

How should we live?

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[0 : 00] What a very good morning to you from me. It's nice to see you. Do keep Bibles open at 1 Peter 2.

! Maybe you change jobs.

Maybe you went to university for the first time. You see, fitting in is a very, very important part of life, isn't it? Because if you don't fit in, you feel yourself to be an outsider.

And that's a very uncomfortable place to be. Now, if you follow Jesus in this world, you may well feel uncomfortable.

For in truth, you and I don't belong here. How then should we live here on earth when we don't easily fit in?

[1 : 10] And that's the question, I think, that 1 Peter poses for us. You see, if you're a believer in Christ, you know exactly who you are. Look back with me at verse 5, for example.

It says, We're living stones. We're built into a spiritual house. We're a holy priest. This is Old Testament religious language applied to the Christians.

We offer spiritual sacrifices, which are our prayers, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. We're living stones.

We're chosen people. Verse 11 tells us that, doesn't it? Chosen people. We're the people of God. Well, knowing all that, we're chosen.

We're regarded here as aliens. Christians are regarded on earth as odd. Don't be surprised. We're aliens. We don't find this our natural home.

[2 : 14] How then are we live, if I may say so, as oddballs? You see, how we live is dependent on who we are.

When I'm clear as to my identity, I am in Christ. I am chosen by God. I'm a living stone.

When I know that, then I'm able to do what God calls me to do. Knowing who you are determines how you will live.

And God calls his chosen people to live radical lives. Just take verse 17 as an example. He tells us to show proper respect to everyone.

See, the problem for the Christian is that we don't belong here. We're foreigners on earth. We're aliens. We belong to another kingdom, a new kingdom. So to live a good life here on earth may well be uncomfortable for us.

[3 : 23] We won't always fit in. In fact, we might even be called to be disruptors here on earth. Never rude and never bullies. How do we go about living well in an uncomfortable world?

That, I think, is what our passage is all about. I'm very happy if you disagree with me. Throw coffee over me at the end or stick your tongue out. But I don't mind. See if you agree with me.

Let's get our heads into the text. First of all, I think he calls us to live well. Live well. Dear friends, I urge you, urge you, as foreigners and exiles, see, exiles, 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.

Live godly lives. Good lives. Such good lives. How? In countercultural ways. Among the pagans.

[4 : 27] He says, verse 12, live such good lives among the pagans. That's the people we live amongst. The pagans who don't know God. This is where the rubber hits the road.

Because in this world we are regarded as aliens, foreigners, belonging to another planet. Once we've started to follow Christ, this world is not a natural environment. Now, there's a great tendency, of course, to withdraw from this world.

And so, well, I belong, Francis Schoen called it upper story. I belong upstairs. Heaven is my home. Which is true, but not completely true. You see, the idea of withdrawing makes it safer. We come to church. We shut the doors. We're all together. Here we are. We're believers. It's fun. It's great. We know the language. We're one another's friends. We know the way of thinking. And many Christians in the past have done that. They've pulled up the drawbridge. They've enjoyed fellowship with one another. And minimal contact with the outside world. In the 12th century, in northern Italy, there were a group of Christians who followed the man called Peter Waldo. [5 : 40] These Waldensians tried to keep their heads down. They didn't want trouble from the Catholic Church. They built their own church buildings to look like houses. You can see them to this day.

They tried to dress so as not to bring attention to themselves. Theologically, they were Orthodox and Protestant. But they really lived in what we Jewish people call a ghetto existence. With minimal contact with the outside world. The opposite danger is to be overactive. To believe that unless we throw ourselves into political causes, unless we engage in campaigns, we'll never make much impact with the gospel here in this world. Third option. Just keep your head down and go with the flow. Peter is not advocating any of those. Not withdrawal. Not pressing for activism. And certainly not accommodation to this world. We don't disengage from society. And nor do we live as if it's the only thing that matters. And nor do we just accept everything that is there. [6 : 48] There's a better biblical way. Peter advocates a form of engagement which is both positive and negative. Look at the negative in verse 11.

Abstain from sinful desires. That's negative. We're not to do that. It's a natural thing to have desires. It's a natural thing to be sexually active. Don't do that with people that you're not married to. With anybody you're not married to. Don't. That's negative. Positively, live such good lives among the pagans. See that in 12? The negative and the positive. Now the pagans might not like what you stand for, what I stand for.

