

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY SIX

Hope Beyond Unfairness: Pressing On Even Though Ripped Off

1 Peter 2:13–25

I'm convinced in my heart that if we were good students of submission we would get along a lot better in life. Submission is the one thing that works against our nature. Our problem, however, is that we don't actually do it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

How do you respond when someone rips you off? Assertive personality types might want to take justice into their own hands and try to get even. Meeker individuals tend to adopt an attitude of passivity when experiencing life's unfairness. They may run and hide from the potential threats of life. Others simply try to ignore the pain by looking the other way and saying, "That doesn't bother me!"

While these responses are typical—or even encouraged—they often lead to resentment that grows into bitterness, which slowly eats away at the soul like acid. Are those the ways to respond when ripped off? No! Scripture offers an alternative option—one that enables you to press on with a cool head and soft heart.

Outsiders often consider this biblical option foolish. Yet the wisdom of God is folly to the world. Only that biblical option offers eternal blessing not found anywhere else. This *Searching the Scriptures* study explores that option to help you understand and embrace the way of Christ when—not if—others treat you unfairly.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

You might be feeling the sting of unjust treatment at this very moment. Offer your feelings to God in prayer before you open His Word:

Father, I can write a long list of the people who have treated me unfairly throughout my life, but in this moment, examine me and take away any bitterness that might hide in my heart. I don't want to grasp onto any pain that might make me miss what You want to teach me today. In Jesus' gracious name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Throughout the history of the church, followers of Jesus Christ have been abused because of their faith. Christians have lost their jobs for refusing to compromise their convictions. Some families will banish a member who converts to Christianity. And believers all over the world today experience the constant threat of ghastly violence simply because they worship Jesus.

The recipients of 1 Peter experienced this kind of mistreatment for their faith. With each passing year, the flames of persecution burned hotter and hotter. Naturally, some of these early Christians wanted to retaliate, to rebel, to fight fire with fire.

Yet Peter turned this impulse upside down in [1 Peter 2:13–25](#) as he demonstrated that the appropriate Christian response to unjust behavior is not resistance but *submission*.



Observation: A Disposition of Submission

“What does this passage say?” This question ought to always be at the front of your mind as you study a new passage of Scripture. If you don't observe a text and know what it says, then you will never be able to discern its meaning and application.¹ Read [1 Peter 2:13–25](#), and for now, focus only on what the passage says.



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According to 1 Peter 2:13, with what command did Peter begin this section of his letter? What rationale did he provide for this command in 2:14? How do these verses relate to the context of the letter?

In 2:15, Peter provided the reason for the command in 2:13–14. What is God's will for His people?

In a paradoxical twist, Peter affirmed to his readers that they are truly free because they are slaves to God. In light of this reality, Peter offers five commands in 2:16–17 on how a slave of God can lead a life of holy submission. List the commands below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



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Peter then took his framework for handling mistreatment and focused on a specific example. What group did Peter address in [1 Peter 2:18](#), and what command did he give them?

According to [2:19–21](#), what was Peter’s rationale for offering such a difficult command?

Peter’s point is simple yet challenging. We can endure unjust suffering because Jesus our Savior endured even more unjust suffering. According to [2:22–25](#), what kind of suffering did Jesus endure? What were the results of this suffering?

Peter is appealing to believers to live submissively, ultimately to the Lord and then to those with whom or for whom they work—not only to the good and gentle, but also to the cruel and unreasonable. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: The Meaning of Submission

When ancient Greek-speakers envisioned the meaning of *submission*, certain images came to mind. The term was used to depict one bone arranged under another, a person standing under the protection of a shield, or a piece of parchment appended to the end of a document. In its most basic sense, submission refers to something that is placed or positioned beneath something else.

Peter took this imagery and applied it to relationships. To submit is to place yourself beneath another—both willingly and actively. In other words, “Respect everyone” (1 Peter 2:17). Yet Peter took this command a step further. Respect even those who mistreat you.

