

Living Under Authority

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[0 : 00] Let's do it. How do we point to heaven but live on earth?

You'll remember that was our catchphrase from last week. How do we point to heaven but live on earth? And in answering that question, we looked firstly at Peter's command to live as aliens and exiles.

We then heard about our call to conduct ourselves honourably among the Gentiles. We then learnt how God requires us to accept the authority of every human institution.

And as our passage rounded off, we were encouraged as servants of God to live as free people. We learnt in these ways that we will point to heaven but live on earth.

You'll also remember we finished off our passage looking at chapter 2, verse 17. Honour everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.

[1 : 06] This was a sort of catch-all summary sentence of everything Peter had commanded. And yes, it's concise, it's catchy and it emphasises how God should get the best of our love and respect.

But as we move into our passage this morning, beginning at verse 18, you get the sense that Peter wants to apply these verses, these principles of submission to some specific people, perhaps a group or groups of people who would find it particularly difficult to submit.

And that certainly seems to be the case here, as Peter addresses slaves who suffer under harsh masters in verse 18. Slaves accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle, but also those who are harsh.

Now, since the African-American slavery of the 19th century, the word slave has forever changed. It's an occupation synonymous with cruelty and abuse and racism.

But we should remember in Peter's day, slaves were part and parcel of the household dynamic. It was normal to have servants in the house. They often performed important tasks.

[2 : 25] Having said this, slaves were still lower in terms of legal standing and social standing. They could purchase their way out of slavery, but they had limited economic freedom.

So, it's to these people Peter gives this command. Accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle, but also those who are harsh. And first and foremost, the slaves were to do this for the Lord's sake, as it connects back to verse 13.

And Peter's pretty honest. He doesn't pull any punches. He basically says, it's not too hard to submit to the authority of a nice master. It's not too hard to show them deference, or in other words, respect or a desire to please them.

Anyone can do that. But it's when your masters are harsh, when they're crooked, when they're not only physically abusive, but totally dishonest, when they're not paying you a fair day's wage for a fair day's work.

That's when it's hard to respect them. That's when it's hard to desire to please them. But Peter says, that's exactly when you've got a golden opportunity to be a servant-hearted Christian.

[3 : 40] That's the occasion for glorifying God. Verse 19, This really goes against what comes naturally, doesn't it?

Because when you suffer for doing right, the natural instinct is to want justice, self-protection, which inevitably leads to revenge. Peter knows this.

That's why he urges a Christian response. Keep on enduring, being aware of God. Being aware of God, what does that mean? It means a trusting awareness of God's presence, of his care.

It means trusting he'll make all wrongs right. It means God is not pleased when slaves merely endure punishment. He wants them to trust him too. And just in case there was any confusion as to which sort of endurance God approves of, Peter again pulls no punches and says in verse 20, If you endure pain when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that?

In other words, if you're suffering for doing the wrong thing, well, you're just getting what you deserve. But if you endure pain when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval.

[5 : 01] Now I feel for these slaves because I too once had a harsh master. I had a job in a pizza shop. I had to work 10 hours straight for \$5 an hour.

And apart from the occasional free pizza, there was no encouragement, no joy and I often left my shift feeling it's just not fair. And although I didn't do anything obviously insubordinate, like fail to show up for a shift or do my work half-hearted, I did grumble, I did whinge, I did complain to my family, it was an awful job and I did actually tell half my friends not to get their pizzas from there anymore.

Was I suffering? Yes. Was I enduring the pain? Yes. Was I aware of or trusting God?

No. Was I being a servant-hearted Christian? No. Was I doing right? No. Would God have approved? No.

No. No. No. No. No. What I should have realised was that I had a golden opportunity to glorify God by being willing to suffer unjustly.

[6 : 15] Well, we started looking at this section by suggesting Peter wanted to address some specific people and he knew the Christian slaves were a persecuted group, a suffering group.

Perhaps they, more than anyone, needed to hear these words of comfort and challenge. But let's just rethink that for a moment. Did Peter only intend to apply these verses to slaves who are under masters?

Is he being that specific? Has Peter not earlier referred to all of his readers as slaves of God, as servants of God in verse 16?

And does he not say in verse 21, for to this you have been called? To this sort of suffering you have been called. Not to this sort of suffering you slaves have been called, but to this you, all of you Christians, have been called.

