the sins of worldly people, but keep their identity as God’s chosen people.
	2. Second Peter urged believers to abstain from sinful desires because sinful desires war against the soul. Believers are in a spiritual war. According to Apostle Paul, their battle is *“not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Eph 6:12). It is not a battle against human beings, but against invisible forces of evil. This means that the real battleground is the soul of each believer. Like it or not, no believer can avoid fighting this spiritual war, and must fight it as a matter of life and death. The Apostle Paul spoke of the seriousness of this battle when he said, “*In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood”* (Heb 12:4). Here, Peter is saying that the war for the soul of each believer is waged at the level of one’s desires. A believer must struggle to abstain from sinful desires that war against the soul. To abstain means to restrain oneself from enjoying something. A believer should not try to enjoy their sinful desires, but rather restrain themselves from enjoying them. They should not allow sinful desires to come and remain in their hearts so that they must act on them. The book of James says, ***“****but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.* ***15*** *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death”* (James 1:13-15). A believer should not say that they are not able to abstain from sinful desires. God has commanded it, and God does not command anything without also giving the ability to obey. Even though, in our own strength, we are not able to abstain, we must choose to fight and win, believing that God is fully able to give us the victory. Then, as one struggles to abstain from sinful desires, God works to replace those desires with holy desires. The wisdom here is to fight the battle at the level of our evil desires. If we try to enjoy our sinful desires, sinful desires grow in our heart. As a result, the battle against our evil desires becomes a huge war that requires a huge amount of resources, time and energy to win. It is better to fight many small battles on a consistent basis than to let the battle grow into an all out war that takes so much to win. . against our sinful desires. In this way we can fight and win each battle with our sinful desires as they arise. In this way, we can be focussed on fighting the small battles, so that we don’t have to face an all out bloody war that is difficult to win.
2. They believers could be a good influence to unbelievers by living good lives and doing good deeds. In order to live good lives, they needed to not only abstain from sinful desires, but also do the good deeds. Afterall, when they stop sinning, they should start using their resources, time and energy to do good things. According to Apostle Paul, this is God’s purpose for the saved soul. He said, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph 2:10). In this way a good life is a life of God works in Jesus Christ. Afterall, without good works, no one will see a person’s good life. The example of Jesus was that in the midst of great suffering and trials, he continued to do what is right by doing good to others in obedience to God. In this way, he set an example of godly love through serving and bearing others in the truth; through living and teaching the words of God. God has called believers to do the same. We are the example of Christ in the world. The world is watching what we do and what we do has a huge influence on the world. When we do what is good we reveal Jesus Christ to the world. This is why it is so important for Christians to not just talk, but also to live good lives of good deeds.
3. The contrast in the way unbelievers respond to believers is that although they accuse believers of doing wrong, they may see their good deeds and glorify God. Believers should not expect or demand to avoid the accusations of unbelievers. These accusations are quite a natural occurrence. The good lives and good deeds of believers cause unbelievers to feel condemned. Since they don’t like to repent, they look for a way to justify themselves by their own lives and deeds. However, this turns out to be quite challenging for believers. Believers should continue to do good despite the accusations of unbelievers. It is the next step in the spiritual war, so to speak. After abstaining from sinful desires and doing good, they must continue to do good through the sufferings and trials of accusations and persecutions. When faced with accusations of wrongdoing, a believer should be aware of the spiritual battle and wage the battle through good deeds. They should not fight back through arguments or acts of malice or vengeance, but through good deeds. As Paul said in Romans, *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.* ***18*** *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* ***19*** *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.* ***20*** *On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom 12:17-21). When a believer responds to the accusation of an unbeliever with good deeds, the unbeliever will no longer be able to justify themselves and will fall under God’s judgment. In this way, they can have the opportunity to repent and may end up glorifying God when Jesus comes again. Though they accuse, their accusation has a good purpose in both the life of the believer and the unbeliever. In this way, God is carrying out his plan of salvation for the whole world; wanting believers to grow up in their salvation and unbelievers to be saved.
4. Read verses 13-15. Why should the believers submit to every human authority? (13-14) What good purpose do human authorities serve? What is God’s will in the believers submitting to human authority? (15)

**13** Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, **14** or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. **15** For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

