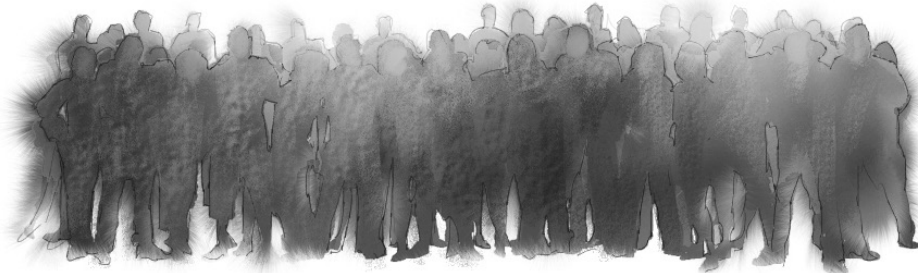


Our Relationships With Others



SABBATH—APRIL 15

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Peter 2:13–23; 1 Peter 3:1–7; 1 Corinthians 7:12–16; Galatians 3:27, 28; Acts 5:27–32; Leviticus 19:18.

MEMORY VERSE: “Most of all, love one another deeply. Love erases many sins by forgiving them” (1 Peter 4:8, NIV).

PETER'S FIRST LETTER deals with some of the more difficult social questions of his time. For example, how should Christians live with a cruel and evil government? What did Peter tell his readers to do? And what do his words mean to us today?

How should Christian slaves act when their masters treat them harshly and unfairly? Modern employer-employee relationships are different from master-slave relationships in Peter's day. But what Peter says will have a lot of meaning for those who have to deal with unfair bosses. How interesting that Peter points to Jesus! After all, Jesus is the example of how Christians should act when they experience bad treatment (1 Peter 2:21–24).

How should husbands and wives treat each other? How should they treat each other when they do not agree on something as important as their religious beliefs?

Finally, how should Christians relate to the government? And what should they do when the government is evil and when it goes against the Christian faith?



Peter points to Jesus as an example of how Christians should act when they experience bad treatment.

THE CHURCH AND THE GOVERNMENT (1 Peter 2:13–17)

The Bible was written a long time ago. But it discusses issues (problems) that are very meaningful for us today. One of these issues is the relationship between Christians and their government.

Read 1 Peter 2:13–17. What do these verses tell us about how to relate to the government?



Christians need to be good citizens, even if the government they live under is far from perfect.

The evils of the Roman Empire were well known to those living within its borders. The Roman Empire had been built by cruel men. These men used armies to carry out their plans. They used violence against anyone who dared to stand against them. They used cruel methods of torture to punish their enemies. And one way they tortured their enemies was to put them to death on a cross. The Roman government practiced nepotism. Nepotism is the unfair practice by a powerful person of giving jobs and other favors to relatives.

So Peter knows how cruel Rome is. But he still asks his readers to accept the authority of every human power in the empire, from emperor (ruler) to governor (1 Peter 2:13, 14, NIV).

Peter argues that emperors and governors “punish those who do wrong . . . [and] praise those who do right” (1 Peter 2:14, NIV). In doing so, these leaders have an important role in shaping society.

The Roman Empire had many faults. But it still provided a dependable society. For example, the Roman Empire gave people freedom from war. It built roads. It established a system of money to support its army. In doing so, Rome created an environment where the people were able to grow. In many cases, some people became rich and successful. It is true that its justice was harsh. But it was based on the rule of law. So with these things in mind, Peter’s comments about government are wise. No government is perfect. And Rome certainly was not. So what we can learn from Peter is that Christians need to be good citizens. They need to obey the law of the land as much as they can. And Christians must do so, even if the government they live under is far from perfect.

Why is it important for Christians to be good citizens as much as possible, even when their political situations are not perfect? What can you do to make your society better, even in a small way?

MASTERS AND SLAVES (1 Peter 2:18–23)

Read 1 Peter 2:18–23. How do we understand what these verses mean today? What important rule can we take from these verses for ourselves?

A careful reading of 1 Peter 2:18–23 shows that these verses do not support slavery. Instead, they give spiritual advice for people in difficult situations that could not be changed at the time.

The word translated as “servant” or “slave” in 1 Peter 2:18 is *oiketes*. This word is used very clearly to mean the group of slaves who worked in the houses or homes of their Roman masters. The Roman Empire was made up of many different social groups. Slaves were at the bottom. They were the property of their masters. Their masters had total control over their lives. And their masters could treat them well or cruelly.

However, a slave’s freedom could be purchased. A slave whose freedom was purchased was described as “redeemed [freed when one’s debt is paid for by another person].” Paul uses this word picture to describe what Jesus has done for us (Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:24; Colossians 1:14).