All Christians will suffer under some sort of earthly authority, be it in employment, like me, in business, in marriage or family, in education or in government.

[7 : 27] We are all slaves of God. We all have these godly obligations when suffering under authority. Do right when suffering unjustly.

But why, Peter? You've given us the how, you've given us the what, but why? Yes, yes, yes, you've given us the reason why we should do right when we're suffering unjustly.

That's because we're slaves of God. But why must we suffer in the first place? Why must we endure pain for doing right? For to this you have been called because Christ suffered for you, leaving an example so that you should follow in his steps.

was not Christ a slave of God? Was not Christ made to suffer under harsh masters?

Was not Christ doing right and did he not suffer for it? Was not Christ unjustly abused? Christ is our model.

[8 : 36] He was totally innocent and free from sin, suffering not for his own sake, but for the sake of God's purpose. Christ was perfectly obedient to God in the face of the most difficult hardship and opposition.

Verse 23, when he was abused, he did not return abuse. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

Jesus endured the pain of the 39 lashes. His body ripped apart. It was unjust. It was suffering. But he did not sin.

Jesus hung upon the cross. His accusers mocking him, telling him to get off his cross if he really was the Son of God. It was unjust. It was suffering.

But he did not sin. He committed no sin. Verse 22, and no deceit was found in his mouth. Jesus embodied the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, sinless and perfectly obedient.

[9 : 44] Jesus suffered, leaving us an example. We suffer because he suffered. We walk in his steps because he first walked that path. A life of suffering is not our fate.

It's our calling. When we commit to following the one who was abused, we should expect abuse. When we love the one who was unloved by many, we should expect to be hated.

When we believe in the Bible that says all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, we should expect it will happen. Christ is our model and we desperately need a model, don't we?

Because our natural instinct is revenge. Our human response to abuse is to get even or at least threaten to get even later. But this is not the way of Christ.

As our model, when he suffered, he did not return abuse with abuse. But what? What did he do instead? He perfectly obeyed. He endured the pain.

[10 : 52] And verse 23, he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. Jesus was confident that God would be just and fair, that God would be the avenger of sin, God would rule with his righteous judgment, that God would look upon Jesus and see a true slave of God, submitting to his Father's will.

Jesus entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. Do you? When you're mocked and belittled by friends for being a Christian, do you entrust yourself and the situation to God, the just judge?

When you're bullied for speaking out against corruption in your workplace, do you entrust yourself and the situation to God, the just judge?

When you're emotionally abused by a family member who doesn't believe in Jesus, do you entrust yourself and the situation to God, the just judge?

When you're passed over for that promotion and discriminated against because you won't work Sunday, do you entrust yourself and the situation to God, the just judge?

[12 : 10] or maybe you don't suffer it at all for being a Christian. I'd like to say that's okay but God doesn't give us that option.

Perhaps you should think about why you don't suffer for your faith in Christ. But if we do entrust, if we are committed to leaving it in the hands of the just judge, if we imitate Christ, this will bring glory to God for it is He who sustains us through suffering.

It is His grace which is sufficient for us. It is His judgment that will be shown to be righteous. It is His grace that may end up saving our accusers. Enduring suffering glorifies God.

So, Christ suffered leaving us an example so that we would follow in His steps. But for Christ's sake, let's not leave it there.

Christ's suffering is our model because it's our salvation. Christ's suffering does not simply guide us, it's the motivation to follow. Jesus is far more than our example, He is our sin bearer.

[13 : 25] Verse 21, For to this you have been called because Christ suffered for you, for you. He's not just another martyr for the cause, He's not just a really good example of how to suffer well, His suffering was not just a symbolic outpouring of love, no, His suffering actually achieved something and that something was nothing less than our salvation, our reconciliation with the Father, new life, eternal life, escape from God's wrath.

Christ suffered for you, how? Verse 24, He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross. The Father regarded our sins as belonging to Christ.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us and then punished Jesus with that anger against sin, that separation from God, that consequent death that we deserved.

Christ hung in our place on the cross. By His wounds you have been healed. by His blood, by His scars, by His ripped and shredded body.

If you've watched the Passion of the Christ, you'll remember the scene where Jesus is bound to the scourging pole, where He's whipped and whipped and whipped, until the whipped metal and bone pieces dig into His side.

