

Citizens of heaven, workers of Christ - 1 Peter Ch 2:4-12

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[0 : 00] The Church Bible. It's good to sing the Lord's praises, isn't it? It's good to gather in his name, and as we've been praying and reflecting on this morning, remember the freedom that we have to do this.

That no one is going to burst through the door, no one is going to round us up, that we can gather freely and we can praise the words of the living God who said, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

And we're going to look this morning at some of the ways in which we use that freedom to stand out from the world, but first we'll read our text this morning. So 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 13 to 25.

Peter 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.

For it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil.

[1 : 10] Live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor. 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.

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. 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. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness.

[2 : 24] By his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and the overseer of your souls.

Let's just pray quickly. Father, we thank you again for this freedom. We thank you for the reminder this morning that it is for freedom that you sent your son to set us free.

Freedom to live lives that honour you and point others to your son. And we ask this morning that you open our hearts and minds as we look at some very real, practical, and in many ways, uncomfortable ways in which we can live our lives to point others to you.

So we pray that as we continue our worship, that all things would be done for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen. I wonder what it is that makes you stand out from the crowd.

This building kind of stands out from the crowd this morning. In fact, I thought I came to the wrong church when I walked in the door and saw the different set-up, but standing out from the crowd this morning. And we get bombarded with this idea every day of standing out.

[3 : 34] Advertising is masterful at this, if any of you work in advertising or marketing. Sometimes it's subtle. Sometimes it's pretty on the nose. But the message is always the same.

It's all about you. Stand out from the crowd. And you hear stuff like this. Wash with this shampoo. You'll look like Jennifer Aniston. Shave with these razor blades.

You can play tennis like Roger Federer. Or drink this coffee. You'll be like George Clooney. I still haven't figured out that one, but somehow it makes us like George Clooney. And the world tells us all the time, feed your desires.

And stand out from the crowd. Give in to that urge that you have for people to admire you. To think you're sophisticated, rich, good-looking, good athlete, whatever the case might be.

Stand out, because it's all about you. But when it comes to our faith, we learned this last week, the world tells us the exact opposite.

[4 : 41] Blend into the background. Integrate. Sacrifice your faith on the altar of conformity. But Peter tells us, actually, God does want us to stand out.

Not because of our possessions. Not because of our achievements. By our conduct. By the way we live our daily lives such that people look at us and they see that we don't look like the rest of this world.

There is something different about us. Something that points to Christ. And we're going to look at two ways this morning that Peter tells us. And I've given it away in the title of the sermon, but that happens sometimes.

That's okay. In civil society, we stand out because we're citizens of heaven. And in the workplace, we stand out because we're workers of Christ.

So let's kick off verses 13 and 14. Submit yourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every human authority, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors who were sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

[5 : 50] Now, if there was a competition for the least popular verses in the Bible, I think this would be up there. And I remember the first time I read this years ago. I was a political science student. And I since went on to get a master's in the same subject.

And I was indignant when I read this verse. I was just angry. Because you see, everything I've been taught about government and politics and everything we're exposed to in the West tells us we do not submit to our government.

Our government submits to us. At least that's the theory. We choose our government. We decide when the government starts and the government finishes.

And so who is Peter, I was thinking, to tell me? Dan, submit to your government. But ultimately, it's not Peter. Ultimately, this is the Lord himself.

In fact, Peter says it is for his sake, for the Lord's sake, that we ought to submit. Not to please the government. Not to make Leo and Pascal and all the rest of them happy that we're being nice and submissive, but to please God.

[7 : 02] And I remember reading this and thinking, all right, Lord, I get it. This is some kind of generic command, right? In principle. On average. But nothing specific. I remember reading it and going, you don't really expect me to submit to Bertie Ahern, do you?

You don't mean the kind of governments that we actually see in reality, do you, Lord? Well, look at the two kinds of authorities Peter mentions. the emperor as a supreme authority and governors who were sent by him.

And in Peter's day, the emperor had another name, Caesar. Caesar was the head honcho. He was the boss on top of the political system, the one who ultimately decided how to direct the law and in which direction society went through the law.

And the Caesar, at this time, you've heard his name, was a guy called Nero. I once had a friend who had a Rottweiler called Nero.

That's pretty reflective of the Caesar's character. Let me tell you about him. He murdered his brother, he murdered his wife, he murdered his mother, plundered the public accounts, and used all of that money to fund these wild parties for himself and then build gods or build statues of himself as a god.

