

Living as exiles IN the world

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- [0 : 0 0] So 1 Peter 2 from verse 11 onwards. 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. 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.
- [1 : 3 9] 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. Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own 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 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.
- Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, 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.
- For this is the way the holy women of the past, who put their hope in God, used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her Lord.
- [2 : 5 5] You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. 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.
- Amen. This is God's word for us this morning. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority, writes the Apostle Peter.
- Different things perhaps go through your head when you hear this word submit. We're not talking about submitting coursework, submitting a form. This isn't kind of submit as in handover, but rather submit as in accept, yield to a superior force or the superior authority of a person.

And when we start to talk about submit in those terms, we rapidly head into feeling a sense of defeat or to be feeling like this is subjection.

Submission is often not a very popular or positive idea, is it? Submission wrestling. Submit means you lose the fight. And we carry that same idea across, don't we?

[4 : 16] That to submit is to be defeated, to have lost. We carry that idea into relationships, that to submit your will to another is to be defeated.

And so the idea in chapter 3 of submitting to a husband, or at the end of chapter 2, a slave submitting to their master, this broader call in verse 13, that God's people submit ourselves to every human authority, these are not attractive instructions, are they?

It feels like defeat. But my hope is that as we work our way through these verses, we're going to see that it is not just possible to obey these commands, but even that there is an attractiveness to doing so.

Not least, we're going to see in the latter part of today's passage, we see the example of our Savior doing precisely what he calls us to do. We see him submitting himself to others, even to the point of death.

Now, if we come back up to verse 11, we see that Peter actually begins this section in a more general way. These couple of verses here, verses 11 and 12, these kind of bridge from what's gone before into what we're coming to now.

[5 : 30] The call to submit that forms the bulk of our passage, this is a specific example of the call to good behavior that's here in verses 11 and 12.

Now, we're going to leave chapter 3 for next week, we'll come back to that next time. So, for today, verses 11 to 25 of chapter 2, three sections this morning.

Abstain from sinful desires, that's verses 11 and 12. A call to submit to human authorities, verses 13 through 17. And then finally, a call to submit to unjust suffering that we see in verses 18 to 25.

So, verse 11, God's people, says Peter, are to abstain from sinful desires. So, as I say, he's moving now in this section of the letter.

We're kind of moving into the body of the letter, if you like. And he's now coming to apply, to flesh out the instructions that he wants to give these people in the light of what he has taught them in what's gone before.

[6 : 35] And he recalls what he said already by this reminder that we are in this world, foreigners and exiles. This world is not our home. And he begins with some powerful language.

Dear friends or beloved, there's a depth of affection for the people to whom he writes here, isn't there? Peter's not writing as a distant authority figure, as a dictator declaring, you must go and do this and I don't care how that is for you.

No, he loves these people. He stands alongside them. He counts them as brothers, as he calls them to these difficult things. That's not to say that what he says is unimportant.

Brothers, dear friends, I urge you. It isn't just a polite request. It's not just a good idea. No, he urges them. This is a matter of significance.

Abstain from sinful desires. Peter reminds them that they're called to holiness. They're not called to licentious behavior. As we'll see down in verse 16, true freedom is not a cover-up for evil.

[7 : 44] Having been set free by the blood of Christ, God's people are now called to go and live good lives, not to entertain their sinful desires. These sinful desires, this phrase sometimes also translated, passions of the flesh, carnal desires, it sets kind of the body against the soul.

And Peter's concerned, Peter's telling them to abstain from these kind of earthly, fleshly desires. And if that sense of fleshly or carnal makes you think of sexual misconduct, well, rightly so.

That is at least part of what Peter has in mind here. The people who Peter's writing to, they lived in a world kind of like ours, a world that claimed to prize a set of virtues, that claimed to hold to a philosophical idea that would value abstention from indulgence, that would value moderation.

Much like we have these theories today. And yet in practice, people then and people today live with a principle that really is much more like, what can I get away with?

