

Good morning. May the Lord bless you and give you peace. We are considering some instruction from the apostle Peter regarding our Christian responsibility to authority. Last week we concerned ourselves with what that looks like towards governing authorities. This week we will interact with another structure of authority within society.

Let me begin with an illustration. I was finishing graduate school, which for my discipline is seminary. One of my final classes required a certain amount of hours serving as a chaplain at a local hospital. I had done very few hospital visits, if any, up to that point. Now because I had an hour and a half commute to seminary, I opted to complete my hours in one weekend. The hospital was equipped for a chaplain to be able to spend the night, and so my shift began. It was an incredibly busy weekend. I was the only chaplain that weekend, and just about everything that could happen, happened, like the message that I received in the middle of the night. Some young kids were not being as careful as they should have been and had driven their car into a tree. I was called into help the family through the process of sitting through the ER to the ICU. It was really intense on a lot of levels, the first being that the minute people find out you're the chaplain they assume the worst. Now one thing about people interacting with trauma is that inhibitions that are normally present are very now very absent. Everything is raw. Our emotions swing in so many directions. We had at this point moved the family from the ER waiting room to the ICU. So here I am wanting to bring some form of calm and comfort to this family, and I noticed a basket of fruit in the ICU waiting room that everyone in the room was helping themselves to. There were multiple people for different patients there, so I assumed that the hospital had that basket out for those that were waiting. As the family I was now serving swelling with people who were distraught, I moved them to a different room where they could be more alone, and I carried the basket to the room where they would be staying.

Everything went as well as it could have, and seeing that I could not do anything else to help I went back to the chaplain's quarters to get some sleep. Around 5 am I was awakened by a page from the charge nurse of the ICU. When I responded to the page, I found that it was not a benevolent nurse seeking the aid of a young seminary chaplain on the other end of the line. It was a ferocious bear, posing as the charge nurse, at the end of her very difficult shift. This bear was trying to figure out what had happened to a basket of fruit that was in the ICU waiting room because the owner of the basket was asking for it. Have you ever felt the heat of embarrassment take over your body? I misunderstood what had been happening all night. People were stealing from this poor lady's basket, and I pulled off the boldest heist – the chaplain absconded this poor ICU grieving woman's gift. Well, the tone of the bear on the other end of the phone told me that there was only one safe answer...I am sorry, and, I'll replace the basket immediately. I hurried to the shower, located a grocery store, and then blew our "barely making it through seminary and life" budget on fruit. There were a few other mishaps that weekend that are hilarious...now. I'll save those for another sermon, or if you just need a good laugh.

What exactly happened in my little adventure? What had happened is that I misunderstood what was happening in front of me, I misunderstood how that hospital functioned, and then I acted on that assumption. The consequence was that I made decisions that were not truly congruous with all the events taking place.

This is important because as we enter into this next section our context today implores responses from the text and the Bible itself that we would give in our day and time. What am I talking about? Well, in this conversation about submission to authority Peter now addresses servants. It is the word "oiketai," which is a little more specific than the word "doulos." Doulos which is another common term for slave, or servant in Greek. The word oiketai comprehends the idea of servitude, as a doulos would, but focuses on the household servant, or domestic. So, several things happen here. First, because slavery was such a horrific part of our history, we have trouble understanding Peter's intent as he writes in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and in a society that had lived with structures of slavery longer than the USA has been a nation. Consequently, and secondly, we become frustrated that Peter doesn't call this out like we expect him to. Thirdly, we begin to question scripture in general, Jesus included, because of an apparent lack of teaching about the abolition of slavery as we would seek to abolish it in our society. I feel

compelled, therefore, to address these issues briefly, given our context, and then I think we can be better equipped to interact with the text without distraction.

**.I. The Bible and Slavery.** I start with the broader scope of the Bible because Peter is informed largely by O.T. literature, and the N.T. is very concerned that we understand that it is rooted in the O.T.

The charge that the Bible doesn't speak against slavery is actually quite wrong. In reality, the Bible speaks against slavery in a more powerful way than our simple need to hear the words, "do this, not that," would do. How does the Bible do this? First of all, the narrative and focus of the Bible is such that man is seen as the pinnacle of creation because men and women bear the image of God. Every other created being and form displays something of God's wisdom, creativity, and shares some aspect of His life-giving power, but only of man is it said that we bear His image. Further, mankind is **created free** and set over all creation. It is not until Adam and Eve sin that oppression begins to show its head. Biblically speaking, slavery is as much a sinful repudiation of God's design in the created order as polygamy is, and murder is, as unbiblical sexual relationships are – namely, any form of sexual intimacy outside of intimacy between one at birth biologically male person and one at birth biologically female person. Just notice that within the scope of the first chapter after the narrative of man's fall into sin, we read of Cain murdering his brother, then we read of polygamist relationships, then we read of overreaching retribution by Lamech. By the time we get to chapter 6 we read of generational and cultural sins that display the same structural patterns of sin present with Adam and Eve, as Waltke points out, "saw...good...took." Evil is so rampant that God brings destruction upon the earth in the form of a flood. **The point is this, that the creation of slavery is birthed from a rejection of God's established and created order, and a consequence of sin.** If I deal with sin and follow God's design, then **ALL** these issues will begin to be dealt with.

