

## LIVING FOR GOD IN DIFFICULT TIMES

(Part 2)

1 Peter 2

### PREFACE

This is the second book in a series in which we hope to cover the whole of 1 Peter. Because of that we have kept the same title throughout with only the change in the chapter of 1 Peter in the title. This decision we trust will be a helpful reminder to you that the whole of this New Testament letter was written to people who faced hardship, and in particular persecution for their faith in Christ, on a daily basis. This in turn enables us to see how practical the teaching of Peter is for any of the Lord's people who are facing difficulties, because Jesus himself taught us that in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33). That verse continues with these words, "...*But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" In the light of this Peter gives us some valuable instruction on how the Christian believer and the Church should live and respond when facing stressful and difficult situations.

I am again grateful to Howard Sayers who has given so much of his time and study that we might benefit from the *Sound Words* programmes on which this book is based.

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## Chapter 1 The Word of God and the Christian (1 Peter 2.1-3)

### Introduction

One aspect of persecution which troubled and scattered believers come under is the temptation to be somewhat less than they ought to be in their Christian lives to avoid the tensions and pressures that the world might put on them. The remedy when this happens is to wield the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.

Peter has already compared the world and what it has to offer with the Word of God and what it promises. One is temporary and fading, the other enduring (see 1:24; 25a). Then he reminded us that the Word of God is God's good news for His beleaguered people (see 1:25b).

With this in their minds how were they, and we, to approach and respond to the Word of God? This question is important because the Bible is the instrument God uses to keep us from falling and yielding to the pressures to conform to the ways and attitudes of this world. Peter helpfully tells us in this opening paragraph of 1 Peter 2:1-3, "*Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*"

## 1) We must deliberately lay aside specific sins (1 Peter 2.1)

Peter begins with a clear directive. He tells his readers to ‘*rid yourselves*’ of certain things. This phrase carries the idea of deliberately taking something off as we would take off our clothes. It means severing fellowship with someone or something. Indeed, this is a decisive action each believer is to take. This is similar to the expressions found in Hebrews 12:1 and Colossians 3:8.

Peter then gives us a list of five sins in particular which the Christian believer must be rid of, and they are all sinful attitudes that we see in this world. So Peter is teaching us they should not be seen amongst the people of God. We must get rid of such traits in our lives.

The first of these is “*all malice.*” Note the word “*all*”. This covers even the smallest amount of ill will we may be tempted to harbour in our hearts against another. Such an attitude will act as a great hindrance to our spiritual lives, therefore we must rid ourselves of it.

The second of these is “*all deceit.*” Note again the word “*all*”. We deliberately put to one side any notion of untruthfulness. Proverbs 12:22 tells us “*The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.*” Dishonesty grieves God therefore we must not act corruptly or with trickery.

The third sin we are to cast off is “*hypocrisy.*” This of course is linked with deceit. We are not to have double

standards or pretend to be what we are not towards another person. There is to be no pretence or insincerity in our lives. The word translated hypocrisy has its root in the theatre when someone wore a mask and pretended to be another person. The Christian believer is to be upright and genuine.

The fourth in Peter’s list is “*envy.*” We are not to be guilty of jealousy or resentment against another. When the Lord blesses or uses them or gives them a gift, we are not to begrudge that but to be thankful for God’s goodness to them, even if we have not been given such things ourselves. This sin of envy is something that eats away at our being like rust or a cancer. We see it in that awful root of bitterness that so easily arises in us. We must get rid of it.

The final sin we are to shun is “*slander of every kind.*” All that Peter has referred to up to now has to do with the heart and inner man. However what goes on inside inevitably finds expression somehow and often it is in our speech. We are not in a fit state to approach the Word of God and benefit from its teaching and promises while we are thinking and speaking in an evil way. We must get rid of it.

## 2) We must cultivate a spiritual appetite (1 Peter 2.2)

Peter exhorts us with these words “*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*” A newborn babe is always a joy to

behold, and we all know it has an insatiable appetite for its mother's milk. Even from its earliest days a baby will let you know when it needs to be fed. Well, in a similar way this is how we are to respond to our spiritual food, the Word of God. There is to be an eagerness for the Word of God to penetrate our thoughts and lives. We are to have a desire and longing for the teaching of the Bible. There is to be a simplicity in our approach to the Word seen in a simple trust in all that God reveals in it. There also needs to be a single-mindedness in our aim when we open the Scriptures to learn and obey them because that is what will glorify our God which is the chief end of man. If we do these things we will make spiritual progress (see 2 Peter 3:18).