But they'll never be able to fault your lifestyle. In fact, in the first century, through history, the Christian believers contributed really positively to this world. And that is the key, says Peter. The key is in verse 12. Live such good lives among the pagans. Negative and positive. Keep emotions in check and do good. [7 : 51] Peter says in verse 12 that your good deeds will glorify God on the day he visits you. See that? Your good deeds will glorify God on the day he visits you.

That's probably the final day when Jesus appears as judge. But it's also true in the early church too. When many fled from persecution, others stayed.

Others looked after the sick and the dying. They did good. They contributed to the flourishing of society because of their faith. Yeah, it was costly, sure. And they received opposition. True, true. Look at the accusations in verse 12. They may accuse you of doing wrong. It seems to me that that's probably language when you go down to 15. You silence the talk of ignorant talk of foolish people, you see. Probably it was verbal attacks. Or maybe in 23, if you pop down there, look at that.

[8 : 52] It could have been insults and threats like Jesus had. They hurled their insults at him. They made threats. He made none. Now, none of us like that.

We don't like being slandered. We don't like being verbally rubbished. But the way to overcome it is not to answer back. The way to overcome it is to do good, is to live well amongst unbelievers. The aim is not to show how good we are, but how glorious our God is. To glorify God on the day he visits us. Live well. Secondly, live free.

Here's the middle section of verses, 13 to 17. Submit yourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every human authority, whether it's the emperor or the supreme authority or governors or sent by him to punish those who do right, wrong and to commend those who do right, for it's God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

Live as free people. Do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil. Live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor.

[10 : 07] So to be free is to do what we're designed to do. We're to run on the maker's tracks. Now, this is not the same as freedom is often spoken about today.

You see, to be free has come to mean throw off all the inhibitions. Throw off all the restrictions. And you do you. You be you. No.

No. Although it's true in Christ that we are free and this world has no hold on us, that is true. No, says Peter. Freedom means doing what God wants you to do.

Not what you want to do. What God wants you to do. To please him in all things. A fish is only free when it's swimming in water, isn't it?

If he decides to go against that and go for a little wriggle on the land, it doesn't last long, does it?

Think of beached whales. I know they're not fish, but think of beached whales.

[11:10] See? Doesn't work, does it? When you flow on the master's tracks, works well. So the follower of Jesus is called to be submissive. See that in 13?

Submit yourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every human authority. For the Lord's sake. For the Lord's sake. And in Peter's day, this meant emperors and governors. And these were people who could both punish wrongdoing or commend good.

Now you can submit grudgingly or you can submit willingly. And each day we have a choice. When we get up in the morning, how am I going to live today? Am I going to live in freedom? Serving God?

Or am I going to live nastily and hatefully and write my quick tweets everywhere? How am I going to live today? Peter says, do good. Do good. Do good. Indeed, it's God's will to do good because that's what silences the opposition.

How should we live? As free people. Live as free people. Look at 16. Live as free people. But don't use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.

[12:14] Even live as God's slaves. That's strange, isn't it? Don't you think that's strange? We live as free people and we live as slaves. It's almost contradictory, isn't it?

I don't think it's contradictory. I think it's a paradox. Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 6. Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone.

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible.

See? Or in Galatians 5, he says, You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh. Rather, serve one another in love.

We are free in the sense that we no longer stand under judgment. We've been freed by Christ's death. But at the same time, we serve this world and we are slaves.

[13:19] But never use your freedom as being free from the law so that you can do whatever you like. Do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil, it says, doesn't it, in the text in 16.

Now think how radical biblical freedom is. We don't worship our masters, but we serve them. We don't throw off all controls, but we submit.

We show proper respect to everyone, he says. To fellow believers, to God, to the emperor, the state, we live freely. We live freely. Yes, even if we are slaves, we're willing to face unjust suffering. Look at this. 18, 19, and 20. Slaves, in reverent fear of God, submit yourselves to your masters, not only those who are good and considerate, but also those who are harsh.

For it's commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they're conscious of God. Because how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?

[14:26] But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. Isn't that brilliant? Brilliant. Christians can stand up under unjust suffering.

You have to remember in the first century that many workers were indentured slaves. Not like the African slaves in America, but rather sort of contracted workers under a master.

It was a way of survival for the poor. If you were in trouble, you sold yourself to a master and he would pay you and you would have a little bit of money to pay off your loan or your debts.

It was for a limited period. In fact, Roman slaves were captured in war or kidnapped and they became the property of their master, indentured. Now, we Christians are meant to be the best workers around.

We're meant to be conscientious. We're meant to be trustworthy. We're meant to make a positive contribution to the company we work for. People should be pleased that we are working for them, even though we're aliens.

