

This morning, we are in the fifth week of our sermon series through the New Testament book of 1 Peter, a letter written by the apostle Peter, one of the early church leaders, to a group of Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. I have entitled this sermon series “Stranger,” because one of the main themes throughout this letter is that those of us who believe in Jesus are citizens of heaven, living here as strangers or resident aliens. Our primary identity, values, and hope are not given to us by the culture in which we live but are found in heaven. The letter begins by focusing on who we are as believers in Jesus Christ, then moves on to a section on how we relate to each other in the church, and in today’s section, part of which we read last week, Peter focuses on how we relate to the world.

Remember that this was not dropped out of the sky to 21st century America. Remember the context. Peter is writing to Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire, living in a society that does not share all of their values, and which is often hostile to them or suspicious of them. How then are they to live? In particular, he addresses three populations that do not have much power in the population. One of the dynamics is that in Christ, they are free. They have been brought into a community where the barriers have broken down and they are one in Christ.

***Galatians 3:28** - There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

But they live in a world of hierarchies; emperors and governors and their citizens, masters and their slaves or servants, husbands and their wives, parents and their children. And each of these relationships comes with their cultural expectations. How, then, is the Christian supposed to live in that tension?

***1 Peter 2:11 - 3:14** - Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which 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. ¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, 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 men. ¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. ¹⁸ Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to*

those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. ^{NIV 1 Peter 3:1} Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. ⁴ Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. ⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. ⁸ Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." ¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

Notice Peter's goal in writing this section. It is not a marriage manual, or a primer on slavery or work relations. His goal is evangelistic, to turn people from being suspicious of Christians and opposing them to glorifying God, to faith in Jesus:

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... ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

The goal is that they would see your good deeds, stop slandering you, and glorify God. Give them no reason to say something bad about you by your conduct. And try to win them to Christ by your life, as you serve and submit to others:

¹⁶ Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God... ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

You are free in Christ. Use your freedom to serve and submit. And when you are mistreated, you are not to respond with evil but blessing. Why? Because you are following Jesus' example.

²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Difficult situations give a great opportunity to point people to Jesus:

Matthew 5:46-47 *If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?*

As much as you may long for an easy marriage, workplace, or life in this world, it is the difficult situations that give you the greatest opportunity to showcase the gospel of grace. The reason is to follow the example of Jesus and to lead others to Christ.

I want to focus on the heart of this passage rather than giving you new laws. This is a hard ask, to serve and submit to government, to bosses, and to spouses, especially

when they are unjust or cruel. Where do we find the power? “Entrust yourself to him who judges justly.”

Entrust your identity to God

You are not defined by your status in life or by how others treat you, or even by how you view yourself.

Romans 5:6-8 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

You are so sinful that nothing less than the death of the Son of God could save you. And yet you are so loved that He willingly gave His life for you. What does that mean? It gives a humble confidence. No one can offend you, because your pride has already been laid down. And no one can take away your dignity, because in Christ you are already His chosen and beloved.

1 Peter 2:9 - *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

As strangers, we can **detach with love**. Not being codependent with the alcoholic. Not detach in anger. Detach from this world in love. I will love them, but I will not let them define me. I will work for their good, but I will find my value and hope in God.

Entrust the battle to God

Remember that we do not return evil with evil, but we overcome evil with good. The battle will not be won with the weapons of this world, but with prayer and love and the Word of God.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 - *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Matthew 5:43-45 *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.*

Pray, love, preach and obey the Word.

Entrust judgment to God

Let God be the judge. Even if you are mistreated in this world, trust that God will be the judge, and will do a better job than you can do.

Romans 12:17-21 - *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my 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." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

This is not an easy teaching. It runs contrary to what we think we should do, and it ran even more contrary when Peter was writing it. Peter focuses on three spheres in particular:

Government

¹³ *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, 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. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.*

Governing authorities, including the government and the police, have been instituted by God to keep the peace, law and order. Yes, you are free, yes your primary citizenship is in heaven, but no, that does not exempt you from paying taxes and obeying the laws of the land. Listen to how Paul put it:

Romans 13:1-7 - *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right,*

but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

You are to be model citizens, seeking the peace and prosperity of the city, just as the exiles in Babylon were instructed to do by God.

