

How Shall We Live? Week 3: Bosses

We are in week three in our winter series called “**How Then Shall We Live?**” It’s a very important question to ask. In this culture, **post Christian culture**, how do we live? Are we to live **angry and combative** lives because things are changing and not for the better? Are we to live **fearfully**? **Are we to hunker down until we die or Jesus comes to protect those closest?** Or should we **go on the attack against what we see as the enemy?**

Peter has something to say to us. He is helping a motley group of new converts, who are **resident aliens** in Asia Minor. They are **poor, powerless, and on the margins** of culture. Then add to this situation, **now they become Jesus followers** and that makes people view them as, at best, weird and, worst, not to be trusted.

How then shall we live as Christ followers in times like these? Jesus taught Peter and now Peter is teaching us.

Last week we said that 2:11-12 is pivotal for the rest of what Peter wants to say. **¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² 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. 1 Peter 2:11-12**

Central to answering the question, How then shall we live, in their situation was this idea. They were to live **holy lives, avoiding sin even while being persecuted**, so that the people around them would take notice and realize that this kind of life pleased God. **They aren’t given a free pass to behave badly and to give them a dose of their own medicine.** Anyone can act godly when everyone treats them nice.

Now Peter is going to give examples of how to do that in different relationships. He starts first with the **Roman government and its leaders.** **¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of**

God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. 1 Peter 2:13-17

Since they aren't even official citizens, I'm guessing that the government isn't really doing anything on their behalf. They have no obligation. How then shall we live in relation to the government?

First of all, what does it mean to be subject? Others translate this word "submit." Remember this in the context of avoiding sin, living a holy life that causes those around to see God. **It means don't do things that will cause people to confirm what they already thought of you and your religion.** That's the point of that phrase, **for the Lord's sake."**

The people believed that this new group of people, mostly from the lower class, was the cause of trouble. They were the first place to look for suspects. In other words, **don't poke the bear just to poke the bear. Don't ignore the laws of the land because you think they don't apply to you and your new life in Christ.**

Or is it really for your sake, not the Lords. It makes life easier or more comfortable for you. More about that later.

Be subject or submit means to order oneself/**Know the pecking order**, in a certain relationship.

A century ago, foundational work by **Thorleif Schjelderup-Ebbe** described a 'pecking order' in chicken societies, where individuals could be ordered according to their ability to exert their influence over their group-mates.

What's the pecking order? **I slot myself below** the government officials and the laws they uphold, but the laws of the land **are below God and my allegiance to him.**

Remember that phrase, **"Live as people who are free."** **They are subject to the government's laws, but they are free to live for Christ.** There's

nothing that the laws can prohibit or the government can stop if our goal is to live for Christ like Peter is telling them.

When taking a job, particularly in ministry, know the pecking order or to whom you are responsible is vital. Is there a senior pastor, a board, a team leader? To be unclear is deadly.

Wherever you are slotted, work within the system to glorify God and show his holiness and justice to others by the way you live. Do good, even when the system is causing you to be wronged or persecuted.

This, in fact, will eventually cause the system that is evil to change.

Paul says it this way. **Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. ² So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. ³ For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. Romans 13:1-3**

However, this does not mean that they are to submit to the authorities, no matter what. The NT does give examples of civil disobedience. This does not mean to sit back and allow injustice to take place. Work within, whenever possible. But not full-out rebellion.

This scripture was misused to keep people in line and in subjugation. It was used to say there are some people created to be on top and others to serve them. This is God's choice and doing. When the church has been complicit in this. It has caused much suffering in America and in any society that practiced feudalism.

What if the people in power lived by this verse? It would have changed everything for those under them. If they started to live and love like Jesus things would really change. It doesn't appear that there are any of those types of people in this group to whom Peter is writing, because he doesn't refer to people in power.

It really bothers me how this verse has been used. Years ago, a man sent me a tape of a sermon preached on this verse. This preacher took great pains to say that we should obey the government **in all things, period.** He went on to state, accurately, that **anyone in power is allowed in power because God allows it.** Then he begins to talk about one of my hero's, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor during the time when Hitler came to power. **He spoke out** against the injustices of the Nazi regime. **At the beginning, working within the given structures** until all power was given to Hitler, and that was not possible. **Then he worked as a part of at least one plot to kill Hitler.** He was eventually arrested and kept in prison. Then, as the war is all but over, and this prison is soon to be liberated. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was **hanged on Easter morning.**

This preacher then said that he was wrong for what he did. Had he obeyed the Nazi regime, he would have been able to be a part of the rebuilding of Germany.

Later on, this man who gave me this tape, refused to accept any mask mandates, or the outcome of the election. He did not have to obey the present government.

This is not what Peter is teaching and this is not how we are to apply it to our times.

Living under the order means something different then straight out submit in a democratic republic. The **Pecking order** is different and not so clear in a system where there is authority, but the people choose who wields that authority.

Example MLK's I Have a Dream speech was civil disobedience within the context of the laws of the land and being a good citizen. When there were **sit-ins at the Woolworth's counter,** it was then arrested peacefully. **Our friend George Gant** ended up in a history textbook where his grandson was able to point him out. **This was because the law didn't live up to the constitution** from which all laws are supposed to be based.

These early followers were experiencing such freedom in Christ that they may have been tempted to revolt against the culture, which would

have been devastating. They would have been **labeled dangerous and crushed** by the Romans.

In our context, we ought to be able to disagree respectfully. We were able to **march against racial injustice** in our country and do it with the cooperation of the police and government.

You cannot achieve a Jesus-like goal with un-Jesus like methods as a Christ follower. The end does not justify the means.

