

Accepting Authority

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- [0 : 00] This is the AM service on the 3rd of May 1998. The preacher is Paul Barker.
His sermon is entitled Accepting Authority and is from 1 Peter 2.13-3.7.
Please be seated. And you may like to have open in front of you the passage from 1 Peter on page 984 in the Black Bibles that are in front of you.
We're preaching through this letter in the weeks after Easter. Our world does not understand this passage.
It seems that every group these days in our world is claiming its own rights, sometimes violently, often not. And more and more people are suing as soon as their rights seem to be infringed.
- [1 : 07] From the Melbourne docks, even to Canterbury Cathedral, people are claiming their rights. Their right to strike, their right to work, their right to be gay, their right to be sad, I guess, their right to life, their right to abort life.
But this verse says, submit. For the Lord's sake, submit. Our translation of verse 13, I think, tones this down unfairly.
It says, for the Lord's sake, accept the authority. But it is submit to the authority, not just to accept it. Peter gives us three examples in this passage.
The first is to the state, the second, masters and slaves, and the third is husbands and wives. But the general context in verse 13 says, for the Lord's sake, submit to the authority of every human institution.
Although it's not really the institution, it's actually the people who are the authority that are to be submitted to. And in each case, the motive is for the Lord's sake.
- [2 : 14] Later on it says, wives in the same way. That is, with the same motive. For the Lord's sake, submit. And so on. That is, submission is a gospel concern.
It is because of Jesus Christ that we are to submit to God-given authority in this world. Whatever the nature of that authority is. And these are just three examples. There are many others that we could find.
But there's another concern as well. The passage we looked at last week ends in verse 12 by saying that we as Christians are to live such honourable lives in the world that other people may come to glorify God.
And submission is the first thing that we're given as an example of that. So as we Christians submit to human authority, God-given authority, we do so, one, for the Lord's sake, but two, so that the world will come to glorify God.
Well, the first example is the emperor. For the Lord's sake, accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme or of governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.
- [3 : 26] It is easier for us to obey this command than for Peter. Very often in the world, it's the other way around. Very often there are things in the Bible that in some respects we find harder to do than maybe the first original readers and hearers did.

But for this, it's easier for us. Our governments are generally, in our country certainly, democratic. We have more say in government. Generally, they are fairer and therefore easier to submit to.

Our governments are more likely to do the things that are described at the end of verse 14. That is to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. But Peter's command is a command without qualification.

Submit to the state, to the emperor. We don't have an emperor to our prime minister, president, premier, whatever the situation is in whatever country, by whatever name that person is known by.

Peter's command, you see, does not just apply to good emperors, moral, kind, caring, godly, fair, just, but to any. To any.

[4 : 38] You see, submission to an office is to be regardless of the incumbent of that office. Peter writes, probably at the time of Nero, there could hardly be a worse Roman emperor for Christians than Nero, neurotic Nero, who charged and persecuted Christians with the burning of Rome, unjustly, almost certainly.

He was no friend of Christians and yet in his day and age, Peter can say, submit to the emperor. Nero's governors were probably little better, the provincial governors who ruled over parts of the empire.

But nothing much had changed on that score either because in Jesus' own day, different emperor, Tiberius, different governor, different even province, but the governor of Jesus' day in Judea was Pilate and Jesus was prepared to go to death unjustly from weak, wavering, pathetic Pilate.

Like Jesus, who said, render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, Peter also recognised the God-given state authority.

You see, bad examples do not override our responsibility to submit to the state. We have no grounds for excuse. We cannot say, well, this doesn't apply to us because our government, our premier, our head of state or whatever is bad or evil or corrupt.

[6 : 10] even if that were the case, we are still bound by this command to submit to the emperor, the prime minister, the president or whatever. Indeed, as we recognise Peter's situation, this ought to give us cause for thanks for our own government in our country.

I'm sure that we can find many faults but basically we ought to give thanks to God for good government, for stable government, for basic justice and fairness even if there are weaknesses and we ought to give thanks for the freedom we as Christians have to live, praise and proclaim the gospel.

But Christian responsibility to the state, submission to the state is not a passive thing. There is an activity involved as well. We as Christians are to be good citizens in our society and that means an active good citizenship.

