

Living In This World As Elect Exiles

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[0 : 00] Well, if your Bible is open, you can turn again to 1 Peter chapter 2 and we're going to read from verse 9 to 25.

1 Peter chapter 2 from verse 9 to 25. Peter writes, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners in exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

[1 : 07] For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover up for evil, but living as servants of God.

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.

This is a gracious thing, when mindful of God one endures sorrow while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?

But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. Go to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

He committed no sin, neither was the seat found in his mouth. When he was reviled he did not revile in return. When he suffered he did not threaten, but continued in trusting himself to him who judges justly.

[2 : 15] He himself bore our sin in his body on the tree, that we may die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you are straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

Amen. Well the question I want to begin with is what impression do we make on the world as we pass through? What impression do we make on the world as we pass through?

Most of us have walked at some point along the sands in Dalmore or Dalbeg and as you walk along the wet sand your feet will sink down and as you go across the beach you can look behind you and you can see the impression of where your trainers or your shoes, the impression that they've left in the wet sand.

And if you're going back and forth, back and forth along the beach, you see not only your footprints, but the footprints of tens, twenty other people all stretched out across the beach from the past few hours.

The impressions that each one of us make in the sand. But what impression then do you make in the world as you pass through it? What impression do we make as a church as we pass through this world?

[3 : 30] In his first letter Peter reminds followers of Jesus that they are elect exiles. That was a term that we thought a little bit about last year.

What does it mean for the Christian to be an exile? The Christian is elect exile, they're elect in that they've been chosen by God. They're part of his people, they're citizens of his kingdom, they belong to Jesus.

But at the same time a Christian is an exile because they belong with Jesus in his kingdom. That means they don't belong in this world. They're just passing through the world's not our home. However, that doesn't mean that Christians should ignore the world. While the world is not our home, God doesn't intend us to hole up in a nuclear bunker and wait for Christ's return. He doesn't intend us to escape and join a monastery and have nothing to do with the world or just form a Christian bubble in our communities. Rather God intends that as we pass through this world, we make an impression on the world.

[4 : 29] And as we'll see, Peter says that our new identity should make an impression so deep that it will lead to God being glorified on the day of Christ's return.

We're going to look first of all at the principle in general that Peter teaches us before seeing how and what God has to teach us from two examples that Peter gives.

First the principle which we draw from verses 11 and 12. You are different, so live differently in this world so that God will be glorified.

You are different, so live differently in this world so that God will be glorified. Let's just unpack that. You are different. Notice Peter starts by saying in verse 11, beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles, underpinning everything that Peter's about to say is the identity that Christians have.

The identity of the church, whether it's scattered back in Asia Minor, the people he was writing to or the church in Carly today or anywhere else in Scotland or in the world.

[5 : 32] Who we are determines how we should live and we could spend whole sermons looking at what Peter just says at the beginning of chapter 2. There are some really amazing and important statements there about who the church is.

For example in verse 5, Peter speaks of the church as the living temple of God. You might say that God loves us so much that he wants us to be not just with him as family, but we are his dwelling place for eternity.

Or in verses 9 and 10 which we read, Peter describes the church as the chosen people of God. Look how rich some of those words are. He says, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.

We might not realize it, but as we go through those verses, there's a firework of God's promises being fulfilled there as Peter's drawing together all these lines from the Old Testament and saying to the church, you are God's people.

You are the fulfillment and expectation of everything that God has been working for and through Jesus Christ that has now come to a head through his death and resurrection as he has saved you and brought you into God's family.

[6 : 50] The bottom line is that through Jesus' death and resurrection, God has created something new. He has created this holy temple. He has created this new family.

And tell you what, those words must have been a real boost to the people that Peter was writing to. I don't know if you noticed from chapter 1, these are people who are facing persecution.

They're facing opposition. They're scattered not just because they live in different places, but because life as a Christian was hard. They feel like that they are exiles.

They feel like they don't belong and they're being made to feel it as well. So these words would have been a real boost to the discouraged and persecuted Christians. And I'm sure they will be for us as well.

