

A guide to conduct for Christians under pressure

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon and welcome to our weekly lunchtime Bible talk. My name is Josh Johnson. I'm a minister in training here at the Tron Church. This week we're going to take a brief look at 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 11 to 15 or 11 to 25. So 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 11 to 25. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and 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. 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 God's servants. 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. For this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures sorrows 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. For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example so that you might follow in his footsteps. He committed no sin neither was deceit found in his mouth.

When he is 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 were straying like sheep but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

Before we turn to study the passage let's pray. Heavenly Father we want to thank you for all that you've given us.

We want to thank you especially this afternoon for the wonderful inheritance that's laid up in heaven for those who belong to you. We thank you that through Jesus facing suffering despite conducting himself perfectly we have been returned to our chief shepherd.

[3 : 03] We thank you that though we may feel like aliens and strangers in this world even though we feel like we may not belong here we know that one day we will be at home and it is to that place that we really belong.

So we ask Lord that as we turn to your word now that you might shape our desires to be for eternity. That you might shape our lives to be like that of your son and that you might do this as we open up your word.

For we ask it in Jesus name. Amen. I got a very interesting Christmas present last year. It's a book called The Brett's Guide to the Modern Gentleman.

It's a fascinating book on how to conduct yourselves in all manner of things if you want to be thought of as a modern gentleman. I wonder what my wife was trying to say. When people come round to our home it's the most popular book on our coffee table and it contains all sorts of fun facts and interesting tips about wearing wedding rings, how to have your coffee, how dogs reflect their owners, how brogues are the most important shoe in a gentleman's wardrobe, even instructions on how to present yourself in conversations.

It has 192 pages on how one must conduct themselves if we want to be, or at least be seen to be, a modern gentleman. It's a bit of fun really.

[4 : 36] But the question of how we must conduct ourselves and what that leads people to see in us is a very important question. And as we look at this section of 1 Peter we see conduct is a vital question for Peter 2.

Indeed, it's perhaps one of the key themes throughout the whole letter. And that word conduct shows up in quite a few places. Peter having started his letter by drawing attention to the fact that the recipients are exiles, aliens and strangers in this world, he also says that they're elect.

They're alien and strangers to this world because they belong ultimately to another world. They're elect exiles. So in chapter 1, Peter lays down for them a clear future.

We see that in verses 3 to 5 of chapter 1. He makes clear that they have a secure future inheritance. It's imperishable. It's undefiled. It is kept in heaven for them.

And they're being guarded for it by God's power. So with this clear future laid out, Peter then wants Christians to live in light of it. That's what you see from verse 13 in chapter 1.

[5 : 49] And it's that word conduct that he uses to say this in 115. But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

As he is holy, be holy. Peter is saying, be godly. Be like God in your conduct. And he repeats in 117 that word conduct.

And in verse 18, he says, you were ransomed from the futile conduct inherited from your forefathers. Now that you have a new inheritance, one that's waiting for you in heaven, have conduct that is fitting, that is godly.

Conduct yourselves like Christ. And then again, it's picked up in our passage this afternoon in chapter 2, verses 11 to 12, which seems really like one of the key instructions in the whole letter.

The message is, look at your conduct. Look at your conduct. For a church under pressure, which is what they were, for Christians who are feeling the heat, not physically, but socially, who are being made to feel on the periphery, who are mocked, maligned, slandered, reviled.

[7 : 10] The instruction is to keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, verse 12. And the majority of the mentions of difficulty in the whole of the letter are not physical attacks, but what can best be described as pressure.

It's slander. It's ridicule. It's being made the outsiders in society. Peter urges them, verse 11, as sojourners and exiles, as aliens, strangers, outsiders, abstain from the passions of the flesh, fight against sin, and keep your conduct honorable.

For a people under pressure, they've been pointed to the true grace of God. They've been urged to stand firm in it, to long for their rewards, to be aware that what they put up with now is for eternity.

They're elect. Their hope is kept for them in heaven. It can't be spoilt. But for now, under pressure, the command is to keep your conduct honorable.

And that's what Peter unpacks in this whole middle section of the letter. He's basically saying, keep your conduct honorable in society and in the workplace up to the end of chapter 2.

[8 : 26] And then at the start of chapter 3, he says, even in your family and in the church. Verses 11 to 12 are that whole section in summary. Keep your conduct honorable.

And how he describes that in the rest of this chapter the two ways are really to be submissive to authority. Both in the public sphere, to government, to emperors, but also in the working world, to masters and employers.

Peter says, live as people who are free, verse 16, but not taking advantage of that. Live freely, but live as servants of God, because that's who you belong to.

And Peter hopefully summarizes this for us in verse 17. Honor the emperor, but fear God. And that's the right order of things, isn't it?

Honor those in power as best we can, but if it comes to the point where we have to pick one or the other, we fear God. And that's who you ultimately will be serving.

[9 : 38] It's not the emperor that we fear, it's God. And we serve God by submitting to authorities. So in the public sphere, honorable conduct is to be subject as best you can to rulers and authorities.

And it's the same in the workplace, verse 18. Be subject to your masters, your bosses, not just the ones it's easy to submit to. Submit to the one who makes you stay late every night, even though he knows you've got a Bible study to go to.

