

## **Submit and do good, Part 1 - 1 Peter 2:13-25**

*As Christians we have change loyalties and allegiances. We no longer follow the ways of the world, but of Jesus Christ. So, how then are we to relate to a world that has rejected our Lord? In particular, how are we to relate to the authorities and those who are bosses over us?*

### **Drunk, Hunk or Monk?**

Drunk, hunk or monk?

That was one humorous social media post I saw during lockdown.

It was an observation that being stuck at home had meant people may be focussing on new things in life.

Some were just drinking a lot more - hence drunk.

Some, perhaps following Joe Wicks, were doing a lot more exercise and body building - hence hunk,

Whilst others were maybe becoming more spiritual, hence monk!

You can of course draw closer to God, without becoming a monk.

In fact, if by monk you mean someone who locks themselves away from society just to do spiritual things for their own spiritual development, then I think the New Testament would question whether you were being truly spiritual.

True Christian faith is just as much about relating to people around you as it is about relating to God.

### **Set apart, but living for**

We saw last week, that most people instinctively reject God and his followers.

Yet, we also saw that although as Christians we are rejected by the world, we are precious to God and set apart by him to live distinctively and differently.

All of this is a lot easier if you do become a monk and lock yourself away from a world that is against God! Perhaps as a Christian you have even enjoyed being forced to be a part from work colleagues who ridicule you for being a Christian!

But the reality is that most Christians cannot practically live a life that is completely separate from the world. More importantly that is not God's plan. Rather as Peter says in 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." (1 Peter 2:12)

If we want to make a difference in the world,  
we need to live differently from the world,  
but we cannot live apart from the world!

We are set apart from the world, but living for the world.

So how are we as those who are keen to follow Christ and obey God to live amongst people who reject God - either the very idea of God or at least the idea that we should live as God says?

That is the issue Peter turns to tackle in the central part of his letter. And he starts with perhaps the most difficult relationships. How are we to relate to those in authority over us? Either the state authorities or our bosses at work? Peter's key answer is... submit and do good!

### **Submission and doing Good**

#### **To Authorities - vs. 13-15**

Peter's experience of those in charge was not wholly positive. After all it was the Jewish ruling body in Jerusalem, who had condemned Jesus to death. It was the representative of the Roman Emperor who had allowed Jesus to be crucified.

What is more after Jesus died and rose again, Peter and his colleagues were regularly arrested and tortured for talking about Jesus by the authorities in Jesus and one of the puppet kings of Rome had had James, one of Peter's closest friends and one of the Twelve executed for telling people about Jesus. Peter would have gone the same way if it wasn't for a miraculous escape from prison!

Peter knew what it was to be rejected by the authorities, just had Jesus had been rejected by the authorities.

So, how does Peter say that as Christians we should respond to the authorities?

Submit! The command is very stark in verse 13. To submit means to do what they say without grumbling or complaining. And not just to the ultimate authority in the land - in Peter's case either emperor Claudius or Nero, but to the emperor's representatives. Sometimes it is easier to submit to a distant authority figure, than to the local representative - who you may have even more reason not to like.

But, Peter does not just say, submit, he teaches us to do good so that those ignorant people - probably those who assume that Christianity is wicked and evil may be silenced.

- Of course we live in a society that is very critical of our leaders. In some ways that is appropriate in a democracy, where we need to choose who will lead us we need to debate who is doing a good job!

But, whatever we think of our present government, they are the only government we have got. As Christians it is important that we obey them and seek to do good for our society.

Perhaps the most pressing issue at present are all the different rules that keep coming out about how we should behave in this pandemic. The latest and most controversial one is that from this weekend we will have to wear masks in shops.

You may think this is inconsistent with other rules. You may not like the idea of wearing a mask. It may even put you off shopping.

But as Christians we should as good citizens obey the law of the land and be good citizens. And indeed, this rule along with others is for the general good. It will help to limit the spread of the virus and ultimately mean less people die and less people lose their jobs.

### **To Bosses - vs. 18-20**

So, Peter first of all calls on us to submit to the main authorities, but he also wants us to submit to our bosses.

Now that is not quite what Peter says! In verse 18, he says 'slaves' submit to your masters.