It is worth us noting that a baby who does not eat is a cause of great concern to its parents as it means there is something wrong with the child's health. It is exactly the same with a person who does not receive the Word of God, something is dreadfully wrong with their spiritual condition. When we lose our spiritual appetite for the things of God we need prayerfully to repent and seek the Lord to restore us.

### **3) We must approach the Word of God with confidence (1 Peter 2.2-3)**

Our approach to the teaching of Scripture is to be with the conviction that it is the very thing we need, and is suitable for every situation we face in life. Like that newborn baby we are to have confidence or trust in what is provided for

us because it is "*pure spiritual milk.*" It is food which is eminently suitable for our spiritual nourishment, especially when we are weak and ignorant.

Peter draws on the believer's past experience to stimulate us to follow his instruction. He tells us we have already tasted and seen that the Lord is good. He has done us good before for it was by this Word we came to faith and salvation. We have already tasted God's grace and mercy therefore we have every reason to hunger for more.

### **Conclusion**

In our times of need we have infallible guidance, perfect strength and proven help for whatever we need so that when the pressures and temptations come:

- We deliberately divest ourselves of all that is mentioned in verse one and turn to the Word.
- Like a newborn baby we fly to the breast of God's Word to receive the consolation, guidance and spiritual nourishment it gives.
- We turn to the Word with the deliberate intention of listening to it and doing what it says to us.

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## **Chapter 2 The Christian's security (1 Peter 2.4-8)**

### **Introduction**

Studying this letter we have discovered that its purpose is to encourage and help Christian believers to face their trials and problems in a way that will glorify their Saviour. We

have also seen that it achieves its purpose by making great statements about Christ, the Christian and the Christian life and applying them to the present situation of persecution which his original readers faced. Peter now gives the believer the basis from complete assurance in the face of these difficult circumstances. To help us he has in mind the familiar picture of building works in progress and he draws on some Old Testament passages as well.

When we think about a building we note a number of things. At the base is a foundation. Next comes the cornerstone from which the whole building takes its shape. Then follows the stones (or blocks) which form the main structure. Lastly all is surmounted by the capstone.

### 1) The Christian's foundation (1 Peter 2.4)

The Christian's foundation on which he or she rests and builds all their hope and life is Christ. *"As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him."* Peter's reference to stones naturally links with Matthew 16:8 where Jesus says concerning Peter's testimony, *"On this ROCK I will build my Church."* There the word *"rock"* conveys the idea of solidity, durability and permanence. In 1 Peter another word is used which has the idea of a prepared stone for the foundation of a specific structure. When we combine those two thoughts in the Church's one foundation, how fitting they are to describe the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus is (v4) *"a living stone."* That is a living foundation imparting its strength and stability to the structure built on it. All our strength and hope is derived from a living Lord – a truly living foundation who gives us all things in and through his Holy Spirit. Think of all that Jesus Christ means to the Christian in these words by John Newton - the unusual word *"thrall"* in the quotation means domination of sin from which the Saviour has redeemed us:

*"If asked what of Jesus I think,  
though still my best thoughts are but poor,  
I say he's my meat and my drink,  
my life and my strength and my store;  
my shepherd, my husband, my friend,  
my Saviour from sin and from thrall;  
my hope from beginning to end,  
my portion, my Lord, AND MY ALL"*

Even though he is such a wonderful Saviour Peter reminds us that he was still *"rejected by men."* We immediately think of Isaiah 53:3 where Isaiah prophesied about Jesus that, *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering."* This is what men thought and sadly many still think of Jesus. This is what our opposers think of him. Indeed, prior to trusting him to be our Saviour this is what we once thought of him. Mercifully by God's grace that has changed.

Although men despised Jesus he was “*chosen by God.*” God has chosen his Son to be the foundation of his Church. No other could do what he has done and is doing to impart the strength that his people need. No one else could turn a people who hate God into those that love him. No one else could bring men from death to life, from earth to heaven. In Jesus Christ all God’s purposes are fulfilled and on that rock all our hopes are founded. Such a prepared foundation alive and successful in all his work is precious beyond measure in the sight of the great builder God himself. So Peter adds “*precious to him.*” We can add that this foundation is precious in the extreme to the structure which is utterly dependent on it for its form and security.

## **2) Christians are stones built on that foundation (1 Peter 2.5)**

*“...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

The Christian believer who is built on that foundation is compared to a stone. This is the same word as is used in v4 and indicates the same things. Christians themselves are prepared to be part of the building. They have been prepared in the purposes of God by his electing and predestinating plan, his calling them out of darkness to light, and their response in repentance and faith (see Romans 8:28-30). But Peter describes believers as “*living stones.*” We have passed from death to life. Not only does

the living foundation stone impart its qualities to the structure but the living structural stones derive their qualities from it. There is a mutual usefulness. (We can compare this with another analogy of the union between the branches and the vine in John 15.)

