

Living Godly Lives before Unbelievers, Part 1

1 Peter 2:11-25

16 August 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: How do we live as strangers in this world?

Big Idea: Live in a way that won't give Christ a bad name amongst unbelievers.

Introduction

Jesse McDonald's family have been show-people for five generations.

He's known as the Dagwood Dog Guy.

With all of the agricultural shows for the rest of the year being cancelled, he's one of the people who've lost their livelihood to COVID.

To bring in some income, he's set up his trailer on the edge of his property down on Blunder Road at Doolandella.

He's been doing an absolute roaring trade.

Every time I drive home, I see cars parked everywhere out the front... and that's the problem.

People have complained to the council about the danger of people crossing such a busy road without a crossing and cars barking on the street.

Other re-tail businesses nearby think he's barking up the wrong tree and that he should have to jump through all the hoops they did.

Council have told him that he's fur-bidden from selling stuff on the roadside, but the Dagwood Dog Guy thinks that's a bit ruff.

He won't come to heel because he thinks they're just being pugs.

The state government rejected his application and he says that the council's alternative suggestions aren't paw-sible.¹

So, he's continuing to operate regardless.

What's the right thing to do if you're a show-person who just wants to be able to put food on the table?

What's the right thing to do if you're the council, who're responsible for keeping people safe?

It's tricky and I can see it from both sides.

How much should the rules be bent in these challenging times?

Let's go one step further.

What if – and I've got absolutely no idea if he is – the Dagwood Dog Guy is a Christian?

Would faith in Jesus make any difference to what he should do?

How does faith in Jesus change the way that we live in this world?

Outline

Dave's exposition of the prodigal son last week was a breath of fresh air.

It was an important reminder of God's costly forgiveness to both self-indulgent and self-righteous sinners.

This week, we're back in 1 Peter, which is all about living for Jesus in sight of the end.

The break happened at just the right time because we'd finished the first section of the letter, which's all about living as people who've been chosen.

In chapter one and the first part of chapter two, Peter unpacked what it means to live in relation to God and others in the church.

Today we're beginning a new section that goes from 2:11 through to 4:11.

The focus of this section is on how to live in exile, how to live as strangers in this world.

Living for Jesus means that our highest priority is living for God's glory, but to people who aren't living with Jesus as their king, that looks really strange.

It's not hard to understand why they might be a bit suspicious, perhaps even a little bit hostile, to people who believe the gospel.

For the last couple of centuries, Christianity has strongly influenced Western societies like Australia.

Up until fifty or sixty years ago, it was normal for most people in this country to call themselves Christians.

But times have changed and there are a growing number of 'nones' – people who don't think of themselves as being religious.

There's also been a shift in all sorts of areas of life so that principles that were just a given two generations ago are now typically viewed as strange – either quaint or downright dangerous.

How do we live as Christians when the cultural tide is against us?

When most of the people you see at the school gate are on a different page?

When the people you rub shoulders with (of course, we don't do that anymore) at work have a very different view of the world to what you do?

When your friends have very different goals in life?

Peter wrote this letter to churches in the Roman empire who were facing exactly that situation.

He wrote to people who were a bit strange because they believed in Jesus.

People discriminated against because of their faith, looked down upon by some and called names and generally thought to be weird.

Remember that at this point, the persecution was probably quite mild although it was likely to ramp up in the future.

Good Lives before Unbelievers (v11-12)

Verses eleven and twelve act like a bit of a heading, explaining the ideas that'll be unpacked in this section.

Those two verses are a summary of how to live as strangers in the world.

Here's the main point that Peter wants to make in this section: **As strangers in the world, glorify God by fighting sin and doing good.**

How do you live for Jesus as a stranger?

One option is to bunker down: pull up the drawbridge, cut yourself off from the rest of the world and have nothing to do with them.

That's been a common response from Christians throughout history and it causes the church to suffocate when she loses sight of her mission.

Another option is to come out all-guns blazing to fight the culture wars.

Demand that everyone in the world lives according to the maker's manual and then watch as they laugh in your face.