But Peter didn't just write them for them to be, I don't know, stuck up on a wall as a motivational quote to lift our spirits. Who we are should affect how we live.

[7 : 48] That new identity as God's chosen people as a holy temple, that means, yes, we no longer belong to the world. Yes it means we're exiles to journey. Yes it means we're passing through.

You might say, to think about passing through, you might think it's like shepherds moving to a new grazing ground, like people just traveling through the airport. But that doesn't mean that we should just be cut off from the world and ignore the world.

Peter says, you are different and so live differently in the world. Now, both parts of that statement is important. Live differently and in the world.

Let me just show you where they come from in verses 11 and 12. We are different, so we must live differently. That's the big emphasis of verse 11.

Peter says, beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. As Christians, we no longer belong to sin.

[8 : 49] We belong not to sin but to a God who is holy, holy, holy, who has ransomed us from sin by the precious God blood of Jesus. Instead, we are to be a holy nation, a kingdom of priests set apart, belonging exclusively to God, something beautiful that are reserved for his worship and for his praise.

So Peter says, you don't belong here, just like you worship a God who is separate from sin, so you too are to be separate from sin. You are to abstain from the passions of the flesh.

Be who you are, not what you were. In the summer I was in London and I don't know if you've been in London. There's lots of markets that you can go to. I went to Camden Market.

And as you walk through those narrow lanes, you've got street vendors on all sides trying to get your attention, shouting of you to come over to their stall, holding out skewers with bits of meat on it and stuff.

I went around the stalls numerous times to get as many tasters as I could. And they have like, you know, then they'll also be displaying their wares, you know, boards full of glittering jewelry outside the shop.

[10 : 00] Now we could use that as some kind of illustration for the Christian life, that as we travel through this world, we are assaulted on all sides by temptations to sin.

But that would only be to tell half the story. Sin isn't just a problem out there. It's also a problem in here. Notice Peter says abstain from the passions of the flesh.

He doesn't just say, make sure you don't get burned. Don't make sure you don't get tempted by the stuff out there. If sin was just a problem out there, it would be much easier to deal with it, wouldn't it be?

It would actually make total sense to just build a monastery and go and live there and cut yourself off from the world and cut yourself off from sin. But sin is in our flesh.

The reformer John Calvin said that our hearts are like idle factories. And sin isn't there just lying there passively. Do you notice how Peter describes it? He says, the passions of your flesh which wage war against your souls.

[11 : 05] Sin isn't, no sin is just harmless. There is no kind of little indulgence in some kind of respectable sin. Even any kind of little indulgence is an attack against our very souls.

Sin is aggressive. It's destructive. And Peter saying the front line is right there in our hearts. When our pride begins to inflate, that's where the fight is.

When the roots of bitterness begin to grow, that's where the fight is. We've got to think more about the fight here unless, ooh, we've got to stay away from the yucky sinful world outside.

Peter says, this is where the fight is. The fight is in your hearts. The passions of the flesh are out there all right, but you don't need to be on the internet or go to a bar to lust.

You don't need to be on social media to start coveting what other people have and getting jealous. You don't need to be talking with non-Christians to gossip. All of those things spring up from our hearts.

[12 : 09] The battle to abstain from sin is a battle for our hearts. It's a battle for our affections. And it's a constant battle. When Peter says abstain, that word is present tense.

It's continuous. We've got to keep abstaining from the passions of the flesh. The passions of the flesh will never stop waging war on us. And so we can never let our guard down.

So first part of the principle, so live differently, but live differently in this world. As Christians, we're a holy nation to God. We're to live differently, but we don't yet live in our eternal home.

We are living in this world even while we're passing through it. We are sojourners in this world. And so while the front line is in our hearts, the fight to abstain from the passions of the flesh will be seen and should be seen in how we interact and how we live in this world around us.

And verse 12, we see this. Peter says, keep your conduct among the Gentiles, in other words, those who aren't Christians, honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

[13 : 24] Keep your conduct honourable. Now we don't use that word honourable much maybe, but it carries that sense of noble, of praiseworthy, even beautiful.