1. Believers should submit to every human authority for the Lord’s sake. Every human authority is under the Lord’s authority. Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”* (Mat 28:18). Also, Paul said, *“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God”* (Rom 13:1) Since the human authorities are established by God, we have to submit to them out of our respect to God. Disobeying human authorities displeases God who established the authorities. Furthermore, all human authorities are answerable to God. God is the final judge who gives and takes away human authority as he sees fit. This is also why believers are commanded to pray for their leaders, including governing authorities. Paul said, *“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—* ***2*** *for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness* ***3*** *This is good, and pleases God our Savior,* ***4*** *who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”* (1Tim 2:1-4). Not only does God want to save our leaders, but also to save all people coming under their authority.
2. Human authorities have the good purpose to punish those that do wrong and to commend those who do right. In this way, God uses human authorities to establish an environment of law and order and right and wrong where God works out his salvation purpose. Through the authorities of this world, God keeps and maintains the order of human society. If the authorities of this world are destroyed or ignored, the order of human society will collapse and the world will become chaos and we can’t expect peaceful life in that condition. Since we obey God and follow his commands, we Christians could have negative thoughts and feelings about the authorities of this world. But we need to have a positive perspective about these human authorities, remembering the good purpose that God has for establishing them. In the case of the wrongdoer, God uses human authorities to catch them in their sins, so that they would be punished and have the opportunity repent. In the case of those who do good, and continue to do good though accusations, they will be commended. And, even if the human authorities fail to punish or commend rightly, God will judge eventually at His day, and his judgement will be final.
3. God’s will in believers submitting to human authority is to silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. It has been said, the Christians give the church a bad name. People love to talk about the faults of believers, in order to justify themselves for their own sins. They are foolish, because this cannot save them, but they do it anyway. However, when believers do what is right, even down to submitting to every human authority, they are above reproach. As Christians need to show good examples on how to submit to every human authority since the authorities come from God. If we don’t submit to the authorities, people in the world will criticize the believers with a lot of foolish words. By submitting to the authorities in this world by faith, we can give good influence to the people in the world.

As a result, these foolish people have no more foolish words to say. They are silenced and can be humbled before God; open to rebuke and correction and able to repent.

1. Read verses 16-17. How could the believers live as free people? (16) What basic guidelines or commands did Peter give the believers (17) How are each of these related to submitting to every human authority?

**16** Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. **17** Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

1. For believers to live as truly free people they should not use their freedom as a cover-up for evil, but live as God’s slaves. Personal freedoms are important for believers to practice their faith. They need to have personal freedom to worship and serve God. However, these freedoms come with personal responsibilities. The letter of 1 Peter was written during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero. It was a time when Christian were severely persecuted. It seemed very unfair and that the work of God was being hindered. However, instead of talking about fighting against persecutions, Peter talked about not using one’s freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as slaves to God. This implantation here is that God allowed accusations and persecutions for the good of believers. God really wanted to purify their faith; their lives and deeds in order to make them more fruitful. So instead of thinking about their accusers, they should look inwardly during these times of suffering and correct themselves first. The bottom line is that freedom to sin is no freedom at all, but slavery. Jesus said, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). One can only have true freedom when they are set free from the slavery to sin and become slaves of God. To become a slave to God requires one to submit to God’s authority in everything, including submitting to every human authority. Peter issued this command of God even at that the very time believers were being treated most unfairly by the governing authorities.
2. Peter gave the believers guidelines or commands in verse 17.  **“**Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.”
3. First, showing proper respect to everyone. Everyone includes the weak and the wicked too. It is easy to despise those people. But everyone is under God’s authority and was created in God’s image. We do not honor their sins and wickedness. When we remember how Abraham showed proper respect to the wicked king in Genesis, we can follow his good example for God’s name sake. Jesus showed proper respect to a Samaritan woman in order to save her from her sinful lives. As a slave of all, Jesus showed respect to everyone who came to him by faith. Apostle Paul showed proper respect for men, Jews and Gentiles so that he became all things for all people in order to save them all for God’s name sake. So it is the will of God for us, as well as our duty to show proper respect to everyone in this world.
4. Second, love the family of believers. Peter pointed it out in chapter 1:22b, you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart. Likewise we love the family of believers in such an in depth love to make God’s love known as a light in this dark world. All believers are united to Christ the Head, the same family and same interest; having communion with one another because we are going to the same home.
5. Third, fear God and honor the emperor. We fear God by keeping His commands. We put our absolute trust in our living God. With such a perspective, we will never be ashamed. Although we are under the imperfect human authority of governing officials; such as mayors, governors, senators, congressmen, and the president, God is perfect in all things, and Jesus has all authority. Human leaders all have their own agenda to one extent or another, but God’s agenda of world salvation will prevail. God will turn everything into ultimate goodness for those who put trust in the Lord. Paul said, “in all things, God works for the good of those who love him …” (Romans 8:28). This is why we should not overly worry about injustices in this visible world. When we put our faith and hope in God, God will surely orchestrate His own story of salvation for all mankind. Amen.

C. Each of these are related to submitting to every human authority. When we live by doing what is right before God out of holy fear, we become an instrument of God’s righteousness. Paul said, *"Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness"* (Rom 6:13). We have been freed, through the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, from the power of sin. Our old self has been crucified with Christ. The result is that sin no longer has any authority over us. We have been set free. Then we ought to use this priceless freedom to continue doing the will of God; doing what is good and right by willingly by submitting to every human authority for God’s name sake.

**One word: Submit to every human authority!**