Both of those approaches assume that the problem is "out there" – THEY need to be fixed!

Peter's approach is totally different and it's confronting for us because it goes to the heart of the problem.

How do we live as strangers in the world? We need to put sin to death.

I need to focus on my own sinful desires rather than the sin out there somewhere.

As Christians living as strangers, we need to be fighting the battle that goes on in our hearts.

Verse eleven:

1 Peter 2:11 NIV11 ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

Don't be under any illusion: we're in a war.

Every day, we're in a war against our own sinful desires which are out to destroy us.

It's an intense, bloody and brutal war going on inside us all the time.

A war that we'll fight every single day from the time we first repent and believe in Jesus until the day that we die.

Man, how I wish that I'd get more godly just by breathing.

I wish I could be exactly like Jesus without making painful mistakes, without hurting myself and others.

Fighting sin is exhausting and sometimes it feels like it's overwhelming and it'd be easier to just go with the flow.

The enemy is sneaky and effective.

Sometimes he uses all-out assault but often his most effective weapon is seduction, "Go back to what you were doing and life will be easier and much more comfortable. You'll just fit in with everyone else."

On the night he was arrested, Jesus' prayed for his disciples, knowing that the world would hate them.

He sent them on a mission to share his love in his world anyway.

How did he pray for them?

He didn't pray that the world would stop hating them, but that they would be protected from the evil one and become holy. **{DP}**

John 17:15, 17-18 NIV11 ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but **that you protect them from the evil one.**
¹⁷ **Sanctify them** by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

That's number one: as we live as strangers, we need to keep fighting the war against our own sin.

The second principle as we live as strangers is to do good, verse twelve.

Live good lives.

Live so honourably amongst the pagans/gentiles/outsideers that they will see your life and know that absolutely nothing's up that needs to be hidden.

Live in such a way that you're known for doing good.

What's a good life though? After all, isn't that the problem?

Believers are strangers because we've got different ideas to others about what 'good' actually is?

Doing good doesn't necessarily mean people will agree with you on everything or that they won't fault you or even that they won't slander you.

In fact, if you're living as a stranger in this world then expect to be told that what you believe is evil and that what you believe is toxic and will harm other people.

While there will inevitably be things we disagree on, there's usually a much bigger list of things that we agree on as being good.

As human beings, we usually like to stereotype each other and put one another in nice, neat categories.

If you're living for Jesus AND living a good, morally beautiful life, you'll break those categories.

It will make some people stop and scratch their heads as they wonder, "How can someone who believes such dangerous ideas be so good?"

How could a Christian believe these things and yet be such a good person in so many other ways?

When Nero says that the burning city should be blamed on those crazy Christians, that they stop and think, "Hang on a second, that doesn't tally with my experience."

Christians should expect to be accused of doing the wrong thing, simply for being Christians.

That's a reality today for believers in some parts of the world.

The Christian organisation OpenDoors has reported on the persecution being faced by some Christians in Colombia at the moment.²

They write:

"The situation is worse than ever. Because of their animist beliefs, communities are now convinced that the coronavirus outbreak is a punishment sent by their deities for allowing Christians to live in their midst."

"Certain ethnic groups believe that the conversion of Christianity by a member of their community destroys the harmony with the spiritual realm and, as such, brings all sorts of disasters such as droughts, famine, illness and death. For this reason, they do not hesitate to imprison them and force them to renounce their faith."

"We have heard from our partners in the north that two Christians were taken to jail... They simply met, as they always do, to praise Jesus."

Christians are being blamed for bringing on disasters like Coronavirus which seems almost unbelievable to me.

We know that it's not them worshipping Christ that brings these disasters, but how can Columbian Christians defend themselves against that charge?

Their best defence isn't taking their faith into hiding or trying to fight.

It's living good lives – fighting sin and doing good.

When they see Christians leading the charge to help those who are sick, then people will notice that something doesn't compute.

Notice what the goal for them seeing your good deeds is NOT though.

It's so easy for us to get caught up with what people think of us.

The point isn't just to be SEEN to be doing the right thing.