So as believers in Jesus Christ we become part of a structure, “*built into a spiritual house.*” Christians do not exist in isolation. They are part of a whole; the building is properly joined together (see Ephesians 2:21). There is a mutual dependency on each other. Each stone has its part to play whether to strengthen, beautify, support etc. This emphasises the need for believers to have fellowship with each other often. There is the need for each to play his rightful part in the Church using the gifts God has given for the benefit of the whole Church. And this spiritual house is a most useful structure. Not only does each stone have an acceptable use and purpose in the building, but corporately there is an acceptable use and purpose. The Church is the temple of God, for God’s habitation. It is a holy priesthood, for God’s acceptable worship, praise and glory. All these things are dependent on the Church founding all on and rooted in her foundation stone.

It is important to emphasise that the Bible teaches us that all believers are priests, and holy priests at that. We are set apart, consecrated to the service of God and therefore are to seek to be pure in our conduct, word, thought and deed. But as priests we have wonderful privileges. A priest has access to God. In Old Testament days only a few were

called to be priests, but in Christ every believer is a priest, with Christ as our great high priest. We can therefore lead others to the Saviour he has found and loves. As priests we can bring offerings to God. These include the spiritual sacrifices of worship and praise (Hebrews 13:15), his body as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2), his good works (Hebrews 13:16), all done for the glory of God. It is also important to note that the New Testament never calls any minister of the Gospel a priest. This priesthood belongs to all Christian believers now.

### 3) The stone that surmounts all (1 Peter 2.6)

*“For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’”*

The Christian’s crowning glory is the chief cornerstone. There are many binding influences, or stones, in the Church. For example, her doctrines, her practices and her worship. The chief stone however must be Jesus Christ. All doctrine, practice, and worship must focus in him now in time and forever in glory. The whole building finds its focal point in the cornerstone of Christ. We are nothing, he is everything! He was “*chosen*.” That is in God’s plan and purpose, that in all things he [Christ] should have the pre-eminence (cf. John 3:3, Philippians 2:9-11 & Colossians 1:18.), because of all this Jesus Christ, the Son of God is “*precious*” in the sight of the builder and the structure. Without him there would be no basis, no form and no completion.

### 4) The consequence of this for Christians (1 Peter 2.6-8)

*“...and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,’ and, ‘A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message — which is also what they were destined for.”*

The consequence of this for the believer is that we need not, indeed should not, be ashamed or confounded. Our opposers who reject this glorious foundation are only stumbling along and they will fall ultimately and be crushed by the cornerstone.

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## Chapter 3 The wonder of the Church (1 Peter 2.9-10)

### Introduction

Observe what the Church of Christ is (v 9-10), *“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. 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.”*

We shall note the great similarities between 1:2 and 2:9-10. The first passage relates more directly to the individual Christian and the second to the gathered community or the

Church on earth and in heaven. The one helps us understand the other.

### 1) The Church is a chosen generation

We can link this with what we found in 1 Peter 1:2 “*chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*” The Church is chosen, elect on the basis of God’s sovereign will and purpose, according to his foreknowledge. The Christian community, the Church, is not a random group of people with a common interest. It is made up of those described in 1:2. The Church is a chosen generation. That is an aggregate of many individuals of the same nature or sort. We have been saved by the same grace. We all know Christ as our Saviour and God as our Father in heaven.

Now at this point we need to beware of a danger we could easily fall into and that has sadly been true of some of the Lord’s people over the years. That is, we are not some sort of elite and superior race of men. We are sinners and unworthy, just as much as anybody else. The difference lies in the fact that God has saved us according to his grace; therefore this should constantly produce humility in the believer’s heart.

Having said that, we must also add that the Church has been chosen for blessing. We are chosen in Christ. As a result God has become our Friend and we his. In Christ we are reconciled to God, something that cannot be known outside of Christ. The Christian Church is also chosen for obedience. With our great privileges come great

responsibilities. We have not been chosen to do as we like, but chosen to be holy (see Ephesians. 1:3 & 4), chosen so that we put God’s will before our own. The Church was also chosen to be God’s servant, which comes out below.

### 2) The Church is a royal priesthood

We saw in 2:5 that the believer in Christ is a priest. Now in verse 9, the whole Church is called a royal priesthood. This adds the idea of kingship and regal dignity and when combined with priesthood includes access to God. Indeed we are a people who have authority to come into the presence of God.