So verse 15 says, for it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. In part the doing right is submission but in part it seems to imply general activity as good citizens in the world in which we live.

In Peter's day and we know from Roman documents that are found from that day the Christians were falsely charged with subversion, lack of patriotism, treason against the emperor.

[7 : 34] Peter is saying make sure there is nothing that can stick against you if charges like that are made. Make sure that your behaviour is so impeccable that any such charges would be manifestly unjust.

And remember the motive. Submit to the emperor and do good in society so that society which is not Christian will be won over and will glorify God on the day of his visitation.

verse 17 puts this in a bit of context. Four things.

Honour everyone. All people. Regardless of class, creed, morality, colour, etc. Honour everyone.

Not even just Christians but non-Christians as well. The second thing though moves a step up. Love the family of believers.

[8 : 37] Love the brotherhood literally. That is Christian people. A higher obligation is placed on us as Christians in our Christian mutual relationships. Honour everyone certainly but love Christians, fellow Christians.

and then another step up. Fear God, Peter says. God alone is worthy of our fear. Not terror but rather an absolute awe and respect but in the context of a relationship with a holy God.

So moving up the steps. Honour everyone. Love fellow Christians. Fear God and we might expect that the steps keep going up when we get to the last one, the emperor and maybe some Roman citizens would expect that as well but notice what Peter says about the emperor.

Honour the emperor. That is the same word that's used for all people. Clearly making sure that Christians recognise the emperor is not divine as he claimed to be in Peter's day but is just a human being.

So honour him like you honour everybody. Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. Having said all that the Bible is full of and Christian history is full of Christians or people of God being civilly disobedient.

[9 : 58] The Israelites in Egypt when they were commanded to kill their own firstborn sons in Exodus 1 and 2. Daniel thrown into the lion's den for civil disobedience.

Peter himself in Acts chapter 4 was civilly disobedient. Submission you see is not absolute. Submission does not mean that we do absolutely everything that we are commanded by an authority in every case.

Where submission leads to sin we must not submit. Whether we're talking about the emperor or husbands or anyone else in authority. Where submission means sin we do not submit.

Where the state encroaches on God's laws we do not submit. But on the other hand civil disobedience when it is expressed must be expressed appropriately.

I think it's right and proper for Christians to protest against the freedom of abortion in our country and around the world generally. But there is no excuse for expressing that disobedience violently and certainly not by killing those who are pro-abortion.

[11 : 03] Civil disobedience must be done appropriately. The second example that Peter gives is slaves and masters. If you're like me your picture of slavery is probably formed by Uncle Tom's Cabin or something like that.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was a book about American slavery last century. One of the greatest books ever written I suspect. But it portrayed slavery as it was. Harsh, cruel, demeaning, black American slaves without rights, working extremely long hours, without any sense of family life, no human dignity applied to them, etc.

Many of them died in such harsh conditions. Well admittedly in Peter's day slaves had little or no legal rights. Their conditions varied from good to bad.

Certainly their slavery was compulsory. But in the first century over a third of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. Many of them had responsible jobs, managerial positions in effect.

Many of them, maybe even most of them, were well treated and even paid. It's hardly the picture of American 19th century slavery in Peter's day.

[12 : 24] Sometimes people accuse the Bible of condoning slavery. Their picture of slavery is last century's American slavery. I think if that were the picture in Peter's day there would certainly be stronger and harsher words against the institution of slavery.

But for many people the institution of slavery in the Roman Empire was one that actually protected people's dignity and gave them some protection and housing and jobs and so on. Certainly there were abuses of that.

But by and large the system was certainly nowhere near as bad as that of last century in America. But Peter's not necessarily condoning slavery here but rather he's exhorting Christians about how to live in a real world, a world that has its faults like our own world does.

Peter's not saying here their first job is to correct every fault in the world and its institutions but rather submit and live as godly Christians in the midst of that trouble. So the first word to slaves is submit.

It's not quite an employee situation today but it's not dissimilar either. And I think Peter would just as well say to employees today submit as he did to slaves then.

[13 : 33] slaves submit to the authority of your masters with all deference that is all fear. Again submission is independent of the character of the authority.

So he says at the end of verse 18 not only those who are kind and gentle it's easy to submit to them but also those who are harsh. good or bad submission is the lot of the servant slave employee.