And the point isn't so that people will think that you're a good person, either.

It's not even just about making sure that people don't have a reason to think badly of people of faith.

The hope is that they'll defrost in relation to the gospel and glorify God, verse twelve.

This's intended to aid mission as the good deeds in our lives serve as a giant, but silent, signpost pointing to God himself.

Some people will see those good works and that will lead them to salvation, so that they'll be saved on the last day.³

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his disciples to live as salt and light – distinctively and brightly in the world so that people would glorify God. **{DP}**

Matthew 5:16 NIV11 ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

As we live as strangers, we're to live such exemplary lives that although we'll be accused of evil, our good works will point to God.

If you're thinking, "But I don't know how to do that!" then don't worry, because Peter's about to explain what that looks like.

He puts legs on to this by explaining what this looks like in real life.

Abstaining from evil and doing good means submitting to others, even when that's difficult and even unfair.

You can sum up what he says in these examples like this: **Live in a way that won't give Christ a bad name amongst unbelievers.**

Our responsibility as Christians isn't to cause chaos by turning the world upside down.

That's a recipe for living in self-autonomous rebellion against God, just living however you want.

For the sake of Jesus, we live in the social structures that are in place so that Christ doesn't get a bad name amongst unbelievers.

Our commitment to living good lives for the sake of Jesus will point people to him.

I think Peter very deliberately chose three real, perhaps even extreme, examples to make his point.

We're going to look at two of them this morning and we'll save the last one for next week.

- To the government
- As slaves
- In marriage

Submitting to the Government

Not so long ago, submitting to the government probably seemed like a bit of a no-brainer to many of us even though it's a topic that comes up a few times in the Bible.⁴

Australians like to have a whinge about our government, but on the whole we've got much better leaders than at other times in history.

But we know over the last few months that many of us have been forced to think about this again.

Peter's point is clear enough: Submit to every human authority.

Jesus is king over everyone and everything, but it's precisely because of our faith in Jesus that we obey everyone from the top dog (in Peter's day that was the emperor) all the way down to the most officious, junior council officer.

That means paying your taxes – giving to Caesar what's Caesar's, like Jesus said.⁵

It also means you follow planning laws, having good workplace health and safety, and keeping to the speed limit.

Verse 13:

1 Peter 2:13 NIV11 ¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority

God's given governments an important role.

They've been put in place by God to restrain evil by punishing those who do the wrong thing, verse fourteen.

The vast majority of laws that our government makes – without any reference to God whatsoever – are about restraining evil.

Following the rules they've made is a good way of helping us to restrain evil in our own lives.

And don't forget that they've also been given the job of praising what's good.

In the Roman Empire, people were rewarded for doing good with statues and inscriptions in public places.

Today, our governments still have awards ceremonies to honour people who do good.

What if the government isn't Christian or doesn't uphold Christian values though?

I don't think Peter was so naïve that he was suggesting that governments will always do the right thing.

They'll bring in ridiculous laws like the Queensland government did this week.

I understand that there have been tragic cases of abuse, but saying that a medical practitioner can't question someone's gender identity is just going to lead to even more abuse.

Governments won't always side with what's right according to God.

As a Jew who knew his Old Testament, Peter knew that governments would be anti-God in all sorts of ways.

And remember that he was writing from the city of Rome, capital of a cruel and brutal empire.

He likens it to being in Babylon in 5:13.

Peter wasn't a fan of the government, and yet he says to follow them whether we like them or not.

We often approach this thinking that you've got to choose: either you follow the government OR your follow God's will.

Yet submitting to the authorities – even though they're just human beings – IS God's will.

It's because we're strange people who follow Jesus that we submit to the government, not because they get everything right.

It's for the Lord's sake, verse thirteen.

We need to be careful of setting ourselves up as the only authority we'll listen to.

Sinful hearts will always be drawn to that kind of thinking because that's the core of sin.

Sin is setting ourselves up as the ultimate rulers, the supreme authority, the ones who get to decide truth.

Sin is saying, "I'll decide what's right and wrong, so God, the authorities, other people can just butt out."

