

The World is a Foreign Country - We do things Differently Here

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, the world is a foreign country. We do things differently here. I don't know if you picked up. The tone has changed, hasn't it, in Peter's letter. We have turned a corner over the last few weeks. We've been hearing about the glory that we press onto you as Christians, the privilege we have in living for Christ, the great value that we have to God as chosen and precious people to him. But chapter 2, verses 11 and 12 begin to take us onto new territory, and it's rougher terrain, because if you remember way back to the very first verse of this letter, God is addressing us as elect exiles, elect exiles. So up until now in this letter, his focus has been, Peter's focus has been on who we are to God as chosen, precious elect.

But from here, his focus turns to who we are to the world. That is left out, exiles. See that there in chapter 2, verse 11? What does he call us? Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and exiles. And so if we follow Jesus, says Peter, this world is to us a foreign country, as it were. And so we do things differently here. I don't know about you, those words took me straight back to school. If they don't, for you, they are a twist on a famous opening line from a classic novel, the past is a foreign country. They do things differently there. Well, to us, says Peter, the world is a foreign country. And so we do things differently here in it.

Peter has told us that we are in exile through the setting apart of the Spirit. This world was our home, but not anymore. If you've flown the nest, moved away from home, you'll know what that feels like. You move to a new place, perhaps for a semester or a year or a few years, and then you go back home. And it feels different. It doesn't feel like it used to. It doesn't feel like home anymore. Not because the place has changed, but because you have changed. The routines of home life feel awkward and constrictive.

[2 : 51] The habits and the patterns of life feel strange to you. The rules feel restrictive and tight, and you begin to feel that it would be better and freer to go again. Because, so to speak, you've become a stranger in your own home.

Or Peter says, that is how life in this world feels if you are a Christian. This world is not our home. But while we are in the world, this side of glory, how do we do things here? Are we just to wish that we would be teleported into the new creation? No, says Peter. Do things differently while you are here.

And you'll have picked up as we read that we are to do things very differently. Very differently. Chances are, already, while we were reading the passage, your hearts perhaps were hovering over the break in case of emergencies button.

Because submitting ourselves, as we heard three times, to governments, to bosses, to husbands, is anathema to our world. And if we're honest, it doesn't always sit easily with us, ourselves.

And perhaps you're thinking, well, why do I have to take this on board? Why do I listen to this? I ask myself in the week, why am I saying this? Well, this is what happens when we work through the Bible bit by bit. We hear things that we would only be willing to hear from God.

[4 : 36] I have no other reason to say what I'm going to say other than that God says it in the Bible. Actually, we'll see in this passage, He gives us lots of reasons to listen and to follow what He teaches us here.

But all that to say, I don't expect us to find these verses easy. I don't find them easy. But let's remember together who is speaking to us. This is God's Word.

And let God be true, and every man a liar. Firstly then, for us to get this different way of life into our bloodstream, Peter helps us to see why, why it is we do things differently.

So our first point, why we do things differently. Peter packages this teaching in a big shiny wrapper that explains why this distinctive way of life is so important for us to live.

Have a glance down, if you would, at chapter 2, verses 11 and 12. He writes, So why do things differently?

[6 : 12] Well, verse 11 tells us that we are to live holy and distinctive lives because God has set us apart from this world. But verse 12 tells us that because God has left us in the world, our holy and distinctive living is to point people to God.

So our lives are both worship and witness. We are from God and we are for the world. Both those truths are vital, says Peter.

If we forget that we are from God and not of this world, well, then we won't live good and holy lives. Notice the picture Peter uses in verse 11 is of a battle or a siege.

Sin is waging war against you, he says. Sin is scaling the walls. Sin is crouching at the door of our souls every day, mine and yours.

Friends, it's a reminder, isn't it, that in this life we are never in the clear. We're never above sin. We are not holier than thou. If we ever come to think that we are too holy to sin, too big to fail, the likelihood is that we probably will.

[7 : 35] Because as soon as we forget that we are foreigners and exiles here in the world, we will be walking straight back into our old way of life.

But if we forget we're still in the world, then it won't matter how good or holy our lives are, they won't be doing their job. Because, verse 12, we find our lives should point the world to the God who has loved and chosen and rescued us.

Even if people accuse us of doing something wrong, says Peter, yet the goodness of our lives should tell a different story. So even if somebody doesn't believe what we believe, they should be able to say to you, says Peter, well, I don't agree with you, but I like the way you live.

What you believe is ugly, but the way you live is beautiful. Perhaps you know that famous quote by Francis of Assisi, preach the gospel, use words if necessary, he's reported to have said.

