

**1 Peter**  
**Part Four: Landmines**  
**Pastor Rick Henderson**      **February 25-26, 2023**

Today marks the halfway point for our series through First Peter. I love hearing about how you're responding to this series. I love what I'm hearing from all those of you who are studying this in your small groups. Some of you have shared some fantastic questions with me. I don't think I've done a good job of telling you about a resource we provide. We have a podcast called, Church Is Messy.

Each week, Pastor Svea and I record a new episode that keeps the conversation going from the sermon. We cover many details and questions I don't have time to cover during the sermon. New episodes drop each Wednesday. And after today's message, I think you'll want to check out the podcast. The passage that we are studying today is probably going to feel like walking through a minefield.



Today and next week, we are going to touch on some the topics that might feel explosive to you. We'll talk about

- Politics and Nationalism
- Slavery
- Gender Roles

I owe to you to be upfront. We are not going to do our best to avoid landmines. We are going to step on them on purpose. This is why it doesn't scare me to do that. This is why I don't think it should scare any of us to do that. Our significance and security and satisfaction are safe in Christ—there's nothing that we can't face. I think we'll discover that these potentially explosive topics are simply intersection points between real life and our identities in Christ. Let me remind you of our anthem during this series.

**SERIES THESIS:** Let your **IDENTITY** drive your **ACTIVITY**.

Courage and clarity come from understanding who we are. Let's begin by looking at the verse that I've challenged you to memorize.

**1 PETER 2:9-10** *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once*

*you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Notice the emphasis at the end. The implication is that this redefines who we are and what we do. Mercy is something that gets all the way down in our bones. It is now fundamentally who we are: people of mercy. Do we live in a merciful culture? Could our world use more of this? Is there anyone where you work that could use more of this? Do you already have enough of this at home, or would it be helpful to experience it just a bit more? Who are going to be the ones that carry mercy with them? Will it be you? Will it be us? What does it take to talk you out of being merciful? As you think about that, I'm going to put our memory verse back on the screen.

**1 PETER 2:9** *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, **a holy nation**, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

Everyone who trusts in Jesus: this is who we are. We don't level up and achieve this status over time. We don't eventually get promoted. These aren't Christian merit badges that you can acquire. Whenever someone transitions their allegiance to Jesus, this instantly becomes true. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Obviously, there is one that I've highlighted. I highlighted this aspect of who we are in Christ, because if we misunderstand it, it will corrode our mercy like an acid. Would you write this down?

Jesus **MADE** us into **A** holy nation, not **MAKERS** of holy nations.

Christian Nationalism has gotten much attention in the past couple of years. It's not new. The current iteration has been a growing movement since the 1970s. Leaders of Christian Nationalism want to deceive us into thinking it's nothing more than patriotism and love of country. Their true motive is to get power and impose their view of Christianity on the entire country, by force of law. Every time that it's been attempted in history, that country becomes less merciful and less Christian.

It is not Jesus' goal to create Christian nations. His purpose is much better than that. He is the King, and he has brought his kingdom. His kingdom is here, and it will be fully realized and experienced when he returns.

Our purpose is to represent him well right now, as ambassadors of that kingdom. We are a **royal priesthood**. Our top priority is to invite people into that kingdom. We represent the king so that others can come to know him. Notice what Peter writes next.

**1 PETER 2:11** *Dear friends, I urge you, as **foreigners and exiles**, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.*

In Christ, we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. But what are we in the context of where we live right now? We are foreigners and exiles. That may not be how others see us. And yet, this is how we should see ourselves.

Our primary citizenship is not the country where we were born, or the country that gave us a passport or visa. Our primary citizenship is his kingdom, not this country. And understanding that aspect of our

identity frames and defines how we engage right here, right now. I want to share with you an observation from Karen Jobes, a brilliant biblical scholar.

*Peter conceptualizes the relationship of Christians to society as that of visiting strangers or resident aliens, those who appreciate, respect, and value their host land but nevertheless maintain their own distinct identity within it. —Karen H. Jobes*

We absolutely should love the country and the society in which we live. Our love shouldn't be restricted to that country only. And yet, our love should be expressed fully for the country and society in which we live. We should fully engage and fully participate—bringing love and mercy with us.

Where do you see love and mercy needed in this community and in our country? Would you move toward that and bring the gospel with you?

- If you see injustices in the legal system—go, be the best lawyer or judge you can be and let the gospel work from the inside out.
- If you see brokenness in our government—go, be the best public servant, politician, city council member, governor, or president you can be and let the gospel work from the inside out.
- If you see solvable hurts in the medical world—go, be the best doctor, nurse, administrator, or researcher that you can be and let the gospel work from the inside out.
- If you see something broken in the education system—go, be the best teacher, teacher's aide, parent volunteer, principle, or school board member that you can be and let the gospel work from the inside out.