God's will isn't that other people can talk to the hand because the face isn't listening.

It's to do good, verse fifteen, and that means submitting to the authority of human institutions.

And going out of your way to go above and beyond what a reasonable person would do to help.

Good deeds is a way that Christians can still be known, even when we don't have a platform to speak from or influence in the government.

WE know that churches are essential because Jesus alone has the words of eternal life and power to change sinful hearts.

We can shout that from the rooftops as much as we want, but for churches to be deemed essential by the rest of society, we need to BE essential.

Or would what we're doing make absolutely no difference if it wasn't to happen?

I'm not saying that we go soft on the gospel or that we allow our mission to drift, but doing good in the world is an important part of that mission as we live as strangers in the world.

If it is, it will silence the objections of people who don't know God.

Let me also clarify, the principle here isn't that you have unquestioning obedience, blind loyalty and unthinkingly follow along.

We live in a democracy where our voice can be heard if we speak up.

And, you might be thinking, isn't Peter one of the ones who said, "We must obey God rather than human beings!"⁶

Yup. Did Peter change his mind over time?

The NIV & CSB say to submit to "every human authority" or "institution" in the ESV & NASB.

A more literal translation is "every human creature".

In Roman thinking, the Caesar was the son of a god.

It started with Augustus and later emperors were deemed to be gods and they had temples built for themselves around the empire.

By saying these so-called gods are creatures, Peter's taking a subtle but important dig at them.

The emperor of Rome didn't get everything right and neither will our leaders.

That doesn't just mean we should just ignore what the authorities say when we think they've got it wrong.

When we do that, it causes anarchy as everyone does what's right in their own eyes.

We see the results of exactly that in the last chapters of the book of Judges and it's stomach-turning.

We're living in very tricky times.

We know that our leaders have been inconsistent in what they've done.

They're going to make mistakes and while we can focus on the negative, there's also lots of things they're going to do well.

They need wisdom and courage.

How exactly do you balance people's health with the future of our country's economy?

It's good for Christians to be thoughtful and have opinions about these things.

It's also really easy to sit on the sidelines when you're not the one making the decisions.

I've been praying for our leaders more over the last couple of months than ever in my life because they need it.

But what if you're directed to do something that's evil?

What if you're not allowed to worship the Lord?

And we know that there are places in the world where that's happening right now.

We should be seeking to do all we can to follow the rules and only disobey the government if there's absolutely no other choice.

What this passage DOESN'T mean is that the government has to butt out and can't tell you what to do.

It's reasonable that the government has something to say about keeping people safe.

We follow the rules they put in place all the time by following fire codes, rules about parking and food safety – even in the church.

And rightly so.

We know that there are churches who are “peacefully protesting” by defying the government and going about doing what they want.

I'm a nobody, certainly not a spiritual giant, but I honestly don't get it.

If you're meeting because you think this virus numbers are so small, then that's putting yourself above the expert authorities God's put in place.

It concerns me if you put out a statement that doesn't say anything about loving your neighbour because that seems fundamental to doing good.

If you're allowed to gather as a church outdoors, I really don't understand how you can tell the government that you're going to keep meeting in your church building regardless because that's what you've always done.

We need to be careful of claiming that it's persecution when the government isn't picking on churches in particular and giving them restrictions that are unreasonably tighter than elsewhere, then defy him.

In light of this passage, and especially with a robust doctrine of sin, the onus is on us to be really slow to play the "God's way, not man's card."

The exception – something that will happen in a small number of cases – can't become the rule.

In the vast majority of cases, submitting to the government IS God's will, so we obey the authorities that God has put in place.

It's not helpful, in fact, it's NOT following the Bible if you look like you're trying to overthrow or ignore the government which God's put in place.

So, it must ONLY be in the very rarest of cases, when we truly have absolutely no other option, that we defy the government.

Doing anything else is a bad witness to those who are around us.

If we're just sticking to our rights, we've missed the point of what Peter's saying here.

If we go about using our freedom to do what we want, then we're anarchists.