How much food and alcohol can I afford to buy? How many women can I sleep with without their husbands catching me or my wife finding out? What can I get? What can I enjoy? What can I get away with?

[9 : 06] Whilst I kind of paste a veneer of respectability on top, while underneath is this seething mass of whatever I want to do as long as I can get away with it. That was the attitude then and it is the attitude today.

And that is not just the attitude of society at large. If we're honest, that is often our attitude too, isn't it? What can I get away with whilst people at church still think, I'm doing all right?

Whilst I paste a veneer of respectability on top, what can I get away with at home or when I'm away? We live in a society that says, well, as long as you're not going to go and drive a car, then the limit on student alcohol consumption is the size of your student loan.

And for grown-ups, the limit is how much your liver will cope with. We live in a society that says the only constraints on sex are consent and avoiding infection.

Maybe, maybe a nod to some sort of monogamy, but no expectation of a lifelong partnership. This is the world that we live in, isn't it? Peter says, God's word says, whilst our desires are good gifts from God, there is something behind that desire to run to excess, behind that wish for excess, there is a good desire behind it.

[10 : 26] The exercise of these desires within their proper context is a good thing. Wine gladdens the heart, says Psalm 104. Yet do not get drunk on wine that leads to debauchery, says Ephesians 5.

Context, moderation, sexual intimacy, designed by God to deepen the bond between husband and wife. It is a good thing in its proper place. And then outside of that context, to indulge that desire is sinful, displeasing to God and damaging to us.

In all these kinds of different contexts, many, many more that you can fill in for yourself, sin distorts our desires, doesn't it? Sin takes what should be a good thing and drives us to excess, drives us to seek to fulfill that desire in an unhealthy way, drives us subtly or dramatically, drives us to satisfy these desires in ways that are contrary to God's will.

And Peter calls us to abstain from sinful desires. And he gives us two reasons why we would do that. Two reasons. First, you see the end of verse 11. These sinful desires wage war against your soul.

It is not good for us to indulge ourselves in these ways. Often it's not good for us on a practical and pragmatic level.

[11 : 45] We see anger destroy relationships. We see excess alcohol causing damage to bodies, causing damage to other people's lives. This practical, pragmatic level.

But more importantly than that physical level, if you like, more importantly, these things wage war against our souls. It's evocative language, isn't it?

There is a battle for your soul being waged. The devil's temptations promise life and joy. He says to us, this will give you life.

This will be life to the full. This is where enjoyment is found. He promises everything and delivers nothing. Delivers death and despair.

He fights against us. There is a battle being fought. Our own distorted desires. The compulsive urgings of the world around us as we're bombarded by advertising.

[12 : 49] The temptations of the great deceiver. The enemy's forces are arrayed against us. There is a war being waged. It matters greatly. Your soul is at stake.

Your soul is at stake. So abstain from sinful desires, says Peter. Now the second reason stands alongside that. Verse 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.

Abstain from sinful desires, not only because it will be good for you, but because it will be good for others also. And that's not just that they'll leave you alone to live a quiet life.

Not just that they can't accuse you of anything and make your life miserable. It's more than that. It goes deeper. So the objective here is that those who watch you will glorify God on the day he visits us.

Abstain from sinful desires because it will be good for other people. Your abstention is supposed to have eternal consequences. Supposed to have eternal consequences for your own soul, as we've seen already, and supposed to have eternal consequences for the souls of others as well.

[14 : 01] Peter says to them, how you behave will have an impact on who stands before God on that last day, who stands and then willingly bows to give him glory, to hail him as king in all joy, will rejoice to bow as king.

Who will do that? And who will grudgingly cower in abject terror at the conquering king? Who will bow in homage and who will cower in terror?

Peter says depends in some part upon you abstaining from sinful desires. eternal consequences for you, for your family, your friends, your neighbors.

