

1. Intro

Can I invite you to keep your bibles open at 1 Peter Chapter 2 as we explore God's word together.

First, a question. Do you remember an Englishman by the name of Bear Grylls? He had a TV show called Man vs Wild. He was famous for his survival techniques, which usually involved making shelters out of sticks and things and, perhaps most of all, eating bugs and grubs and spiders in order to stay alive in the wilderness. I remember one particular episode in which he was dropped in a giant forest, with no food or other supplies and had to find his way to safety. One of the first things he did was to climb the tallest tree he could find. Why did he use up precious time and energy climbing a tree? Well, when he was up above the level of the other trees, he was able to see where he was - to get his bearings. It's the same when we read bible, isn't it? .

It's been a couple of weeks since we looked at 1 Peter, so let's spend a few moments to refresh our memories and get our bearings.

Peter & his audience:

In terms of background, this letter was written by Jesus' apostle Peter somewhere around 63AD. He wrote it to Christian people who were scattered over a wide area in what we now know as modern Turkey.

Peter & his message of salvation

As you may recall, the letter of 1 Peter starts by reminding us what God has done for us through the death & resurrection of Jesus. Verse 9 of chapter 2 tells us something about God's gift to his followers:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.

As followers of Jesus, we are chosen by God to be his special people. This is our **Christian identity**, an identity which is only possible because of the death and resurrection of Christ; 1 Peter Chapter 1, verses 3 & 4:

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

New birth, a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the wonderful truth of the gospel, isn't it?

This is the starting point, the springboard if you like, for our bible reading today and it leaves us with a question - how do we **live out** our lives today in a way that **reflects** our new birth?

2. Peter & how we are to live as Christians

Peter teaches us how we are to live. Verse 12 of chapter 2 tells us to:

Live such good lives among the pagans that, although they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day that he visits us.

In our reading today, Peter examines what it means to live good lives among the pagans. This part of Peter's letter is so packed with teaching that we would need a whole series of sermons to unpack it all. So today we will focus on one aspect of its content and that is 3 key areas of relationship in our lives – our relationship with our government, our relationship with our leaders at work and our relationship with our spouse.

So there are three key areas, but one common theme – we are to Submit. To submit is an unpopular concept in today's society, isn't it? The world tells us that to submit is to show weakness. Surely we have been taught

that we need to stand up for ourselves. Don't take any nonsense. Stand up for our rights. Or should we? Let's see what Peter has to say.

a) Government (2:13-17)

In verses 13 & 14 Peter instructs us to:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority instituted among men; whether the king as the supreme authority or to governors...

Peter is instructing us to submit to our government. I'm no expert in politics, but it seems to me that while the system of government that we have here is not perfect, it's a lot better than that found in many other countries around the world. Living in this country, it's relatively easy for us to submit to our government as a testimony to our **Christian identity**.

How do we do that? Simple examples include obeying the laws – even the ones that we don't like or being honest when we complete our tax returns. But it goes a bit deeper than that. Have you noticed how people, especially in the media, love to treat our leaders? Have you noticed the way some of our leaders treat each other? Personal insults, name-calling, jeers and jibes are commonplace. What do they show? Essentially it's a lack of respect isn't it? Friends, it shouldn't be the case with us. Verse 17:

Show proper respect to everyone....

We are called, amongst other things, to show proper respect to everyone. And that includes our political leaders.

We are blessed to live in a democracy. Submission to the authorities does not mean that we should not actively push for change when we can see that it is needed. It does mean that we are to do so within the boundaries of the law.

There is a limit to the extent of our submission to our government. In verse 16 we are told to:

Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

We are **God's** servants. We are bound to God, first and foremost. We are his people. He has the absolute right to rule our lives. So if a government ever orders us to behave in a way which dishonours God, or which conflicts with our **Christian identity** then of course we must disobey. And be prepared to live with the consequences.

b) Slaves & Masters

Peter moves on to the second of the 3 relationships – that of slaves and masters.

Back in first century Rome slavery was a part of everyday life. However it was often very different from the kind of slavery that we might imagine. In first century Rome it was possible to sell yourself as a slave in order to pay of your debts (sounds a bit like a mortgage to me!). Equally you could buy back your freedom if you had enough money (sounds like superannuation). Slavery was a little like our modern-day experience of employment, although there were, of course, some significant differences. We are not enslaved in the same way as people in the first century. We have much more choice in respect of where we work, when we work and for whom we work. But we still have bills to pay and so for the vast majority of us, at some point in our lives, it's off to work we go.

Have you ever had a boss that you'd describe as a slave driver? I think we've all come across them: someone who's never satisfied with our efforts; someone who picks on people or who plays favourites; someone who revels in their authority with little thought for their staff. Maybe that's the kind of boss that Peter had in mind when he wrote about masters *who are harsh* in verse 18.

