

1 Peter 2:16

Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.

As we studied last week, this is the central verse of the surrounding passages. We have been freed from the control which sin and our *Old Sinful Nature* wielded over our mind and emotions. In other words, not a single one of us is a victim. We are now free to fight these forces and we have been fully empowered to conquer them and to enjoy our victory. We are free to live as bondservants—those who have a mental, emotional, and physical bond of love for the only One who knows us, cares for us, provides, for us, and is everything we need all the time; the one who is taller, stronger, bigger, and more magnificent than all else—Jesus!

We must keep in mind however that anytime—anytime—we cling to our baggage of pain and life experiences, and those fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love which bind the baggage to our lives, we are using our freedom as a covering for evil. The Lord wants us to cut the ropes and let the baggage go. It is all so useless and there is no reason to continue to drag it around; it just bogs us down. It keeps us bound to our pain, our trauma, our failings and so on. But that is not who we are. We are bondservants of Jesus Christ, children of God, and those who can call the Father “Abba.” We are aliens and strangers on this earth, royal priests, a part of a holy nation, and so many other amazing things. Remember, so far **1 Peter** has been all about our embracing our true identity and living in it.

1 Peter 2:17

Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Here we have a series of four commands which seem to just about cover it all— from one end to another. Not a lot is left out of this equation. Each statement is an *imperative*, a command, and by no means simply a suggestion or a good idea. It is how those who have been set free are to live. To start, “honor all people” is given to us a general way of life; it is in the *aorist active imperative*. Honoring all people is to be what generally describes our life from beginning to end. Thus, there is to be no group of people (regardless of race or lifestyle) that we are entitled to treat poorly; rather, we are to honor all. That does not mean that we are to honor what they do or even their particular heritage, or else we might find ourselves being someone who places undue value on things of this world. Rather, we are to simply honor them without prejudice as people who are loved by God. For God so loves the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. Yes, we are to honor all people because they are loved by God.

“Love the brotherhood” is in the *present active imperative*; thus, every moment of your now you are to love your brothers and sisters in the Lord with God’s *agape* love. This is a very powerful command with very powerful practical implications. This means that when you are together with someone who is part of the brotherhood, there is no room for you to choose to be in your flesh or to complacently live in your flesh. There is no room for you to place in the middle of your relationship with others all your baggage which is tightly bound by those

fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love. There is simply no room; such things are a bar to our ability to love others with God's divine agape love. I know we have all failed in this command and honestly for the most part we have not even given it much thought. We have used our freedom as a covering for evil and never really looked back. We come into a room and we are first and foremost fixated on taking care of ourselves. We are registering what we are feeling, what we are reading in the room, what's coming off of others, and so starts a moment where the "Me" is our priority and not the welfare and concern of others.

It is no mistake that the Spirit has spent so much time talking to us about our identity and then He steps it up with the requirement that we abstain from those fleshly lusts. Because in order for us to be obedient to our Father, and in order for us to have a continual access to His agape love, we must stand in our true identity fully confident that we are the Lord's **beloved**. It is the only way we will have the courage to cut the ropes of fleshly lusts that bind us to our baggage and let it all go. We all know that dragging around this baggage has never helped us and never will; we just need to decide that as a bondservant of the Lord we will NOT use our freedom as a covering for evil. Besides, if this stuff can no longer actually control us why should we let it practically yield such control. We have been set free.

In effect, this is a command for us to make the choice to walk in the Spirit. It is a command to trust that Jesus has our back in all circumstances such that we are truly safe to give ourselves to other true believers and love them with His divine love. This is a command for us to take Jesus at His word and give it the **absolute** authority over our lives. If we don't let what He has said be our source of comfort, strength, security, identity, power, purpose, and satisfaction, we will continually

let our fear, doubt, and shame rule our lives and we will not love. His word must become the **absolute** authority over our lives.