[8 : 24] And then later on, when he started the persecution of Christians, he would take Christians and he blamed them for burning down Rome and as kind of a sick joke, he then took them, put them in his garden, covered them in oil and set them on fire to use them as torches for his garden party so his guests could entertain themselves at night time.

This was Caesar. This was the man who held supreme power and Christians were starting to ask things like this. Do we obey this guy? This guy who does all these wicked, terrible things?

Do we rebel him? Do we go out and get swords and spears and bows and arrows and try and overthrow the government? Peter's answer, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority.

Submit means defer. Recognize the authority they have and do it, and this is the point we're getting into, because it's part of our Christian witness.

Not because we're part of a political game, not because we're here to change the world through politics, because it's part of our Christian witness. Now we don't have emperors these days, although sometimes the occupants of the White House and Downing Street tend to act that way lately.

[9 : 42] But these days we have presidents, prime ministers, TDs, senators, the European Commission. So these are the people who make the law in our time, and they're the ones who hold this political power.

And we might ask some of the questions the believers in Peter's day were asking, what do we do about this government that we have that redefined marriage, that introduced legalized slaughter of unborn children?

This government that looks like it's tone deaf to poverty, homelessness, and any concept of justice. Well, if Peter told the early church, submit to Nero, this guy who's going to put you on torches and set you on fire, he'd tell us, submit to Leo.

Now let's be honest, we don't have a lot of interaction with Leo Varadkar or with the Eurotus in general, except every five years when they come around and knock on our door and kiss our babies and very nicely ask us to vote for them so that they can ignore us for another five years.

That's the end of my political speech, I swear. Every few years we vote, that's it. So what do we do? Well, we do things like Ralph just did. We pray for our leaders. We pray, first of all, that they would see the gospel.

[10 : 57] We pray for opportunities to share the gospel with them. I wonder if any of you went door-to-door last year for the abortion referendum. Would you go door-to-door for the gospel?

That's ultimately what we should do. We stand up for the unborn, the impoverished, and the others without a voice, yes, but we stand up for Christ first and foremost because no law is ever going to change this country.

No law is ever going to change the problem that the human heart has, which is, it is far from God. And Peter isn't concerned about who we vote for. He's not concerned about what political party we support.

He's concerned, once again, with our daily conduct. How does it make you stand out from the crowd? And even though we don't interact with the cabinet or even our local TD every day, we do interact with what Peter calls governors, the ones that Caesar empowered to actually run the programs, administer public programs that he put into place.

So you might ask, okay, who are they to us? Well, here's a clue. I work for one of them. You get your passport renewed at another one. You get your state pension for another one.

[12 : 16] Every day, you interact with the laws established by this government because they're administered by what Peter calls governors, the ones sent by the political leaders, empowered by the political leaders to punish those who do wrong and commend those who do right.

In other words, the ones who enforce the law set by the government, the ones who represent people with power, the ones you see people interact with every day and people see you interact with every day.

And this is the point in our Christian witness, at the dole office, or the tax office, or the guards, or traffic wardens, when people are looking at you, how do you submit to these authorities?

Do we submit to these authorities? Do we obey them? Or do we consider ignoring them when it might benefit us?

When we think nobody is watching, when we think nobody is looking or it won't hurt anybody, things other people do without hesitation, do we do things like this? I'm only going to be in the shop for five minutes.

[13 : 31] I'll just park in the disabled space. Or I'll park on the double yellow line. How about this? You go and you apply for job seekers.

The condition for that is that you have to actively be looking for work. But we know people who claim that and they have no intention of working. Is that us?

How about driving? You drive on a public road every day. Have you ever driven a car that's got no NCT? No insurance? No motor tax?

That's the last time I'll mention tax, I promise. Now these things might seem simplistic or trivial and you say, Dan, that's very down to earth. That's very basic. This really isn't what we're talking about, right?

But if you think about it, aren't these pretty real ways in which people see us every day interacting with the laws set by the authorities?

[14 : 30] real ways in which we show whether or not we do submit to the authorities as the Lord tells us to do. To show that we're not like the rest of this world. That we don't disobey the law when it suits us.

When we can benefit from something. We do these things, Peter says, for the Lord's sake. And look at verse 15. It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

That's pretty strong language. Silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. You see, by doing good, by obeying the law, by submitting to the authorities, we stand out from the crowd.

We stand out from a world that says it's all about you. And you do what you can and you get away with what you can as much as you can. But by being good citizens, by flouting the law, or by not flouting the law, when we could gain something from doing that, we're actually demonstrating we're not from this world.

