

## **1 Peter 2:11-25 ~ Submit to Rulers and Masters ~ Discussion Questions**

1. As in Verse 1:1, in Verse 2:11, Peter again refers to us as aliens and strangers. Other Bible versions say exiles, pilgrims, and visitors. Why does he call us by these names? Where is our real home? (Revelation 21:3)
2. Why is it important for believers to live good lives? What's the objective? Who previously said what Peter says in Verse 12? (Matthew 5:16, 1 Peter 1:17, Ecclesiastes 12:14, Romans 2:6, Revelation 20:13)
3. Why is it so hard to abstain from sinful desires and live good lives that others will look up to? (2:12) What's the lesson to us today?
4. What deeds in your life do non-Christians see? What do they show?
5. In 2:13-14, Peter says Christians must submit themselves to "every authority instituted among men," i.e., worldly civil and political authorities. What do you think about that command? (Romans 13:1-7, Acts 5:29)
6. There seems to be a conflict between Verse 13 (obey earthly authorities) and Verse 16 (live in obedience to God). What do you think?
7. This section is summed up in Peter's four injunctions in 2:17. They are:
8. Why do you think Peter tells slaves to submit to harsh and cruel masters? Shouldn't he be telling them to resist, rebel and try to escape? What's the lesson for us today? (Ephesians 6:5-8, Colossians 3:22-25, Luke 6:32-36, Acts 8:32)
9. How do you know when to submit and when to resist? (2:19-20)
10. In Verses 21-23, what is the example that Christ is setting for us? How should we "follow in his steps?"
11. In Verse 24, what does the phrase mean, "that we might die to sins" (NIV) or "being dead to sins" (KJV)?
12. Also in Verse 24, what does "live for righteousness" mean? (John 3:7)
13. In Verse 25, what should we understand from Peter's rephrasing of Isaiah 53:6?

## **1 Peter 2:11-25 ~ Submit to Rulers and Masters ~ Leader's Guide**

**1. As in Verse 1:1, in Verse 2:11, Peter again refers to us as aliens and strangers. Other Bible versions say exiles, pilgrims, and visitors. Why does he call us by these names? Where is our real home? (Revelation 21:3)**

As believers, we are aliens and visitors in this world because our real home is with God in heaven. Life in heaven operates according to God's principles and values and is eternal and unshakable. Someday, after God judges and destroys all sin, heaven will be in every corner of the universe. In Rev 21:3, John says, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'"

Peter is also saying here that we are aliens and strangers from the pagans who do not believe in Christ and do not regard heaven as their eventual, permanent home.

So Peter says that our true loyalty should be to our citizenship in heaven, not our citizenship here on earth, because eventually earth as we know it will be destroyed. Our loyalty should be to God's truth and his way of life rather than the values of the world. Because we are loyal to God, we will often feel like aliens and strangers with people who put material values first and prefer to ignore God.

**2. Why is it important for believers to live good lives? What's the objective? Who previously said what Peter says in Verse 12? (Matthew 5:16, 1 Peter 1:17, Ecclesiastes 12:14, Romans 2:6, Revelation 20:13)**

Peter says "the pagans will see your good deeds. Jesus said this earlier as recorded in Matthew 5:16 – "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

The Greek word "see" used by Peter refers to a careful watching over a period of time. In other words, the pagan's evaluation of you is not a snap judgement but something observed over a long period. The idea here is that a believer's good life may influence unbelievers to repent and believe.

It is also important that believers live good lives by God's standards since (1) believers are commanded to praise God by their good works and (2) believers will be judged in the end time.

1 Peter 1:17 – Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 – For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Romans 2:6 – God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

Revelation 20:13 – The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

### **3. Why is it so hard to abstain from sinful desires and live good lives that others will look up to? (2:12) What's the lesson to us today?**

This isn't easy, back then or today. Abstaining from sinful desires, resisting temptation, living a pure life and "walking in the narrow way" is not what comes naturally. Your own flesh, your friends, and the world is urging you in a different direction. As a Christian believer, you're going to be different, an alien; you may be shunned or ostracized, but even if not, it's difficult resisting your own internal desires.

When this was written, many of Peter's readers were scattered among pagans (unbelieving Gentiles), some of whom spread vicious lies and rumors about Christians. However, gracious and upright behavior on the part of Christians could show these rumors to be false and might even win some critics to the Lord's side.

The lesson for us today is not to write off people because they misunderstand or are hostile to Christianity. Instead, show them Christ by your life. The day may come when those who criticize you will praise God with you.