Jeremiah 29:7 - *Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

There will be persecution for the gospel. Don't add to it persecution for disobeying the authorities God has instituted.

But what about when they are asking us to do something contrary to God?

Acts 4:18-20 - *Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. ²⁰ For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

Your primary allegiance is to God. If the government wants you to do something that is in opposition to God, you choose God. But if it's just something you don't like, use mechanisms under the law to try to bring about reform. And if you don't get your way, you submit and trust God. But do not rebel against the authorities God has ordained.

But you don't understand how evil our government is! You don't understand how bad the police are! You think the Roman governments to which Peter was referring was any worse? Nero? Pontius Pilate? Jesus was executed. Peter would be executed. Paul would be executed. Be model citizens, unless you are asked to go against God.

Workplace

¹⁸ *Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.* ¹⁹ *For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.* ²⁰ *But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?* *But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.* ²¹ *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

The second realm he speaks to is household servants. Slaves made up ¼ of the population in those days. They were not going to be able to overthrow the whole institution. But they sowed the seeds that would eventually destroy slavery.

As Miroslav Volf put it, *“The call to follow the crucified Messiah was, in the long run, much more effective in changing the unjust political, economic, and familial structures than direct exhortations to revolutionize them would have ever been. For an allegiance to the crucified Messiah – indeed, worship of a crucified God – is an eminently political act that subverts a politics of dominion at its very core.”*

Remember the dignity that the gospel gave to slaves. They were seen as objects in Rome, bodies in Greece. Aristotle taught that some people were fit to be slaves, and that no true injustice could be done to a slave. But Peter writes that their suffering is unjust. And the gospel proclaimed that they were made in the image of God and on the same level spiritually as their masters:

Galatians 3:28 - *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Nevertheless, because of their freedom, they could use their role to showcase their freedom in Christ and their trust in God’s judgment, even when they endured unjust suffering:

1 Corinthians 7:21-24 *Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you-- although if you can gain your freedom, do so.* ²² *For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave.* ²³ *You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.* ²⁴ *Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.*

If you can gain your freedom, great. But if not, submit to masters, even when they are harsh, and entrust yourself to God. Think of David's example as a household servant to Saul.

But you don't understand my boss! Be a model employee, and by this you will be a witness for Christ. Obey even when their eye is not on you.

Ephesians 6:5-9 - *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. ⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.*

Marriage

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

Peter is addressing Christian wives married to unbelievers, a real difficult situation in those days. Consider this piece of advice from a leading Roman manual on marriage in those days:

Plutarch's Advice to Bride and Groom – "A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband's friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions."

In Roman culture, a pagan woman who becomes a Christian could appear rebellious for not worshiping her husband's gods and for making friends in the Christian community.

Peter rejects the command to worship their husband's gods, but encourages wives to win their husbands over by their gentle and submissive spirit. It would have been shameful in that culture for a wife to presume to instruct her husband. He encourages them to treat their husband with love, honor, and respect.

And husbands, treat your wife with gentleness.

⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Recognize that your wife is a co-heir of salvation, one of God's precious children. Treat her wrong, and her Daddy in heaven is going to get really upset. Remember that Ephesians 5 gave plenty more instructions to the husband about loving his wife as Christ loved the church.

I know that many of you find yourself in very difficult situations. As far as it depends upon you, love and serve and submit to your spouse in order to win them to Christ through your behavior. This is not talking about enduring physical abuse, which was not sanctioned in the Roman Empire. The true lover of your heart is Christ.

Entrust yourself to the one who judges justly. Entrust your identity. Entrust the battle through prayer, love, and the Word. And entrust all judgment to Him.