

1 Peter 2.11-17 – Doing good for God’s sake

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Main Point – Do good and submit to authorities to please God

It is 64AD in Rome, when a devastating fire breaks out. **(SLIDE)**

Emperor Nero is likely several miles away in his palace, and when he hears the news he rushes to Rome to try and organize the fire-fight.

The fire lasts 6 days and 7 nights, with 10/14 sections of the city destroyed.

12,000 people are killed.-----

The rumour arose that Nero had started the fire so he could rebuild the city the way he wanted.

The Roman historian Tacitus, writing about 40 yrs later, believed the fire started accidentally, but says more and more people started suspecting the emperor.

So to shift the blame Nero decided to blame the Christians (because the Jewish and Christian parts of the city had not burned).

Christians at that time, Tacitus says, were hated for their abominations and ‘hatred of humankind’.

You see back then Christians didn’t participate in social activities, like the theatre, or sports, or the army, due to their pagan worship, and so people thought Christians hated others.-----

Nero blamed the Christians with ‘refined cruelty’.

Many were arrested and condemned.

Some were dressed in furs and killed by dogs for amusement.

Others were set on fire to light up Nero’s gardens.

All to satisfy the cruelty of one person – the emperor.-----[JL Gonzalez, Story of Christianity)

Just imagine being a Christian in Rome at that time.-----

It is in this context and around this time, that Peter writes this letter.

Yes, he writes to Christians in Turkey not Rome, but I’m sure word of Nero’s actions spread fast.

We don’t know how far the persecution spread, but he disliked Christians to say the least.

And he’s the Emperor when Peter writes.-----

So submitting to the emperor, and others in authority, would not have been easy in Peter’s day. And it’s not easy for us either.

So why do it?----- We’ll think about that today.-----**(SLIDE)**-----

Remember from **last week**, Peter told these Christians in **v9**, you are God’s chosen and holy people – set apart from the world, for God.

That’s us too, everyone who’s built their life on Jesus.----

Through trusting Jesus we’ve been included in God’s people.-----

Now in **v11** the apostle Peter refers to his hearers as ‘dear friends’, or ‘dearly beloved’ ones – those who are loved by Peter, and by God.-----

And they are ‘strangers’, meaning foreigners, few having citizenship in the Roman empire, and no genuine citizenship in this world.

For they are also exiles – away from home, in another country.

That’s because they and we are not at home in this world; we’re waiting for our real home in our heavenly inheritance, our heavenly country.

We’re not at home in this world, but sojourners, strangers - just passing through, here temporarily. **(SLIDE)**-----

It’s where the title of this 1 Peter sermon series comes from.-----

Now because this world and the Roman Empire is not their real and ultimate home; because they’re citizens of heaven, they need to live like that.

And because we’re citizens of heaven more than Australia, we need to live like that.

So **v11**, I urge you to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul.

We are urged to reject our natural impulses for survival, for acceptance by others, or for avoiding conflict at all costs.-----

We need to reject our fleshly lusts, our sinful n’ selfish desires, that want us to give in to sin.-

We need to live differently from our neighbours, those around us.-----

And like any war, it requires many battles, not just one.

It means every day, from the time I wake up, choosing to fight desires to be selfishly putting myself first, seeking my pleasure at other's expense, putting others down with my words, and so on.

Our sinful desires are what we must fight – which Peter elaborates on in ch4v3-4.

But now he focuses on what the opposite looks like – conducting yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, the pagan unbelievers, with good works.-----**(SLIDE)**

This brings us to our first of 3 points, Do Good.-----

At Bundy we promoted the Gospel Coalition Australia conference that happened in October, and one of preachers at that was **Rory Shiner** from WA.

He said regarding to engaging with our culture that, 'the only failure is moral failure'.

'If our evangelism or programs fail, okay, but don't fail morally', stick to God, be faithful to God and your family.