And I think those, seeing the different ways in which we could define that are helpful. Honourable carries that sense of being without fault. As Peter says, people can find no fault in their lives, but also carries that sense of beauty.

I think there is to be something attractive about the Christian life. There should be a pull when people see Christians living like Christ.

Did you notice Peter's two assumptions though in the verse? First Christians will face hostility.

Verse 12, he says, when they speak against you as evildoers, not if, not maybe, but when?

And his second assumption is that Christians will have good deeds that are visible. So when people speak against you, when they'll actually see instead that you leave honourable lives and there'll be no room for any kind of legitimate charge of bad behaviour, a Christian should be above reproach.

[14:37] The beauty of their good deeds will be held out to the world rather than opportunities to point the finger and notice hypocrisy.

And all of this leads to God being glorified. You are different, so live differently in this world so that God will be glorified. It goes without saying that God is glorified as we abstain from sin and live honourable lives as his people.

But the surprise in verse 12 is who else is doing the glorified? Do you notice, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and you could even adder they and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Peter's expectation is that the church will live such honourable and good and attractive lives that their opponents will think again about rejecting Jesus when they see how they're living.

They'll even be one for Christ as they see, as they're speaking against them, as they're looking to find fault and they begin to think, maybe they're in the right.

[15:48] Maybe they do actually have something here. Maybe I do need to think again about Jesus. And Peter's vision, Peter's ambition is that these people who are once opponents will one day be part of that great crowd glorifying Christ on the day he returns.

Peter isn't saying that people will be simply saved by watching Christians' lives. We know from chapter 1 verse 23, people are saved by the word.

It's God's word that gives new birth. But our lives, godly living, can lay the table, can give such a good welcome, can cause people to ask questions, can build a friendship across which we can share the gospel, we can share those words for life, those words of life that bring people to know Jesus.

Just think about how powerful the hope is that Peter is offering. He's saying to persecuted Christians that the very people who are opposing you might be converted as a direct result of your behavior, that how you act and in this moment of suffering isn't inconsequential.

In fact, it could have eternal consequences in bringing people from death to life. You might think even if someone is going for months unable to share the gospel with people, even if they're at work and there's no opportunities to tell people about Jesus.

[17:27] Peter's saying even in that difficult environment, your good deeds will cause God to be glorified. So the principle, you are different, so live differently in this world so that God will be glorified.

That's the principle. And now in verses 13 to 25, Peter gives two examples of putting this into practice. Don't worry if you're looking at the time, we're not going to spend that time all on two verses.

We're not going to spend a proportional amount of time on the rest. Two examples, Christians in the government and Christians at work. We might not think immediately that these are the two examples to give, but these are the two examples that Peter knew that his readers needed to hear and that we can trust that God by his spirit thinks we need to hear as well.

So first example, Christians and the government in verses 13 to 17. Across the world and down through history, you'll find many different attitudes towards rulers and governments, won't you?

On one hand, people might deify their leaders. So at Peter's time, there was a whole Roman emperor cult where people worshiped the Roman emperor as some kind of God.

[18:40] And that's maybe the kind of devotion that some politicians would only dream of here. They spend most of their lives being ripped apart by the media with zero respect, being mocked and disparaged, and they might just settle for even being liked.

You've got a whole spectrum of how leaders are seen from being deified from to being vilified. But followers of Jesus are different, and so we should live differently.

And in these verses, Peter challenges both extremes. Verse 17, I think, is a really good summary. He says honor the emperor, but he doesn't say worship him.

Christians are called to live differently by honoring their leaders, but not by worshiping them. What does that look like in practice, though? Let me just read verses 13 and 14 again.

Peter says, be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

[19 : 43] Governors are to subject themselves to the institutions in society because they've been put there by God. Do you notice that? The governors who are sent by him, God has placed leaders in society for good in order to keep law and order.