Our natural response to bosses is to push back against them. All the more so if they're bad bosses. That's the way of the world. Don't put up with any nonsense, stand up for your rights. Peter tells us to be different. Peter tells

us to live out our **Christian identity** by submitting to our bosses. He tells us to bear up even if we suffer unfairly at work because of our Christian faith; verse 19

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

Thankfully, unlike the first century slave, we have the freedom to look for another job if we have to. But we can be a witness to our Christian identity by doing so without complaint or bitterness toward the boss.

c) Husbands & wives

Peter turns his attention to our domestic relationships chapter 3, verse 1. It is to wives, whom he instructs: to

Be submissive to your husbands

Oh dear, that's not going to go down at all well with the wives.

What does Peter mean by this direction? Is he calling on women to be doormats? Or to be subservient? Is he telling women that their sole purpose in life is to cook and clean for their wonderful husbands? I don't think so. He makes no mention of any of those things. Nor is he suggesting that wives are to suffer abuse of any kind at the hands of their husband.

So, what does it mean for wives to be submissive to their husbands? Some people get very agitated when this question arises, so much so that they become distracted from the key message of the gospel itself. We don't want to fall into the same trap. Don't get me wrong, it is an important subject, but it isn't the main subject of today's sermon, so, put simply I think it means that wives need to let their husbands be the man that God made him to be; let their husbands lead them with love; respect their husbands and don't try to dominate them. God made us men and women; he created us with different genders, and assigned us different roles, but he created us with equal love and equal value in his sight. Verse 7 refers to wives as co-

heirs with their husbands in God's gracious gift of life. This means that men and women are equal in God's sight, so there is no need for either to engage in a battle of the sexes.

It's appropriate for Peter to conclude with a direction to husbands. Note how he starts verse 7:

Husbands, in the same way...

His direction to Christian husbands is directly linked to his instruction to Christian wives. Just as wives are to submit to their husbands, so husbands are to be considerate to their wives and treat them with respect.

Peter refers to wives as the weaker partner. Is he being patronising toward women? Absolutely not! He is simply observing that most men are physically stronger than their wives and therefore they need to be mindful of this in the way that they behave toward them.

As Christian men we are to be considerate of our wives, we are to respect them, to protect them, to cherish their femininity. Just as God intended from the very beginning.

Why, why, why?

So, in order to live out our Christian identity, we are to submit to our government, we are to submit to our leaders at work, wives are to submit to their husbands and husbands are to respect their wives. Why all this submission and respect?

When it comes to submission to our **government**, Peter explains that it is firstly for the Lords sake (chapter 2, verse 13) and secondly (verse 15) to silence the ignorant talk of foolish people – people who might otherwise say that the people of God are subversive or criminal. There were plenty of people who thought that way in the first century and there are plenty of people who think that way today, aren't there?

The way we live is important. The way we live is a witness to our **Christian identity**, which is itself a witness to God's great love for us.

Peter teaches us that we are to submit to our **masters** (our bosses), even if it means that we suffer unjustly, because this is what we are called to do.

Verse 21:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

As the chosen people of God we were called to follow the example of Christ. Peter is telling us that this is part of our Christian identity.

In chapter 3, verse 1, Peter explains that **wives** are to submit to their husbands, so that:

if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

Peter is talking about the vital importance of a wife's way of life, especially if their husband is not yet a Christian. Wives can point their husbands to Christ by the way that they themselves live.

Finally, Peter teaches that husbands are to be considerate of their wives and treat them with respect so that

nothing will hinder your prayers (ch.3 verse 7).

Husbands are to love and cherish and care for their wives, that is simply a given. Here Peter clarifies that our relationships with each other, particularly in marriage, are so important that they affect our prayer life. So the way we relate to each other is a reflection of our relationship with God.

So, submission to our government is for the Lord's sake, submission to our employers is because we are called to follow Christ's example and

submission and respect in our domestic relationships are to point to Christ and to ensure that our prayer life is on the right track.

Have you noticed that in all of these cases our behaviour, our way of life, the life to which we are called does not point to ourselves. Living out our Christian identity isn't about saying 'look at me, what a good person I am'. The way we live as the people of God must point not to ourselves, but to Jesus.

Ultimate example

Peter warns us that being prepared to suffer for our faith is part of our Christian identity. We have already heard that we are called to follow Jesus' example. But Jesus is more than just an example. He is the **reason** for the living hope that we have. Verse 24 of chapter 2:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree (that is the cross), so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Jesus bore the burden of our sin when he suffered and died on the cross. Jesus was prepared to die for us, which is exactly what he did. Can we truly call ourselves his followers if we are not prepared to suffer for him?

Conclusion

The world tells us that to submit is to show weakness. That is true. We are weak. I am not talking about comparison with each other. I am talking in the context of comparison with God. But, despite our weakness, despite our failings, despite our fears and frailties, we are chosen by him. Through the death and resurrection of Christ we have been given a new birth into a living hope. We are called to live out our lives on this earth in a way that shows that we submit to Christ and that we are prepared to let him love us as we rely on **his** strength.

Will you pray with me?

Our loving heavenly father, we give you thanks that you have called us into a living hope through the resurrection of Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. You have given us a new life in Jesus. Help us to live out our lives in a way that is true to our Christian identity, which points not to ourselves but to Jesus. To the glory of your name. Amen