In other words, let your way of life speak for itself. Now, that's not possible. How is anyone meant to know that our lives come from the death and resurrection of Jesus, unless we tell them, unless we use our words?

[9 : 01] It's like saying, feed the hungry, use food if necessary. But Peter's saying those words that we need, well, they need to be backed up by the way that we live.

As Norman just prayed for us there, who's going to trust what we have to say if there's nothing to show for it in the way that we live? So, says Jesus, let your light shine so that others may see your good deeds and glorify God in heaven.

In short, to sum this up, Peter's saying live a holy life, but not in a holy huddle. Be in the world, but not of the world.

See, if we don't see why it is that we should listen to Peter's teaching here, if we don't see who we're doing it for, we simply won't be prepared to live the good and holy life that we are being called to.

Because when Peter says live such good lives, what he means is learn to submit yourselves to worldly structures, to human relationships.

[10 : 20] That's probably not what we think of first when we think of holy living. But look who are we submitting ourselves for.

Let me glance down at verse 13. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake. Or verse 18. In reverent fear of God, submit yourselves.

Or chapter 3, verse 1. In the same way, submit yourselves. Why are we doing it? Who are we doing it for? It is for the Lord. We submit ourselves to these relationships for his glory and so that others will come to glorify him by the witness of our lives.

Notice this is a way of life that we have to choose. Peter says, submit yourselves. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that others should submit us.

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that we should wait to be submitted. Submit yourselves. Choose to make that decision, says Peter. Because submitting in these ways means making a decision to use our freedom to serve Christ and to serve others and not to serve ourselves.

[11 : 46] Now, I'm not going to pretend that these are easy decisions. I'm simply showing us, hopefully, why it is that God would call us to live this life.

What it is he's looking for. Because seeing why God wants us to do it makes it possible even when it's costly. See, God isn't the grumpy dad who tells us to do things just because I said so.

He is the loving heavenly father who loves to see us live well and who gives us what we need to help us make that choice to live these good lives every day.

He loves to see us live well. And when we do, if you flick over to chapter 3, verse 9, where we finished our reading, he blesses us for that.

To this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. Why do you things differently then? Well, we do it for the glory of God and for the good of others so that we may receive a blessing.

[12:51] That's the logic that we see played out as we go on into these three areas of life Peter's going to speak into. So, on to the good life then. How we do things differently.

Firstly, says Peter, we do things differently, verse 13, when we submit ourselves to human governments. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the talk of ignorant people. Now, this is a live question for us, isn't it?

The government has asked more of us in the last two years than perhaps it ever has. And then, something like party gate breaks.

And unless you've been living in a cave for the past two years, you will have asked yourself the question, why should we bother obeying the law when the people who made the law don't obey it?

[14:05] Now, that is a tough question and I'm not going to try to paper over the pain and the grief that you may be feeling because of the lack of integrity of our leaders.

But as Christians, there is an answer to that question, why should I obey the law? The Bible isn't silent on this problem. And the answer for us is in verse 13, submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority.

Peter's saying, we're free to keep obeying the law because we are not doing it for the lawmakers. We're doing it for the Lord.

Okay, God's not asking us to submit to human governments because they're always truthful or always trustworthy or always have a good track record. He's not asking us to weigh up their policies, their decisions before we decide what to do.

He's asking us to submit to every human government at every level because it glorifies Him and is good for others.

[15:23] So that's how important it is, brothers and sisters, that we stay on the right side of the law because God commands us to. The one and only exception to that is when the law requires that we directly disobey God.

Now, I know because some of you pointed me to it that there's an article going around that is a great example of this, an article that argues that the requirement to wear a mask in church is one of those issues that Christians should disobey.

Now, let me say firstly that Peter's word should cause us to search our hearts very, very carefully before listening to anyone who would convince Christians to disobey the law because God couldn't have made it clearer, could he, in verse 13, what he wants our attitude to the law to be.

So, if we are so concerned to obey God's word, then we have to be utterly certain that by breaking the law we are not in fact disobeying God's word by disobeying human governments.

Now, since it's a live example, let me say I haven't yet seen a convincing argument from the Bible that being asked to wear a face covering for an hour during church service causes us to directly and deliberately disobey God's word.

[17:03] Masks are uncomfortable, they're inconvenient, certainly in my mind the sooner we don't have to wear them the better, but to convince us to break the law, well it would have to be crystal clear that mask wearing in church was a sin if it was to outweigh God's instruction here in verse 13, wouldn't it?

But it's not clear at all. Hiding Jewish families in Germany during the Second World War was crystal clear. It was right civil disobedience because at that time not to have done so would have been to break the sixth commandment you shall not murder because what would have happened otherwise those families would have been taken and killed.

