

UNSHAKABLE: An Unshakable Honorⁱ 1 Peter 2:13-25

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is so very good to see you this morning. And to get to worship with you.

I want to invite you to grab your Bibles and turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter 2. We are in the middle of a teaching series, working our way through the New Testament book of 1 Peter. We are studying this book as it instructs us in how we can develop an unshakable faith in what often seems is a chaotic world. So far in our study, we've discovered our unshakable hope, how to have an unshakable walk, our unshakable love for one another, and last week Eric Jones, our Student Minister, preached a great message on the unshakable church. Today we are going to look at an unshakable honor. We are going to be in chapter 2, verses 13 through 25 as we look at that topic.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Being Watched

Research has discovered that people change when they know that they are being watched. I think we can all relate to that. When we know that a police officer is up ahead with a radar gun, someone has maybe given us the signal by flashing their lights, what do we do? We tap the breaks and act like we've been the perfect driver. Hands and 10 and 2, using our blinkers and driving under the speed limit. Hey, don't judge me, I know you do that too!

The University of Newcastle published a studyⁱⁱ that shows how being watched affects our behavior. The study took place in an office where a coffee bar was set up. There was a sign that indicated that payment for coffee was on the honor system. For the first couple of weeks the area was decorated with a picture of flowers. During that period, very few people paid for their coffee. But, when the picture of the flowers was replaced with a picture of eyes, contributions went up three times. Just the portrayal of being watched changed people's behavior.

In our passage of study this morning, Peter is telling us that as Christians, we are being watched. People are looking at the way in which we approach our lives. Sometimes they are watching us to see if we will slip up in certain situations. And sometimes people watch us as Christians to see what being a follower of Jesus is all about. But either way, as believers in Jesus, people are

watching us. And Peter's point is that the way we honor key people in our lives provides a testimony to Christ.

BACKGROUND:

By way of background, Peter is writing to Christians that have been scattered all over because of intensifying persecution. Christianity is on the rise and governmental and religious groups are on a mission to squash that growth. And Peter is writing to encourage them, but also to instruct them in how to live in a way that honors Jesus. Specifically, Peter is going to use three examples of how honoring key people is beneficial. We are going to look at two of those this morning and then the third one next week.

In verse 12, Peter says, *"¹²Keep your conduct among the Gentiles **honorable**, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."* The word translated as honorable means, "an outward sign of the inward good," or "noble."ⁱⁱⁱ We are to demonstrate honor as a sign of the inward working of The Lord in our lives.

And today, as we look at an unshakable honor, we are going to see the principle, the practice, and the prototype. That's our outline this morning.

MESSAGE:

So, let's begin by looking at, ...

1) The Principle.

A principle is a fundamental truth that serves as a foundation for how we are to live and think. What is the principle truth that leads us to practice honor? Look at verse 13 of 1 Peter 2. *¹³Be **subject** for the Lord's sake to every human institution.* Let's stop right there.

The principle is being subject. It is to submit ourselves to someone or something. In fact, most translations use the word submit instead of being subject. And the truth is we bristle against this word, don't we? We tend to view the word, "submit," as a surrendering ourselves to being inferior or an object of oppression. When an MMA fighter forces someone into submission, he dominates this opponent. But that's not what the Biblical word means.

Oppression is an outward decision, made by someone else, identifying themselves as superior over you. But Biblical submission is willfully placing

ourselves under something or someone. It is an inward decision, made by us, identifying another as an authority in our lives. And the principle that leads us to honor others carries the idea that we do so when we submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ in our lives, we follow His example, as we are going to see, of being subject to human institutions. That's what Peter says. And by so doing, we demonstrate, verse 12, that when others accuse us as evildoers, we show that as false by our good deeds.

Jesus taught this same kind of idea. In Matthew chapter 5, verse 16, when He said, *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* One way we show our good works, Peter says, is to willfully be subject to every human institution. And notice, again, this is for The Lord's sake.

That's the guiding principle for us. That is foundational as we come to applying it in our lives. Peter is going to say that we show honor by being subject in three areas. To the emperor, or governing authorities, to our masters, and then toward each other in the home. When we live according to this principle, we will show others what it means to follow Christ and enhance our testimony and the advancement of The Kingdom of God.

So, we've talked about the principle, let's now look at...

2) The Practice.