Just like Jesus said, my kingdom, Pilate, is not from this world. Is not of this world. And in verse 16, as we were talking about, we live as free people, yes, but we don't use our freedom as a cover-up for evil.

[15 : 52] We don't say, I'm free in Christ, I'm covered by grace, Jesus paid for my sins, I'll do what I like, I'll disobey the law when it suits me.

We are not Caesar's slaves, that's not why we submit. Peter says, we are God's slaves, we belong to God. When we looked last week at this idea of being a royal priesthood, it said that we are God's special possession.

He owns us. And because he owns us, we reflect his character. And we do that, verse 17, by showing respect to everybody, and honoring the emperor.

Not because we love Nero, not because we think Leo is the political messiah, but because we love the family of believers, and we fear God above all else.

So we live lives that don't copy the world. We live lives that don't look like the world. We live lives that demonstrate our visible witness to the world in a way that people can see, to show people we really are different.

[17 : 04] And we do these things not because we want to be a good citizen of Ireland, or the US, or the UK, but here's the key, because we're citizens of heaven.

So can we ever disobey the government? Because we're not in heaven now. We're not in that place where there's no sin, and we're not in that place where everything honors God. There are some things that this government, and governments like it do, that tremendously dishonor God, that makes God angry.

In fact, you may remember, and this only just occurred to me as I'm thinking, you may remember when we had the referendum last year, and that night when the results were announced, that there was a lightning storm.

I don't want to read too much into that, but I think it shows God is not pleased with many things this government does. So we do disobey in two ways.

When the government commands us to do something God prohibits, when it commands us to do something God prohibits, or when it prohibits doing something that God commands.

[18 : 13] Commands us to do something God prohibits, or prohibits something God commands. And this isn't political philosophy. You can read about this all through your Bible. Here's some examples. When Pharaoh said, we need to wipe out the Jews, they're getting too populous.

They'll rise up. There were Hebrew midwives who refused to do that. Even though it was the law, even though they could go to prison or lose their head, they sheltered those babies, one of whom, as we know, was Moses.

Or how about Daniel? Daniel is a great case study in this. Daniel was told, you have to worship the king of Persia as a god.

You have to bow down to him and pray to him only. Stop this praying to your god. Stop praying to Yahweh. And Daniel said, I can't do that. I respect the authority that you're in, and I respect the position you're in, but I cannot stop praying to my god who has given me spiritual life.

And of course, Peter, who wrote this letter, this wasn't in isolation, Peter and John were told by the authorities, stop preaching about this Jesus.

[19 : 30] You're causing trouble. You're making people think, maybe I need to do something different. Maybe I need to do something other than keep the law of Moses. and Peter famously said, we must obey God, not men.

And the key with this, friends, they weren't disobeying because they didn't like the law that the government had, or because they wanted to change the political process.

They weren't trying to change things to something they preferred. They were put in a position where to obey what the government was telling them would be to disobey God. and because our citizenship is in heaven, we obey God, not men.

Killing babies, worshipping a pagan religion, keeping silent about the only great hope that humanity has for its eternal life, these are things we simply cannot do, and we cannot bow to Caesar when he commands such things.

things. And in our day and age, and these are just random examples again, maybe you're a teacher. If the principal tells you, you know, people are getting really uncomfortable with you sharing your faith in the break room, you have to stop talking about your faith.

[20 : 53] Do you? Or do you say, I obey God, not men? Maybe you're a student, and this is happening all over the world.

If the university tells you the Christian Union now has to participate in the LGBT Pride celebrations, they have to affirm that. No.

We obey God. We don't obey Caesar. We don't affirm that which God does not affirm. If you're a nurse, this is here.

If you're told you have to assist in an abortion, no, I will not be party to the wicked. Those are times where you stand your ground and you say, like Peter, I must obey God, not men, because, and this is the key, our true citizenship is in heaven.

It's not here. Because at the end of the day, friends, heaven, that's where Jesus is seated. He has sat down, his work is finished, and he didn't come into the world to do this work to set us free through politics or economics or anything like this.

[22 : 03] He came into the world not to lead a political revolution, but to lead a revolution of the soul, to take out our hearts of stone and give us a heart of flesh to restore us into right relationship with God.

He came so that all sinners would know true freedom, not political freedom, freedom, not economic freedom, freedom from sin.

And we ought not use that freedom as a cover-up to disobey the laws of our state and make our lives easier. We reject the ways of this world because we accept Christ and because he accepts us.

