

Do Good for God's Sake: Authorities

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] It'd be great if you could keep your Bibles open at 1 Peter chapter 2 as we continue our series. I thought I'd start today with a song and an apology.

An apology because I've used this illustration before. In fact, I was so worried about using it again, I spoke to a family member about it and they said, don't worry, no one remembers your sermons anyway.

Thanks, I think. And so for the one or two of you who might remember, my apologies. But everyone knows this song anyway because we hear it ad nauseum at Christmastime.

It's the song when Santa Claus is coming to town. Do you remember the chorus? It should be on your screens now. You know, he sees when you're sleeping, knows when you're awake. And the last line, I won't sing it for you, don't worry, is, so be good for goodness sake.

Well, today, Peter's message is not be good for goodness sake, but be good for God's sake. That is, we are to do good, whether it's for God's glory or because we are conscious of pleasing God or doing God's will.

[1 : 13] It's for God's sake. And this theme is peppered throughout the passage, as you can see on your screens, glorifying God, doing God's will, conscious of God, hoping in God and so on.

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

So point one on the outline and then verse 11 in your Bible. Have a look there. He says, Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which 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.

Now, while Peter has told us in the first half of his letter how we're to live, the focus on the first half of the letter has really been about who we are.

And so on your screens there, we've heard that we are God's elect and exiles in the world. We've heard that we have been given new birth with hope and inheritance, that we are God's children who are to reflect our father's holiness and that we are God's chosen A-listers.

[2 : 40] But here in verse 11 and 12, Peter shifts the focus from who we are to how we're to live. We are to abstain or refrain from sinful desires.

Now, this is not always easy because did you notice in verse 11, we're told that these sinful desires wage war against our souls.

And I'm guessing if you're like me, we've felt that before, haven't we? That wrestling match within us, you know, when you know you shouldn't do something but really want to do it.

Like if your neighbor annoys you, perhaps throws rubbish over your fence and you really want to throw rubbish back plus some extra for good measure. Or like when someone says something behind your back and you really want to say something about them behind their back.

Or when there's a movie or book that you know is not going to be great for your godliness, but you really want to watch it or read it. There's this struggle within us, isn't there?

[3 : 53] In fact, Vijay often uses the word battle and he's right. Sometimes there is this kind of battle within us where with God's help, we have to work at resisting our sinful desires and refraining from them.

But we're not just to battle and resist. We're then to do good. In fact, we're to live such good lives, verse 12, that will stand out.

We're to be stand out good people. Such that people will see our good deeds. And I think that's why Peter addresses us in verse 11 as foreigners.

Instead of, you know, chosen and holy, like he said just a couple of verses before in verse 9. Because foreigners often stand out as different, like tourists, if you like.

Back when people could travel around internationally, you could often spot a tourist by what they wore. So on your screens is a cartoon picture of a tourist. They've got a backpack and a camera over the shoulder.

[5 : 00] And he's looking at a map, an old school map on paper rather than the phone. And he's looking a little bit lost, which I can relate to. Or on the next slide, you'd see people taking photos of themselves with famous landmarks in the background, like the London Bridge there.

Well, we are like tourists in this world. This world is not our true home. The world to come is our true home. And so we're not to blend into this world by giving into our sinful desires like the world does. We're just stand out as different, like tourists do. Not by what we wear, but what we do, living good lives for God's sake.

Do you see verse 12 again? It says, Though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God. In other words, we are to live such standout good lives that people might turn from being accusers to God glorifiers.

Because the world takes any opportunity to accuse Christians of being wrong, doesn't it? In Peter's day, Christians were accused of being cannibals. Did you realize?

[6 : 17] Because they said they ate the flesh of Christ and drank his blood, referring to the Lord's Supper. And the world didn't realize that it was metaphoric and spiritual, where we feed on his death by remembering it afresh, such that our faith is encouraged.

And they were also accused in Peter's day of incest, because they called one another brother and sister, but then married each other. For us, we're often accused of being hypocrites.

I'm sure we've heard that one before. Even though Christians never claim to be perfect, are just forgiven. Or more recently, we've been accused of being unloving bigots.

We've heard that in the last few years, haven't we? Even though we do love people, just not their sin. Of course, sometimes Christians are, sadly, unloving hypocrites.

But we're to live such standout good lives that those accusations become baseless. So that people think, well, hang on a second. So-and-so is actually a pretty good person.

[7 : 21] How can they be a bigot as well? And perhaps then ask the Christian why they think this or that. And in the process, we can tell them, you know, we just disagree with people's choices.

Like we might disagree with their football team, who they support. But it doesn't mean we don't love and care for them. Just like God disagrees with our sin, but he still loves us so much, he gave his son Jesus to die for us, didn't he?

And God willing, it will silence their accusation. And maybe even turn them from accusers to God glorifiers. This is how we're to do good for God's sake.

I remember a dad who joined a course to learn about Christianity. All because he came to a church playgroup to pick up his child one day and saw the minister going to the toilet to clean the toilet. Another parent had dropped a rather full nappy and made a mess of the toilet. And this dad couldn't believe that the minister himself would go and clean up the mess.