And so Peter's saying Christians should subject themselves to these rulers, shouldn't seek to subvert and to undermine the authorities that God has put in place, but to keep the laws of the land. Now when most of us hear that, I think many of us at least will immediately jump to thinking, well, what if the government is telling us to do something that is against God's law?

And Peter isn't calling for unquestionable and unconditional obedience, is he? In verse 13, he says, it's for the Lord's sake. And so when the government tells us to do something, or tells us to do something that God's law forbids, like murder, or when it tells us not to do something that God's law requires, like share the gospel, then it's right to say, actually, no, I answer to a higher power.

I answer to the king of kings. I answer to the one who has put these rulers in place in the first place. But all these exceptions shouldn't take away from the force of the command.

[21 : 02] I think we're often more prone to thinking, ah, you know, but this government isn't very good or this they're telling me, you know, I disagree with their decisions or they have made some immoral decisions in this area and that area.

We're very quick to think of the exceptions. We're slow to maybe think to actually apply these things honestly, to take the force of Peter's commands and ask, where do we need to submit ourselves to the government?

Because unless the government commands disobey in Christ, they should be obeyed. Whether or not we agree with their decision, whether or not we think it's petty, whether or not they're watching. I think a classic example is speed limits.

I'm guilty of this myself. You know, we travel along over to town and there's all these 40 mile an hour speed limits on the way and we think, ah, that shouldn't be 40 miles an hour or surely that sign comes too soon or that sign, that sign is too far away and, ah, you know, it isn't really the weather for it and there's no cars around and there's certainly no police car.

There's no speed cameras. But Peter would just say, keep the speed limit. Whether or not we think it's reasonable. We are different.

[22 : 19] So we're to live differently in this world and people might think that's ludicrous. You know, it's no big deal, but Peter says, as we subject ourselves to these institutions that God has put in place, what we're doing is something that is honoring to God, honoring to those rulers and is glorifying to God.

Peter understands that the world is watching us and if they see us zooming through villages, if they hear that we're being creative with our taxes, they're rightly call us hypocrites.

However, if we seek to obey the authorities, then Peter says, for one thing, people will be silenced because they won't have a bad word to say.

But also, even just going back to verse 12 again, they will see your good deeds and they might glorify God in the day of visitation. We might think that submitting to governments is a weird place for Peter to go, but it is an area where we can live differently from the world for God's glory.

You are different, so live differently in this world so that God will be glorified. First example is government. Second example is Christians in the workplace. If there's one thing that people like less than the state, it sometimes is their boss at work unless, of course, you work for the government.

[23 : 41] However, Peter says, be subject to the government and he says, be subject to your masters. Now it's worth noting that Peter does say here, he's speaking particularly to servants or to slaves.

Now when we hear slaves, you probably immediately think of the horrific conditions that slaves were kept in in the 18th century and slavery in any age at any time is horrific and barbaric.

But we also need to recognize that first century slavery did look different to 18th century slavery. So first century slaves were sometimes even better off than free men.

Peter even acknowledges that some masters are good and gentle. And because of the dire conditions, some people actually sold themselves into slavery to get a better life. Nevertheless, life was not good as a slave.

You were defined as property, you were denied citizenship if you got married. So those of you who are married, if you were a slave, your marriage wouldn't count. And those of you who have children, your children wouldn't belong to you.

[24 : 46] And if you've ever had to give testimony in court, well if you were a slave, your testimony would only be valid if it was extracted under torture. It's no wonder that, and there's all kind of other slaves are treated harshly, it was grim being a slave.

It's no wonder that in the hundred years leading up to Jesus' life there are three big slave revolts in the Roman Empire and it was not uncommon at all for slaves to attack their masters.

That's the context into which Peter is writing. But Peter's saying that followers of Jesus are different and so they should live differently. Christian slaves should live differently.

And he commands slaves to submit to their masters with all respect in verse 18. Not just to the good ones, but also to the bad ones. And it's worth stressing just to avoid misunderstanding.

Peter is not condoning slavery or discouraging slaves from getting their freedom. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says that if you can get your freedom to slaves, then do it.

