

# Humbly Follow His Footsteps to the Cross

1 Peter 2:11-25 • 2022-07-03 • 1 Peter Series "From Cross to Crown"



Liberty and freedom are words which are practically enshrined in our country's founding documents. And they are still celebrated with enthusiasm. You'll see fireworks today and tomorrow. With each explosion they announce the celebration of freedom. You'll see parades of those who love liberty. You'll see people waving flags as if to echo, "we love our freedom." All across the nation, in towns like ours you'll hear the reading of the Declaration of Independence. Crowds will gather to celebrate and sing about "the land of the free." But what does freedom mean for us as Christians? Today we continue our series going through 1 Peter. In the second half of chapter two Peter writes about our freedom as God's people. It's actually not the same as what the rest of the world considers freedom. He says, *"Live as free people... but live as God's slaves."* We'll consider that today as we learn how freedom means humbly following in the footsteps of Christ.

As much as we enjoy our freedoms as citizens of our country we don't really belong to this world. Peter addresses believers as "foreigners and exiles." We might live in this world, but we regard our true home as the kingdom of our God. Our time here is only temporary. Just like refugees or exiles mankind was made to leave paradise. When Adam and Eve were chased out of the garden, they began our exile. Men like Noah, Abraham, and Moses recognized they don't belong with the kingdoms of this world; they belong to a higher king who sits on a higher throne. All believers recognize they don't belong to this world. They are waiting to return to the garden and the green pastures of paradise. And so are we. We are foreigners and exiles. This doesn't mean we can't fly our nation's flag. But it does mean that we dare not let our patriotism overtake our faith. Nor should we let anything take priority over our God, our king.

And we are more than just exiles. We are up against that which would forever remove our freedom and enslave us. Peter reminds us that, *"sinful desires wage war against your soul."* A sad reality is that many of those who fight for freedom and their rights are actually fighting for their sinful desires. They might say, "It's my right, my freedom, my choice." But the things they cry for are the defiant desires driven by the prince of this world. This warfare rages against our souls. In a terrible turn of irony the clamor for more freedom ends up placing us further lost in sin's trap. Sin promises freedom but brings Satan's tyranny and our bondage. The right to kill children, the right to abuse your body, the right to give into every sinful desire is the right to lose the war against your soul.

The Scriptures remind us that giving into the cry for sinful desires isn't freedom at all. It is slavery. Once Jesus explained how what some people call freedom is really slavery. He told his listeners that they needed to be set free because they were all held in bondage and slavery. Jesus' opponents had said, "We've never been slaves to anyone! What do you mean we need to be set free?" Jesus responded, *"Amen, Amen, I tell you: Everyone who keeps committing sin is a slave to sin."* (John 8:34) We are bound to the will of our sinful flesh.

We are actually incarcerated because of our sins! God does not allow the devil free reign. He has bound him in chains and holds him for the judgment. And all sinners are destined to join with him. That's not a prison we can escape from. God sees our sins and holds his righteous verdict against all sinners. Sin always loses against him. *"For God imprisoned all in disobedience."* Ro 11:32. How free are we really if we must face death, hell, and the judgment of a holy God?

However, we are not slaves to sin. God has set us free from this bondage. We were set free. Not free to sin, but free to live for God. *"Live as free people... but live as God's slaves."*

How are we to live as God's slaves? It surprises some Christians to learn that waging war against our sinful desires actually includes giving up our freedoms! Peter explains that part of our godly living includes submitting to authority. *"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right."* We are told to submit to every authority. And that means more than just obeying the laws of our nation. Our submission includes, *"Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor."* That means the way we talk to and about those in authority should be respectful and with honor.

Maybe at this point someone might argue that we only have to respect godly rulers. Some argue that we no longer need to honor or respect authorities if they take our freedoms, or if they aren't Christian. But Peter says submit to every human authority. For him that included submitting to the godless rulers who imprisoned believers and threatened them. This is the same Peter who witnessed a great persecution break out against Christians in Jerusalem. This is the same Peter who heard about the beheading of John the Baptist at the hands of the authorities. This is the same Peter who heard of the beheading of James, the first apostle to die at the hands of the ruling authorities. This is the same Peter who could not have missed the godless attacks by Nero against Christians. The emperor Nero had them brutally killed and even burned. Peter himself would die by being crucified under Nero's reign. Do you think Peter made a mistake by telling us to submit to every human authority? No. (He obviously didn't mean to submit if they try to get you to go against God's Word. But in all other cases Christians are called to honor and submit.)