How do we practice, or live out, this principle in lives? Peter uses three specific examples. Again, we are only going to look at two of those today. The specific applications for us to practice honoring others pertain to government and the workplace. Let's first examine government. Look again, beginning in verse 13 through verse 17. *¹³Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to **the emperor** as supreme, ¹⁴or to **governors** as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵For **this is the will of God**, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.* Honor government.

Now, I know living in East Texas I am sailing into choppy waters when talking about submitting to the government. And not just in East Texas, but all across our nation. I don't know about you, but my natural tendency in reading this passage is to say, "That's fine and good, Peter, but who's in office? Anyone

else with me on that? But here's the deal, Peter doesn't make that distinction. We are to honor the emperor, period.

Now, we have a couple of ways we can look at this text. We can say, "Well, the context of Peter's writing was during the time of a dictatorship and when people operated under slavery." To take that view would say that this pertains to a specific context that doesn't apply to us living in a democratic republic nor enduring slavery. So, we can skip over this text. But to say that, is to 1) call into question other instructions in the Scriptures, and 2) to suggest that God didn't foresee all contexts when inspiring and preserving this text.

The other way we can look at this is as instruction for us today, applied, to our context. If we are going to hold to the authority of Scripture, and I view it as God's Word, then we have to align ourselves to this teaching. So, let's talk first about the practice of honoring government by being subject to our leaders.

Peter says that the purpose of government, verse 14, is to punish those that do evil and praise those who do good. This, he says, is the will of God. But what about corruption and governments that call good evil and evil good? Surely Peter didn't mean to honor that type of government.

Well, at the time of Peter writing this, the emperor of Rome, the ruler that these Christians were under, was Caesar Nero. Now, Nero hated Christians. Why? Well, the people saw the emperor as a deity. And every year, when paying taxes, people would bow their knee and say, "Nero is Lord." Well, Christians cannot do that because their Lord is Jesus, not Nero. So, they would pay their taxes but not make the statement. This led to Nero's hatred toward Christians.

So, Nero began state sponsored persecution. And it was an extreme persecution. He started a fire in the city of Rome. A fire that raged for 6 days and burned 10 of Rome's 14 districts.^{iv} He blamed the Christians for starting the fire and punished them by impaling them, dousing them with tar, and lighting them on fire to light the night chariot races. And when Peter pens these words, this is his backdrop. *¹⁷**Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.***"

Now, some of you are at this point asking a question. The same question I asked. What about civil disobedience? Does the Scripture make allowance for civil disobedience or are we to just always be subject to even tyrannical

government leaders? Remember, Scripture interprets Scripture. In light of that, when considering the whole counsel of God, the Bible does support civil disobedience. But there are parameters, guidelines. Let me mention those.

First, Peter says in verse 16, ¹⁶*Live as people who are free*, [People who are free from sin and not a slave to sin. But,...] ***not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.*** In other words, as a free people, we are not to revert to sinful practices. To do so, even when civil disobedience is appropriate, would only serve to entrap us in slavery to sin again, negating our freedom in Christ.

Second guideline, in verse 17, Peter says, ¹⁷*Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.* Again, honor is the general principle. We are to honor and hold respect for everyone, including the office of governmental authorities. But Peter is clear that the only person we are to fear is God. He says honor everyone, including the emperor, oh but fear God. The word, “fear,” means to have upmost reverence.^v We honor the others, but we are most concerned with pleasing God. More on that in just a moment.

Thirdly, there are Biblical examples of believers’ intentional disobedience toward governmental decrees. These examples are contained in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, in Exodus, chapter 1, the king of Egypt ordered the midwives to kill all male babies. But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king ordered. As a result, Moses was born and led God’s people out of slavery in Egypt.

In Daniel, chapter 1, he and his friends are ordered to eat the king’s food, but they refused on the basis of not eating food sacrificed to idols. Then in Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refused to bow down in worship of the king’s statue. They were thrown into the fiery furnace and God delivered them. Again, in Daniel 6, Daniel did not adhere to the king’s orders to not pray. As a result, he was placed in the Lion’s den and was unharmed.

Then in the New Testament. In Acts chapters 4 and 5, authorities told the apostles that they could not speak the name of Jesus. Their reply was that they were to obey God rather than men. Now, they were ultimately beaten for that stance, but Scripture said they were honored that they were counted worthy of such a punishment for the sake of Christ.