[8 : 31] He said most people would leave that for the cleaners. And this unusually good deed meant that he wanted to know more.

And so he did this Christianity Explore course. I actually don't know if he became a Christian and glorified God in the end. It'd be a great story if he did. But you get the point, don't you?

We had to live such good lives by abstaining from sin and doing good that people might turn from being accusers to God glorifiers. And so are we battling or giving in to sin?

And are we known as standout good people? Well, Peter now gives us some more specific ways to do good. And both involve submitting to authorities.

I like state authorities. So point to verses 13 and 14. Now, so verse 13 in your Bibles.

[9 : 36] 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.

And notice here in verse 13, we have to submit ourselves. That is, we are to choose to submit not because we have to per se, but because we want to. Verse 13.

For the Lord's sake. To please him. And because verse 14, he sent them. Here is doing good for God's sake again.

So also verse 15. For it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

Christians often say they want to know God's will for their lives, what job to do or where to live. Well, here is God's will to silence foolish people by submitting and doing good.

[10 : 40] So Peter, by the way, calls them foolish because on your screens, the Bible says that the fool is the one who says there is no God, even when we have lots of evidence.

And Peter calls them ignorant because they've not understood the Lord's supper or how we can be brothers and sisters without committing incest. Or in our case, how we're not actually hypocrites or bigots.

And so God's will is that we do good that people might stop and think, like I said before, hang on a second. They're a good person. How can they be a hypocrite or a bigot and then inquire and find out more?

And God willing, silence their accusations and turn them from accusers to God glorifiers. Now, for us, this means submitting to our government, the tax office, the police, our local council.

It means wearing these frustrating masks. I don't know what law you find hard to submit to the most, but at the moment it's wearing masks. For me, I find them frustrating and claustrophobic.

[11 : 53] But we are to submit and do good. Even when good old Dan Andrews works against Christianity, like removing CRE from the school timetable, or at the moment to try and remove 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 by submitting for God's sake. After all, we shouldn't be surprised when 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. There are legal ways, though, that we do the legal ways of protesting and petitioning. Now, the Australian Christian Lobby often has petitions we can sign.

And, of course, this doesn't mean also that we have to submit if they tell us to do something that is contrary to God's word. So if our state government does say we're no longer allowed to teach, even in our churches, the biblical view of sexuality, then at that point on your screens, we must go with the apostles who said we must obey God rather than human beings.

But we're not in that position yet. Though it seems some churches think we are with these COVID restrictions.

[13 : 22] Last week, a church in California, led by John MacArthur, whom you can see on the screen there, used that very verse from Acts to disobey the government and hold a packed church service without social distancing nor masks.

And you can see how packed it is there on your screens. Now, I need to say that most of the stuff I've seen from John MacArthur is very good. And he does cite some compelling reasons like how the risk is quite low and how on the next slide, he's mentioned that the government has kept abortion clinics open and deemed abortion clinics and liquor stores as essential services, while churches are not.

And churches, he says on the next slide, are the only places where people in this stressful situation can find hope. Hope. Now, I can relate to him.

I feel his pain, believe me. But churches can still go online and offer hope. In fact, the St. John's Mandarin Congregation, I was talking to some of them just last week, and they said that through their online evangelism course, two people have become Christians.

So it can happen. And we can still Zoom and phone and send cards and even drop off things to provide care, although with the government's announcement in Victoria this afternoon or this morning, that might change that last one.

[14 : 59] What's more, it's not as though the state is targeting Christians like they do in other countries, because other places, even in California, like bars and restaurants, were also forced to close.

And it's not a permanent ruling, but a temporary one. In fact, John's sermon 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 in place.

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 his act will silence Christian accusers and turn them to God glorifiers?

Or closer to home, in Australia, a church in Sydney just last week continues to offer communion using the same spoon for every person. This is a Greek Orthodox church.

And the same cloth to wipe each person's chin. Despite the New South Wales health guidelines, which it seems to breach on your next slide, the health guidelines say to avoid direct contact.

[16:19] And so do you think this church will help silence Christian accusers and turn them to God glorifiers? You see, 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 so hard to find positive ones. I mean, there was no news article last month about Blackburn and Doncaster churches give food to the community through Doncare, even though we did that.

So we're not to give the world any ammunition. Instead, we're to do good for God's sake by submitting to state authorities. And so can I ask you then, are we submitting even if we don't like wearing masks?

Are we submitting to our state authorities even if we don't like this lockdown? You see, we are to do good for God's sake by submitting to state authorities.

And point three on the next slide there, by submitting to workplace authorities. Let's have a look at verse 18 in your Bibles, and we see it here.

[17:35] Verse 18. He says, Slaves, 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 the word for slave in verse 18 is, it's not the strong slave word, it's actually a domestic servant. So servants in those days were not quite like the African American slaves.

They did have some rights. So for us, the equivalent would be submitting to our boss at work or our lecturer at university or our teacher at school.

And do you notice in verse 18 there, we are to do it out of fear for God. Here it is, doing good for God's sake again. And so we are to submit to our workplace masters wherever they occur.