When He says that He directs the steps of His beloved and He delights in the details of their lives, He means it. When He says that He guides us down the pathways that are best, He means it. When He says that He holds us by the hand to keep us from falling, He means it. When He says that we are His beloved and we should not worry or be anxious about anything, He means it. When He says He will rescue us from all our troubles, He means it. When He says He is near to the brokenhearted and rescues those who are crushed in spirit, He means it. When He says that He charts the path ahead of us and tells us where to stop and rest and every moment He knows where we are, He means it. When He says He both precedes and follows us, He means it. When He says that His thoughts about us are not just precious but innumerable and outnumber the grains of sand, He means it. When He says that if we seek Him we will find Him when we search for Him with all our heart, He means it. You see, our responsibility is to focus on the reality and magnificent extent of His demonstrated love for us; that is it. Soak in what He has said and let it be the authoritative determinate for your choices.

The point is that to prepare you for obedience to this command to love, He has asked you to take risks on Him. He said that fear must no longer reign over you. He said that the enemy is going to attack in this way: He's going to use the fear within you to confuse your mind and paralyze your feet from walking forward into your future. Therefore, you must battle. In order to love, you must battle all that keeps you from both standing in your identity as the Lord's **beloved** and giving yourself to those who are His **beloved**.

If you think your issues, your specific blend of self-pity and self-love, are too big and far too ingrained for you to have victory, Jesus specifically told you to stop magnifying the enemy. He has warned you that the enemy will forever harass you if you do not pursue intimacy with Him as He is far bigger than your opponent! Jesus is your defender, protector, and your shield! The rest from this siege of control over your life is available to you. As you begin to magnify Jesus, He says that a force field of intimacy will swell from within and you will know Him deeper and you will experience the relent of the enemies schemes when you do this.

Jesus has also said that the time has come to decide; the war is coming and we must not be found still struggling under the bondage of a master that has been defeated. The time has come to risk yourselves (risk your physical, tangible experiences and risk your fear) to allow Jesus to come through and prove Himself. But how can He prove Himself if you are holding onto your fear, doubt, and shame so tightly? You are the one who must dig down deep inside and decide that these fleshly lusts are worthless and have never helped you; thus, you can safely abstain from them. Jesus has told you to take chances on Him because He will never ever fail you, for He is not a God of fear but of joy and love.

This little three-word-phrase—love the brotherhood—is a *perfect* command. And it is no coincidence, in my opinion, that it is the second command as the number two is a number of witness. Agape love is our witness to an unbelieving world; it is the miracle which proves that Jesus lives. It would be far too easy to just quickly read over this list, honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king, and move on giving it far too little attention. But as a perfect command, love the brotherhood deserves our undivided attention. Our entire

Christian experience is to climax in agape love; in fact, the Spirit tells us that all our religion is really of no consequence; what is important is faith expressing itself in God's agape love (***Galatians 5:6***). When the word of God and all that He has promised us is our absolute authority, when we bet our lives on His character and nature, our faith will express itself in God's agape love; it is the true fruit of true faith. Don't be fooled; this is our undeniable supernatural mark that distinguishes those who are truly the Lord's beloved from all others.

When the Spirit tells us to examine ourselves to see if our faith is really genuine, this is the measure (***2 Corinthians 13:5***). Test yourself, do you bear the mark? If not then it is time, without hesitation, to go to battle and risk everything on who Jesus is and all He has said. It is time to risk it all: your emotions, your thoughts, your baggage, your self-pity and self-love, everything. Risk it all on the glory of His name. The key to your victory is found in the following words which the Lord so lovingly and graciously spoke to us: "Dwell in the glory of my name. The enemy has nothing on you. Let MY name, my SON who is your glory, be magnified."