Peter is not just talking about any sort of suffering under slavery. He makes it clear that if you do wrong suffering for doing wrong is no credit to you. Verse 20 makes that clear.

If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong what credits that? But Peter's issue is unjust suffering. the slave servant employee who suffers because of the cruelty, harshness, injustice of the master.

So verse 20 finishes but if you endure when you do right and suffer for it you have God's approval. But a qualification is placed on this in verse 19. For it is a credit to you if being aware of God you endure pain while suffering unjustly.

[14 : 55] You see Peter's not commending stoic self-pity. The person who just somehow enjoys suffering and puts up with it. But rather he's commending the person who aware of God endures unjust suffering.

To be aware of God is not just to have a hazy notion that God is around somewhere but rather to have a confidence that God is the ultimate judge of all.

That he is the one who judges justly at the end of time. To be aware of God in unjust suffering then is to place your confidence in God who will judge at the end of time and even a God who provides your every need in the present.

Our conduct in unjust suffering stems from our fear of God. Verse 18 makes that clear. Although in our translation it uses the word deference but it seems to say slaves submit out of your fear of God.

All of it comes from a motivation of serving God. Now Peter goes on to expand the example to slaves by giving an example of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 05] For his readers as for us Jesus' own unjust suffering was well known even if at this stage not all the gospels were written. For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. Jesus' behavior you see was above reproach in both deed, he committed no sin, and word, no deceit or guile was found in his mouth.

And he is the example for us to follow. When I was learning Hebrew at theological college the first couple of weeks were spent trying to master what the characters look like.

Hebrew characters are not all that easy to write. And so we would spend some time just practicing writing each character. We would have the alphabet in front of us and we would copy it.

It's very much like primary school where on the primary school blackboards you have the alphabet A to Z all the way across the top of the blackboard. It was a bit like that for us. That was our template if you like.

[17 : 17] And that's the word that's used here for how we are to base our model on Jesus Christ. As he suffered unjustly he is the copy, the pattern for us to follow.

Just like when you practice writing an alphabet based on some pattern that you're given. The example of Jesus we're told is that when he was abused in verse 23 he did not return abuse.

The abuse here is verbal. The word is reviled in older translations. He did not retaliate. He didn't give back kind for kind. For us we'd be provoked to revenge probably.

To get even. If somebody reviles us we'd be wanting to call names back at them. But not Jesus. When he was being mocked before his crucifixion he did not retaliate.

He did not return the abuse. When he suffered he did not threaten. He could easily have done so and done so correctly.

[18 : 16] He could easily have threatened his persecutors and mockers and crucifiers by saying to them the judgment that is going to befall them from God. But no.

All his words of woe and judgment had been said before. And at this point he kept silent. He did not threaten. And the context for Jesus doing this.

The end of verse 23 says he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. That is he was aware of God. He was aware that God is the one who judges justly at the end of time.

It is for God to be about the business of justice ultimately. Not Jesus even. Nor us. He was confident that God would bring about ultimate justice on those who persecuted him, who reviled him, abused him and threatened him and caused him to suffer unjustly.

But he entrusted himself to God's justice. When we face injustice and are provoked to anger by it, the psychologists tell us to sometimes to bottle it up, more often to be therapeutic and to express your anger in creative ways.

[19 : 34] But God here says neither. God here says trust him. Trust him who judges justly in the end.

There ought to be comfort here for Christian people. Just desserts are coming and they're coming from God and they're not our responsibility.

humility. We are free to submit because God ultimately will judge and judge justly.

We are free to submit when we trust in the ultimate judge. And Jesus' example is the one for us to follow. Peter takes Jesus' example a step further.

Some of these commentators think that Peter's digressing here, that he's running off the rails in his argument, that he's just getting carried away with thinking about Jesus' death. But it seems to me that there's a fairly central point that's being made here.

[20 : 36] Jesus' death is not just an example for us, it does something unique. But Jesus' death gives us the basis for trusting in God's justice. And that's why Peter goes on to talk more about Jesus' death.

In verse 24 he says, He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross. That's not an example for us to follow, that's once for all. So that free from sins we might live for righteousness by his wounds you have been healed.

Christ suffers for our sins so that we may be free of our sins and live for righteousness.