So abstain from sinful desires. And in that context, we come to verse 13.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority. This call to submit yourselves is one aspect of living good lives among the pagans.

[15 : 16] One aspect of abstaining from sinful desires and instead doing the good. See, as Peter writes, Christianity is a new religion, right?

This is a new idea. This is not, you know, established over thousands of years. Christianity is not respectable. People don't even know what you're talking about if you say Christianity.

People don't know who Jesus is. They just hear of this strange new group of people who call themselves Christians, who say they follow Jesus of Nazareth. And they don't know what to make of it.

They're suspicious. What impact is this new religion going to have on society? Are these people going to pay proper respect to the authorities or will they be subversive?

Will they be troublemakers? Will they destroy the household? Will they destroy this fundamental building block of society? They claim allegiance to someone else.

[16 : 13] They claim there's a higher authority than the emperor. They say they obey another. They say they live in some sense as foreigners and exiles. Can we trust these people?

And so Peter responds to that world in which they're living. And his response to these concerns is to say to Christians in that day, submit.

Submit. Submit for the Lord's sake to every human authority. It's a very broad command, isn't it? It's almost a heading for what follows.

This sense of submit to every human authority then has these kind of offshoots into government in the immediate verses, then slaves and masters, and then wives and husbands that we come to in chapter 3.

It's kind of all under this heading of submit to every human authority. Now, that's not to be carried to a nonsensical extreme. Peter doesn't think that the Christian living in France submits to the president of Nigeria.

[17 : 14] But it's also not something to be foolishly narrowed either. Because this isn't only about governments and isn't only about slaves and isn't only about families.

No, submit to every human authority. Every proper authority within its own sphere. within the sphere of the authority, you submit to it.

And thus, for instance, you go into someone else's home, you're in some sense subject to the head of that household. In a private pace of business, you obey the rules of that business.

That means, for instance, you don't go and lie about your children's ages in order to get cheaper food at the restaurant or to say they're old enough to go into that film even though they aren't or whatever it might be.

No, we submit to the authority of others. It might be inconvenient. It might not be what we want. It might cost us something. We submit to the authority in that context.

[18 : 13] This call to submit can't be absolute, can it? We know instinctively that there are limitations to this, and Peter signals that. Do you see, he flags that these are human authorities, verse 13.

Already, there's a limit that these are human authorities, not divine authorities. And there's also this word that's being translated authorities. This one's a tricky word to translate.

Arguably, it means creature. Submit to every human creature. Now, the translation authorities makes sense because we're not saying submit to, you know, every human being submits to it.

It just gets messy. But there is a value to recognizing the creatureliness of these authorities. They are just that.

Human authorities are inherently limited because they are created things. Now, maybe that doesn't immediately seem controversial, but it sure was then.

[19 : 19] Because the imperial cult in Rome at least skirts around, if not crossing over the line, into saying the emperor is divine. The emperor is a god.

But Peter says here, yes, submit to the emperor. Yes, but submit to him as a creature. Submit to him as a human authority, not as divine, and therefore not with absolute rights.

Now, today, similarly, actually, talking about humanity and society in terms of creation, this is controversial again in a different way, isn't it?

Not because people think that Boris Johnson is divine, but controversial because we deny the existence of a creator, don't we? Therefore, if we deny the existence of a creator who made all things, then we deny the existence of external, objective laws.

We deny the existence of ethics and limitations on what societies can and cannot legitimately do if there is no creator to have such laws. And thus, the only limitation on a government becomes what will the populace permit?

[20 : 34] Whether it permits it by ballot or by open revolt, the effect is the same. What can you get away with? What can the government do without the people themselves bringing a check on it?

But Peter says that's not the whole picture. These authorities are merely human. They exist for a purpose. Verse 14, they exist to punish wrong and to commend the right.

There is a reason why we have governing authorities, but they are themselves created subjects. That purpose statement, of course, is also an inherent limitation of the call for us to submit to these authorities, isn't it?