It is important to remember that a number of the first Christians were slaves. As such, they were caught in a system they could not change. Many slaves were unfortunate enough to have harsh and unreasonable masters. These slaves were in very difficult situations. Even slaves with better masters could face hard times.

Peter gives the same advice to Christian slaves that is given in other places in the New Testament. Christian slaves should yield to the authority of their masters and be patient. Christ also yielded and was patient during hardship (1 Peter 2:18–20). He is their Example. There is no praise for people who suffer punishment for having done wrong. No, the real spirit of Christ is shown when people suffer for wrong they have not done or when they are treated unfairly. Like Jesus, Christians are not to return abuse at such times. They are not to threaten. Instead, they are to give themselves to God. He will judge justly (1 Peter 2:23).

What useful advice can we take away from what Peter wrote here? Does he mean that we should never stand up for our rights? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.



Like Jesus, Christians are not to return abuse.

WIVES AND HUSBANDS (1 Peter 3:1–7)



Wives with unbelieving husbands must live very faithful and holy lives.

Read 1 Peter 3:1–7. What special situation is Peter dealing with in these verses? How are his words meaningful to marriage in today’s society?

There is one important clue in these verses that helps the careful reader to figure out the issue Peter is dealing with. In 1 Peter 3:1, Peter says he is talking about husbands who “[do not] believe God’s word [the Bible]” (NirV). So we can see Peter is talking about what should happen when a wife who is a Christian is married to a husband who is not.

A Christian wife would find many difficulties being married to a husband who does not share her faith. What should happen in these situations? Should she separate from her husband? Peter, like Paul elsewhere, does not suggest that Christian wives leave their nonbelieving husbands (read 1 Corinthians 7:12–16). Instead, Peter says these wives must live very faithful and holy lives. These lives should be so good that others who see them will want to copy them and live that way too.

Roman wives had rights under the law regarding property. And these women also had the right to take legal action to correct something unfair. But in some first-century societies, women in most religions were not allowed to be involved in politics, government, or leadership. So Peter urges Christian women to act with honor in whatever situation they find themselves. He urges them to be pure and show deep respect for God (1 Peter 3:2). He says that a Christian woman should be more interested in her inner beauty than in fashionable hairstyles, jewelry, and expensive clothing (1 Peter 3:3–5). In other words, a Christian woman should behave in a way that will make her Christianity attractive to her husband.

Peter’s words should not be taken by husbands to mean they have the freedom to mistreat their wives in any way. As Peter points out, husbands should show tender thoughtfulness to their wives (1 Peter 3:7).

True, Peter’s advice concerns Christian wives who are married to nonbelievers. But even so, we can see in these verses the perfect standard or example of Christian marriage. They show that Christian partners should live to support each other. Their honor and respect for God should be seen in their everyday work and tasks. This way of living is another way of worshiping God.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS (Romans 13:1–7)

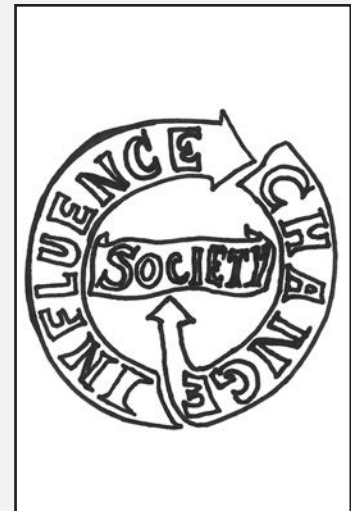
Read what Paul says in Romans 13:1–7; Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Corinthians 7:12–16; and Galatians 3:27, 28. How is what Paul says the same as, or different from, what Peter says in 1 Peter 2:11–3:7?

Paul deals with some of the same issues raised by Peter in 1 Peter 2:11–3:7. What Paul says is a lot like what is found in 1 Peter. For example, both Paul and Peter urge their readers to “obey those who rule over you” (Romans 13:1, NIV). This is because God appoints rulers. And rulers punish those who do evil works, not good works (Romans 13:3). So then, you as a Christian should “give to everyone what you owe them. Do you owe taxes? Then pay them. Do you owe anything else to the government? Then pay it. Do you owe respect? Then give it. Do you owe honor? Then show it” (Romans 13:7, NIV).

Paul also says that women who are married to non-believing husbands should live very faithful and holy lives. As a result, their husbands may join the church (1 Corinthians 7:12–16). And Paul tells us what the model Christian marriage is. It is one in which both partners share the same feelings for each other and share the same interests. Husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25). Also Paul suggests that slaves should obey their earthly masters as they would obey Christ (Ephesians 6:5).