He died in my place as my substitute in my stead, bearing my sins. That wasn't his right, nor was it mine to claim that from him.

But he willingly submitted himself to injustice for my benefit and my sake. Therefore I can suffer even unjustly for his sake.

[21 : 48] But even more than that, his death, his wounds bring me healing. And maybe Peter has in mind especially healing from the pain of unjust suffering now.

I know that when I suffer unjustly for Jesus' sake, his death brings me healing from all the pain and the injustice that I will suffer at the end of time.

That's the basis of God's justice and judgment on this world. So what Jesus has done once for all is the basis that gives me confidence in God's justice and judgment at the end of time.

God's justice and God's justice and I can trust him who judges justly when I myself receive unjust treatment.

These last few verses have been borrowing from the language of Isaiah 53 in the Old Testament, a famous passage dealing with a servant of God who would come and suffer for the world.

[22 : 48] Spoken 700 years probably before Jesus came to earth. They fit exactly what Jesus did in dying on the cross. And Peter goes on and finishes the chapter by talking about one of the benefits of Jesus' death for us Christians.

For you were going astray like sheep, but now you've returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. If Jesus is the shepherd and guardian of our souls, then unjust suffering cannot ultimately harm us.

Our souls are protected by our shepherd who died for us and bore our sins for us. So even in the face of unjust suffering, we can have confidence in Jesus' sake and in Jesus and for his sake be submissive even to injustice.

The third example is the trickiest in our day and age. Wives and husbands. Another joy of being single is not having to work out how to practice this.

This is an emotive topic, but Peter's words are very clear, as clear as the rest of the New Testament on this same topic. Wives, in the same way that is for the Lord's sake, submit to the authority of your husbands.

[24 : 22] Submission does not mean inferiority. Jesus submitted to the father, he was not inferior to him. Christians submit to the emperor, they are not inferior to the emperor.

And the end of the passage we're looking at today in verse 7 speaks of husbands and wives as being joint heirs of God's grace. There is an equality there before God.

Submission is not compelled by husbands, but is to be willingly given by Christian wives. An act of freedom to a God-given authority.

It's not for the husband to command it, but for the wife to freely give it. The motive is for Jesus' sake.

Not the husband's sake, but for Jesus' sake. The other motive still stands as well. To win non-Christians for God.

[25 : 24] So Peter says that you are to submit so that even if some of them do not obey the word, that is the non-Christian husbands, do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

Christian wives are to exhibit such exemplary conduct and behaviour in their marriage that even non-Christian husbands will be won over by their behaviour. In the first century, the authority of the husband extended to the faith and religion of the wife.

If the husband were a pagan, he could expect his wife so to be as well. If a pagan husband was converted to Christianity, the expectation would be that the wife would follow.

That was part of the way of which a husband exercised authority. The picture here, though, is Christian wives and pagan husbands, and Peter's making it clear that the bounds of authority stop when it gets to the issue of religion and faith.

Just like the state, the husband's authority does not encroach on God's territory. Remember also what we've seen in both the example of the state and of slaves and masters, that submission is independent of the character of the authority.

[26 : 43] Bad husbands or good are to be submitted to by Christian wives. many of you have non-Christian husbands, and many of you do what Peter is saying.

Let me encourage you to persevere in that, to keep living exemplary, godly lives, submitting to your husbands, praying for them, that they may be won over to God.

And maybe for those of you who are in that situation but are not thinking in terms of relating to your husband in this way, let me encourage you so to do. Peter goes on to talk about the importance of inner character.

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.

Peter is not condemning here adornment. He's not condemning braided hair, gold ornaments or fine clothing.

[28 : 03] But he is condemning reliance upon them for lasting beauty. Indeed, the wording of the clothing bit is just clothing.

It's not fine clothing. The Greek word is just clothing. If Peter were condemning it, well he'd be telling Christian wives to go around naked. Well, of course he's not doing that. But what he is doing is condemning reliance upon that as the be all and end all of beauty.

What is important is inner beauty, character. He talks about the lasting beauty. Literally it is an imperishable jewel.

In chapter 1 verse 4 he says you've been born again to an inheritance that is imperishable. In chapter 1 verse 23 he said you've been born again by the imperishable word. So if we're living imperishable lives as Christian people, then the beauty that Christian wives must cultivate is an imperishable beauty.