Even a bad government is better than no government at all, and so Peter says that we should submit to them.

We're called to live in a way that won't give Christ a bad name amongst unbelievers.

At the same time, just because a government says something's good doesn't mean that it is.

Don't say, "It's the law, therefore it must be okay."

There are lots of evil things which our governments affirm which God doesn't.

Destroying people's lives through gambling addictions because of the revenue it brings in for clubs and the piddly amount that's given back to the community in grants.

Addictive death sticks which are allowed to be sold to people because the tax on them is so attractive.

The government says that it's safe to go to a brothel as long as it's regulated by them, regardless of how that messes with relationships.

You are slaves to God, verse sixteen.

Our freedom is the freedom to live as God's slaves.

It's not a freedom without any limits which justifies us doing evil.

Don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil.

That's a great summary in verse seventeen.

Love your brothers in sisters in Christ.

In Peter's letter, the only one you fear is God himself.

You don't fear intimidation,⁷ you don't fear the emperor.

You fear God and you honour the emperor.

1 Peter 2:17 NIV11 ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.

Removing evil and doing good looks like submitting to the government as much as we possibly can, even when they get things wrong.

Submitting to Masters

Peter turns to the second relationship where submission was expected, demanded even, in the ancient world.

It's the situation of slaves and masters.

It's hard for us to get our head around what slavery was like in the first century because it really was a mixed bag.

People estimate that up to 40% of people were slaves from being born into slavery, kidnapped or captured in war.

Some slaves were very badly treated and were made to work in rough and dangerous jobs like down the mines.

Other slaves, like the ones Peter's talking to, worked in households.⁸

Many of them had quite good lives as teachers and doctors, they were often better educated than their masters.

Peter says that slaves need to submit to their masters.

Not that you really get a choice, since that's what being a slave means.

And you don't get a choice just because you're a Christian either.

God is our new master and it's out of fear for him that you submit to your earthly master, if you're a slave.

That's all very well if they're a good master, but what if they're a bad one?

Peter says that it doesn't matter.

Even the morally bankrupt ones should be submitted to.

In fact, you gain God's favour if you endure for suffering when you're treated badly without any reason whatsoever.

Not that all suffering is unjust.

Don't congratulate yourself and wear suffering as a badge of honour if you did something wrong to deserve it.

We all do that, don't we?

Something goes wrong and we want to say that it's not our fault, blame it on someone else and call it unfair.

Verse 20:

1 Peter 2:20 NIV11 ²⁰ 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.

How do you feel about that?

It seems so unjust, so unfair, doesn't it?

Is God so nasty that he wants to see his children suffer unjustly and calls it good?

No, that's not the case at all.

The point is that when you do good and suffer for it, don't think you should stop doing it because it feels like it's the wrong thing.

Press on and keep doing good and God will be the one who'll reward you for it, even when no one else does. When you suffer unjust suffering for Jesus' sake, then you will find favour with God.

God's impressed even if the boss isn't.

Slavery is very much alive and well in our world, but it's not what most of us experience.

Going to work just isn't the same as slavery.

Your boss doesn't really own you and you can move your job whenever you want.

But it's the closest thing we have to this situation and this passage still speaks into it.

You can't decide what you are and aren't going to do at work, rather submitting to an employer is expected.

This isn't permission to go and do whatever you want just because you're a Christian.

You can't refuse to type a letter just because your boss is evil.

In the normal course of events, you need to do what your boss tells you to do.

Work as to the Lord, which is being a good witness for Christ.

There might well be times when you get into trouble for doing the right thing.

I know of people who've gone out of their way to help a customer and been chastised for it.

When I worked in service stations, we got chastised and pressured because we refused to sell pornography – how could you lose all those sales?

When that happens, know that the Lord will commend you.

Not that it's fun working for a difficult master, though.

Working for those who are harsh, not just good, is really rough.

Especially when you work in a small industry where questions will be asked if you leave or move on.

It's easy to feel trapped and that's when you need to remember this passage.

It's really interesting that he doesn't say that they should overturn the social system.