[15 : 33] And if we feel unjustly treated, as presumably many a slave did, think of Jesus Christ and copy him. And this, I think, is the punch of the passage.

Look at the last section. Live like Jesus. Sorry about the green. It's not bright enough, is it? Live like Jesus. This is fantastic, as we get from 21 onwards. To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

Look at this about Jesus. Look at it. He committed no sin. No deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he didn't retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 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. How true. But now, now, you've returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

[16 : 51] Why should I live like Jesus? Two reasons. He was perfect. Nobody beats him. Second, he lived well.

22, he committed no sin. No deceit was found in his mouth. Perfect. 21, he's our example. We should follow in his steps. He lived well. Or in the words of Isaiah, he did nothing wrong, committed no sin, either in his actions or in his speech. No deceit was found on his mouth. There was no retaliation when he was insulted. No angry threats. He knew that God judges justly. And he was happy to leave all things in the hands of his father.

And we're to do the same. We're to follow him. He's our template. Slaves, and he did all of us who are Christ followers, should follow in his steps. Did you see that?

[17 : 51] At 21, to this you were called, Christ suffered for you, leaving your example that you should follow in his steps. See? He's the pattern.

He's the pattern. He's the template. So if you want to know how to respond to unjust suffering, look at Jesus at the cross. There was a truly God-centered man.

Not a man-centered person, but a God-centered man. So copy him. Well, of course you say, I can't. He's perfect, and I'm not. How right you are.

How right you are. None of us can. We can't copy him automatically. It takes a change of our natural nature to become like Jesus.

And to change, you must ponder the cross. Essential. You must say to yourself, what was Jesus doing hanging on that cross?

[18 : 54] And Peter tells us in 24, he himself, he himself, bore our sins in his body on the cross. And again he says at the end of 24, by his wounds you have been healed.

See, the cross of Jesus has the most mighty effect on anybody who stares at it. And for us as believers, it's the cause of our change of direction.

We were, according to 25, like sheep going astray. But because on the cross, Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves, he bore our sin, he took our human rebellion into his own body, one man substituting for the many.

We couldn't do this. We're not God the Son. Our sins would crush us. But being God, Jesus can deal with sin and has dealt with death.

The Son of Man gave his life as a ransom for many, said Jesus. He bears our sin that we too might die to sins and live for righteousness.

[20 : 13] See that at the end of 24? Or the middle of it? We might die to sins and live for righteousness. He dies so that we can live well, so that we can live free.

Our sin is paid for, our past is forgiven, and now we are free to be able to please God and live for righteousness. See the connection?

Between God's action on the cross on our behalf and our moral obligation to go forward, to live for all that's right. In other words, the consequences of Jesus' death not only shows us how to live, but actually changes our status before God.

We've returned. Did you see that word at the end? You've returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. Returned. We found him to be our shepherd. For Dave McKnight, that makes him cry. It moves us. It moves us. He's our shepherd. Who else do you follow in this world? Your mum and dad? Yourself? The government? Who do you follow?

[21 : 22] Who's number one? Who's king of the universe? This is a great comfort.

Must have been to first century believers to read these words, mustn't it? Slaves. Aliens who have trusted Jesus and were following him. Don't you think that's a fantastic joy today?

He loves us. He leads us. He cares for us. All we've got to do is follow. Is that what you're doing today? Is that what I'm doing?

Are we following Jesus? Do you follow him because he's made you a new person? He's changed your heart. Your new status drives you to do good. Christ has set you free.

Maybe you're not free yet. Maybe you'd like to live well. Even if it means suffering. Maybe you'd like to copy Christ but you find it jolly hard.

[22 : 26] I sympathise. So pray with me as we draw to a close. Pray with me that Christ's sacrificial death will burn itself into your soul that you will humbly fall down and confess he is really Lord.

Let's pray. Amen. Thank you Heavenly Father that you sent Jesus to live well yet he was crucified for it.

We too want to live well. None of us want to be rebels against you. So please humble us this morning. Show us Jesus Christ in all his agony at the cross.

Help us to realise that he went there for us. He was willing to bear our sins so that we didn't have to. we can go free. And grant us true freedom we pray.

The freedom to be true slaves of you our Master so that we may do good while we're here on earth and effect others for glory. Please make us righteous in our being and in our actions we ask.

[23 : 35] Not only to affect those around us but to help bring many many to glory. in the great name of Jesus Christ to whom be all glory and all praise.

Amen.