That if a government has ceased to punish wrongdoing and ceased to reward the good, then we are no longer required to submit thereto.

The most obvious of that, Acts chapter 5, the apostles are commanded not to speak of Christ. And Peter responds to the Sanhedrin, we must obey God rather than men.

[21 : 43] Peter, who writes this letter a few years earlier, said no to the authorities on that occasion. Similarly, Exodus, the Hebrew midwives, they're commended for refusing to obey Pharaoh's command to kill the newborn babies.

Pharaoh does not have the right to give that command and so it is not to be obeyed. We can draw quite a straightforward today to the doctor who is expected by his superiors to carry out an abortion or in a few years' time perhaps expected to assist in a suicide.

The doctor in those circumstances does not submit to the authority of his employer, does not submit to the authority of his professional body, does not submit to the government that asks this of him.

and so too the politician must refuse to obey her party leaders when instructed to vote in favour of such measures. There are limits. When the government says to school teachers and says to healthcare professionals you must support these young children to change their gender, you must do so even against the express wishes of their parents and that opposition to that changes evidence that they are unfit parents.

When you are obliged to enact such a wicked, evil policy and that is an instruction to which you may not legitimately submit.

[23 : 19] When the will of the state is clearly contrary to the revealed will of God, we must obey God rather than men. There are limits. And we must be conscious of that.

It's very easy to go way off down this line, isn't it? It's very tempting to look for all the times when this instruction doesn't really apply.

Very tempting to find all the times when we don't have to submit. Very tempting to classify everything that we don't want to submit to as we must obey God rather than men.

To see ourselves as foreigners and exiles and therefore not required to obey. I find myself as I've been writing this and as I stand here this morning I find myself very tempted to focus on those things.

And yes, Peter knows there are limits but he did still actually write these words, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors sent by him.

[24 : 28] We do not get to object to what the government does just because we don't like it. If their goal, if their intent is to prevent evil and to promote good as Peter says it should be and we can't point to clear reasons why they're failing to do so, then we must, we are commanded to obey.

You may believe with absolute conviction that you can drive safely at 90 miles an hour but a legitimate human authority says you are not allowed to do so and so you must not.

We must not. We might not like everything that the government chooses to spend our taxes on. There are plenty of things I'd rather not be paying for.

But the government clearly has the right to levy taxes and I don't get to say well I'll pay for this but not for that and so I think we're stuck paying our taxes and that means not going to extreme unethical lengths to avoid taxes that we don't want to pay.

Maybe it's convenient to massage the figures for the benefits office. We might even say everybody does it but you and I are commanded to submit to the law.

[25 : 48] so tempting to categorize every policy that we disapprove of under this heading we must obey God rather than men. But if you are going to say I'm not doing that because we must obey God rather than men then you have better be jolly sure that God has actually said what you're saying he says.

You actually are obeying God not the whims of your preferences and your understanding thing because we are called to submit to every human authority.

Now again let's ask why? Why live this way? It's not always convenient is it? So why? Well first verse 13 we do it for the Lord's sake.

My friends we submit to Nicola Sturgeon's government not because we believe her to be divine not because we believe her policies will bring salvation. We may or may not think those policies wise but in either case we submit for the Lord's sake.

We submit because he commands us to do so. Verse 13 for the Lord's sake. Second verse 15 we live this way because by doing good we might silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

[27 : 06] Friends let there never be a justification to say that Christians are not civic minded that we do not seek the good of society of others. Let it never be said that we want to undermine society.

No we are actively called by verse 13 to do good. Not just refrain from harm. Not just stand back and let it happen. No we are called verse 15 to do good.

Sorry verse 13. We seek the good of our nation. That might call some into the armed forces to seek the good of our nation. We seek the good of our society.

That might call some into services doctors and nurses and teachers and rubbish collectors. Not for the sake of a wage but for the active desire to do good as we are commanded.