The ultimate verse concerning pecking order as it relates to government or any other authority in our lives is this...³³ **Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. Matthew 6:33**

What is your motivation...when you relate in any way to the authority of government in your life?

Matthew 6:33 is where we start. There are two kingdoms and they **overlap** quite a bit. There is the kingdom of God, where Jesus is king and he rules over the restoration of God's loving rule over all things. Then there is the government of the United States of America. It doesn't have a king, but has elected officials who are guided by the constitution with checks and balances. We have a president, congress people, a Michigan governor and others.

What is your motivation to disobey the governmental authority? It can only be the gospel. It can only be the **great commission and the bringing about his kingdom on earth** as it is in heaven, **make disciples** and make the kingdom present for others. **It cannot be a lesser cause.**

The goal is not changing the culture, the goal is to **make disciples and make the kingdom present for others, which will indirectly change the culture** as it did in the Roman Empire. Why did he tell them to do good? For the spread of the gospel.

¹² 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. 1 Peter 2:12

The final option is to **be willing to suffer for Christ** at the hands of those in power.

³⁸ "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ **But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. Matthew 5:39-39 (NLT)**

To suffer is to set aside a right out of love for God, so he may receive glory, or for neighbor.

Wow, I don't hear much about this verse these days. It's all about winning, defeating the enemy of the left or the right. What happens is we lose the moral high ground needed to call the government to task. Why should they listen to us?

This next section, Peter speaks this message to slaves or servants. Why tackle this, because there were slaves in these churches. Next week, Matt will read what he says to wives and husbands. Why wives, because there are a lot of wives who have come to faith in Christ, who have husbands who are not following Jesus, and probably think this means their wives are losing their minds and rejecting their role in the family.

¹⁸ **Servants (Slaves), be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ 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. (And who is our example of enduring suffering for doing good, who was that, it's on the tip of my tongue) ²¹ 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. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the **Shepherd and Overseer** of your souls. 1 Peter 2:18-25

Explanation of the difference between slavery in Greek Roman culture in the Roman Empire and what was seen pre-civil war in the United States. Or even modern day slavery in the sex trade or human trafficking.

Central features that distinguish 1st century slavery from that later practiced in the New World, are the following; racial factors played no role; education was greatly encouraged (some slaves were better educated than their owners) and enhanced a slaves value; many slaves carried out sensitive and highly responsible social functions; slaves could own property (including other slaves!); their religious and cultural traditions were the same as those of the freeborn; no laws prohibited public assembly of slaves; and (perhaps above all) the majority of urban and domestic slaves could legitimately anticipate being emancipated by the age of 30. Pg 170

Our society and economy is not based upon this type of system that they lived in. So how do we apply this? Well, all of the people who have authority over us really aren't government officials. **How then shall we live in relation to your boss?**

How do we define a boss? That depends on where you are in society.

Know the pecking order

Used in feudalistic society, a God created destiny.

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters **with all respect**, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 1 Peter 2:18

Look at how Paul says something very similar.

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with **deep respect and fear**. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. ⁶ Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. ⁷ Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. ⁸ Remember that the Lord will reward each

one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. Ephesians 6:5-8

Who is above you, according to where you are right now. Write them in the margin of your journal or note page.

- Your direct supervisor.
- If you are a student, it is your teacher. Right now there is very little of this obedience in respect to teachers.
- If you volunteer somewhere, there is someone in charge of that organization.
- If you are married, the Bible teaches mutual submission. If you choose to serve and not be served, what will that mean for your marriage and for your kids as they watch you.
- Coach.

What is your motivation?

Are you motivated by wanting the best for the one who is your boss so to speak? Even when they don't do what you want or think is best.

As a JV coach, I need to want the varsity coach to shine. Now that's easy, because he treats me with respect and as an equal, but I must defer to him even though I'm old enough to be his father. Also, the Athletic director is my boss. He is the one who evaluates me.

Would it do me any good to push back against them?

¹² 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. 1 Peter 2:12

¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. 1 Peter 2:19

At one point in my youth ministry career, there was a coup against me. I was out of town and there was a secret meeting of people who "just wanted to help Bill."

And yet there was Al Monroe. City water director. Had done it for years. He wanted me to succeed and he wanted me to lead. He was always gentle, and good, even if he disagreed with me. And I know he never spoke badly of me. Al understood this verse.

Suffer for Christ.

Keep in mind that Peter once had a hard time understanding suffering in this way. When Jesus for the first time brings up the cross, suffering for the good of others, Peter met it with a stiff rebuke. (MK 8:31-33) The second time, he hid from Jesus. (MK 14:66-72)

Jesus is their example of how to respond. "When he was slandered, he did not retaliate with sharp barbs, nor did he threaten those under whose hand he suffered; instead, he entrusted his case to the God who judges justly and waited for God's vindication. The slaves, therefore, are also to respond kindly and not retaliate."¹⁶⁸

What would it mean for you to suffer some at the hand of a boss in your life and yet you endure and continue to treat him or her with respect. Even looking to serve that boss in the midst of something not going your way.

Jesus asked if there was any other way then to go to a cross. But then his attitude was, not my will but yours. Suffering is the last resort. The question is, am I willing if it comes to this.

The cross is your guide...it's not just for your benefit.

Think about a slave or servant who leads his or her master to Christ. Now they are a part of the same church where the gospel says they are free in Christ.

Steps of Obedience.

Confess attitude of rebellion.

Against a teacher, coach, administrator, work team leader, government official.

We are to corrupt evil systems from within with the counter cultural attitude of Jesus.

A rebel trying to bring down authority by non-Jesus ways cannot make the kingdom present for others. They are promoting another kingdom. A rebel trying to bring down authority in a non-Jesus way cannot make disciples who know how to follow Jesus. They will make disciples of some other ideology.