So does mask wearing or for that matter obeying the speed limit or paying taxes does that contradict God's word so directly and deliberately?

Well brothers and sisters it doesn't. So let us submit to our governments on these points. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's.

I'm not saying that doesn't cost us anything but we don't do it for our own comfort and convenience. In fact it's far easier isn't it for us to obey our government today than it was for Peter's readers back then or indeed as it is for many Christians around the world.

[18 : 40] Let's not pretend that Peter didn't know that governments could get it seriously wrong. The emperor in Dairon verse 13 who was that?

Well it was the emperor Nero the Nero who's famous for having played his fiddle while Rome burnt to the ground and then blaming it on the easiest scapegoats of the day Christians and yet Peter can still say submit submit to that man's authority for the Lord's sake for God's glory and look verse 15 for the good of others for this is God's will he says in short that we tell a different story to those who would think of us as being libertines as those who would think of us as claiming freedom over the law as a cover-up for doing what best suits us or a cover-up for our own political leanings there says Peter when we submit to the authorities when we obey the law we show the world that I am not king and that

Caesar is king for a time but that God is king forever and so brothers and sisters let's submit ourselves to our governments in Westminster in Holyrood to our local councils in Aberdeen and the shire for the Lord and for the good of others and now the second area Peter says we're to do things differently is at work look verse 18 slaves in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters not only those who are good and considerate but also those who are harsh for it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they're conscious of God now thankfully times have changed haven't they from the time when Peter is writing we have good laws against slavery against abuse in the workplace and I'll say this again when it comes to the home later on but if you are in that situation okay if you are a slave or you are being abused please please don't have to feel that

Peter is requiring you to stay there okay come and say something talk about it probably you shouldn't stay there if that is the case Peter simply recognizing the realities that some of the people in the churches he's writing to you would have had to live with and he's writing to help them to live well in that situation that they are in and I guess even without thinking of abuse as such we know don't we that harsh and heavy-handed bosses exist and can make life miserable right at the start of this series I gave a few real-life instances where Christians have found life hard at work or at home or at uni and friends the Bible is not a fairy-tale world where everything is okay the Bible speaks into the real world and our real working lives in order to teach us how to honor God and bless others through that

I know lots of you could relate to difficult run-ins with your boss over working on a Sunday or not getting opportunities letting promotions pass you by because of you're not fitting in with the company culture how are we called to deal with that kind of treatment well says Peter submit yourselves submit yourselves to your masters to your bosses to your managers not only the good and considerate he says but also those who are harsh there's a basic sense of staying on the right side of the rules verse 20 says how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it again Peter says if you're disciplined justly at work having a poor work ethic or turning up late or for poor behavior that's a serious thing that doesn't glorify God it doesn't commend him to those for whom you work or those with whom you work but even then Peter recognizes that sometimes in the workplace of the world living as exiles here we will sometimes end up being disciplined unjustly for doing good whether that's formally or informally but he says if you suffer for doing good and endure it this is commendable before

[23 : 45] God now we don't go looking for battles okay trying to prove how faithful we are but how many times we have been fired for speaking up for Christ but should you work hard and do well and when you speak about Christ humbly and respectfully and appropriately to your colleagues and co-workers and end up getting sidelined or cold shoulders or rumors spread about you or being disciplined by your work bear up under it says Peter keep working hard keep doing well keep doing your best work because you are not ultimately working for them you are working and serving the Lord he talks about working out of a reverent fear of God verse 18 because the alternative I guess is working out of fear of those who we work for bosses our colleagues who can make life very hard

for us but fearing

God over the people who we work with even the unfair boss well that frees us to submit when it's costly and difficult without getting anxious or bitter about the way we're being treated because we serve a higher master who is always just who is always worth obeying always worth our faithfulness and the final place Peter says we're to do things differently is in the home submit yourselves to human husbands this is chapter 3 verse 1 wives in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that if any of them do not believe the word they may be one over without words by the behavior of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives so notice the context here Peter's talked about submitting to non-Christian governments submitting to non-Christian bosses and now to non-Christian husbands those who don't believe the word so he's taking the principles of biblical marriage and saying to women who are married to unbelieving men those principles still apply now if submitting to governments is an unpopular line in today's world in today's church well telling wives to submit to their husbands is heresy isn't it now to be clear the bible teaches that men and women are equal in worth god didn't create women as objects men are not to treat women as possessions because god created men and women equally in his own image but he also created men and women and we are different if you are a man being a man is integral to who you are as a human being if you are a woman being a woman is integral to who you are as a human being none of us are neutrally human we are men or we are women every cell in our bodies tells us that and that difference is expressed in marriage when a man and a woman get married the wife is called in the bible to humbly submit to her husband's loving and humble leadership and so the result is a partnership in which a wife gives herself over to her husband's will while a husband gives himself over to his wife's good now that's not straightforward even between two Christians but what about then says Peter when a Christian wife is giving herself over to her husband's will but her non-Christian husband is still living for his own good and not his wife's or can the wife then choose to bow out to not submit well no says Peter nothing changes in fact her submission he says is all the more important because her behavior holds the possibility of winning her husband over by the beauty and the humility and goodness of her life and worship in fear of the Lord and witness for the good of her husband and now some of you are in that position whether by choice or through other circumstances incidentally it's almost certain that these women started following Christ when they were already married that's why Peter is writing to help them but if that is ye however it's come about know that verse for the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit is of great worth in