Some today might hear the word *submit* and think of it in negative terms—like someone acting out of blind obedience, no questions asked. Or like someone acting as a doormat, no struggle returned. Yet Peter turned these ideas on their heads and painted them in a *positive* way.

In light of this context, what does it look like to “submit to all human authority” (2:13)? Why does it matter that followers of Jesus submit to others, especially to those who mistreat them?

Put yourself in the well-worn sandals of a first-century slave. Your previous master, Cornelius, was “kind and reasonable,” treating you like a family member (2:18). But his business was failing, and he needed more cash. So he sold you to his neighbor Marcus—a “cruel” man (2:18).

Marcus follows Aristotle’s philosophy, so he considers his slaves mere property. To him, you are no different than his trusty knife or his favorite chair. He does *whatever* he wants to you. He overworks you. He abuses you when you don’t correctly anticipate his desires. You’ve even witnessed him kill some of your fellow slaves for disobeying him.



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Naturally, you scoff at Peter's exhortation to submit to Marcus "with all respect" (1 Peter 2:18). *How can I respect this man? He doesn't offer me even the slightest shred of dignity. How can I submit? Shouldn't I revolt against this evil institution?*

Now reread 2:18–23, still imagining you're this slave. How could those in the most undignified positions, even slaves like you, find *true* dignity based on their identity in Christ? How is Peter's radical teaching instructive for Christians today?

Just because Peter accepted the reality of slavery doesn't mean he approved of it. Sadly, his pen couldn't erase slavery and its horrors. He did, however, write a word of hope. Christ is our true master (2:16), and He is the shepherd and guardian of our souls (2:25). Our brokenness and pain will eventually fade away, and Jesus will one day give us new, resurrected bodies.

True freedom awaits us in eternity.



Correlation: Jesus' Teaching on Submission

Jesus led a life of self-sacrifice even in His dying breath. His teachings foreshadowed the kind of death He would die and demonstrated why His followers should adopt a posture of submission in their relationships.



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Read [Matthew 5:38–42](#), and in your own words, summarize Jesus' teaching in these verses. According to Jesus, how should a citizen of the kingdom of heaven respond when he or she is treated unfairly?

Jesus' words in [5:38–42](#) may sound startling, confusing, or even irrational. Yet later on, Jesus explained why believers can maintain a posture of submission to those who treat them poorly. According to [16:24–26](#), what does it take to be a true follower of Jesus? What must a Christian be willing to give up to obtain true life?

Jesus Christ is our example. But we are so quick to defend ourselves. Quick to fight back! Quick to answer back! Quick to get back! When's the last time you deliberately took it on the chin, kept your mouth shut, and gave Christ all the glory? That's a rare, rare thing, I say to our shame. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: A Costly Call

No one is immune to mistreatment. So, we must be ready to respond in a Christlike manner when such mistreatment inevitably arrives. What is your natural impulse when someone mistreats you? Do you want to get even? Do you retreat into yourself? Do you try to ignore the pain? What were the results of this behavior for you in the past?

As Jesus hung on the cross, fighting for every single breath, he whispered, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” ([Luke 23:34](#)). Jesus didn’t want His oppressors to suffer. He wanted, rather, for them to experience God’s mercy. Is there someone you need to forgive today? How would your offer of openhanded forgiveness affect this relationship?



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How can you practically submit to those who have historically treated you poorly? Write down some specific ways you can place their needs above your own.

The call to submit is a difficult one . . . a *costly* one. It involves giving up our own desires, our own comforts, and even our own safety to serve others. Doing so would be *impossible* if Jesus hadn't first lovingly submitted *to* us by willingly giving up His own perfect, divine life *for* us. No one was treated more unjustly than our Savior, yet He endured the pain anyway.

Because of His example, we can continue to give ourselves to love, serve, and submit to others—even those who treat us unfairly.



A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your time with God, write your own prayer in the space below.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