### **4. What deeds in your life do non-Christians see? What do they show?**

### **5. In 2:13-14, Peter says Christians must submit themselves to "every authority instituted among men," i.e., worldly civil and political authorities. What do you think about that command? (Romans 13:1-7, Acts 5:29)**

Some historical perspective: Peter's letter was written in about 62 AD, about 5 or 6 years after Paul's letter to the Romans and was written and after Nero, a notoriously cruel tyrant, came into power. So this is a very difficult time for Christians. As with Paul, Peter was not telling believers to compromise their consciences or Christian beliefs. In fact, five years earlier, Peter had told the high priest, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

However, then as now, in most aspects of daily life, it is possible and desirable for Christians to live according to the law of the land. Today, some Christians live in freedom as we do and others live under repressive governments such as those in North Korea, Iran, and Somalia. But all are commanded to cooperate with civil rulers as far as your conscience allows. We are to do this "for the Lord's sake" (vs 13) so that his good news and his people will be respected. If we are to be persecuted, it should be for obeying God, and not for breaking moral or civil laws.

For some people, this means running for public office and trying to be a Christian voice from within. For others, it means avoiding politics and public office. And for still others, it means speaking out for or against policies and laws such as abortion, the death penalty, or compulsory military service. These are what Paul called "disputable matters" in Romans 14 for which the Bible doesn't tell us exactly what to do. But no matter where you come down with respect to serving or not serving or speaking out, you must obey the laws and rules that are in place.

**6. There seems to be a conflict between Verse 13 (obey earthly authorities) and Verse 16 (live in obedience to God). What do you think?**

In Verse 16, being urged to live as servants (literally, slaves) to God is double-edged. It entails obedience to God, but also implies security and status. In so far as God is superior to the emperor, God's servants are superior to Caesar's. So Peter is saying that his advice to obey earthly authorities should be motivated by ultimate loyalty to God's will rather than to any human institution.

I think the main idea here is that "living as free men" (2:16) does not authorize rebellion against constituted authority, but urges believers freely to submit to God *and* to earthly authorities, as long as such submission does not conflict with the law of God.

The second part of 2:16 means that genuine freedom is the freedom to serve God, a freedom exercised under law. Liberty is not a license to do as we please.

**7. This section is summed up in Peter's four injunctions in 2:17. They are:**

- (1) Show proper respect to everyone (treat them honorably because every human being is made in the image of God)
- (2) Love the brotherhood of believers (the Christian fraternity of which Christ is the Head)
- (3) Fear God (show him reverence, see him as huge, awesome, all powerful)
- (4) Honor the king (or emperor, president, prime minister, etc.)

**8. Why do you think Peter tells slaves to submit to harsh and cruel masters? Shouldn't he be telling them to resist, rebel and try to escape? What's the lesson for us today? (Ephesians 6:5-8, Colossians 3:22-25, Luke 6:32-36)**

Many Christians were household slaves in the time of Christ. It would be relatively easy for a slave to submit to a master who was kind and gentle. But what about to one who was harsh and cruel, like a boss who is overly demanding, unfair, takes all the credit for successes and gives you all the blame for problems? Well, actually Peter encourages loyalty and perseverance for two reasons: first, we may win a master (or boss or other employees) to Christ by our good example and second, God gives you credit if you suffer for his sake or for the sake of your good conduct.

Eph 6:5-8 – Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. (Colossians 3:22-25 says nearly the same)

Luke 6:32-36 – "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to

those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

A second focus here is meekness. Of Jesus it was written, “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” – Acts 8:32

From the Online Bible Greek Lexicon – “Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. ... Gentleness or meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God’s goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all.”

A famous book “Uncle Tom's Cabin” tells of the plight of African Americans a while ago. Uncle Tom was a Christian enslaved. He was brutally mistreated but always was gracious to his master forgiving him. However, the general reaction to the book among the African American community was to deride, belittle and make fun of Uncle Tom for his meekness. Even today “Uncle Tom” is considered a derogatory term in the black community. Such is the spirit of the world today. While today people emphasize personal rights and freedoms, they lack a spirit of meekness and graciousness.

Meekness goes hand in hand with longsuffering. Think twice before invoking your personal rights.

### **9. How do you know when to submit and when to resist? (2:19-20)**

The last part of Verse 2:19, “because he is conscious of God” implies that as submission to duly-constituted authority is “for the Lord’s sake” (Verse 2:13 and Eph 6:7-8), so one will submit to the point of suffering unjustly if it is God’s will.