This fits so perfectly into the third command which is to "fear God." Keep in mind, three is the number of perfection: this is a perfect command. First of all, what is amazing about this command is that it is in the *present passive imperative*. For sure, every moment of our now we are to fear God or dwell in the glory of His name, but the *passive* voice makes it clear that our ability to obey this command is from the Spirit of God who lives in us. He is the very source for our ability to fear God. Thus, to obey this command we have to let the Spirit have His rightful rule in our lives. ***Galatians 5:16*** commands us to walk in the Spirit confident that

if we let the Spirit lead us in everything, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh. But to walk in the Spirit, we have to make the choice to abstain from those fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love which keep us tied down to our baggage. We must, as we have said over and over again, dig down deep inside and make the choice to believe that Jesus is enough therefore it is ok to jettison the baggage. He has given us position, authority, power and purpose and we now need to choose to live in this reality thereby granting the Spirit greater and greater access to flow in and through our lives.

As we have learned, to fear God is to hate all evil (**Proverbs 8:13**)—to hate everything that does not derive from the divine. Hate is an extremely powerful emotion, probably one of the most powerful that we as humans possess. And God desires us to literally have the utmost contempt, scorn, and disdain for anything and everything that does not start and finish with Him. We are to hate our self-pity and self-love. We are to hate the fear that paralyzes our steps. We are to hate the woman who rides the beast who tempts us to substitute “doing for God” with truly abiding in God. We are to hate the enemy who lies to us, deceives us, tricks us, says we are not free, and says we are not who God has said that we are: His **beloved**. We are to hate the enemy and not be so compliant or passive and give him so much room to operate in our lives. That is what it means to fear the Lord; and this can only be a work of the Spirit in our lives. The Lord gives us the ability to obey this command; we just need to choose to give the Holy Spirit the space in our lives to lead us in obedience.

And finally, we are to honor the king. Like “love the brotherhood,” this command is also in the *present active imperative*. Thus, every moment of our now

we are to honor the king. The king—the ruler that God has assigned to govern our practical life on this earth—may not give us much reason to honor him, he may even do everything that we despise, nevertheless God has appointed him and therefore we need to honor him trusting that God knows what He is doing and is working out His purposes through this appointed leader.

Romans 13:1-2; 6-7

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and **those which exist are established by God**. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves...For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor the king. These are four commands which help put some meaning around the command that we are not to use our freedom as a covering for evil. Test yourself and see if the Lord Jesus is really among you. Do you honor all people, do you agape love other true believers, do you fear God, and honor the king? If not, it is time to repent, it's time to go to war, and to start living as the Lord's bondservant.

1 Peter 2:18-20

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

The first thing we must understand about this passage is that just like when we were told to submit to every human institution this command is given to us in the *present passive imperative*. This means our submission to our earthly masters flows from the Spirit within us and is a fruit of His life in ours, is a consequence of His decision, and is entirely subject to His discretion (meaning that if He ever did not want us to submit that is a decision He can make on our behalf and something He will do as He lives in us). Thus, our job in the obedience part of this command is once again to walk in the Spirit of God and be fully subject to His leading. Of course, walking in the Spirit is a consequence of our making the decision to fear God; and you now know what that means in terms of our baggage and fleshly lusts of self-pity and self-love. It starts with our choice.

Let's spend a brief moment to discuss this concept of our "masters." Although we are not living in a society that is fueled by the economy of slaves, where masters literally have the right of ownership of one's personhood, we do exist in a society of masters and slaves but it looks like employer and employee and in a lot of ways can be extended to anyone who has authority over your life. So between the commands to "submit to every human institution" and to our

“masters,” I don’t think there is a lot exempted out of this command. So please don’t be sitting there trying to figure out who you don’t have to submit to as this tends to cover each and every one of our relationships in this world where we are not the boss.

Submission, I believe, is about both attitude and obedience. Just doing what someone tells you to do does not capture the attitude that Jesus wants His bondservants to display. It does not really honor our master nor does it express God’s love. Submission is a willingness to join alongside the purpose and agenda of our masters and help them succeed in their endeavors. We may not always agree with our masters, but agreement is not a requirement for submission. We can still choose to honor their desires; and as it says in **Colossians 3:23** do our work for them as unto the Lord. When it is all said and done, He is the one we are serving and our conscience must be bound by His desires.