And only when we are forced to choose between obeying the law and obeying God God, do we disobey? Do we refuse to submit?

And in verse 21, Jesus gave us this example. He gave us an example from his own suffering about how to follow in his footsteps, in reverence, faithfulness, humility.

[23 : 11] And Jesus might have bled from that thorn of crowns, just like our brothers and sisters around the world bleed because of corrupt, God-hating governments, that oversee them.

Even though Jesus bled from that crown of thorns, he has been exalted and he now wears the crown of glory. All things, Nero, Leo, Trump, Boris, all these things are placed ultimately under Jesus' feet and he will reign over the universe forever and his kingdom will will never end unlike the ones that we see today.

And he submitted for a time, but now he's exalted. He's exalted above all rulers and all authorities and we follow his example. We echo Christ's example by submitting and thus we stand out from the crowd.

So we're citizens of heaven. Secondly and finally, only two points again this week, we're workers of Christ. Workers of Christ, verses 18 and 19. 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.

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. I was reading this, anywhere from one in five to one in three people in the Roman Empire were slaves.

[24 : 51] In the early churches it looks like large numbers of believers were slaves. In other words, they were the ones who were the backbone of the empire, the ones who worked the construction, worked the manufacturing, were the farm labourers.

They were the basis of the Roman economy. Without slaves, in that context, there was no economy. So when you read slaves, think labour force, workforce.

Don't read too much into it, that's another sermon for another day. Peter is addressing people who work for other people, whose livelihoods depend on other people working their land, working their business, whatever.

And he tells them, submit, there's that word again, submit to their masters, to the ones they work for. And I don't know what your bosses are like.

I'd like to think that unlike the ones Peter is talking about, they don't give you a beating for doing something wrong. If they do, we can go to the Workforce Relations Commission or whatever it's called, but hopefully that's not the case.

[25 : 59] So I don't know what they're like. Mine are friendly and kind. And they're always understanding. I enjoy working for them. But some of you probably don't have that experience.

Some of you probably have managers or supervisors who frankly just aren't nice people. Maybe they don't do much of the work themselves.

Maybe they let you carry that burden. It's my business, why should I work? That's what all you are here for. Maybe whenever you ask for time off, their reaction is derisive.

What do you want time off for? What am I paying you for? This is why you're here. Maybe they only view you as a pair of hands or another body or another face on the assembly line or the office.

Maybe they've personally harassed you. Maybe they know you're a Christian and because they know you're a Christian, they make your life difficult, give you the hard jobs, give you all the rubbish to do.

[27 : 08] And if you have a temperament like mine, and many of you likely do, you probably want to march into their office and tell them what for. That's the most polite way I could come up with to say that.

But Peter says, regardless of whether your masters, your bosses are good and considerate or harsh, we are to bear up in our places of work.

Bear up means to endure, literally to carry this burden that has been placed upon your shoulders. And remember, this is so that we stand out from the crowd, so that we don't look like the world around us.

Because Peter says we submit out of reverent fear of God, not fear of our employer, not because we really want to please them, although we should, but reverent fear of God.

And remember what that means. We looked at this a couple of weeks ago. Revering God, respecting God, honouring him for who he lives, and living our lives in such a way that gives him glory, and that points other people to Christ because we reflect the character of God.

[28 : 21] Showing that we look different from the world in such a way that our lives point people to Christ. And he tells us how we do that. Look at verse 23. When they hurled their insults at him, at Jesus, he did not retaliate.

When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. So when you always seem to pull the short straw with overtime, or the graveyard shift, or working weekends, do you then steal the boss's time and money by working as slowly and as slothfully as you possibly can, doing as little as you can?

Or do you continue in faithful diligence to your duties, to the one who pays you? this probably applies to a few of you.

What about if you've been refused a higher wage? You've been with the company 15 years, less experienced, maybe less competent staff who might be related to the boss, seem to be getting their pay rises.

Do you grumble? Do you spread gossip around the office talk about how this is such a terrible place to work? Or, do you remember what Paul said when he said, my God will meet all your needs, all your provisions, through Christ, according to his riches, that God gives us what we need?

[30 : 05] How about this? When your manager calls you names because of your faith, and this has happened to me, when your manager insults you, because you're a believer, do you retaliate?

Yeah, well, I might be a Christian, but you insert insult here. Do you wish evil upon him? I know one guy, Christian worker, who keyed his boss's car on his last day at work.