*“Live as free people but do not use your freedom as a cover up for evil.”* Do we sometimes claim that our dishonor and slander of authority is justified because we have a right to free speech? Do we take for granted the freedoms we have? This can happen spiritually as we assume that since God is on our side, we have a right to be insubordinate towards those in authority. God clearly says, *“No, you don’t. I appointed that authority. You will obey them.”*

What impression do people have of you as an American Christian? Someone could look at many American Christians today and wonder if they have any respect for authority. Is it a godly thing to act patriotic by flying a flag with vulgar words dishonoring your governing authorities? Is that any better than the godless dishonoring of the police? Is it a godly thing to mock those in authority? God has appointed governors, presidents, rulers, and all human authority to serve him. He calls on you to submit to them. Do you? He calls on you to honor and respect them. Do you? *“Submit to every authority...Show proper respect to everyone...honor the emperor.”*

Peter goes so far to describe our submission that he even calls upon slaves to submit to harsh masters! Keep in mind slavery in the ancient world wasn’t like slavery in colonial American or the southern states before the civil war. It wasn’t really based on ethnicity. Slaves in ancient Israel were usually based on paying off a debt. And Peter writes to the believers outside of Israel. Slaves in the Roman empire were usually either paying off a debt or prisoners of war from cities who resisted the emperor. While many slaves in ancient Rome could own property and purchase their own freedom, some were indeed treated even worse than we treat cattle today. Peter’s advice for Christians enslaved in ancient Rome is basically “submit.” He instructs believers to bear up, do good not evil, and endure the harsh treatment because they are conscious of God. Their consolation in suffering: God is just. He will set things right. Can we even begin to imagine what that looks like? How did it feel for people like Joseph when he was mistreated as a slave? How did it feel for the people of ancient Israel when harshly treated by the Egyptians? Did they submit and entrust themselves to God? What about you? How bad is it that you feel you have the right to insubordination?

Peter’s instruction to those enslaved believers ought to silence and shame us who think we have a right to be defiant against authority. Are those in authority over you treating you unfairly? Endure it. Submit. Bear up even under harsh treatment. Continue to do good. Don’t be insubordinate. Don’t be defiant. Don’t dishonor authority.

Peter says, *“to this you were called.”* Submit to every authority and show respect even when suffering. But God didn’t just call you to this. He left you footsteps to follow. *“Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”* This is what we do as Christians! We follow Christ’ example of submitting to authority!

No man slave or free has ever lowered themselves under authority more than the Christ. He was called to bear the heaviest load, the greatest weight, the harshest treatment. He came to be the servant of all and to submit himself to the Father’s will. Though the world wrongly accused him of subverting the government and opposing Caesar, he was innocent. He perfectly and humbly submitted himself to the human authority which God has placed over him. He was completely innocent. And when he unjustly suffered, he didn’t retaliate. When the rulers struck him, he *“entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”* When the soldiers beat him, he didn’t retaliate, though he easily could as the Son of God. When he hung on the cross, he bore it all and cried out in faith, *“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*

This is the greatest injustice. How could God the Father ever allow the authorities to do this to his Son? How could the Son allow such injustice? Peter mentions that Jesus was more than an example for us to bear up under authority. He suffered for a purpose. And it wasn’t an injustice. It was mercy. It was the Son of God taking upon himself the justice we deserved. *“He bore our sins in his body on the cross.”* So that we might truly be free from sin Jesus took it upon himself. And he faced the justice we all deserved once for all! *By his wound you are healed!*

And he took our sins upon himself so that we might no longer let sin be our master but live for righteousness. Do you have someone in authority over you that makes your life difficult? Submit. But do it as you follow in the footsteps of Christ. Do it as you see Jesus stepping each part of his path to the cross. Follow the footsteps of your king. And when you do, join your Lord in entrusting yourself to the one who judges justly. He has judged your sin paid for. He has justly declared you innocent for the sake of the sufferings of Christ. Entrust yourself to his care no matter what circumstances you might find yourself facing.

Peter concludes this chapter, *“For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”* Jesus may have died for our sins on the cross. But he rose and now lives forever as our Shepherd and Overseer. He is the one who watches over us. And even if all other freedoms and governing authorities may fail us, Jesus our King never will. He gives us green pastures and feeds us. He watches over us and keeps us safe. We have returned to the one who will lead us out of exile and back to paradise, our Lord and King, Jesus.

What does freedom mean as God’s people? It means we live as free people, but as slaves to God. We serve the God who freed us from slavery to sin, death, and the devil. We live as we trust in him to carry us through the trials of this to join where the footsteps of Christ lead us. We humbly follow in his footsteps from cross to crown.