[25 : 53] And Peter would agree. He wouldn't dispute that. But what he is saying is that you're not going to completely overturn a societal structure by hitting out against your master or by starting a revolt.

You'll probably just get beaten or killed and people just conclude these Christians are anarchists. Hitting back isn't an option. But if you are a slave, Peter says, how you live, how you relate to your master, even in this difficult situation, can glorify God and can be a witness to the world.

Verse 19, Peter says, for it's a gracious thing when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. Now, that sounds like lunacy to the world.

Why would you endure suffering? For Peter saying verse 19 and verse 20, when someone endures suffering, not for something they've done wrong, but as people who are innocent, that's something that gives glory to God.

That's something that only the grace of God can empower us to do. Do you notice in verses 19 and 20 how that phrase, this gracious thing, brackets that section. It's only by God's grace and with his help that Christians can live, a Christian slave could live such a counter-cultural life and suffer unjustly.

[27 : 18] Christian slaves, Peter says, you are different, so live differently in this world that God may be glorified. Well, what's that got to do with us though, as far as I know, and I'm pretty certain none of us here are slaves.

But most of us here are employees. And most of us here, if we're not employees, we have been, or we're, our brothers and sisters in Christ are employees and we have a responsibility to help them to live as Christians in the workplace.

And the attitudes of a slave should in some ways map over to how we should relate to our bosses. Often, it's normal behavior in some workplaces to gossip about the boss, to slander him, to try to, you know, maybe work when they're watching, but when they're not, it's fine, you know, it's free for all.

But Peter's saying that Christian slaves, Christian employees, should have a different attitude towards their work, should have a different attitude towards their masters. Now, if your boss is a bully, Peter isn't saying don't talk to HR, but if and until HR intervene, and they might not, even if you're treated badly in the workplace, that Peter would say the same thing, that as we endure on an unjust boss, as we endure someone who's micromanaging us and treating us as dirt in the workplace, if we do that in a gracious way, in a way that is Christlike, we'll be pointing people to Jesus.

Jesus' death not only saves us, but also provides the blueprint, the pattern for enduring suffering. And that's what Peter then goes on to explain in this beautiful description of Jesus, Jesus's example.

[29 : 02] Let me read it again for us from verse 21. Peter says, for to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

He committed no sin, neither was the seat found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, for you are straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

These verses are packed full of references, particularly to Isaiah 53, that servant song that looks forward to Jesus as the suffering Messiah. But just notice a few of Peter's emphases.

He emphasizes Jesus' innocence. He emphasizes his integrity. He did no wrong. There was nothing, no wrongdoing, as found on his lips. Jesus wasn't even muttering curses under his breath as he was arrested.

[30 : 11] Jesus wasn't even calling down threats, or you don't know who I am, you're going to be damned to hell for doing this. There was none of that. Jesus wasn't insulting his opponents in return, rather he was entrusting himself to his father God and to the justice that God would bring.

Now I don't know about you, but when I see Jesus' example it's beautiful, isn't it? But as a standard, it's staggering, it's overwhelming almost.

You think how on earth can I endure suffering like Christ? How on earth can, when I'm treated unjustly at work or whatever, can I act like Jesus?

And I think that's why Peter doesn't just end at verse 23, he continues in verses 24 and 25. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

Jesus not only saves us, but he empowers us to live like him, to live lives of righteousness, even to endure suffering.

[31 : 15] And that won't be easy. It might be downright horrible, but it's as we follow Christ's example, as we endure suffering without hitting back in response, that the world's going to sit up and notice.

They're going to sit up and see and think, well, why are these people living differently? We're going to make an impression on this world as we pass through.

The question is what impression will we make? Will we follow in the footsteps of Jesus and make an impression like him?

We are different. So let's live differently in this world so that God may be glorified. May God help us to live such radically different lives in our communities and our workplaces that we make a deep impression as we pass through.

A noticeable impression that gives glory to God now and on the day that Christ returns. And God willing, brings many other people to bring glory to him as well.

[32 : 15] Let's pray. Amen.