Now again we need to be careful. We do not have some special and mysterious power and contact with God. The point is that God has made us a kingdom and priests to himself (see Revelation 1:6; 5:10). We are called to reign with Christ as well as to serve God. We have been “*anointed*” just as kings and priests were anointed in the Old Testament. This means we are set apart by God himself. We are a kingly priesthood.

Once we were “*not a people*” and are now “*the people of God*” (v10). We have been “*sanctified by the Spirit*” (1:2). God has made us what we are by his grace alone.

This is so helpful and brings such encouragement to us because whatever we are in man’s sight and however weak we may be, we have access to God himself in and through the Lord Jesus Christ and the certainty of acceptance with him. And so we can say that we know the power of prayer.

### 3) The Church is a holy nation

In the Old Testament the people of the nation of Israel were known repeatedly as the people of God. Now under the new covenant the Church is the New Israel, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). This is why Peter readily uses Old Testament descriptions which he applies to the Church of Christ. See for example Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 7:6 and Isaiah 62:12 which Peter refers to and specifically applies to the Church in this passage.

As 'holy' the Lord's people are separate and distinct from others. We are called to reflect the character of God who has called us. We are therefore to be seen to be holy by the way we live. Failure here will not only bring harm to the Church but also dishonour the name of the Lord.

As a holy 'nation' we are a new society or community. We are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). We are also under the same government - Jesus is our Lord.

This means a number of things. First, we are separated from the kingdoms of this world. This earth is not our resting place; we are only pilgrims travelling through it to a much better destination. We seek a city yet to come (see Hebrews 11:10). Ours is the kingdom of heaven. And again this strengthens us because we have something beyond this life to look forward to, and which the unbeliever knows nothing about.

### 4) The Church is a people belonging to God

This is sometimes translated God's 'peculiar people' and simply means we are God's possession (see Titus 2:14 and Ephesians 1:14). We are a purchased possession, purchased by the precious blood of Christ (see 1:2). The emphasis is that we are God's own special people. The word was used of the eastern King who had the exchequer of his country under his control, **plus his own private treasures**. The Church of Christ is God's own treasure, and it is this ownership which gives us the greatest dignity we could possess; we are the Lord's.

How marvellous this is when we consider what we once were! We were under God's wrath just as others but now we have obtained mercy. The blood of Christ, sprinkled before the throne of God (1:2), speaks for us. We are blessed because though men may accuse us, God acquits us. We are safe in the face of the great judgement day to come because we belong to Jesus Christ. We are the redeemed people of God.

### 5) The Church's function

We have the immense privilege of declaring the praises of God. Our joy is to declare the excellencies of God. To witness to men concerning the mighty acts of God and tell others what God has done for our souls. We are not to hide this good news away but to declare it openly. The unbelieving world ridicules and despises us, but we have a glorious function which will go on beyond the grave.

Our worship consists of praise to the Father who chose us (Ephesians 1:3-6), of praise to the Son who saved us (Ephesians 1:12) and to the Spirit who quickened and sanctifies us (Ephesians 1:14). Also our lives consist of doing the same as we yield to the Lordship of Christ to the glory of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our obedient lives will shine forth his praises, and our heaven will consist of it around the throne of God and of the Lamb.

We are stimulated in this as we recall what we are and the privileges that attach to it. We have been called “*out of darkness into his wonderful light*” (v9). John Calvin has written: “*When grace found us we were addicted to spiritual darkness.*” In Christ we come into the light. This means we are no longer in the dark or in ignorance of God; now we know him personally as our God. We know and enjoy his goodness and purity and splendour for God is light and in him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). We have also come to know his power in our lives as he delivers us from sin and gives us victory over temptation. We were once insignificant “*Once you were not a people...*” now we are significant “*now you are the people of God.*” Once we had no mercy and therefore no forgiveness of our sins, “*but now you have received mercy.*” Now our sin is forgiven, and God has done this for us.

What a change has taken place in the believer’s life! Our deliverance came by the entrance of God’s Word as applied by the Holy Spirit (see 1 Peter 1:23-25 and John 3:3ff). We have come to “*the knowledge of God and*

*ourselves*”. We are encouraged because our relationship with God and each other is of God’s doing and making. It cannot therefore be broken however hard men may try to destroy it. The Church, as well as its members, has its origin with God not man.

All these privileges are due to the grace of God alone. Therefore it is our responsibility to tell others of what the Lord has done for us. Then go and tell the world “*the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*”

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## **Chapter 4 The believer and the Church in the world (1 Peter 2.11-12)**

### **Introduction**

Peter has described Christians in 1:2 and the implications of that for these persecuted believers. He has also described the Church as a whole in 2:9-10. Now he explains the implications of that for them. There is inevitably a marked difference between believers and unbelievers, the Church and the world in which it is found. This difference has two effects:

- i. It encourages us when we come under fire in various ways.
- ii. It stimulates us to develop our Christian life and to grow and mature in the faith.