And isn't it true that moral failures, adultery, abuse, paedophilia, have undermined the cause of the Gospel so much in recent decades, have ruined lives, and churches, and horribly shipwrecked the faith of many.-----

Part of our doing good as followers of Jesus is not failing morally.-----

Rory Shiner also said, '**Keep Christianity weird**'.**(SLIDE)**

'It's ok to believe weird things, and weird can keep us different', and even be attractive.

So we believe the fate of the world rests on a crucified Jewish prophet, we believe in angels and demons, we sing together, we believe in a new world, and that God loves us, and will bring justice and judgement.

Keep Christianity weird.-----

I'd also add keep being weird, by having people into your home, really caring about people at work or school, loving people extravagantly.

Our weirdness, difference and integrity will be seen and proved by our 'good works', **v12**.

So even if people slander you as evildoers they are to see our good works.-----

We heard that first century Christians not participating in popular entertainment and sports because of the pagan worship, made others think, Christians hated socializing.

But Peter says people need to be able to see our good works.-----

Today Christians can be slandered for holding or speaking biblical views on gender, marriage, or sexual sin.**(SLIDE)**

Soon Christians in Victoria could be not only slandered but punished for praying God would change a Christian's, even their own child's, transgender feelings.

A conversation on gender between two consenting adults could prosecuted; not that it should silence us.

Or a Christian school or organization could be punished for wanting to hire or fire staff who hold to their values, in belief and practice.-----

You can be or may have been, slandered, verbally abused, for your views.

I had a Hindu slander me for saying I believed Jesus is the only way to God.-----

How should we respond in the face of slander or abuse?----

With love, and by doing good.-----

Not with aggressiveness, but with humility and gentleness.-----

Maybe with an invitation to coffee or lunch, and to talk?

With a smile to someone's who's been ignoring you at school.

An offer to pray for someone's sick family member, even when they'd rejected you for your Christian views before.

Or from our Growth Group Generosity Project, Your doing good might be the generosity you show to other staff or work colleagues, in your time or words.

Your care for the poor, the refugee, the vulnerable.-----

It's more than good manners, it's good deeds.

Doing good without pride or hypocrisy.-----

Doing good, not to earn God's favour, but because God's already made us one of his people through Jesus.-----

Are you someone who does good?-----

Remember Jesus said to his followers in **Matthew 5,(SLIDE)** 'you are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'-----

Peter seems to have had Jesus' teaching in mind here for he says there'll be unbelievers who 'will glorify God on the day he visits us', **v12**.

This seems to be saying that our lives should point to God and his character, so that people are attracted to Christ, and moved to follow him too.

Then as people are converted and trust in Jesus, they will glorify God in their worship, when Jesus returns.----- [also 1.9 &5.4]

This is supported by **3v1** where a wife's unbelieving husband can be won over without a word, by the way their wives live.-----

The point is, Christian behaviour, doing good, is powerful; a powerful witness.-----

I know an older couple who'd raised their children to know and follow Jesus, but **their daughter turned away from the Lord** in her teenage years, and stopped going to church. She became quite antagonistic to Christianity and never wanted to talk about Jesus.

But her parents continued to love her, relate to her, pray for her.-----

And when she had children her parents were involved in their grandkids lives.

Sharing meals and showing love in practical ways – every so often taking their grandkids to church and inviting their daughter to church.-----

And do you know that when their daughter was in her 40's, she just had a new openness and willingness to reconnect with God. She started attending church again, and her parents rejoiced when she said she trusted in the Lord Jesus and was now wanting to follow him – a gracious answer to their many prayers.

And her parents, patient, loving care, in word and deed, without being pushy and argumentative; was used by God, to save their daughter, and her family.-----

To the glory of God!-----

Point 2 is, Submit to authorities.(SLIDE)

And submitting to those in authority over us is part of the good we do – the repeated theme of the passage.-----

V13 'Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors'.

This theme of submission introduced here will continue over the next 2 weeks, as we think about masters and marriages.

But here we're thinking about submitting to humans who have governing authority.---

Remember Nero is emperor at this time, and he was happy to blame the great fire of Rome on Christians, then arrest and cruelly kill them.

To many Roman rulers, Christians were opposed to their values and way of life.