And perhaps most visibly we seek the good not just of this kind of far off nation or society in an abstract sense. No we seek the good of our community. These people around us.

[28 : 06] These people who we know. This place where we live. We're committed to it. And that means we should be at the forefront of plans and organisations that seek to improve our villages where we live.

We should be engaged. We should be volunteering for the gala committee. Stepping in when the floodwaters rise down the road. Out planting flowers in the boxes along our streets.

We should be the ones who are volunteering to help out with the scouts and the brownies. We should be the first people to respond when the calls out goes out on Facebook for daily necessities for a struggling household.

We're called to actively do good. We should be at the forefront of these things. And I don't think we're delivering on that.

We're called to live as free people verse 16. You are free. But that is freedom to do good. Not freedom to do as you please.

[29 : 11] Certainly not freedom to cover up evil but more than that. Freedom to live as God's slaves. And surely one aspect of living in that way is to actively do good in our communities.

Submission to human authorities doesn't just mean knuckling under for things we don't approve of. Though it may sometimes be that. but it's also positively seeking the good of our communities and our nation.

And it continues. Peter's not done. Third we have this call to submit to unjust suffering. It just gets better doesn't it? Submit to an authority that you may or may not like.

Submit to suffering. It comes verse 18 to actually a specific case of submitting to a human authority. The call here is for slaves to submit to their masters.

Quick introductory comments as we come into this section. First understand the Bible does not condone, does not promote the practice of slavery. Peter knows the gospel is ultimately subversive to this social order that involves this wicked institution.

[30 : 22] He knows slavery is antithetical to the gospel. He knows all are equal before God. As Paul writes there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor male and female for your one in Christ Jesus.

He knows this. Don't hear me, don't hear the Bible, don't hear the church saying slavery is a good thing. However, the New Testament writers also know that for them to go and advocate an immediate abolition of slavery would have been, well problematic to say the least, and really rather counterproductive.

do you remember I said there was suspicion of this new religion, the impact on society. Well, part of that society is that slavery is so fundamental to the institutions of the society in this ancient world that to advocate for the overthrow of that institution, well the result of advocating that is not that anything actually changes, but just that Christianity is stamped out before it begins.

Nobody would have stood for it. Now, Peter's concern, the New Testament writers' concern, the Bible's concern, God's concern, is never so much with your circumstances as with how you respond to them.

God's more concerned with your soul. And for the slave, difficult though his circumstances may be, there is plenty in that experience that rightly responded to can be productive for his ultimate good.

[31 : 58] Maybe he's tempted to think his greatest need is freedom. Just as the person who can't walk is tempted to think that their greatest need is physical healing.

But God's concern is more immediately what can be learnt in the midst of this experience than how can you get out of it. Caveat one, caveat two, maybe you're inclined to think that instructions here from Peter for how slaves are to behave, maybe you're inclined to think, well that is of limited, if any, value to me.

I hope none of you, even those of you watching online, I hope none of you could be called slaves right now. And yet, in some sense we are.

If we can get past the unpleasant taste in our mouths of the idea of slavery, there is plenty we can learn here and that's for two reasons. First, verse 16, Peter says we're called to live as God's slaves.

We are slaves. The actual slave, in his obedience to his master, he is a model, an example for the whole Christian community.

[33 : 11] His obedience then is a model to you and me today. We're called to be slaves of almighty God. We're called to this life. And then second, if you want applicability, well look at the example Peter uses.

Do you see in the second half of this section just how Christologically rooted these instructions are? This is on the basis of what Jesus Christ himself did.

God chose to send his one and only son into a life not of slavery in that sense but into a life of such a lack of power that he died a slave's death by crucifixion.

And Peter makes no bones whatsoever about calling us to follow his example in that. So, what do we do with this call then to submit to unjust suffering?

Well, first let's be cautious. Let's recognize that what we're talking about here is unjust suffering, undeserved suffering.