But as the years roll by, no amount of braided hair and gold ornaments can hide the loss of physical beauty. I'm afraid we can look around and see examples of that.

[29 : 16] But what is imperishable and what is vastly more important is the beauty, the imperishable beauty, of good character. A gentle and quiet spirit that is a spirit that's not pushy, not selfishly assertive, not demanding its own rights at every turn.

A spirit that is full of the fruit of God's own spirit, as gentleness in fact is. That is a spirit that trusts in God and his justice at the end and his present provision as well.

There is much of relevance here for our world. The cosmetics industry, the indulgence that it promotes, the glamour that advertising cultivates, the sense of importance of physical beauty that's on every page of our newspapers and on every advertisement and TV program, the vanity, the pride, as well as the greed and the dollars that are expended in the pursuit of all these things is far from what Peter would commend.

Let me encourage you to cultivate godly character and not physical beauty. Physical beauty is perishable, but godly character is not.

The other thing I guess that's relevant from this section relates to the feminist streak that's around in our world today. Some of it right, but much of it I think ungodly.

[30 : 48] Christian wives are to submit to their husbands. And any modern feminism that seeks to undermine that is ungodly, regardless of the character of the husband.

Hard words, I know. But Jesus is the example to encourage us in unjust suffering. Peter's final word is to husbands.

They only get one verse. Something they didn't need the correction. I'm not sure that that's true. But the words to the husbands are just as demanding.

Husbands in the same way show consideration for your wives and your life together. We might think that's little. In Peter's day it was much for wives who were merely chattel, property.

For a husband to show consideration to his wife, though that was probably sometimes done in the pagan world, but as a command generally would be quite striking. They are to be considerate for their wives.

[31 : 57] And the expression we've got in our translations, in your life together, but literally it means according to knowledge. And that is according to your relationship to God, because Peter uses words ignorance and knowledge to contrast non- Christians, ignorant, and Christians knowledgeable.

So what he's saying here is that the Christian marriage, led by the husband, must be founded on Christian relationships with God. Husbands, for the Lord's sake, show consideration for your wives as you relate to God together.

Paying honour to the woman as the weaker sex. That's not demeaning, that's not patronising, it's treating her as she is. Since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

I wonder if you husbands find your prayers not being answered. Have you ever wondered why? Here's one possible reason.

Peter says that if you do not show due consideration to your wife, due honour to her, due care and love of her, then God will hinder your prayers. The next time your prayers are not answered, you husbands, think about how you're relating to your wife.

[33 : 20] Is it that God is hindering your prayers to expose your wrong marriage relationship? It may be, it may not be. But at least consider the possibility.

If only husbands would show wives the consideration and care honour that God commands. If only they would esteem them as the weaker sex.

If only they would exercise godly leadership of their family and accept the God-given authority that is given to them instead of wimping out, as so often happens. If only Christian husbands would love their wives as Christ loved the church.

But so often they don't. Many of you I know are victims of husbands who have not fulfilled these commands.

Jesus' word is to endure suffering, aware of God, confident of his justice in the end, following Jesus' own example. Some of you may be perpetrators.

[34 : 32] God's word to you is quite clear, Christian husbands that may have disobeyed this. Stop and sin no more. If there is anything that our world needs desperately from Christian people, it is the example of godly marriage.

Our world desperately needs gentle, quiet wives loving God and their husbands. It desperately needs the examples of considerate, loving, honouring husbands and loving and honouring God.

So many social problems of our world are caused by unsubmitive wives, but so many more from inconsiderate, dishonouring husbands.

Let me urge you to make sure that your marriage is godly and a good example for the world that it might be won for God. The end of last week's reading, Peter said that we are to conduct ourselves honourably in the world so that the world may see our honourable deeds and glorify God.

We are to abstain from the desires of the flesh. And the first example that Peter gives is the issue of submission. So a lack of submission is a desire of the flesh.

[36 : 06] In Peter's day and in ours, it is something that is sinful and wrong. For Christians, we are to submit to every human institution for the sake of Jesus Christ.

To follow his example of submission, even unjustly and even to death. Trusting rather in God, who judges all justly.

Thus will we conduct ourselves honourably in this world and thus, according to God's grace, may the world come to glorify him.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[37 : 09] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.