In general, I find that this command speaks a powerful message to us regarding the emotional weight we put into our circumstances. Most of us have guided our lives by the quality or nature of our circumstances. If things are going well, we think we have done things good; and, as a result, God is blessing us. And that goes the same for the other side of this spectrum. If things are going bad, difficult, and we find ourselves suffering, then we think we have done things wrong, are bad, and have failed. We need to strip this perspective from our minds and let our minds be renewed with the truth. Suffering is prescribed by God to accomplish His purposes in our lives and not as a punishment for our not doing it right.

Remember, **1 Peter 1:6-7** made it clear that the distressing trials we endure are about God developing and strengthening our faith; and, despite what we feel,

they are not about performance. God allows our suffering in order to cause a separation between us and this world, to induce us to live as aliens, to train others, to test others, to judge others, and for so many reasons it is crazy. He is the great multitasker and not a single opportunity goes to waste. But for us to be ok with unjust treatment we have to always start with the perspective that Jesus is our Lord, the one who guides our steps, delights in the details of our lives, and whose one maniacal goal for our lives is to transform us into His image. If we keep that in mind, then we can be at rest trusting that no matter what is happening in our lives, we can confidently know that our Father, who handpicked us for His Son, is merely making us into a phenomenal lover that shares the character and nature of His Son.

And the true test of this godly perspective is found when we suffer unjustly; when we suffer for doing what is right or intrinsically good (the Greek word “*agathos*” is used). Yes, the true test comes when we walk in the Spirit of God and do deeds that are “good”—that are His deeds—and still we suffer. When we know we are going through difficulties because of what we have done in our flesh, and we buckle up and endure it, that is something that most people do. After all, it fits their cause and effect paradigm and their underline core ethic of goodness. But when things are unjust, especially at the hands of those we have trusted to take care of us, and we choose God’s perspective and patiently endure under this suffering, then this is the type of faith that will result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the kind of faith that has power and will not falter. It is the kind of faith that is rooted in our true identity.

Besides, we can always keep in mind that **1 Peter 1:17** said that our Father is

always impartially judging, even now, so these people who take advantage of His children will be held to account. We may not always see His judgment in action, but we can be confident that our Father, our *Abba*, is watching out for us and will deal with the unjust ways we have been harmed. As an example, do you remember what He said to me from ***Zechariah 2:8-9***? "Anyone who harms you harms my most precious possession. I will raise my fist to crush them, and their own slaves will plunder them." Personally, I take this seriously and I have seen it happen over and over again. God deals with those who have harmed me; and, when I see it, I am always comforted to endure unjust suffering knowing He has my back covered.

This passage also speaks to the fact that as our Lord Jesus will at times place us with people who are intrinsically good ("*agathos*") and other times with people who are unreasonable and difficult, or in the Greek warped. Maybe other cultures are conditioned differently, but we are all pretty entitled and if some master is not "good" to us, we freak out, we complain, we are miserable, we hate life, we hate everyone, and we get busy trying to find a new "good" master. But rarely do we stop and ask the Lord if this warped person is exactly what He wants for us during this season or this period of time. Maybe it is exactly what He has ordered and instead of running He wants you endure patiently while He accomplishes His purposes with you, with them, with others, and so on. Remember, things are not always just about you. As the Lord's bondservant, He uses you to accomplish so many things with so many other people. Our view tends to be so narrowly focused on the "Me" that we get lost and tend to lose this perspective.

With that said, there may be times He wants you to run and find a new master,

but we have to be willing to be subject to His will either way and not superimpose our emotions over His will such that magically our will seems to suddenly become His will. We must fight this tendency and instead seek Him and believe that He will communicate to us when or if He wants us to find a new master. But please keep in mind, that His goal for you is not that you only find “good” masters, but that you will be conformed into the image of Jesus; and that just might require a few warped masters along the way. Don’t be surprised, just be subject to His will and His lordship over your life and rest in it.