God's sight even if your goodness and your godliness and your humility and the beauty of your life go completely unnoticed at home even if they are mocked yet they are of great value to God he notices he sees he loves your inner beauty as you submit yourself to your husband even in what can be a hard and a lonely marriage but again let me say Peter is not instructing wives to quietly submit to abusive husbands and if that is you do not stay silent come and say something church should be a place where men and women can speak freely about what is going on at home husbands are not to take it upon themselves to make their wives submit Peter has a word for us doesn't he verse 7 husbands in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect you sometimes too a husband is married to a non-Christian wife but it's the same teaching all husbands we are to love our wives as

Christ loved the church and gave himself for her for her eternal good and for God's glory and so brothers and sisters these these are the such good lives that we are to live if we follow Christ humble submission even says Peter to harsh and sinful governments bosses husbands better he says to live faithfully in those relationships and suffer for it than to use our freedom to sin now that's a lot to take in and process I'm happy to talk about it afterwards or any time during the week I need to preach this to myself as well doing things differently is not easy but as we close let's fix our eyes again on the one who we do it for because he is the one who did it perfectly for us the one who did it perfectly for us

[31 : 25] I'd love you to read with me from chapter 2 verse 21 to this you were called because Christ suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps he committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth when they held insults at him he did not retaliate when he suffered he made no threats instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness by his wounds you have been healed for you were like sheep going astray but now you have returned to

the shepherd and overseer of your souls don't forget says Peter as you suffer for Christ in this world that he suffered first for you submitting himself to the insults and the false charges and the accusations and the beatings of human authorities as if

Peter had that passage Isaiah 53 open in front of him as he wrote these words he the one who suffered to serve us for he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross by his wounds we have been healed he submitted and suffered and died perfectly says Peter so that our sins might be forgiven so that our debt before God would be cleared our sentence in hell would be served so that we might be set free to choose to serve and honor and love God and live holy lives for him. And his suffering is not only our salvation, but our example also. Jesus doesn't call you and me to do anything that he hasn't done himself at far greater cost. And our Lord Jesus entrusted himself to God as he suffered. His glory for our good, he submitted himself to flawed and fallen human powers who nailed him to a cross. But now he lives, says Peter, raised to life. He is the shepherd, the overseer of your souls. And so as we follow in his steps through this world, through this foreign country, living as he lived, dying to our sin as he died, so that we would be raised as he is raised, we look to glory, to home, our homeland where we belong. Friends, let's fix our eyes on his lives living and dying as we live and die for him in this world. Let's look to him now as we pray. Let's pray together.

God, our Father, your word cuts us open. It is living and active, cutting even to the division of soul and spirit. And Father, this morning we are open before you. And you know what is in us. And we confess, Lord, that it is not what we would like to show you. It is not what we would want you to see. Father, we thank you for your precious word, that it is always true and that it always leads us into truth.

[35 : 15] And Father, above all, we thank you for the Lord Jesus himself. We thank you that he did live perfectly, that he submitted, that he did not open his mouth against his accusers, that he did not retaliate.

The Lord, he bore our sins silently to the cross so that we would have new lives to live, free from the chains of sin. And so, Father, we pray that you would help us, help each of us, Lord, this week at the beginning of a new week, to choose to serve ye above ourselves, to submit ourselves, Lord, to human authorities, structures and relationships. Lord, when that is costly, show us again, we pray, the beauty of Jesus, his living, dying and rising again. Give us strength, we pray, for these painful situations in which we live. Remind us every day, our Father, that we are not of the world, though we are in the world. And remind us, we pray by your Spirit and your word every day, that we are destined for a homeland, where we will be with the Lord, and the sun will never set on our freedom and our glory. We thank you, our Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.