

Do Good for God's Sake: Authorities

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[0 : 00] Well, as we come back to 1 Peter today and even next Sunday, Peter's message to us is to be good, not for goodness sake, but for God's sake.

And we can see this idea running through today and next week's passage. In fact, doing things for God is peppered throughout. So have a look at your screens there and you can see it from those various verses, glorifying God, doing God's will, conscious of God, putting hope in God, praying to God, eyes of the Lord God and so on.

Peter wants us to do good or be good, not for goodness sake, but for God's sake. In fact, we're to live such good lives that will stand out as different, like foreigners or strangers or perhaps even like tourists.

So point one in the outlines and verse 11 in your Bible. Have a look there. He says, Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles or aliens and strangers, depending on which version, to abstain from sinful desires which wage 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.

[1 : 22] Now, while Peter has told us in the first half of his letter how we're to live, the focus has really been on who we are. And so on your screens, I've got some examples there.

We've heard over the last weeks where God's elect and exiles in the world. We've been given new birth with hope and inheritance. And we are God's children who are to reflect our father's holiness.

And then last week we heard that we are God's chosen A-listers. But with verse 11 and 12 today, Peter now shifts the focus from who we are to how we're to live.

Firstly, verse 11, we are to live by abstaining or refraining from sinful desires. Now, this is not always easy, is it?

In fact, in verse 11, did you notice how Peter says that these desires wage war against our souls? I'm guessing if you're anything like me, we've felt that before, haven't we?

[2 : 28] You know, that battle within us, that wrestling match within us, where you know you shouldn't do something, but you really want to do it.

Like when you have an annoying neighbor who does something to you, perhaps throws rubbish over your fence and you really want to throw it back, plus an extra bit for good measure.

Or when someone says something about you behind your back, you really want to say something about them behind their back. Or perhaps there's a movie or book that you know is not great for your godliness, but you really want to watch it or really want to read it.

These feelings we have wage war against us, don't they? Vijay often uses the word battle and he's right. Sometimes there is this battle within us, where with God's help we have to work at resisting and refraining from giving in to sin.

But we're not just to battle and resist against sin, we're then on the flip side to do good. In fact, we're to live such good lives that we'll be like standout good people.

[3 : 50] In fact, verse 12 says that people might see our good deeds. In fact, I think that's why Peter addresses us as foreigners or strangers in verse 11, instead of being chosen or holy, as he called us just before in verse 9.

Because foreigners often stand out as different, a bit like tourists, don't they? And when people could travel around, you could often spot a tourist, couldn't you?

By what they wore. So on the next slide there, they'd, you know, have a backpack on with a camera over the shoulder or to their face and perhaps a map out reading it, either paper version old school or on your phone new school.

But you could spot them, couldn't you? Or like on the next slide, you'd know they were tourists if they were taking a selfie of themselves in front of a prominent landmark like the London Bridge here.

Well, we are like tourists. This world is not our true home. The world to come is. We're just passing through, if you like.

[4 : 58] And so we're not to blend into this world so much so that we live like it, giving in to our sinful desires. Rather, we're to stand out as different, like tourists stand out.

And not by what we wear, of course, but by what we do. That is doing good for God's sake. So verse 12 again, it says, Though they accuse you of doing wrong, they might see your good deeds and glorify God.

In other words, we're to live such stand out good lives that people might turn from being Christian accusers to God glorifiers. Because the world takes any opportunity to accuse Christians of doing wrong, doesn't it?

In Peter's day, Christians were accused, for example, of being cannibals, did you realize? Because they said they ate the body of Christ and drank his blood, referring to the Lord's Supper.

Not realizing, of course, that it's metaphoric and spiritual, that we use tangible symbols to remember his death. And so our faith is encouraged afresh.

[6 : 10] In fact, Christians in Peter's day were also accused of incest because they called one another brother and sister and then married each other, not understanding that we're spiritually united in Christ as family.

For us, though, we're often accused of being hypocrites. I'm sure you've heard that before. Even though Christians never claim to be perfect, just forgiven. And more recently, we've been accused of being unloving bigots, even though we do love people, just not their sin.