Still, the God-inspired word through the apostle says, submit.

Submit to the emperor or king as the supreme authority and to governors, that is all the leaders, rulers, commanders, under him.

Don't forget that Pontius Pilate was a Roman governor, who'd sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion.-----

Roman emperors were not nice democratic government ministers who could be removed after an election. And they were not convinced of moral principles like 'human rights' or 'equality'.-----

The role of the state is mentioned in **v14** - God's purpose for them is that they 'punish those who do evil' and praise or commend those who do good'.

This is supposed to be what those in authority do.

In an ideal world or good situation, if a Christian is wrongly accused of doing evil, the government should only punish those who are guilty.

But we know in our fallen and sinful world things don't always work like that do they?

Sometimes rulers commit despicable evil, and make unjust decisions.

There's no doubt some governments totally fail at this – like in North Korea, Iran, Pakistan – so oppressive and unjust.

And Peter is not naïve about the goodness of governing rulers, who were never Christians in his day.

It's implied that they are likely among the 'foolish people' of **v15**.-----

Later he'll make clear we can suffer for doing good - it happens!

That's why we do well to remember Jesus words in **Matt 5** – blessed are the persecuted.----

But the principle is still; God's command is still, submit to every human authority.----

How we respond to this will be influenced by our culture and experience.

If we've come from a culture where we've experienced corrupt authorities, police brutality, or Muslim Sharia law, heeding what God says here will be hard.----

Many Australians have a negative view of submission, seen with everything from people not wearing masks, to horrible brutality towards police.

And when we've experienced authority being abused it can lead us to resent the idea of submission, putting ourselves under an authority.-----

But notice that Peter doesn't encourage civil disobedience until Rome's justice improves. He's not anti-Rome.----- Same with Paul in **Romans 13**.-----

God is saying to the Turkish believers Peter writes to, and to us – submit to the governing authorities.

In Victoria that has included us obeying the directions of the Chief Health Officer in the pandemic State of Emergency, even when we disagreed, or we felt it unjust.

God calls us to obey, for we're not in authority, and are to submit.-----

Yes, there is a **limit**.

When the Hebrew midwives were commanded to murder newborns (Ex 1), when Daniel was commanded to pray to the King, or his friends to worship the idol (Dan 3&6), and when the apostles were commanded to stop speaking about Jesus, in each case the believers disobeyed.

For 'we must obey God rather than men' – **Acts 5.29**.

But let us not make excuses for our failure to obey the authorities.-----

Let's not take on our culture's individualistic autonomous thinking, and claim we're in charge.-----

I understand that these matters are complicated, and **some churches have met in person** and some Christians wanted to meet, against government directions.

Because Hebrews 10 says, do not give up meeting together.

But at Bundy our elders have been convicted of the importance of obeying Scripture in its clear teaching to submit to government.

And up until today we'd not been meeting because it was a temporary lockdown and restriction, for the public good.

We didn't gather in person for the sake of people's lives - out of love for our neighbour, which Scripture also commands, and so Jesus' name wouldn't be shamed.-----

So as a church, and the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, has sought to please God in our submission in this case.-----

In what ways do you find it hardest to submit to the authorities?-----

In not driving over the speed limit, or using your phone while driving?

Not being completely honest on your tax return?

Kids maybe you don't always obey your school rules or teachers? Or maybe only when they're watching?-----

For yes kids, your school teacher & principal are human authorities over you too, who God wants you to obey.-----

Or maybe we've not been QR coding-in when you enter a shop or building, or keeping our mask on?-----

I've disagreed with the vaccine mandates and the State government stopping people working without vaccination. I've expressed my views in writing to the Premier and my local MP, and I'll express my views when I come to vote next year too.

Your elders wrote to the State government asking for the distinction between vaccinated and unvaccinated attending church to be removed – the letter is on the Roadmap page of our church website. You could write too.-----

I've disagreed with many of Daniel Andrew's decisions – their goodness and justice.

But unless he's asked me to disobey God and sin, then God tells me to obey.