Oh, yeah. Now, it's funny, but it's not particularly Christ-like. It doesn't point people to Jesus. So do we wish evil upon our bosses when they insult us, or are we like Christ?

On our next break, or on the commute home, do we call out tearfully if necessary, Father, forgive him. He doesn't know what he's doing.

Do we call out to the only one who can soften the boss's heart, break down his walls, and pray for God's mercy to wash over him? Do we pray for the strength to be a faithful witness?

[31 : 16] In other words, friends, does our work life reflect our spiritual life, or do we put them in two compartments? this is my spiritual life, and it belongs on Sundays, and this is my work life, and the two never meet.

When we're wronged, do we look the same as everybody else? Do we retaliate? do we take an eye for an eye, or a car key for a car key?

Do we look different from the world around us? Do we submit to our masters, even when it's the hardest? Because as Peter says, verses 19 and 20, and I'm paraphrasing, if you have to suffer, friends, suffer for doing the right thing.

Suffer for standing up for Christ, not because you're stealing from the boss. his time or his money. You might think, by the way, and this just occurred to me, you might be self-employed, that's great, I don't have any bosses, I don't have any masters.

Who puts food on your table? Your customers. So, tomorrow morning when that customer walks through your door, or you get that first email, or that first phone call, do you treat that person as if the Lord himself walked into your business?

[32 : 37] Do you submit? And brothers, sisters, I could have showed up this morning and I could have just given you a lecture on civic involvement. I could have just given you point by point through the Constitution and said because this is where we live, this is how we act, and that's what Peter means.

Or workplace relations. If you're a shop steward, maybe that's what you were hoping to hear this morning. But that's not the point. The point of the text is that Peter is not interested in telling us how to be a social justice warrior.

Peter is not interested in telling us how to be an advocate for traditional rights or workers' rights. He's interested, as am I, in exhorting you to live lives that honor God in very visible ways that people can see in your daily interactions, in the mundane elements of your life, the things that you think aren't necessarily spiritual, are those the things in which you honor God the most?

Our lives ought to point people to Christ, friends. It's the only reason why we're here. We're here to point people to Christ and to do that by standing out from the crowd around us, submitting to the authorities and submitting to our masters.

And we do these things not because we're so wonderful, not because we're do-gooders. You probably heard the expression, Holy Joe. Maybe people have said that about you.

[34 : 13] They've said that about me. We don't do these things because we're great. Verse 24, we do these things because Jesus bore our sins so that in his death we might die to sin and live to righteousness because by his wounds we have been healed.

So we don't live for sin. We don't live for ourselves. We crucify ourselves daily, Paul says, and never is sin more put to death in our bodies than when we live lives of simple, straightforward obedience and submission.

Things that point people to the Son of God who in his perfect submission, in his perfect obedience, gave us that freedom. Not political.

Our freedom from sin. Because we were like lost sheep, Peter says, but the good shepherd brought us back. It's all for his sake. It's all for his glory.

And we don't have time now. If you've got one of the notes there, you can have a look. Read Revelation 5 sometime later today. It's a great image. The Apostle John sees the Father holding the scroll, the title deed of ownership to the universe.

[35 : 24] And John is weeping because nobody is there who's worthy to take ownership of all of these things around him. But then one of those presents said, no, John, look behind you. There's Jesus, the Lamb of God.

And Jesus walks up to the Father. And the Father hands him this scroll. And everybody starts singing, you are worthy to take the scroll because you were slain.

You have made your people, that's us, the church, to be a kingdom and to be priests and serve our God and they will reign on the earth. And as we're about to sing, worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise because every wicked government and every corrupt boss, everything you own and every single molecule in this universe, it's all for Jesus.

It has all been placed under his feet. Even when things look the most bleak, especially when things look the most bleak, Jesus will reign over the universe.

And we get to reign with him. Despite everything that passes away and fades away, our inheritance is guaranteed. And so we live our lives by standing out from the crowd pointing to the Lamb who was slain, worthy to inherit it all.

[37 : 00] And we're going to come to the Lord's table. Perhaps the musicians can make their way back up. We're going to come to the Lord's table and as we do so, think on Jesus' words.

Do this in remembrance remembrance of me. Remember the Lamb who was slain. Remember the King who wore the thorn of crowns, crown of thorns, made worthy to wear the crown of glory.

And we submit, remember, because so did Jesus. And our lives ought to point people to Jesus. Jesus. Amen.

Let's pray. Father, this has been a tough text to preach.