In the first century Roman Empire, the household was the basic unit of society and the master, was king over the household. Everyone else, whether wife, child or slave were expected to fit in and play their role. We'll think more about Peter's attitudes about slaves and wives in next week's sermon.

But, we need to translate his teaching in to today's world, where I at least hope you don't have slaves at home! In our society, the place where you are expected to fit in and play your role is in the workplace (or possibly these days remotely in your work place). So perhaps it is best for us to understand this teaching as applying to bosses and their employees.

Peter recognises that there were good masters and bad masters. I know as well that it can make a big difference to people at work, whether you have a good boss or a bad boss!

Indeed, you may have a horrible boss who treats you quite unfairly and possibly dislikes you because you are a Christian. That comes close to the situation of the slaves Peter is addressing here. Although, unlike the slaves it may be easier for you to change jobs - and that may be an appropriate thing to do if you can!

However, while you are working for a bad boss, who treats you unfairly, how should you respond?

Well again, Peter says submit and do good. Be the best employee you can. Do what you are asked to do, even the unpleasant jobs and do things that go beyond the general expectations. Be the ideal employee.

The hope is that in seeing your good, you boss and others at work, may end up realising that being a Christian makes a really positive difference. Maybe some of them will come to faith as a result?

That is the kind of slaves / employees we are meant to be!

But, you might say. As Christians we are God's special people. We have an incredible status in God. Peter told us in verse 9:

"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." (1 Peter 2:9)

Why should we submit to those who have rejected our amazing God? Shouldn't we be living for God instead?

## **Slaves of God**

Well even as Peter tells us to submit to those in authority, he does not shy away from emphasising where our ultimate allegiance still lies. He tells us in verse 16 - that we are slaves to God - not to the authorities or our bosses, but slaves to God!

### **Fearing God** - vs. 17

To submit to the authorities and to do good for them, means to obey them and work hard for them, but it does not mean to give them our ultimate allegiance. Here lies the key difference between being a Christian and being a doormat to an oppressive boss. And it is down to who we ultimately fear.

Verse 17 gives 4 snappy commands. The first is general universal one. We should honour or show respect to everyone - whether they are Christians or not.

But, the next three commands give a kind of decreasing level of allegiance:

- We are to fear God
- Love other Christians
- Honour the king

The difference is important. When there is no conflict between obeying God and those in authority, then we must submit and do good. This is the normal state of affairs and we do this because of God!

So, Peter says in verse 13, submit to the authorities for the Lord's sake.  
And in verse 18, he says out of fear or respect - to God, we should obey our bosses.

We must submit to authorities and bosses and do good for them, but not because we fear them, but because we fear God! However, there will be occasions when we have to disobey the authorities or the bosses in order to obey God.

When there is a conflict between obeying God and obeying the king, then the question is who do we fear most. As Christians it must be God, because we know he has the power over our eternal destiny!

For Peter there were times, when he would not obey the authorities - when they told him to stop telling people about Jesus. They threatened floggings and even death. But Peter did not fear them, he feared God, so he carried on speaking of Jesus.

### **Following the Death of Christ** - vs. 21-25

Secondly, we should recognise that the way of submission, even to those who treat us unjustly is actually the way of Christ.

In verse 21, we are told that it is to the life of a slave that we are called to, following the example of Christ, that we should follow in his steps.

So, what was Christ's example?

- a. He submitted
  - Even as he was being seriously oppressed and abused, Jesus still did nothing wrong.

If we are honest it is easy to be good, when everyone is kind to us and we have a good boss. True Christianity means to be good even when our bosses or other are treating us harshly. That is much more a challenge.

Although, people treated Jesus horrendously, he did not fight back or even speak back. He didn't meet lies with lies, abuse with abuse or violence with violence.

b. He feared God

Jesus knew he was being treated unjustly, but he trusted that God would ultimately and eternally see justice done. God did indeed, vindicate Jesus by raising him from the dead!

c. He did good

Jesus's death on the cross was ultimately for our sake. He bore our sins, by his wounds we are healed.

So, we must live like Jesus.

We submit to the authorities and bosses, even those who do not treat us well. But, although we honour them, we don't fear them.