But the bigger question is, how do we know what is God’s will? When Peter was writing this, for example, pressure to conform to a master’s pagan religion would not be God’s will. But aside from that, physical tasks and punishments were generally to be endured and will have God’s approval. The same applies today with respect to the workplace, schools, camps, organizations, rescue missions, etc.

But again, how do we know what is God’s will? We frequently don’t know, but if we pray for wisdom, guidance, understanding, and opening our eyes, that’s a start. Also, look at Jesus for an example of God’s will in action. Indeed, that’s what Peter recommends in the next verse when he says, “follow in his steps.”

### **10. In Verses 21-23, what is the example that Christ is setting for us? How should we “follow in his steps?”**

Obviously there are many examples set by Christ for us to follow, but I’m talking specifically about 1 Peter 2:21-23. One way of reading it is that we should

follow Christ's example living as pure a life as possible serving others and be willing to face suffering as he did—with patience, calmness, and confidence that God is in control of the future. We won't necessarily have to suffer, but we might, and if necessary must do so willingly.

Another interpretation is this: each time Jesus was attacked verbally with abusive insults, he gave himself over to his Father for vindication of the injustice and did not seek to retaliate. This was his response again and again.

This is the example he left for his disciples to follow when falsely accused or maligned...this is not easy (in fact in our own strength it is impossible!)...the temptation of the flesh will always be to lash out at our adversaries...but we must master it.

Bottom line: patient endurance of injustice is part of God's plan for the Christian believer. Prominent examples of Christ's silent submission are found in the account of his last hours and crucifixion in Matthew 27:12-14 and 12:34-44.

Matthew 27:12-14 – <sup>12</sup> When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. <sup>13</sup> Then Pilate asked him, “Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” <sup>14</sup> But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

### **11. In Verse 24, what does the phrase mean, “that we might die to sins” (NIV) or “being dead to sins” (KJV)?**

In a literal sense, the Greek word used here for die is *apogenomenos*, which means “Having ceased to be what we were before” or “we having parted with (sin)”. Believers are now separated from the sin that previously ruled and reigned their every thought and action.

From a practical sense, this means that if we are truly born again, we can never be the same as we were before (“having ceased to be”). Conversely, if you are **not** born again, you are still in bondage to the power of sin and are dead to your trespasses. If you are in this state, you need to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ so you might be born again by his Holy Spirit.

### **12. Also in Verse 24, what does “live for righteousness” mean? (1 John 2:29, John 3:7)**

“Righteousness” means right living or acting in accord with moral and divine law, i.e., being right with God. It also means “free from guilt or sin.”

In this particular verse, the verb “live” refers to how one conducts oneself. Ultimately Christ has opened the door for believers to enjoy life in its fullest, richest sense, as God intended it to be lived. And in context such a life is one that conforms to God's holy character (which equates with righteousness), for He is the essence of righteousness. When one lives to righteousness they will show rightness of character before God and rightness of actions before men. Both of these qualities are based on truth, which is conformity to the Word and will of

God.

James, Paul, John and others tell us many places that our faith in God and Jesus leads to our demonstrating our belief by our deeds and by the way we live. “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” – John 13:35, NLT. “You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act.” – Matthew 7:16, NLT.

John also looks at this the other way around, i.e., from effect (righteous behavior) to cause (being truly born again) to affirm that righteous living is the proof of being born again. He says in 1 John 2:29, “If you know that He (Jesus) is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him” – 1 John 2:29.

Peter enlarges on this in 2:24 and says that because of the work of Christ on the Cross, righteous living now can be our reality.

If you claim to be “born again” but the way you live has not changed and remains unrighteousness, you may be trying to deceive yourself, but in reality you have not actually experienced a spiritual rebirth. Those who have truly been born again as God’s children have their heavenly Father’s righteous nature.

### **13. In Verse 25, what should we understand from Peter’s rephrasing of Isaiah 53:6?**

Again Peter alludes to Isaiah 53:6 – We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” It is not that Christians characteristically stray, for he says “you *were* like sheep going astray”, not “you *are* like sheep going astray.” And not all sheep characteristically stray. But like the prodigal son, having repented and having been reconciled to God, we have been healed from such behavior. “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” – 1 John 3:9.

So Peter is saying that some of us, like sheep, had wandered, but now we have returned to our shepherd, Christ. And now, he doesn't simply watch us, he oversees us. We are not free to do whatever we want as Christians but we must follow the lead and directions of Christ.

The NIV Study Bible goes a step further and says this verse also means that elders and church leaders are to be both shepherds and overseer, i.e., they are to look out for the welfare of the flock.