So Paul is willing to work within the laws that are already set up in society. He understands what can be changed about his culture and what cannot. But he also sees something within Christianity that could end up changing the way society thinks about people. In the same way, Jesus also worked with the laws already in place in society. He did not try to start any kind of political revolution. He did not try to overthrow the government in order to change the social order. And neither do Peter or Paul. Instead, they believe change should come by the influence of godly people in society. This influence then spreads throughout society and causes others to change.

Read Galatians 3:27–29. What do these verses teach us about how Christians are to relate to one another because of what Jesus has done for them?



Change should come by the influence of godly people in society. This influence spreads through society and causes others to change.

CHRISTIANS AND OBEYING THE LAW (Acts 5:27–32)

Both Paul and Peter know that human organizations and governments are flawed (imperfect) and sometimes sinful. And both men have had bad experiences with governments and religious leaders. But both Paul and Peter urge Christians to obey human authorities (1 Peter 2:13–17; Romans 13:1–10). Paul and Peter also say Christians should pay taxes. And as far as possible, Christians are to be good citizens.



Suppose we must choose between following God and following people. Then the choice is clear: we must follow God.

DEFINITIONS

1. scribes—a group of men in New Testament times whose job was to copy manuscripts and books.

Read Acts 5:27–32. Peter says to obey the authorities (1 Peter 2:13–17). But what do Peter and the other apostles (leaders; teachers) actually do in Acts 5:27–32? What do Peter and the other apostles mean when they say, “‘We must obey God instead of people’ ”? (NirV). Why must obeying God come first above everything else?

The early successes of the Christian church lead to the arrest of Peter and John (Acts 4:1–4). They are questioned by the rulers, elders, and scribes.¹ Then they let Peter and John go with a stern warning to stop preaching (Acts 4:5–23). Soon afterward Peter and John are arrested again. They are asked why they have not done what the authorities told them to do (Acts 5:28). Peter replies, “‘We must obey God instead of people’ ” (Acts 5:29, NirV).

What important truth must we take from the apostle’s words in Acts 5:29?

Peter is not being a hypocrite. A hypocrite is a person who says one thing and does another. Suppose we must choose between following God or following people. Then the choice is clear: we must follow God. Until then, Christians should support and obey the government. They must support and obey the laws of the land even as they themselves try to bring about social change.

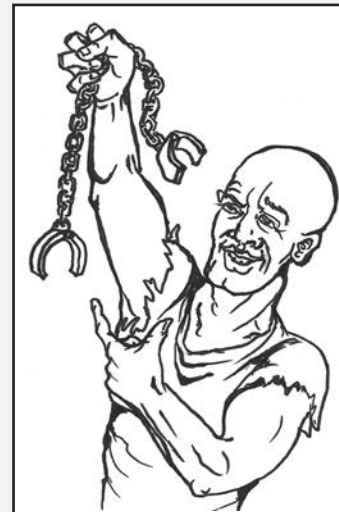
Read Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:39. These verses command us to love our neighbor as ourselves. How might this command include the need to work for change that could make life better and fairer for your neighbor?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Impending [Coming] Conflict,” pages 582–592; “The Scriptures [Bible] a Safeguard,” pages 593–602; and “The Time of Trouble,” pages 613–634 in *The Great Controversy [War Between Christ and Satan]*.

The law in Ellen White’s day required that an escaped slave be returned to his or her master. But Ellen White spoke against that law. She told Adventists not to obey it, even though they might suffer for it. “Suppose the laws of men go against the Bible and law of God. Then we are to obey the Bible and the law of God. We are to obey the Bible, whatever the results may be. The law of our land requires us to deliver a slave to his master. But we are not to obey this law. And we must live with the results of going against this law. The slave is not the property of any man. God is his rightful master. And man has no right to take into his hands another person made by God and claim him as his own.”—Adapted from *Testimonies² for the Church*, volume 1, pages 201, 202.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Should Christians *never* stand up for their rights? As you discuss, think about this one question, as well: Just what are our rights?
- 2 What are some examples of Christians being a powerful force in changing society for good? What lessons can we take from these examples?
- 3 First Peter 2:17 says, “Honor the emperor” (NIV). The emperor at that time was probably Nero. He was one of the more evil rulers of Rome. What message does this verse have for us today? Now read what Peter says at the beginning of that verse, “Show proper respect to everyone” (NirV). How does this part of the verse help us to better understand what Peter is saying about how we are to honor the emperor of our land?
- 4 Read 1 Peter 2:21–25 in class. How is the gospel message shown in these verses? What hope do they offer us? What do they call us to do?



“The slave is not the property of any man.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1, page 202.

DEFINITIONS

2. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.