Of course, sometimes Christians are actually unloving hypocrites, which is terrible. But we're to live such standout good lives that those accusations become baseless so that people might stop and think, oh, hang on a second, that person, that Christian guy or girl, they're a really good person.

How can they be a bigot? And perhaps then they might ask you to explain a bit more. And in the process, it gives us a chance to tell them that we might disagree with people's choices, like perhaps even which football team they go for, but it doesn't mean we don't love and care for them.

Just like God disagrees with our sin, but it doesn't stop him from loving and caring for us, so much so that he gave his son to die for us. And God willing, it will silence their accusations.

[7 : 39] And even perhaps, if we get a chance to explain the gospel, turn them from being Christian accusers to God glorifiers. You see, this is how we're to do good for God's sake.

I know of a dad who joined a course to learn about Christianity, all because when he came to pick up his child from the church playgroup one day, he saw the minister going to clean the toilet.

You see, a nappy had dropped in the change room. It was a full nappy and it was a mess everywhere. And he couldn't believe it. Normally people would leave that to the cleaners, he said. But here is this person doing this unusually good thing.

And it led him to find out more. Now, it'd be great if I knew he became a Christian and then glorified God. I don't know the end to that story, but you get the point, don't you?

We're to do good, firstly from abstaining from sinful desires and then doing good deeds that people might see. And so can I ask you, are you battling or giving into sin?

[8 : 50] And are you known as a standout good person? Well, Peter now gives us some more specific ways to do good and both involve submitting to authorities.

Firstly, submitting to state authorities. So, point to on your screens and then verse 13 in your Bibles. He writes, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor 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.

Here, Peter now gives us these specific way of doing good, which is submitting to state authorities. And notice here, we're to choose to submit. Not because we have to, per se, but because we want to for the Lord's sake, you see, to please him.

And we see the same thing, doing this for God's sake, in verse 15. Have a look there. For it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

Christians say that they often want to know God's will for their lives, you know, what job to take, what to do with life, where to live, and so on. But here is God's will for us to silence foolish people by submitting and doing good.

[10 : 20] Peter, by the way, calls them foolish people because on your screens, we read in Psalm 14 and I think on the next slide, well, Psalm 14 and 53, that it's only the fool who says in their heart, there is no God.

So he's not making a comment about their intellect. And Peter also calls them ignorant because they've not understood things like the Lord's Supper or how we're Christian family or how we're not actually hypocrites or bigots.

And so God's will is that we do good and to silence these foolish and ignorant people that they might actually stop and ask, oh, hang on a second, they are a good person. I wonder why they are doing this, as I said before, that they might turn from being accusers to glorifiers.

Now for us, this means submitting to our government and a tax office or the police or the local council. It means wearing these masks at the moment.

I don't know what your answer was to the one law you find hard to submit to, but for me, it's this one. I really don't like wearing masks. I find them frustrating and claustrophobic.

[11 : 37] But we are to do good by submitting. Even when good old Dan Andrews works against Christianity, like removing CRE from the school timetable, or at the moment trying to remove some of our religious exemptions in the Equal Opportunity Act, or promotes unbiblical values like the Safe Schools program.

Even when he does this, we must still do good and submit for God's sake. After all, we shouldn't be surprised that non-Christian authorities promote non-Christian values, should we?

Now, of course, this doesn't mean we can't object. We can and we should, but we do so legally. And there are legal ways of protesting and petitioning our state government.

In fact, the Australian Christian lobby often has petitions we can sign. And of course, this also doesn't mean we have to submit if they tell us to do something that is contrary to God's word.

And so if our state government says we are no longer allowed to teach the biblical view of sexuality in our church, then at that point, we will do what the Bible says on your screens.

[12 : 54] We must obey God rather than people. But we're not in that position yet. But it seems like some churches think we are with these COVID restrictions.

So for example, last week, a church in California led by John MacArthur used that very verse from Acts to disobey the government and hold a packed church service, you can see it in the background of the picture there, without social distancing or masks.

Now, let me say, most of the stuff I've seen from John MacArthur is very good. And he cites some compelling reasons like how the risk is low and as you can see on your screens, how the state kept abortion clinics open and abortion clinics and liquor stores have been deemed essential services while churches are not.