In your neighborhood, in your apartment building, in the marketplace, and in your home, would you be willing to be a royal priesthood in every sphere and arena in which you have access? Something you've heard us say a lot over the past year is this: **Leadership is a destination of discipleship**. In all aspects of our lives, let's represent the king and bring mercy with us.

**1 PETER 2:11** *Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.*

War is helpful metaphor and it's a weighty metaphor. If we misunderstand it, it will gnaw away at our mercy.

We're not in a **WAR**, but there's a **WAR** in us.

We are not in a culture war. If other people want to try and wage a culture war, let them have at it. There is no place for that in the church. Jesus has not drafted us into a fight with people. We should make a fight against our own sin. All sin is a violation of love. It's treason against love of God and it's treason against love of people. We fight our own sin. We are not in a war against the actual sins or the perceived sins of other people, the sins of society or the sins of culture. As followers of Jesus, the only fight we are in is against our own moral brokenness.

How many have ever heard this before?

Love the sinner. Hate the sin.

Whoever came up with this may have had really good intentions. The impact, however, has not been that good. The truth is, it whiffs on what the text actually says.

Love the sinner. ~~Hate the sin.~~ Hate your own sin. *I fixed it for you.* —Peter

People who are on the lookout for the sins of others are not merciful people. People who are aware of their own sins, who grieve their own treason against God and their own treason against other people, those are the ones understand just how underserving of mercy they are. They are the ones who generously share it with others. What kind of people do we want to be?

**1 PETER 2:12.** *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.*

Remember, we are stepping on some landmines today and we're doing it on purpose. I've got something I want you to write down and we're going to talk about it.

Our purpose isn't to get people to **AGREE** with us, but to **WORSHIP** with us.

Why do we sometimes settle for uniformity instead of unity? Why are we vulnerable to elevating conformity over Christlikeness? The reason is that sin is sneaky. As you worship Jesus and happily submit to him and his word, and as I submit to Jesus and happily submit to him and his—you and I will grow in unity and will begin to agree on more and more because we both agree with Jesus.

The counterfeit version of that looks almost identical. The sobering truth about counterfeits is that they look like the real thing, but they are worthless. The counterfeit is only worshipping with people who agree with me. If you've been with us during this series, you know that Peter was writing to men and women who were persecuted for their faith. They were misunderstood and seen as threats to the well-being of the community. People were convinced these Christians were wrong and accused them of doing wrong.

Notice that Peter did not tell them to live in such a way that other people become convinced of how right they are. No. Live in such a way that other people become convinced of how good Jesus is. One day Jesus is going to return. In that moment, may people celebrate and worship Jesus because of our influence. That's the goal.

Please don't mishear me. I am not saying that truth is not important. Truth is massively important. As a church, it is our first value.

**ARC VALUE:** Take truth seriously.  
*We'll follow it wherever it leads.*

**Real talk.** Too many people think our goal is to get them to vote like us. That our not-so-secret agenda is to get and maintain power. Too many people believe that what's most important to us is who sits on the Supreme Court. That may not be your fault and it may not be my fault that people have that perception. Talking about fault is boring and unhelpful. I'm more interested in responsibility.

We are a royal priesthood. Experiencing what we are like should reflect what Jesus is like. How do we want to steward the responsibility that he entrusted to us? I want to make it easier for others to see

what Jesus is like. Some days it feels like the best I can do is not make it harder for folks to see what Jesus is like. What would it mean to you if people wanted to worship Jesus because of how you represented him?

If people don't agree with me on all kinds of things, I can live with that. I've parented kids through the teenage years. I've got lots of practice with humans disagreeing with me. What I can't live with, what I can't be OK with, is people not seeing, not loving, and not worshiping Jesus.

At Autumn Ridge, we will happily place ourselves under the authority of Scripture. We will teach what it says. Even when we are out of step with culture, we will teach God's word faithfully and to the best of our ability. At the end of the day, the whole point is for people to see, know, and worship Jesus. How willing are we to reflect what Jesus is like?

**1 PETER 2:13-17** *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. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.*

Before I say anything about this passage, let's remember who wrote it. Peter saw Jesus crucified by a Roman governor. He had friends who were executed by government decree. He would eventually be executed himself for preaching the gospel. This was not abstract, and these were not empty words for him. And they shouldn't be empty words for us.

Let's have the guts to be honest with ourselves. For too many churches, and too many pastors, and too many Jesus followers—these were empty words during COVID. 2020 exposed that too many of us find our value in power and getting our way instead of finding our significance, security, and satisfaction in Jesus. We are not told to submit when we agree. We are told, **for the sake of Jesus**, submit to every human authority. By the way, this applies to school board meetings too.