Peter picks up on this as he now does two things:

- i. He lays down a basic principle which naturally flows out of what he has been writing so far (2:11-12).

- ii. He works out the application of that principle in various situations and the subsequent consequences for his readers (2:13 – 5:11).

### **1) The Church's relationship to the world**

Now we need to note that Peter begins by pleading with his readers, he beseeches them, he begs them, "*I urge you.*" There is here a sense of longing desire expressed in the strongest terms. Peter is burdened with this matter. It weighs very heavily on him. He sincerely wants these persecuted believers not only to be what they are but to live out what they are each day. He therefore draws attention to the believer's and Church's relationship to the world as he addresses them as a whole.

#### **a. Christians are beloved**

Note where Peter begins, "*Dear friends*" or 'beloved', as it can also be translated. No doubt this is true concerning Peter's relationship with them but it is even more true concerning the Saviour. In the midst of a world that scorns and ridicules us, Christians are truly beloved of God who gave his Son who in turn gave himself for them.

#### **b. Christians are aliens and strangers**

There is an old hymn which has these words in it, "*This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through.*" And this is what Peter is teaching us by using these two descriptions for the Church. We are not at home in this world because we seek the one to come which the Lord has promised us, like Abraham whom we mentioned in chapter

3 earlier (see Hebrews 11:13ff). The Christian's citizenship is in heaven not this world (see Philippians 3:20). And because of that we speak a different language from the foul unclean language of the world around us. We speak of spiritual and eternal realities which this world knows nothing of. We also have a different culture and way of life than we find in this world which is ruined and tarnished by sin. We really are foreigners; aliens and strangers in this world. This helps us to have a light grip even of this world's best blessings and to look forward with eager expectation to heaven.

#### **c. Christians are warriors**

We are in a spiritual war. We face opposition because of who we are, what we believe and the way we live. The world feels guilty when it sees our chaste and pure conduct and it reacts against us. And it also attacks us within our own hearts. (See also Ephesians 6:10-20.)

### **2) The Church's relationship with the ways of the world**

#### **a. Christians abstain from sinful desires**

The word 'abstain' means to stop doing something completely. A number of years ago there was a movement called the 'Abstinence Movement' and its aim was to get people to make a solemn promise to abstain from drinking alcohol and drunkenness. Peter uses the term and applies it to a much wider area of conduct. He writes of "*sinful desires*" or 'fleshly lusts' as it is also translated. Not all desires are sinful, but many are. Therefore the members of the Church of Christ must abstain from every kind of sinful

desire. It includes covetousness, immorality, greed, impurity, idolatry, witchcraft, jealousy, fits of rage, envy, selfish ambition and a host of other wrong desires (see Galatians 5:19-21), anything that is contrary to the Word and purity of God. The believer is to fight against such things when they arise in his heart and mind. He is to be a spiritual warrior against these things in his own soul, as well as in the Church and the world at large. He is to be like salt and light having a purifying effect on others. It is warfare, so we can expect to have a real battle with these things, but battle we must and by God's grace and the Holy Spirit's power resist and overcome them. (Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 5:6; 6:19 and 30.)

Now again we need to be careful. Peter is not teaching us to cut ourselves off from the rest of the world and go into isolation somewhere. We are to resist sin while we are in the world. Indeed, cutting ourselves off from contact with the rest of the world is no solution because we take our own indwelling sin with us and the battle will continue even if we lock ourselves away. Instead, the Lord wants us to live in this way before the eyes of the world so that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16).

We must do this is because sinful desires war against the soul to defile and destroy it. They would take us back into the realms of darkness and extinguish the light. They would defile that which God has sanctified and set apart for himself.

### **b. Christians live honourably and do good works**

Peter writes in 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.*" We are to behave in an honourable way even when under severe opposition from unbelievers; in a way that is good and noble, commendable and upright, godly and God-fearing. (See also Romans 12:9ff, Philippians 4:8, Galatians 5:22-23.) These are to be works that flow out of a love to the Saviour and desire for others' good and welfare. They are **NOT** done as a means to procure blessing and favour from God, but rather an outworking of grace given (see Ephesians 2:9-10).

All of this is to be done before the nations. This is another way of saying the whole world and especially the persecuting environment in which his original readers were living. This is to be true of us even when the unbelieving world we live in misunderstands us, ridicules us, opposes us, and even when they make false accusations against us, and we can only do this by much prayer and commitment to the Lord.