God asks you to submit and obey too.-----

How will you respond?-----

But why? Why obey, especially when I don't want to, or I feel it violates my rights, or I'm convinced what they demand is harsh, wrong, unjust?

Why submit?

Point 3, To please God.-----

Peter said that in **v13** didn't he: Submit to every human authority, 'because of the Lord'; that means as part of your serving and following the Lord Jesus.

He's the one who's coming back, the Lord God who will 'visit us' when he returns, v12. So we're to live to please him.

Submitting will glorify God when we see him; it's for God's sake.-----

Or **v15** says our submitting, which is part of our continuing to do good, is 'God's will'.-----

And we do it because we are God's slaves.-----

Did you notice the oxymoron in **v16?**---- The opposites put together?

We are to submit because we're 'free people', and as 'God's slaves'.

So we're free, yet we're slaves. It's a paradox.-----

Even though many Peter wrote too were likely actual slaves who had masters, he's saying spiritually, and in God's view, they are free.(**SLIDE**)

They and we are people who've been freed from sin and its bondage.

The chains which bound us to sin, and eternal death & judgement, have been broken.

Broken by the Lord Jesus who died for us, rose again and is returning.

Christ has set us free.-----

But we're not free from responsibilities now.

As Paul says in **Rom 6.22**,(**SLIDE**) we're freed from sin and become slaves to God.

That is, we've been freed to live under God, and flourish in living the life God intended for us, in relationship with him, which ends in eternal life

And there's actually nothing better.----- It is good!-----

So now, in order to please the God who has set us free through Jesus, we live for him.

And that means, **v17**, with awe-filled respect for him, we honour or show respect to everyone.

Even your enemy, your false accuser; the Police Officer, Centrelink worker, or one who disagrees with you on covid or vaccines, or morality.-----

Doing good also means we love the brothers and sisters, not just individually but as a church.

Will you love for your brothers and sisters by serving them?-----

Lastly, Peter says, honour, that is value, hold up, **respect, the Emperor.**-----

I'd find it really hard to honour n' respect an Emperor who burned Christians for fun.----

Honouring and respecting such rulers is not easy.-----

We should remember the example of our Lord Jesus, in giving to Caesar what is Caesar's

[Matt 22.21]. He submitted to the authorities, even unto death, and when he was innocent.---

We'll consider this more next week.-----

The principle of honouring the king still applies to us.(**SLIDE**)

So even if all our friends bag and disrespect the Premier or Prime Minister, or even if everyone around you ignores their directions and disobeys, we are to be different.

Even if we stand out, we are to be different.-----

It's God's will that his saved people submit to governing authorities.

And if and when the time comes for us to disobey the government to obey God, like the martyrs of the early church, may we not show disrespect.

But let's be willing to suffer the consequences, whether prison or death, entrusting our lives to God.-----

And maybe a helpful way we can 'honour the king', is by praying for those who rule over us, including our Queen, in this last phase of her earthly life.

As I wrap up and to bring this passage home, I wonder which of these people and their choices is how God wants you to respond?-----**(SLIDE)**-----

Like **Tom** who wants to not give into sinful desires but, remember his in a war, and fight, crying out for the Spirit's strength.

Like **Kelly** who decides to be more open with her friend about why she follows Jesus and the difference he's made in her weird life, even if she cops criticism for it.---

Like **Fred** who is in a difficult season of life, and faithfully caring for his unwell family members are the good works he's doing at the moment, which brings glory to God.

Like **Sally** who will intentionally keep wearing her mask inside church or the shops as directed by the government, because she knows she's pleasing the Lord.

Like **Arthur** who has a new conviction that God wants him to obey the government not cos they deserve it, not cos of fear of punishment, but because it's God's will.

Or are you like **Sandra**, who is praying for new desire and energy to do good to her work colleagues and church family, and serve in love, out of her comfort zone; to please her Lord Jesus?-----

Whoever we are, if we belong to Jesus and know heaven is our home, we'll do good and submit to the authorities, to please God.-----

Let's pray.