What are we to learn from these examples when it comes to holding in tension honoring the emperor but fearing God? Well, consider the real issue in each of the examples I gave. The issue was not a law that they didn’t like or disagreed with. I’m sure Nebuchadnezzar passed all kinds of laws Daniel didn’t care for. But in the case of the examples of disobedience was a law, or a decree, that required them to personally go against a command of God. As a result, in that situation, disobedience to that command was an appropriate response.

One commentator I read this week, in relationship to when civil disobedience is in order, said it this way, civil disobedience is appropriate **“When the State violates a direct command of God that would force a Christian to choose between allegiance to God and allegiance to Caesar.”**^{vi} Now, outside of that, we are to honor, respect, and adhere to the civil government and its laws.

For example, the midwives’ disobedience was due to a direct command of God to not murder. Daniel’s defiance was based on a command to not eat food sacrificed to idols. And the apostle’s stance was due to a command to go against the charge given to them by Jesus, to be witnesses all over the world.

Now, we may not like the laws that are passed, we may not agree, but unless we are forced to choose between obeying God or government, we are to honor the emperor and the laws of the land. Now, we have the freedom of speech, in our government structure, and the privilege to vote for Christian leaders, that gives us the right and the ability to speak out against certain laws and in favor of others, but that privilege does not give us the right to sin.

What about modern day examples, Pastor Chris? Are there examples of appropriate application of civil disobedience? One that comes to mind to me is not something we experienced in our state, in Texas. But in California, during the pandemic, churches were ordered, by the Governor, not to meet in person. Now, I understand churches decision to not meet in person, but that should not be something dictated by government. Because God’s Word says that we are to forsake NOT the assembling of ourselves together. When the government tells the church to violate that command, we should fear God rather than man.

Also, if I am ever required to submit my sermon notes to governmental authorities or threatened jail time if I teach certain biblical views, like our neighbors to the north, then I’m going to need you guys to bail me out of jail. Because I should fear God more than man. But we are not there yet, beloved.

Again, the principle is to honor government by being law abiding citizens. Peter says that is the will of God, and the way to showing others good deeds that they may in turn glorify God.

The second application Peter uses in teaching the concept of honor is in verses 18 to 20. He says, *“**18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 19For this is a gracious thing, when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 20For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.*** Believers are to honor, respect, their employers.

Now, there are some translations that translate the word, “servants,” as “slaves.”^{vii} I think servant is the better translation here as it is a different word from what is typically translated as slaves.^{viii} But it is certainly an appropriate translation as that is what they were referred to.

But one of the reasons that I prefer the translation as “servants,” is because of the lens that our country’s history causes us to view the term slaves. When we read that, we tend to think the sinful approach to slavery that existed in our country in the 19th century. But this word, servants, refers to a household servant working for a family.^{ix} It included occupations like doctors, teachers, writers, accountants, agents, bailiffs, overseers, secretaries, and sea-captains.^x So, it is best understood in the context of employee and boss relationships.

Now, Peter’s admonition is to willingly submit to our bosses with all respect. We are to be characterized by outstanding performance and loyalty at work. The Apostle Paul said in Colossians 3:23, *“**Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.**”* I think Christians should be the ones that stand out in the workplace for pursuing excellence and demonstrating cooperation. We should be the best employees.

Peter then addresses the question we all have in our minds again. What if our boss is a jerk? Again, end of verse 18, we are to show respect, *“**not only to the good and gentle but also the unjust.**”* Listen, Believer, if your boss is rude and a jerk, our urging as a Christian is to honor them. Two reasons: 1) because Peter commands it, and 2) because you will heap burning coals on their head by your kindness (Romans 12:20).

Now, get counsel on whether or not you need to remain at your job, but honor your boss. God may have you in that position to be a witness to your boss.

I’ve got to move quickly. We’ve seen the principle, willful submission. We looked at two of the practices, government and employers. Now, let’s look at...

3) The Prototype.

A prototype is the first model of something.^{xi} In our case, our prototype is also a perfect representation of who we are to be. Our model is The Lord Jesus. Look at verses 21 through 25. *“**21For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.***

A couple of things that I want to point out here. First is the word called. We typically reserve this word to refer to someone being called to the ministry. But this is a general calling that applies to all believers here. Remember, Peter is writing to believers, not just pastors.