Slavery is a man-made idea that isn't ever encouraged in the Bible, but it is regulated.

The first thing on Peter's agenda wasn't social reform.

Overhauling social structures won't transform cultures.

Instead, Peter points slaves to Jesus as our example.

The reason that Peter gives for suffering unjustly is because Jesus has suffered for you.

We follow in his footsteps and he's the example of how we should live, verse 21.

It's no coincidence that he starts quoting from the SERVANT song, particularly Isaiah 53.

Jesus was the sinless son of God.

He did absolutely nothing wrong in his whole life.

He didn't lie, steal or cheat.

Jesus handed over every facet of his life to the Lord.

And yet he was condemned to die as a criminal on the cross.

The soldiers jeered and played games with.

They teased him about being king, even putting a crown of thorns on his head.

And yet Jesus, the one who could've called down the troops from heaven to aid him did nothing in response.

He didn't climb down from the cross and call it quits, instead he suffered unjustly.

He did good – he did what the Father wanted and needed to happen to save us.

Jesus went to the cross so that he could love his enemies.

Those soldiers who mocked him? Jesus died so that they could be forgiven.

In fact, Jesus said: **{DP}**

Luke 23:34 NIV11 ³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

And we're no different from the soldiers.

If I was there, I reckon there's a really good chance that I would've been there with the crowd, joining in.

Jesus was so willing to do good, so full of grace and mercy, that he was willing to lay down his life so that sinners could be called righteous.

How unfair is that?

He was willing to be wounded so that you and I could be healed.

Verse 24:

1 Peter 2:24 NIV11 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."

But it wasn't unjust.

We were going astray and our sin needed to be paid for.

So Jesus suffered unjustly for us.

We're following our saviour when we do the same.

Now, Jesus has called us back into his fold.

He's the shepherd who watches out for us and guides us and directs us.

We have a greater master whom we're working for, a good master who gives us real joy in serving him.

There's always a danger in a 'do' sermon that we think that this's all down to us.

It's not.

The cross was never far away for Peter and it can't be for us either.

Being branded with suffering for doing good is to be branded with Christ.

Suffering for doing good is the ear tag that shows we belong to Jesus.

Not because this earns us our way to him, but because in doing this we're like him.

We follow after Jesus in submitting even to those who are unjust.

Conclusion

How do we live as strangers in this world?

We put to death evil and do good.

By living in a way that won't give Christ a bad name amongst unbelievers.

That means submitting to our government, even when we think they're wrong.

And slaves submitting to their masters, even when its unjust.

So that people might see our good deeds and praise our father in heaven.

¹ 'Dagwood Dog Vendor's Street-Side Set-up Forced to Shut up Shop due to Traffic Concerns', 22 July 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-22/brisbane-dagwood-dog-vendor-told-to-move/12472288>.

² Open Doors Australia, 'Colombia | Christians Blamed For COVID-19', Open Doors Australia, accessed 14 August 2020, <https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/prayer-news/colombia-christians-blamed-for-covid-19/>.

³ There's some debate about whether the day of visitation refers to salvation or judgment. It seems to be more likely to be salvation. Jeremiah uses the same language to speak of the day that God brings his people back from exile – Jeremiah 29. However, the day of salvation also seems to be seen as being future.

⁴ See also Romans 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1.

⁵ Matthew 22:21

⁶ Acts 5:29

⁷ 1 Peter 3:6, 14.

⁸ Peter is talking about 'household servants' here, not just slaves in general.

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Big Question: How do we live as strangers in this world?

Big Idea: Live in a way that won't give Christ a bad name amongst unbelievers.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Peter mean by calling his friends "strangers and exiles" (verse eleven)?
2. What does living a good life look like?
3. What will be the outcomes of Christians living good lives?
4. If we were living in the Roman Empire in the first century, would the emperor be our supreme authority? Why/why not?
5. Why does God put governments in place?
6. How could Christian freedom be twisted to cover up evil?
7. Is all suffering unjust?
8. Why would God want people to suffer unjustly?
9. Why should Christian slaves submit to harsh masters?