Don't break the rules and give reason for him to slander you. Even if it's a boss who picks on you and puts pressure on you for your faith, submit to him, because that's serving God.

What does Peter say? He says, be subject not only to the gentle but to the unjust. Look at your conduct and keep it honorable.

Secondly, Peter gives us a motivation. He says, look who's watching. Look who's watching. As Peter unpacks the conduct in the rest of chapter 2, he gives some motivations to keep doing it.

[10 : 51] The first one is in verse 12, so that when people speak evil against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God. In other words, our godly conduct may just lead people to glorify God.

What an encouragement and what a motivation to keep going. When under pressure for being Christians, when mocked and made to feel weak and silly, it's our honorable conduct that may just bring more glory to God by bringing more people to him.

People are watching how you live and that is people who may turn to glorify God. So people are watching you.

They may turn to glorify God. Secondly, verse 15, for this is the will of God that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. The second motivation, when forced to the outside of society, when in the minority and people speak against us, when people are looking for a way to slander our name, our godly conduct will leave them with nothing to say.

It will mean that any slander will be baseless. It will mean that ultimately they will look the fool. And being good employees for God and being good citizens who submit to authorities, we will not diminish God's name in the slightest.

[12 : 26] Enemies are watching how you live to catch you out. Don't give them any reason. And third motivation, verses 19 to 20, for this is a gracious thing when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

And then in verse 20, but if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. If our conduct is godly and we have to put up with suffering for it, then that is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

If our boss treats us terribly for living as a Christian, and we take it and submit and endure, God delights in our faithfulness.

It's not wasted. It proves our faithfulness is to him, which is no small thing. Things that are gracious in God's sight are precious.

God is watching how you live and he delights in those who serve him, especially when it's costly. So we've seen the motivations.

[13 : 40] Look who's watching. But now we have a model in Jesus. Look at Jesus' example in verses 21 to 23. Look at Jesus' example.

Because Jesus, in saving us, in being the suffering servant, modeled this very thing. there are multiple references here to Isaiah 53 where we see Jesus described as the suffering servant, where he's mistreated and punished in order to rescue his people.

And it's in this that we have the greatest example of honorable conduct under pressure. Jesus was patient in trial, submissive in suffering. Jesus faced more pressure than we can imagine as he faced the sin of the world, as he faced being forsaken by God.

Yet in that, he did not retaliate, did not respond in kind. When he was mocked, he didn't have a clever quip. He was patient in suffering.

And what did that achieve? Well, it achieved for us salvation. It secured for his people their promise, future inheritance. His model, his example, produced real fruit.

[15 : 03] Jesus is the means of our promised hope and in doing this, he is also the model for our present holiness. So we conduct ourselves honorably knowing that our sins are forgiven and we know we're following in the footsteps of Christ.

He's our great model. Verse 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.

We follow in the path that Jesus walked. He lived under pressure, intense pressure. His conduct was perfect and he suffered for it.

as we emulate his example, we're walking the same path he did and that's the path to future glory. Finally, Peter gives us the means.

Look at what Jesus has done for us. Look at what Jesus has done for us. He's not just our model. Jesus has brought us back from straying.

[16 : 17] He's brought us back to the shepherd and to the way of the shepherd. If we look at verses 24 and 25, we see 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 were straying like sheep but have now returned to the shepherd or it may be more helpfully read like this but have now returned to the way of the shepherd to the conduct of the shepherd.

That's what the returning here means. By Jesus' wounds we have been healed and moved from being alienated from God scattered straying and we've been returned both to him and to his way.

We've been returned to him in relationship and in conduct. As Peter tells us we have a new inheritance no longer the futile conduct of our forefathers but an inheritance kept in heaven.

We have a new health. We're healed of our sin through Jesus' suffering and he's let us taste something good. He's brought us back to himself and with that given us a new life a life of representing him.

[17 : 43] If we look back to chapter 2 verse 9 but you're 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 marvelous light once you were not a people but now you're God's people once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy and it is now as this people of God people return to the shepherds people made holy it is now as God's priests that our conduct must be honorable that's what flows from these verses this is the command in 11 and 12 to keep your conduct honorable no longer are we people straying and scattered from God but we're his people returned by Jesus to him people returned to him in relationship and people now shaped by a conduct that follows after their shepherd it was for this that Jesus suffered that you might live like him that you might have a conduct that's honorable under pressure as you're feeling weak and marginalized in the world in the workplace as you feel like you don't belong it's because you don't

Jesus has rescued us for something in the future but as you feel like the outsider what he tells us to do now is live like him and as we return to him we can't but be returned to his way his conduct the conduct of him and his people we were lost straying from him but he has returned us both to him and to his way Peter lays down clearly our precious future and then he wants us to live in light of it because of our secure future inheritance he says keep your conduct honorable because of what is kept in heaven for you live godly lives as those who represent their shepherd king the bread's guide may have 192 pages on how to conduct oneself as a modern gentleman but for us as

Christians we have the life of the lord Jesus to look to he is our guide he is who we follow that is how we live as Christians under pressure if we follow his conduct his model people may come to glorify him he will delight in us and we live up to being his distinct people to living his way our guide could simply read Jesus is our model of holiness in the present and our means of hope for the future amen now may the grace of the lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all amen