And in fact, churches on the next slide are the only places in these stressful times, he says, where people can find true hope. Now, I can relate to him.

I feel his pain, believe me. But churches can go online and still offer hope. In fact, I was talking to someone from our St. John's Mandarin service at our parish council meeting last week, and they said that they had an online evangelism course and two people have become Christians just in the last month.

[14 : 27] And we can still Zoom and phone and send cards and text messages. We can even drop things off to provide caregiving, although the announcement this afternoon might stop that last one.

What's more, it's not as though the state is targeting Christians like other country governments do. Because other places in California, like bars and restaurants, they were forced to close too.

And it's not a permanent ruling, but a temporary one. In fact, the sermon that John MacArthur gave was last Sunday and then last Wednesday, a few days later, from what I could work out from the Californian government website, churches are allowed to meet indoors, but only a maximum of 100 people and with social distancing.

The point is, from what I can see, this is not a case of, we must obey God rather than people. And so, do you think their actions will silence Christian accusers, that is, people who accuse Christians of doing wrong, and turn them to God-glorifiers?

Or closer to home in Australia, in fact, in Sydney, on the screen there just last week, a church, a Greek Orthodox church, continued communion using the same spoon for every person.

[15 : 52] and wiping their chin with the same cloth, every person. And on the next slide there, you can see that it seems to breach the New South Wales health guidelines, as well as, I guess, common sense, that tells us to avoid direct contact.

Now, do you think that would silence our accusers and turn them to glorifiers? our world looks for any opportunity to accuse Christians, doesn't it?

It's why it's so easy to find negative news articles about churches and really hard to find positive ones. I mean, there was no news article last month in our local newspaper or online about Blackburn and Doncaster churches give to Doncare to provide for their community, even though that's what we did.

I couldn't find it anywhere. And so we're not to give our world any ammunition. Instead, we're to do good for God's sake by submitting to authorities.

And so can I ask you, are you submitting? Even if you don't, like me, like wearing masks or finding this lockdown hard.

[17 : 09] We are to do good for God's sake by submitting to state authorities. And point three, by submitting to workplace authorities. So have a look there at verse 18.

Verse 18 says, Slaves, in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

Now, here in verse 18, the word for slave isn't the extreme version of slave. It actually means a domestic household servant. One who had much more or many more rights than the African-American slaves did.

And they are to submit to their master. And notice it's out of fear, not of their master, but of God. Here is being good for God's sake again.

The equivalent for us, of course, is submitting to our work, our place boss, or perhaps our lecturer at university, or our teacher at school. Doing what they ask us to do and working to the best of our ability, even if we are working at home and can probably fudge it a bit.

[18 : 27] sometimes this is easy to do because our master is good and considerate. If that's the case for you, then thank God that for them. But sometimes they are harsh and unreasonable.

In fact, my son came home from school last week. He was one of the ones who went back to physical schooling. And he said they were running around playing soccer at lunchtime, working up a sweat.

But they got in trouble because they weren't wearing masks while they were running around. The teacher said to them, your running is not rigorous enough. Now that's pretty unreasonable and actually not what our government says.

They say you can remove the mask to run around. But my son is still to submit. Or if your boss at work is rude to you or finds out you're a Christian and discriminates against you, they are wrong.

Absolutely. But we are still to do the job they ask us to do. Now of course like before there are limits to this. If they tell us to do something that goes against God, like lie on a government form to get more job keeper or cheat some customers, then we don't do that.

[19 : 46] We must obey God rather than people. And if they are abusive to you, then we can go over their heads to HR or the appropriate authorities.

As verse 14 told us, these authorities have been put in place to commend those who do good, but also to punish those who do evil, like bad bosses.

And if they make unreasonable requests like Tim's teacher did last week, then we can still ask if we can talk to them about it and reason with them. But it doesn't mean we stop submitting to them as our boss, doing the job they asked us to do, just because they're harsh.