Jesus followers in American churches have much to learn from the global church. There's a lot we can learn from Christians in China, in Afghanistan, in places where the government is openly hostile to believers. We'd be wise to adopt a posture of humility and repentance and become students.

I believe this framework will help us to think about this challenging teaching from the vantage point of the gospel.

Always **SUBMIT** to authorities.  
Sometimes **SUBVERT** authorities.  
Rarely **DISOBEY** authorities.

It's possible to submit to authorities while actively subverting them. An example of that from church history is when Christians in Rome rescued infant girls who were left in garbage dumps to die of exposure. It was legal to kill unwanted daughters. When congregations rescued and raised those precious baby girls, they were being subversive.

Believe it or not, it's even possible to submit to authorities while also disobeying them. I don't think anyone's done a better job of modeling and explaining that than Dr. King in his, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. We will read just a portion of it and let him disciple us.

*In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.*

*Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. —Dr. Martin Luther King*

When it comes to submitting ourselves every human authority, I know that you have some, “Yeah buts...” I have some, “Yeah buts...” too. This requires a courageous mix of humility and wisdom. Whenever submission to an authority means personally experiencing injustice, we will all have our own, “Yeah but...”. And there is no bigger, “Yeah but...” than slavery.

**1 PETER 2:18-21** *Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. 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. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

This doesn't feel like a landmine. It feels more like an atomic bomb. It's completely understandable that we might naturally read this passage through the history of American chattel slavery and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. I get that. Our task, however, is to view that history and all aspects of life through Scripture, instead of the other way round.

It's also important to note that slavery in the Roman world was not at all like the slavery in the American South. That's not to say it was good—you just can't equate the two.

#### **ROMAN SLAVERY:**

- Slavery was based on economic status and sometimes the outcome of a war.
- It had nothing to do with race or ethnicity. Europeans had African slaves. Africans had European slaves.
- Slavery was rarely permanent. Most slaves were free by age 30.
- Slaves could own businesses, property, and even other slaves.

I'm not saying Roman slavery was great. I am saying that we cannot read this through the lens of American history. But we should be honest about history. The hard truth is that far too many Christians and pastors abused passages like this to justify the abuses of those they enslaved. That was wrong. There are no excuses. It was evil.

Peter is not at all trying to address how society should be structured or the evils of slavery. He's trying to remind people of who they are in Christ, so that they can stand fast in the true grace God, regardless of their situation. Many of the early Jesus followers were slaves. So, here's the question. What do you do and what are you like when you are treated unjustly, and you don't have the power, prestige, or privileges to stop it?

What do you do and what are you like when you are treated as insignificant, your physical safety is taken away and you are treated with harshness you don't deserve? That's what Peter is addressing, and his answer is straightforward. His answer is not for the faint of heart.

The gospel doesn't **ENDORSE** subjugation—it **EMPOWERS** submission, servanthood and suffering well.

There is no excuse for injustice. And yet, we have an example in Jesus when we experience it. We are to follow his example of being a servant and his example of suffering well. This a tough one.

I'm the wrong guy to talk about this. I'm a middle class, middle-aged white guy, and the lead pastor of prominent church. There are people in prominent positions, some in powerful positions who I could text right now, and they would text me back. I could ask to meet for coffee, and they would say, yes. Sure, I've had experiences of injustice and hardship. But I don't have experience with what Peter is writing about.

The best I can do is study the text. But I shouldn't stop there. I should also listen to and learn from people who have lived without power, prestige, privilege. I should listen and learn from those who know injustice from the inside. The people who understand this passage best are the ones who have lived it.

I can learn from the text. I can learn from others lived experience. And yet, the whole point is to look to Jesus. If I'm going to understand my identity in him, and if I'm going to live in a way that reflects him, I need to know him and I need to know how he identified.

My identity is in Jesus, and he **IDENTIFIED** as a suffering **SERVANT**.

I want to read to you how Peter ended this chapter. He wasn't the first person to write down what we are going to read. He was quoting the Old Testament passage of Isaiah 53. It describes the suffering servant who subjected himself to the ultimate injustice so that we could be justified and forgiven.

**1 PETER 2:22-25** *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 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. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

If you have been made to experience injustice. If you are hurting. If you are bitter. If you are doubting your own significance and worth. If you are wondering if you are seen, may you come to see how loved you are. May you be captured by the explosive truth that God stepped into a broken world as a man, took every human hurt and the cost of sin onto himself and paid the price to make you whole.

May we all know that the peace that comes from having a Shepherd who watches over our very souls.