[14 : 58] and there's the horrible sound of His flesh being ripped from His body. By His wounds you have been healed.

That was for us. We are healed from spiritual sickness by His wounds. We are healed from the curse of sin by His wounds.

We are healed day by day from the pain of suffering by His wounds. God's Do you believe this? Do you believe it should have been you taking the full wrath of God?

Do you believe it should have been you dying for your own sins? And do you believe you get what you don't deserve instead?

Do you believe God saves you because of Jesus, not because of you? If you don't believe all this, do. It makes Christ who He is.

[16 : 01] If you do believe all this, listen to Peter's command because there is a point to Christ bearing our sin. It is meant to affect how we live. Verse 24, He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we might live to righteousness.

so that our lives are characterized by holiness, not sin, so that we can receive the Holy Spirit who will sanctify us, so that we might preach Christ's sacrifice to unbelievers.

We can only live for righteousness because Christ died for sin and if we believe in Him, we die to sin. Sin is no longer our master.

Yes, we were going astray like sheep. Verse 25, but now when we believe in Jesus, we return to the shepherd and guardian of our souls.

Quite literally in the original Greek, Christ is the shepherd and bishop of our souls. He is our overseer, watching, caring, calling. Remember that next time Bishop Stephen Hale comes to visit.

[17 : 15] Great guy though he is, Stephen is a mere shadow of Christ, the chief shepherd and bishop of our souls. So, Christ suffered for you so that you might live for righteousness.

And in light of all of this, in light of all Christ has done, Peter gives some specific instructions for the married couple in chapter 3 verses 1 to 7.

Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands. Now, as someone who's about to get married in three months time, I have a vested interest in working out what the heck this means.

What does it mean for my soon-to-be wife, Camille, to accept my authority as her husband? And actually, it's not just a vested interest I have.

I have a responsibility to know what this means, as do all husbands and wives here this morning. But as part of this responsibility, I need to be honest and actually say, I haven't quite worked this out yet.

[18 : 32] Camille and I have grappled with this text and others like it. We've spoken to older Christians. We've pondered long and hard about what this actually means in practice. We both have to be honest and say, we haven't quite worked it out.

Some might argue that's just avoiding the text. Some might say that's the easy way out. But can I say to those people, it would be irresponsible of me to get up here and do one of two things.

Either gloss over it completely and act and pretend like it's not a part of scripture. scripture or regurgitate some scholar's view that I haven't actually thought through and don't know if I agree with.

The responsible path, as with other hard passages of the Bible, is honesty, humility and a commitment to the hard work of exposing the whole meaning of God.

God. Something I'm committed to and Camille is committed to and we'll work on that together. Having said this, we need not fumble around in the dark.

[19 : 44] There are some things we can say that this verse does mean and importantly there are some things we can say this verse does not mean. Accepting the authority of your husbands is not accepting dictatorship.

We have to remember to read 1 Peter 3 chapter 3 verse 1 in light of the entire biblical witness and that includes Ephesians 5 25.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. A husband who commands and orders his wife is not loving her with the sort of self sacrificial love that Christ showed the church.

A husband who commands his wife to effectively sin or makes her stumble in her walk with the Lord is not loving her like Christ loved the church.

So, wives, accepting the authority of your husbands is not accepting dictatorship. Secondly, accepting the authority of your husbands is not something to be used as ammunition or leverage in an argument.

[20 : 55] too frequently husbands resort to demanding submission when they don't get their own way. Again, this does not fit with Christ's exemplary love for the church.

What a husband should be doing is asking himself why he wants to be submitted to. Often, it's for selfish reasons. So, wives, your husbands should not be using this verse as ammunition or leverage.

Well, we've looked at a couple of things marital submission is not. But let's return to our text now to find some helpful ways forward in figuring out what marital submission is. We have to say that God has definitely built an authority structure into marriage as part of his design.

Peter did not write these words on a whim, neither did Paul write his letter to the Ephesians on a whim. But as we've said, how that plays out in practical terms is difficult and complex.

But let's not forget the purpose of such submission. Whatever it may mean in practice, Peter makes clear that a wife's submission to a husband is part of pure and reverent conduct, verse 2.