But what is it that Christians are called to? When we apply this to the context of Peter’s writing, we are called to honor our boss even when under harsh suffering of those in authority over us. And Peter gives us the basis for why we are to do this. Because Jesus suffered for us, as an example, a prototype, a model to follow, that we might follow in His steps. Think about it. Jesus was falsely accused, ridiculed, reviled and beaten; the exact conditions endured by the early believers reading this letter. But Jesus did not return evil for evil. Instead, He entrusted Himself to God The Father who is the ultimate judge.

The second thing that I want to point out here is verse 24. *“**24He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*** There are some things that are often taken out of context here. Peter is saying that the purpose of Jesus’ death was to provide forgiveness AND to empower us to live for righteousness. Jesus died that we might be forgiven, but also that we might live in a new kind of way that is different to the ways of the flesh.

Then Peter adds the sentence, "By His wounds you have been healed." Taken in context, this healing is not referring to physical healings. Wounds most likely refers to the sting of death brought by our sin or the literal wounds of servants serving under harsh masters. But, in this particular passage, forgiveness of sins is the subject here and nothing else points to physical healing.

The main idea is that as Christ Followers, we must surrender our lives to the Lordship of Christ. We are to follow Him in all arenas of our lives including our approach to being law abiding citizens and employees. And again, the purpose for this endurance is couched in verse 12. *"¹²Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, **they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.**"*

The principle, the practice and the prototype.

CONCLUSION:

Living this out is impossible apart from a personal relationship with Christ. By faith in Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our soul. He empowers and guides us into the paths of righteousness. And the strength to endure in challenging situations is found in Him.

If you are here today and there has never been a moment in your life where you have been born again unto a relationship with Jesus, we want to visit with you today. Being born again is a spiritual birth by which you come to the end of yourself, and you confess Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life. If you have questions about what that means, we want to walk you through that. At the end of our service, our elders will be here at the front of the stage and we would love to share with you how you can place your faith in Jesus as Lord.

Others of you here may be carrying a burden. Maybe it is related to a sense of oppression in your life. Maybe you are seeking wisdom in how you can pursue Christ in the workplace. Whatever it may be, we would like to pray with you and over you. Again, following our service today, we would look forward to visiting with you.

I'm going to pray, we will sing a song of reflection, be dismissed, but know that we will be here for you. Let's pray. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation for this message: Thomas R. Schreiner, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Peter, Jude: Vol. 37*, B&H Publishing: Nashville, 2003; Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Peter*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996; Paul A. Cedar, *The Communicators Commentary: James, 1, 2 Peter, Jude*, Word Books: Waco, 1984; John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Peter*, Moody Publishers: Chicago, 2004; William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1976; Max Anderson, *Holman New Testament Commentary: I & II Peter, I, II, III John, Jude*, Holman Reference: Nashville, 1999; Troy Rackliffe, “Stand Firm in Your Faith: Messages 5,” preached at Glade Community Church, notes given by Troy Rackliffe; Skip Heitzig, “Rock Solid: The World’s Hardest Activity,” sermon taught at Calvary Albuquerque, Jan 12, 2014, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/175/sermon/2380>; Michael Gossett, “Anchored in Submission,” message preached at Green Acres Baptist Church, September 18, 2022, accessed online: <https://www.gabc.org/episode/anchored-in-submission-anchored/>; J.D. Greear, “Submission: Training for Exiles,” sermon preached at Summit Church, June 28, 2020, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/submission-training-for-exiles>.

ⁱⁱ Clive Thompson, “The Eyes of Honesty,” article published by New York Times, December 10, 2006, accessed online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/10/magazine/10section1C.t-3.html>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Strong’s Concordance, 2570, kalos.

^{iv} National Geographic, “Jul 18, 64 CE: Great Fire of Rome,” article published by National Geographic, accessed online: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/great-fire-rome/#>.

^v Strong’s Concordance, 5399, phobeó.

^{vi} Alistair Begg, “Submission in a Secular Culture,” published by Truth for Life, April 1, 2008, accessed online: <https://www.truthforlife.org/resources/series/study-in-1-peter-volume-2/>.

^{viii} For more discussion on this see Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Peter*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996, pages 164-166.

^{ix} Strong’s Concordance, 3610, oiketes.

^x K. Hopkins, as quoted by S.S. Bartchy, contained in McKnight, *ibid*, page 166.

^{xi} Oxford Languages.