This helps us understand why the O.T. Law seems to govern and regulate slavery as opposed to seeking to delegitimize it. The answer to that is that the Bible is telling us slavery is evil by showing us what it does. The image of God that was created free is being subjugated. God hates that. God has told us how we are to interact with other people because we bear His image. Further, in the Bible the expressions of slavery in humanity in any form is always cast as being like sin, which God hates, and it is always coupled with stories of hardship and God's commitment to deliver the slave. The truth is that God did what no one was willing to do in the establishment of His law, and that was to define actual laws for slaves. The ANE culture didn't give this kind of universal identity of image bears to mankind in the same way. So, we see in the law not only laws governing slavery, but how to treat slaves if they love their masters and their masters them, they become part of the family. That is scandalous even in the household codes of Roman law thousands of years later. To cap it off, God commands that if a slave runs away from his master, you are not to send them back. Dt 23:15–16 ESV <sup>15</sup> "You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you. <sup>16</sup> He shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place that he shall choose within one of your towns, wherever it suits him. You shall not wrong him."

How can we say that God is not against slavery when His word depicts slavery as contra-naturum, that it is equivalent to sin, and that is depicted alongside the worst expressions of sin? How can we say that God is not against slavery when God demands that in His society, He required His people not to honor slave contracts if a slave ran away from their master? My friends, it is not God who is to blame for slavery, it is our thinking that allows for any action and philosophy that is contra-naturum, against the created order. You see, this is even more intense because it means that in God's eyes, when I work against God's created order, I am as violent to the beauty and order that God wants reflected in His society as those who support slavery. God's word challenges the heart of thoughts, not just the actions, because if I can deal with the heart, then all my actions that are evil will be brought under proper control. Many Christians, and many who called themselves Christian but were not, in the early part of our country's history did everything it could to quell the biblical principles we just stated. They did it because they wanted to either maintain the status quo, much like many in the church are doing with sexual sins and abortion, or they were concerned that it might cost them too much socially, or personally. The Bible is clear enough. We just don't like what it says.

Now it may not sound like we've really made headway in understanding our text, but we really have. Here is how.

**.II. Understanding our Text.** Remember what the purpose is of all that we do, 2:9b **“that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”** That is the purpose of every Christian, to reveal Jesus Christ. Peter has already laid out a massive amount of theology with his teaching of who we are in Christ: family, priests, holy. ***Those descriptions are true of us regardless of our station in life!*** Now tie that into the fact that 2:21 tells us that the sufferings of Jesus are distinguished as an **example** for us to follow in. The word “example” is the word that describes a pattern for drawing or writing. Trace these lines, that would be the understanding of the word. Trace Christ's life!

What is the pattern? Why did Jesus suffer? He suffered to provide salvation from sin and eternal condemnation in hell, and He suffered so that rising again we might have hope of holiness and eternal attestation through Christ in heaven. Peter speaks to brothers and sisters in Christ whose station is some sort of servitude, and he reminds them of the greater goal, reflecting Christ and magnifying Christ. Karen Jobes does a masterful job outlining how Peter follows the pattern of Greek and Roman culture in outlining household codes, but he does so in a way that is redemptive. As she brings out, it is seen in writings like Plato's Republic, or Aristotle's Oeconomica on household codes to see the difference. They are free downloads on Kindle, if you want to look it up on your own. The parts that I read were quite fascinating, but how they needed the scriptures! Peter is speaking to Christians who are slaves in a society that was embracing these philosophers' teaching, but these slaves are really free in Christ. They are not to worship other God's, even if society demanded worship of their master's household God, and they were to promised great reward for faithfulness in the midst of hardship because they were honoring God. What's more, if they are able by their submission to these earthly masters to reveal Jesus Christ, and win them to Christ, then they have won a soul. Their master has become their brother, and they are now both on a mission to extol Christ.

This is actually seen in Paul's letter to Philemon. Philemon had a slave named Onesimus. Somehow Onesimus ends up incarcerated with Paul and Paul leads him to Christ. Paul then reminds Philemon that he was a Christian because Paul shared the gospel with him. It's a reminder that Philemon and Onesimus were now brothers. Paul then makes an appeal that Philemon release Onesimus so that Onesimus could be with Paul. After all, Philemon owed Paul. Do you see how the church worked through these things?

Let's apply this to our lives. First, what cultural sins have we embraced that are really against God's created order? Secondly, praise God we don't have slavery in our country, though there is still much work to do, but we do have relationships where someone has some authority over us. Our employers give us a wage. If we don't get payed, we don't pay the mortgage, or pay our bills. That puts us in a vulnerable position before them. Some employers are harsh. How does sacrifice and the call to bear up under hardship until God opens the door change my prayers, and my work for my employment and employers? What if our mission at work is not only to be the best employee possible for the work before me, but also to be the most effective reflection of Jesus Christ in my workplace? What if we chose careers not based upon what we liked as much as based upon how much light I could be in my place of work? It doesn't mean I look for employment in a place that requires sin of me, but it may mean that I look for employment in a place where I can be light in spite of the sin.

This leads to our time of communion. Just think of what Peter says of Jesus here. Jesus rested solely on the justice seeking nature of God the Father in dealing with those who mistreated Him, and so He kept silent in the midst of hardship. He who was sinless bore our sin that we who were sinful might through faith bear His sinlessness. Communion for the Christian is a reminder of the grace of God, and it is a catalyst of faithfulness for us. Are we willing to somehow bear the sins of those around us so that they might see the sinlessness of Christ and seek Him?

Amen.