### **c. The motivation which drives that relationship**

A desire for God's glory "*and glorify God.*" If our good works declare our thankfulness they will also rise up in testimony against our persecutors. It is the principle we find in Romans 12:20-21. Christians glorify God now by

their lives and one day in heaven as they acknowledge God's grace and mercy.

The unbelieving world will glorify God in hell and judgement by its acknowledgement of God's justice and righteousness as they confess the uprightness of those they have hated and persecuted, however subtly.

Having laid down the principle Peter teaches us, we must now work out the practical implications of that in our own lives and relationships, and in the next two chapters we will begin to see what he has in mind as we consider the believer's relationship with unbelieving rulers and unbelieving employers, then, God willing, we shall consider other areas in 1 Peter in future booklets.

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## **Chapter 5 The Believer, the Church and Government (1 Peter 2.13-17)**

### **Introduction**

Peter has laid down a principle to which we shall keep referring in verses eleven and twelve which we looked at in our previous chapter. *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 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.”* This has an impact on every area of life, and in the section we are considering in this chapter Peter begins with the government of the day.

We need to remember the setting of these verses because the government of Peter's day was ungodly to an extreme, perpetuating emperor worship and persecuting to death all who opposed it. Every aspect of life was formed into a ritual whereby heathen deities and the Roman Emperor were in some way involved. By this means the Emperor and his senate maintained control over everyone and everything in the empire. A problem therefore arose because Christians are required of God to worship only him. Jesus Christ alone is to be our Lord. Worshipping other gods, even the Emperor was and still is something no genuine Christian believer can do. This raises all sorts of questions for us as the Lord's people, such as, how should we respond to matters such as laws and taxes and many other things imposed by a worldly government? As in all matters relating to what we are to believe and how we are to behave we turn to the Bible, and consider the answer God has given us. We turn to the Word of God and the example of our Saviour and his apostles. And so we come to consider 1 Peter 2:13-17 and we will consider each phrase in turn.

### **1) The Church is to submit to the laws of our country (v13-14)**

Peter writes, *“Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, 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.”*

The Christian believer both as an individual and as a member of the church is to be a law-abiding citizen. We are to submit to, to yield to, to co-operate voluntarily with and to be subject to those in authority over us. Christians are to do this even though they are subjects of a greater king, Jesus, and members of a greater kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. Peter is very thorough as he applies this to “*every authority instituted among men.*” In general we will find no difficulty in doing this. For example, it is good that the laws of our particular country forbid stealing. To obey such a law is to be obedient not only to men, but also to God.

As a general rule this covers the area of the creation ordinances which have to do with:

- i. Our relationship with *GOD* and includes worship, service, the Lord’s Day, etc.
- ii. Our relationship with *EACH OTHER* and includes marriage, sexual relationships generally, family life.
- iii. Our relationship with *LIFE* which includes our attitudes towards life, death, health etc. because life is to be viewed as sacred to God alone.
- iv. Our relationship with *CREATION* for we are stewards of it for the glory of God.

These are binding on all men including rulers and governments. Laws, or ordinances, that do not contradict the creation ordinances and the covenant with Noah in Genesis 9:6, (both of which were later enshrined in the Moral Law of the 10 Commandments found in Exodus 20),

are to be submitted to. Peter tells us why we should behave in this way in v13, “*for the Lord’s sake.*” In other words, out of love for our Lord Jesus Christ we respect and honour those he has raised up to be rulers in matters temporal and administer law and justice in the state. Such obedience is to be without distinction. It is to be to every authority. This includes the supreme head of government whether King, Emperor, President or Governmental body or whatever we like to call the leaders in the state. It applies to governors by which is meant the magistracy, law enforcement agencies which would include civil and criminal courts, the taxation authorities, any type of commission set up to oversee the administration of the law. This is because they are all are sent by and put in place by God to govern according to his word (v14).

We need to note two important observations:

- i. The Scriptures do not lay down any particular form of government (Commonwealth, Kingdom, Presidency, Democracy, Single Party State etc).
- ii. The Scriptures do require of Christians that they have regard to the government that God in his providence has set over them.

There are numerous Bible passages which support this and we shall list just a few. There is detailed teaching from the apostle Paul in Romans 13:1-14 (v7 in particular), 1 Timothy 2:1-4 and Titus 3:1. Then we have the example of Christ and his disciples. For example we have the payment of taxes in Matthew 17:24-27 and 22:15-22. We see Peter

before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:18-21), Paul before Agrippa and Festus (Acts 25:8ff; 26:24ff) and before the High Priest (Acts 23:1-5). There is also an application of Hebrews 13:7; 17; 24. These verses definitely refer to those in Church leadership but good and godly statesmen would be doing the same in their sphere. We can therefore legitimately take them to heart concerning our temporal rulers.