Doing what they ask us to do. And working to the best of our ability. Even if it's from home. And sometimes this is easy to do if they are, or as the Bible says, good and considerate.

[18:45] If your boss or teacher is like that, then thank God for them. But if they are not, it's much harder, isn't it? If they are harsh and unreasonable.

My son came home from school last week. He's in year 10. So he was one of the ones that went back to school and they had to wear masks. But he was running around at lunchtime, working up a sweat, playing soccer with his friends.

And they got in trouble because they were not wearing masks. The teacher said, your running is not rigorous enough. Even though they had worked up a sweat. And the Victorian government says, you can take your mask off to run.

Here is a teacher who is being unreasonable. 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.

Then yes, they are absolutely wrong. But we're still to do the job they ask us to do. Now, like before, there are limits to this. You know, if they tell you to go against God, like lie on a government form to get more job keeper or to cheat a customer, then of course we must obey God rather than people.

[20:00] And if they are abusive to you, then go over their head to HR or to the appropriate authority. We can do that. After all, we heard in verse 14 that that's what the authorities have been put there to do.

Do you remember? To commend those who do good and to punish those who do evil like bad bosses. So we can do those things. And even if they make unreasonable requests like Tim's teacher, 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, doing the job they've asked us to do. Now, this will mark us out as different, won't it?

I mean, the world offers all sorts of ways to get back at our bosses or teachers or lecturers, from using all the milk in the fridge so there's none left for their coffee, to calling in sick out of spite, or for some kids they are muting their teacher's mic with online schooling to get them back.

There's even on the next slide there an article which speaks about 17 employees who use 17 different ways to get revenge on their boss.

[21 : 11] One of them put a device that beeped loudly, like the battery is low beep, put it in that, hit it in his boss's office to drive her mad, and apparently it worked.

But imagine if your colleagues saw your boss speak to you rudely or do something bad, harsh, and while you agree your boss was completely out of line, and that you might report it, you still decided, no, I'm not going to take revenge.

I'm going to keep doing my job to the best of my ability. Wouldn't that mark you out as different?

Might that lead your colleagues to ask, why would you do that?

And perhaps even give you an opportunity to say, well, God wants us not to take revenge, but to do good. You see, we're to do good by submitting for God's sake.

That people might turn from being accusers of Christians to God glorifiers. Of course, this is not easy. I mean, I know someone from our church whose boss yelled at them last week without good reason, and I was angry for them.

[22 : 25] I couldn't believe it. How dare you do that to her? We find it hard even when it's not us. How much more so those when it is the us.

And so to help, Peter reminds us in verse 19, he says, Here, if we endure unjust suffering for the sake of God, you know, being conscious that we serve him, then we're told it is commendable in his sight.

We find favor in his eyes. We please him. Make him proud, if you like. Why? Is it because God finds enjoyment in our unjust suffering?

Of course not. It's because we are acting like his precious son, who himself suffered unjustly. You see verse 21?

He says, Here Peter quotes parts from our first reading.

[24 : 08] from Isaiah 53 and sees it fulfilled in Jesus. For he suffered unjustly at the hands of authorities, didn't he? Like the Jewish council who held that kangaroo court and produced false witnesses, do you remember?

Or like the governor, Pilate, who knew Jesus was innocent, yet still sentenced him to death anyway? Can you imagine how hard it must have been for Christ?

Here he is, God the Son, the Lord over all these human authorities, and yet they spit, lie, whip, and sentence him to death.

I mean, could there be any greater miscarriage of justice? Could there be any greater misuse of authority? How does Jesus respond? Well, he did not retaliate.

He didn't seek revenge. Even with his mouth, we're told, which is the really hard part, isn't it? I mean, how easy is it to tear down our bosses and teachers and lecturers when they are unreasonable or harsh to us?

[25 : 19] You know, call them names behind their back. But Jesus didn't. Instead, he endured unjust suffering, and he entrusted himself to God, God who will judge these bad bosses on the last day.

They will get theirs. But that's God's job then. Our job now is to follow in Christ's footsteps. And we should be familiar with this at the moment because there's these footstep things all around the place, like on your screens.

You know, the footsteps outside supermarkets like Coles, where we have to follow them around to keep the social distancing and so on. Well, we had to follow in Christ's footsteps, enduring unjust suffering, doing good by submitting, and entrusting ourselves to God who will judge them justly on the last day.

And you notice, we ought to do this not just because Jesus did it, but because he did it for us, for you and for me. Do you see verse 24?

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.

[26 : 43] 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, entrusted for us, for you, that we might be spiritually healed or forgiven, that we might die to sin, or as we heard before, abstain from sinful desires, and instead live a righteous or good life.

And so, the last bit of application is, do we submit, even if we suffer unjustly? For we are foreigners in this world, like tourists passing through, who are to stand out by our good deeds, not for goodness sake, but for God's sake.

Let's pray that we would. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, as foreigners and exiles in this world, please help us to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against our souls. Help us to live such good lives, among the non-Christians of this world, that though they accuse us of doing wrong, they may see our good deeds, and glorify you on the last day. Help us, we pray, to follow in Christ's footsteps, to have his mind, for we ask it in his name. Amen.