[22 : 15] And this is all so that, verse 1, even if some husbands do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct.

Some of you wives here this morning are in this position. You've been coming to church for years and every Sunday morning you leave your husband at home, you return to him after church and you're reminded of the pain, the hurt and the way your heart aches because he does not believe.

God says to you, you've got a golden opportunity to display Christian love and humility in such a way that your husband might come to know Jesus.

Even when your husband ridicules you for your faith, you still have a mighty weapon, your life, the purity and reverence of your life.

Verse 2, words have not won him over, evangelistic sermons have not won him over, a talk with the vicar has not won him over, so let him be won over without words.

[23 : 27] Wives, your pure and reverent life is the best sermon he'll ever hear. It's the sort of life that makes Peter encourage his readers in verse 3 to 4.

Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing. Rather let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is very precious in God's sight.

Now Peter's not forbidding fashion, he's not against the odd gold bracelet or nicely cut dress, but he is opposed to the outer self getting more attention than the inner self.

lasting beauty, he says, comes from a gentle and quiet spirit. This isn't to be confused with a weak and wimpy spirit, it's meek, meekness that Peter is encouraging, it's the kind of gentleness and humility that characterised Jesus' life on earth.

Peter's effectively saying, imagine if someone went into a really expensive ladies wear store and they swapped all the price tags with tags from a two dollar shop. So what once was really valuable was now worth nothing at all.

[24 : 47] And what was once worth nothing at all is now worth something very valuable. It's like that with outer and inner beauty, Peter says. It's that kind of beauty that is very precious in God's eyes.

The kind of beauty that Sarah and other holy women displayed, verses 5 and 6, Sarah's submission to Abraham was part of the purity and reverence of her life.

It contributed to her inner adornment, her gentle and quiet spirit. You have become her daughters, Peter says in verse 6. You have attended Sarah's beauty school.

You are part of her spiritual family. If you do what is good and never let fears alarm you. Yes, even the fear of an unbelieving husband and the alarm of not knowing his eternal destiny can be overcome by holding to that inner beauty.

Husbands, don't think you get off lightly. Peter spent six verses addressing your wives but that doesn't mean you're off the hook. Husbands, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honour to the woman as the weakest sex.

[26 : 03] Now, just like the idea of submission, the idea of women being the weakest sex has been misunderstood and misapplied. We should rightly understand it in at least two ways.

That wives were physically weaker than their husbands and thus husbands must show consideration and not physically oppress their wives. But also, wives were weaker in the world's eyes simply because they were women and men were more socially advantaged.

But God is in fact pleased to give honour to the weak. Like the foolishness of the cross in 1 Corinthians, like the turning of the other cheek, these things that seem weak, God gives honour to.

So husbands are to pay honour to their wives as the weaker sex. But husbands are also called to show consideration for their wives.

That is, love them. Know them intimately. Understand their feelings. Listen to their frustrations. Let them know you are there.

[27 : 16] It's no accident that this is exactly what wives want too. Aren't I right, ladies? God's design is perfect. His marriage intention is pure.

So much so that he requires husbands to pray. At the end of verse 7, do all of this so that nothing may hinder your prayers. Peter is saying that all Christian husbands should be committed to a strong ministry of prayer so that the marriage might be enriched and his conduct be kept in check.

Just in case there was any confusion as to whether God valued the husband more than the wife. Verse 7 makes it clear. Pay honour to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life.

Husbands and wives are equal in sin and equally need Christ Jesus for their redemption. Husbands and wives are equal when it comes to their spiritual inheritance and eternal importance.

Well, as we close this morning, let's be reminded that submission does lead to hardship. Christ knew it. He experienced it.

[28 : 39] He submitted to the Father's will. Yes, even to death on a cross. Submitting to a harsh master or an unbelieving husband is going to be hard at times.

But let's not forget what really counts. Our individual submission to Christ is what will save us on the last day. Our surrender to the Lord Jesus is how we will enter the gates of heaven.

And what a joy it is. He has not left us stranded. He has not only left us an example of suffering to follow, but the sure knowledge that his suffering saved us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for Jesus, our suffering saviour.

We ask, Lord, please help us to submit under his rule for our lives. Please help us submit under your word. Change us by your Holy Spirit to be your servant-hearted people.

[29 : 58] In Jesus' name. Amen.