This raises another very important question, and that is, ‘Is there any exception to this?’ Is there ever a time when the disciples of Christ should refuse to obey the laws of men? Now we need to be very careful with this because the Scriptures do not teach us to disobey the laws of our country as a general pattern of behaviour. We are to be law-abiding citizens as we have already stated. But having said that, there may be times when a Christian believer will have to refuse to obey laws instituted by men when they actively oppose what God has declared in the Scriptures. We have an example of this in Acts 4:18-20 when Peter and John were being commanded to cease to preach about Jesus. Their answer is quite instructive. *“Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’”* Obedience to God always takes precedence over our obedience to man, but when the laws of men do not contradict the commands of the Bible the Lord expects us to obey them.

## **2) The reason for that submission (v15-16)**

*“For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.”*

### **a. It is God’s will (v15a)**

Doing the will of God is always a priority for the followers of Christ in every area of our lives. We are to recognise that governments are basically for the good and prosperity of all men including themselves. Anarchy is dangerous and evil bringing disorder and chaos. If we believe in the sovereignty of God, the providence of God, and the glory of God then we turn to his Word and discover his will which we seek to do. The government is in place to punish evildoers and praise them that do well. See also Romans 13:3-4.

### **b. It silences ignorant and foolish men (v15b)**

Peter quite literally says we will ‘muzzle’ them. When Peter describes them as ‘ignorant’ he is not just thinking of a lack of knowledge, but obstinate unwillingness to learn or accept the truth. To this he adds the description ‘foolish’. They are without reason and are senseless in what they are prone to say about Christianity. These are those who criticise and disapprove of the Lord’s work without any adequate reason. When such people see that we are law abiding this will silence them and give them no excuse for speaking against the faith. (See a similar result from good conduct in Titus 2:8.)

We have the examples of Jesus and Paul who, by their obedience and submission to the rulers of the day, caused them to declare they could find no fault with them. See the Roman governor Pilate who said of Jesus in John 18:38 “*I find no basis for a charge against him*” and King Agrippa who declared concerning Paul in Acts 26:31 “*This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.*”

### **c. We are free to be God’s servants (v16)**

Christ has made us free and given us liberty (John 8:36). We are free from the Old Testament Law as a means of salvation. We are free to worship God and can approach him with confidence. We are free to do God’s will and to please him. We are free to use our faculties for God’s service. All of these we could not do before Jesus saved us (see Romans 8:8). Like our Lord we are not of this world (see John 15:19; 17:14, 16) because he has freed us, **but** that gives us no license to rebel against God given governments or national laws that are in place for the good of society. Our freedom lies in our captivity to Christ and his Word which is for the good of all. God desires peace in this world that he made and that can only exist where there is respect for those who administer the principles of the laws of God for mankind.

### **3) A summary (v17)**

*“Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king.”*

Observe the order which we have before us! We are to “*Show respect to everyone.*” We relate to all men around us and all are entitled to our respect. All men are made in the image of God and should be treated appropriately. When they are treated like that who knows what good may be done for their souls and God’s glory.

Next we are to “*Love the brotherhood.*” These are those who are part of the Church of Christ.

These we rightly esteem in a special way because they are our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are saved, like us, by the precious blood of Christ. We are to seek to do those things which will be of mutual good, both materially and spiritually, in public and in private. (See Galatians 6:10.)

Then we are to “*fear God*” who is the sovereign ruler of all. We are to revere and respect our God continually. He is to be respected above all other rulers (Luke 12:5). A good test to see if we are genuinely doing this will be seen in the way we respond to the very commands he has given us in this chapter of 1 Peter. Obedience indicates we do fear God, whereas disobedience indicates we are not revering his holy name.

Finally we are instructed to “*honour the king*”. We are to give to earthly rulers the honour that they are due under God. (See also 1 Timothy 2:1-3.)

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**Chapter 6 The believer, the Church and employers (1 Peter 2.18-25)**

## Introduction

Peter has laid down a principle in 1 Peter 2:11-12. Christians, the Church of Jesus Christ, are strangers and pilgrims in the world, abstaining from fleshly lusts, living honourable lives for the glory of God. We have begun to see that this has an impact on every area of life. Having looked at our relationship with the government of the day (vv13-17), Peter now turns to our relationship as Christians with employers or masters. It is often in this area that Christian believers have some of their greatest difficulty and from where some of their greatest temptations and pressures arise. How are they to respond? What are they to do?