[34 : 22] The slave, he does have to endure the beating, whatever the cause of it. And you and I, we might suffer for various reasons. But what Peter's talking about here is the unjustified beating.

Verse 20, how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? It isn't. It's easy to develop a martyr complex, isn't it? It's easy to tell ourselves that whatever befalls us, that it is this unjust suffering.

Every slight, every difficulty, anything someone might say negatively about us, it's easy to interpret that through this lens of unjust suffering. But my friends, the reality is if your co-workers are angry with you because you haven't done your job, or because you've been unpleasant to them, then it isn't a credit to you that you bear up under their anger.

If your manager tells you off because you didn't do what you were supposed to do, you do not get to claim your suffering unjustly. And if the government imposes restrictions on us for good and proper reasons, then we do not get to claim persecution.

So let's not be quick to cry that we're punished unjustly. First, let's check whether we're getting what we deserve. Second, however, when you must bear up under the pain of unjust suffering, it is commendable, says verse 19.

[35 : 47] It's commendable when you do that because you're conscious of God. And Peter says we're following the example of Christ. Here, Peter's theology, it drives his ethics.

Peter knows that Christ died as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 that he's quoting here. He knows that without in any sense taking away from the atoning sacrifice as the primary motivation for Jesus' death, he knows there is also this exemplary nature to his sufferings.

Verse 21 says the example is intended for us to follow. And this following along this is a very close following. Tamar has this wooden board.

You may not be able to see from there. This board has the letters of the alphabet on it. And the idea is you get this stick and you trace it along and you learn how to write your letters. That is what Peter says here.

That is the word he uses. It refers to something like this. Something that you trace over to learn how to do it. A pattern to trace. This is not an example in the sense of do something vaguely a little bit like this.

[37 : 00] No, this is an example as an exact pattern. And to that he adds the image of following in his steps. Not just walking along the same road, walking in his very footsteps.

We're called to this same path. Called to the same response of silence. Called to refuse to retaliate when insulted. Not silence from fear, resentment, stoic resignation.

No, no. No, the silence that speaks of courage and compassion and confidence and patient endurance. A silence that is itself commendable.

We're called to suffer as he did. Ed Clowney says a life of suffering is our calling, not our fate. It's not just something that happens upon us.

It's not just something that we're resigned to. It is our calling because we are God's people. It is our calling because it was Christ's calling. And so we might be tempted to despair in the face of unjust suffering.

[38 : 09] And we do not seek suffering, but nevertheless we reach the point where, as Peter's going to call us later in this same letter, where we can rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that we're conscious of God.

Knowing that therein he draws us to himself. because we're following in the footsteps of our Savior in that calling. It seems an impossible task, doesn't it?

All of this. To abstain from evil desires, living such good lives that others may be drawn to glorify God. Sounds pretty impossible. To submit to human authorities when they enact laws that we don't like, and to discern when lying's been crossed beyond which we cannot follow.

It sounds pretty impossible. To submit to unjust suffering, to submit to harsh musters as well as good ones, it sounds pretty impossible. But my friends, we do this following the example of our Savior.

We do this because he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross. We do this because when we like sheep went astray, the shepherd and overseer of our souls drew us back.

[39 : 24] We do this in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit and we do it knowing that it is pleasing to our God. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, give us strength to follow in your footsteps, we ask. As we face this task that you have set before us, we recognize again our inadequacy, our inability.

But Lord, we know that you give us strength to do that which you command. That you do not call us to anything that you do not empower us for. We thank you for the example of our Savior Jesus as he went before us.

that he died to break the power of sin over us. And he set us an example that we might follow. So Holy Spirit, be at work in our lives this very afternoon, this week, as we go into difficult situations, as we face unjust suffering, as we face questions about what is right and proper submission and what is a line we cannot follow.

As we seek to live exemplary lives, calling others to glorify you just as we do. Lord, equip us for this, we pray.

[40 : 57] Amen.