I love the fact that when we check in with Him, seek His understanding, and rest in His purposes for our lives confident that we are the **beloved**, that it finds favor with God. And that is because in those moments we stand in faith, we stand in the truth; and we know **Hebrews 11:6** makes it clear that without faith it is impossible to please God. Besides, we also know that whatever is not of faith is sin (**Romans 14:23**). So there is no middle ground. Thus, we are to submit to our masters and trust that in and through it all, even our unjust suffering, God is our Dad and He is taking care of His business and so we are ok and we can endure. After all, it is all for His good purpose since all that He does is good.

1 Peter 2:21-25

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins

in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

There is a lot here, but to start let's just consider this first phrase which just might have caused your heart to stop for a few beats: "For you have been called for this purpose." What purpose? You know what purpose; it is very clear. This concept points back to **2:20**, "When you do what is right and suffer for it and patiently endure it." We have been called to do what is intrinsically good ("*agathos*") and to suffer for it at the unjust hands of those who are warped and twist light into darkness and distort all that we do, even slandering us as evildoers (**2:12**). Did anyone tell you this when they invited you to accept Jesus; I doubt it. This is the fine print we find about much later.

But we were always called for this purpose as "called" is in the *orist passive indicative*. God has called us (*passive*), and from beginning to end this calling has described our life (*orist*), and it is a statement of fact (*indicative*). We were called for this purpose of suffering unjustly and patiently enduring under its sting. Accordingly, it is now time to let this truth start to work its way through our entitled minds, through our emotions, through our bodies, and, as it says in **1:6**, greatly rejoice; yes, greatly at the privilege of suffering in this manner!

How radical a departure is this from how we have lived? We hate suffering, we hate injustice, we hate it when people (especially our masters) are horrible and mean to us; and we have been trained to self-protect, fight, and flee. But the Lord wants us to know that part of our assignment as aliens and strangers on this earth

is to suffer unjustly; and He wants us to not just accept it and settle with it but to greatly rejoice in it knowing that we will be fully compensated beyond imagination for every ounce of suffering we have incurred at the hands of our masters. This is our hope.

In addition, as I said before, we can have full confidence that justice will be done. Each person who ever abused one of the Lord's beloved will get their comeuppance. This is also our comfort and assurance. We must never forget the saints who have been unjustly martyred and are resting underneath the altar of God. They shout to the Lord and say, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?" (*Revelation 6:10-11*). The Lord told them to rest a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters—their fellow servants of Jesus who were to be martyred—had joined them. Well, the implication is that they will be fully avenged; no one will not get away with harming the Lord's beloved; it is only a matter of time.

I want to stop here tonight and pick up with this verse next week, but I want you to start thinking about this reality: you were called to submit to your masters, both those who are good and those who are warped and twisted, and suffer unjustly at their hands. As you think about this truth, it is important to start to see how far from this calling you may actually live (mentally, emotionally, and physically). If so, as the Lord's bondservant, it is time to humble yourself and repent from your attitude, entitlement, anger, rage, fight, and fear. Truly consider who you are. You are the Lord's **beloved** and in this truth you can find rest in the fact that you have been called, for His glory and yours, to suffer.

And please keep in mind that even though the things we go through are distressing, we can still greatly rejoice. With that said, no one is asking you to pretend that such injustice is not completely awful, hurtful, and even terrorizing; but if you know who you are and who your Dad is then you can still greatly rejoice knowing that your Dad is doing something marvelous not just with your life but in and through your life.

Ironically, I have found that such times of suffering has ultimately led to more intimacy, trust, rest, patience, peace, joy, and even a deeper commitment and love for Jesus and my heavenly Father. That is not saying I experienced it all in the moment of suffering, absolutely not. But God used suffering to bring all of this into my life. It is amazing, God always works the opposite of our flesh. I know it does not make sense and I notice that you are squirming in your seats, but relax, He is bigger, stronger, taller, greater, and more capable and amazing than you have ever imagined. He is the God of the impossible and He loves to do the impossible through you. Let's get our minds wrapped around this reality: as aliens and strangers on this earth we have been called to suffer and in our suffering to glorify our Father in heaven.

Let's pray.