Now this will mark us out as different, won't it? The world offers us all sorts of ways to get back at our boss, from drinking all the milk in the fridge so they have none for their coffee, to calling in sick out of spite, or I know some kids mute the teachers on Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

In fact, there's even articles like on your screens, where it talks about 17 times employees got revenge on their bad bosses, and it gives you tips.

[21 : 01] One of them actually bought a device that beeped loudly, you know, like the battery is dying kind of beep thing at random intervals, hit it in his boss's office to drive her mad, and it worked apparently.

But imagine if your colleague saw your boss being rude to you, and while you agree they were completely out of line, and you might report it, you're not going to take revenge, but you're going to keep doing good and working to the best of your ability.

Submitting to them. Now, wouldn't that stand you out as different? Wouldn't that provoke your colleagues to ask, why? Why would you do that? Wouldn't that then give you an opportunity to explain to them that God doesn't want us to take revenge, but to continue to do good.

It might even lead you to talk to them about the hope we have in Christ, that they might turn from being accusers of Christians to glorifiers of God.

Of course, it's not easy to do. I mean, I know someone from our church whose boss yelled at them just last week without good reason and I was angry for them.

[22 : 19] How dare he do that to this person? And so if we find it hard even when it's not us, then how much harder are we going to find it when it is us?

And so to help, Peter reminds us in verse 19, he says, for it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

If we endure unjust suffering for the sake of God, being conscious of Him, that this is commendable in His sight.

We find favour in God's eyes. We please Him, make Him proud, so to speak. Why? Is it because God finds enjoyment from our unjust suffering?

[23 : 20] No, of course not. Rather, it's because we show ourselves to be like His precious Son, who Himself endured unjust suffering too.

See verse 21? To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps.

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth. When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate. When He suffered, He made no threats.

Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. Here, Peter quotes parts of our first reading from Isaiah 53 and He sees it fulfilled in Jesus, doesn't He?

For Jesus suffered unjustly at the hand of human authorities. And remember there was Jewish council to start with who ran that kangaroo court and brought in all these false witnesses.

[24 : 19] And then there was the governor, Pilate, who knew Jesus was innocent but still sentenced Him to death. Can you imagine how hard that must have been for Jesus?

Here He is, God the Son, the Lord over these human authorities, and yet they spit, mock, lie, whip, and sentence Him to death.

I mean, could there ever have been a greater miscarriage of justice? Can there ever be a greater misuse of authority? And yet, how does He respond?

Well, we read, He did not retaliate. He did not make threats. He did not seek revenge. Even with His mouth, we're told, which is the really hard part, isn't it?

I mean, it's so easy to tear down those bosses or lecturers or teachers with our words, you know, to call them names behind their back and so on. But Jesus didn't even do that.

[25 : 25] instead, it says, He endured unjust suffering and entrusted Himself to God, who will judge these bad bosses justly on the last day.

They will get theirs. But that's God's job then, not our job now. Our job now is to follow in Christ's footsteps, verse 21.

And we should be used to this now at the moment because we have all those social distancing footsteps plastered everywhere, on floors and shopping centres and like on your screens in supermarkets like Coles.

Well, we are to follow in Christ's footsteps, enduring unjust suffering, doing good by submitting and entrusting ourselves to God, who will judge justly on the last day.

And we ought to do this not just because Jesus did it Himself, but also because He did it for you, for me, for us. See verse 24?

[26 : 31] It says, He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

By His wounds, you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

You see, Jesus submitted, endured, and entrusted for you, for me, for us, that we might be healed, that is spiritually forgiven, that we might die to sin, or as we heard before, abstain from sinful desires, and instead live for righteousness, do good, if you like.

And so, the last bit of application for us this morning is, do we submit even if we suffer unjustly? For we are like foreigners, tourists, in this world, and we are to be standout good people, not for goodness sake, but for God's sake.

let's pray that we would, let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning, particularly in light of these pending announcements from our own government today, that we are to stand out as good people by submitting to our authorities.

[28 : 09] Help us, we pray in this, because it's not always easy. Help us as aliens and strangers, or as foreigners and exiles, to abstain and live such good lives in the world, that people may see our good deeds and glorify you on the day Christ returns.

We ask it in his name. Amen.