We need to remember that the situation in Peter's day was very similar to our own. The gods of the day are worshipped. Today we can think of the materialistic and money grabbing approach to life which is a modern day idol. Further, it is in the workplace that believers have more contact with unbelievers than almost anywhere else in the world. The Christian ethic of work demands that we seek and use employment aright, but most employers are men of the world working to worldly principles. So how does the Christian behave in such a situation? What does he/she do when called on to do things that are questionable? What do we do when there is injustice arising largely because of our Christian faith, which is nothing short of persecution?

Peter deals with these issues first by teaching us about the Christian's relationship with his/her employer in 2:18, and secondly by giving us three incentives to encourage Christians to be like this in 2:19-25.

### 1) The Christian's relationship with their employer (2:18)

*"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."*

The emphasis in this verse is not so much on the issue of whether slavery is right or not – other Scripture passages deal with that issue and show how slavery is wrong – but the issue Peter is concerned with is how the believer is to relate to their master when he or she is not a believer. This is a principle which we can apply to ourselves with regard to our relationship with our employer. The term Peter uses is for a household servant, and is used in this way in Acts 10:7 where it describes the servants of Cornelius. The term '*master*' is the one in authority. So the relationship is one of employee and employer, and that brings certain responsibilities to both parties. (See also Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1.)

In verse 18 Peter is more concerned with the employee's responsibilities to their employer especially against the background of non-Christian employers. The relationship is one of subjection and Peter uses a tense that indicates when we allow ourselves to be subject. This will be seen

in our obedience to and respect of our employers. It will result in a single-mindedness, in a hearty service. (See also Colossians 3:22, Ephesians 6:5-9.) The principles we applied to 1 Peter 2:13 “*every authority of man*” apply here too. Unless the requirements of our employer run contrary to the creation ordinances then Christian employees must submit to them.

This relationship is to be impartial. The Christian must behave in this way regardless of who his employer is. Some employers are good which makes them pleasant and desirable to work for. They are considerate and fair in their dealings with their employees. To work for such can be a delight. But other employers are exactly the opposite. They are harsh, and can often be guilty of being crooked and perverse in their treatment of their workers, making life very difficult and unfair at times. We are still to submit.

## **2) Three incentives to encourage Christian employees (2.19-25)**

To behave like this is not at all easy. To maintain the Christian ethic is never easy whether in regard to the world or fellow Christians. It is vital however that we maintain it and strive to live by it. Hence the great encouragements Peter now gives us. It is interesting to note that these next verses, which are capable of some wonderful spiritualization, are actually written in the setting that they are!

### **a. It pleases God. 2.19-20**

Patient endurance of undeserved suffering in the work place is acceptable to God. Often such submissive behaviour will bring to us grief and injustice. This may come from fellow employees who would rise up against their employer, but Peter’s emphasis is when we receive such grief from employers. We are still to be submissive for conscience’ sake. The believer may endure difficulty because of our relationship to the Lord. And the believer is able to respond in this submissive way because he knows in God’s providence this is God’s overruling. (See also our Lord’s words in Matthew 5:10-12.)

If we are at fault and suffer then we have no reason to complain. If we do well and suffer then it commends us to God. We are showing our love for him and our devotion to him and his Word. Men too will honour deep down those who act according to Christian principles. As the hymn says, “*They gaze and admire but hate the change.*”

### **b. Christ has given us an example to follow (2.21-24)**

Peter picks up on what we know as the *Servant Songs* of Isaiah (especially Isaiah 53) with which his readers would no doubt have been familiar (see Isaiah 42; 49; 50; 52:13-53:12). God’s own servant came to save us by his service. We know that he was without sin and completely open and frank (Isaiah 53:9). Yet he was abused and persecuted but did not retaliate. He committed all to the one (his Father in heaven) whom he was ultimately serving and for whose sake he was suffering all the abuse and indignity that the

hatred of men poured on him, until eventually he was crucified. We too are serving the same God! Jesus went as far as the cross so that by his service we might be healed from all our sin and unrighteousness. God wants us to serve like him!

**c. Our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (2.25)**

Simply put, we are his followers. He is our Shepherd and we are his sheep. Once we were like the world around us, going astray from God and his Word. We too hated and despised the ways of the Lord and sought our own will and way, not only spiritually but also in life's various scenes. **BUT** we have now returned to God in Jesus Christ. We are followers of Christ as sheep follow their shepherd, going where he leads, living close to him. We are under the oversight (bishop = overseer) of Christ who has not only saved us but is responsible for our souls and keeping them against the great day of the Lord.

**Conclusion**

We can have no greater incentive than these last two points to live the Christian life, not only as regards daily work but in everything!

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