

• *Appeal for Godly living – down to the details*

• *The severe problem of suffering*

1. They should submit to every human creature

• *Government authorities*

• *Every human being should be treated with respect*

• *For the Lord's sake*

• *Includes delegated authority*

• *Ultimately authority is given by God*

• *Secular rule promotes good order*

2. Living in submission to other people will eventually win approval

3. Submission does not imply loss of freedom

In 1 Peter 2:13–4:11 Peter gets down to details in his appeal for godly living. He asks for willing submission to people around us¹. He gives instructions to slaves², to wives³, to husbands⁴, and then widens his material asking for general kindness⁵. He then takes up the particular problem of unjust suffering⁶ and asks them to specially realise the special time in which they live⁷.

The letter almost gives the impression of ending in 4:11, but then it seems to re-start and 4:12–5:11 specially takes up the severe problem of suffering which is expected to get worse.

1. **They should submit to every human creature.** They do so out of regard for God. *‘Be submissive for the Lord’s sake to every human creature, whether it be to the emperor as the supreme ruler¹ or to officials sent through him for the punishment of evil-doers and the praise of those who are doing what is good²’*. These verses are often taken to refer to government authorities exclusively. It is true that Peter has in mind the emperor and officials sent by him. Yet the opening words are not ‘Be submissive to every institution...’, they are ‘Be submissive to every human creature...’, and Peter goes on to mention people who have no office in government, and he mentions fellow-Christians. The opening line should be taken seriously. Peter is not speaking of institutions; he is speaking of people. Every human being should be treated with respect and we should be submissive to what he is and where God has put him.

In this context Peter goes on to mention government authorities. The authorities concerned might not be totally worthy of respect, but it is not done ‘for the emperor’s sake’; it is done ‘for the Lord’s sake’ – that is for Jesus.

This submission includes those with delegated authority: courts, local government and minor officials must be respected as well as the Roman emperor himself.

Peter implies – although he is not as explicit as Paul in Romans 13 – that these authorities have the authority of God behind them. In verse 14 the phrase ‘sent **through** him’ seems to refer to God. (It is not sent **by** him – by the emperor; it is sent **through** him – coming ultimately from God.)

Peter explains the function of secular rule: it is to control evil and to promote good order. It sets up a system of punishment and reward.

2. **Living in submission to other people will eventually win approval.** Peter says: *‘For living like this is God’s will: doing good to silence the ignorance of foolish people¹’*. When Christians show obvious willingness to submit themselves to lawful authority and to treat people generally in terms of where God has put them in society – then others are impressed whether they admit it or not! Eventually they will not be able to complain.

3. **Submission does not imply loss of freedom.** Peter perhaps surprises us when he goes on to say: *‘Live as free people...’¹*. Surely – one might think – submission is loss of freedom! Peter does not think so! Having said ‘Be submissive’, he now says ‘Live as free men and

1 2:13-17
2 2:18-25
3 3:1-6
4 3:7
5 3:8-12
6 3:13-4:6
7 4:7-11

1 2:13
2 2:14

1 2:15

1 2:16

• *Freedom is more a matter of feeling at ease in the presence of God*

women'. Freedom is not a matter of whether one does or does not obey authorities over us. It is more a matter of feeling at ease in the presence of God. Our God is a good Father. It is freedom to serve Him. He gives us freedom from fear – even under the worst tyrannies. He gives us freedom from feeling guilty, freedom from petty regulations and tiny and insignificant matters. When we love God and enjoy doing His will there is an amazing sense that we are 'doing what we like' – because what we like is doing God's will! Peter asks us to **enjoy** our freedom. Live as free men and women! What is the good of being free if one makes no use of one's freedom. The Christian lives in the joy of the fact that there is nothing and no one to fear – except God Himself. Our sins are washed away. Forgiveness is available to us on a daily basis. Our God is not a God of petty regulations. His yoke is easy; His burden is light.

4. Freedom does not imply license to sin

4. **Freedom does not imply license to sin.** Peter says: '*Live as free people but not as having a cloak to cover up freedom to do evil*¹'. One does not regard oneself as free to run wild. It is not a matter of regarding nothing as sin for us at all. This is using a good freedom to cover up a bad freedom. (In the Greek the idea of freedom comes twice: 'live as free people . . . but not... to cover up freedom. . .'.)

1 2:16

5. Freedom is happy behaviour towards God and people

5. **Freedom is happy behaviour towards God and people.** Peter goes on to describe this 'freedom' in a string of commands. '*Honour all men and women. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honour the emperor*¹'. It is really defining what the Christian's freedom consists of.

1 2:17

• *No group in society is worthless*

Freedom is feeling free to honour all people everywhere. The Christian knows that everyone is created in God's image. No group in society is worthless. No one is garbage or junk. Everyone is to be honoured as God's 'creature'; Peter's use of this word has a point to it.

• *Freedom is love within the fellowship*

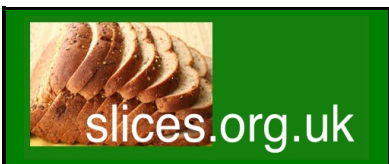
Freedom is love within the fellowship. There is no freedom unless there are people around. Isolation is bondage, not freedom. There is no freedom unless there is love.

• *Freedom is fear of God*

Freedom is fear of God. Strangely, there is no freedom unless there is fear – but it has to be fear of God. It is not that we fear eternal alienation; God holds His people forever. But we fear His disapproval; we fear not receiving from Him the honour He wishes to give us.

• *By relating rightly to everyone the Christian enjoys freedom in God*

Freedom involves courteously and fearlessly honouring state-authorities. Peter comes back to one of his main concerns in verse 13. 'Honour the emperor'. By relating rightly to everyone and keeping a good conscience, the Christian enjoys wonderful, delightful, freedom in God.



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