

Feed My Sheep: 1 & 2 Peter

Social Relationships

Lesson #4 for April 22, 2017

Scriptures: 1 Peter 2:13-23; 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16; Galatians 3:27-28; Acts 5:27-32; Leviticus 19:18.

1. This lesson, covering 1 Peter 2:13-23 and 1 Peter 3:1-7, will focus on the challenges of dealing with important social relationships which we might face in our everyday activities.
2. How should we relate to our government? Our work environment including our bosses? Our spouses? Other church members?
3. How should we relate to a government which we know in the near future will act like a dragon? (Revelation 13:11-18) How will America force people to pay homage to the “first beast” who in turn gets its authority from the dragon (the Devil)? (Revelation 12:7-18)
4. Did the emperors of Rome also get their authority from the Devil?
5. It is estimated that up to 60% of the population of the Mediterranean world in Peter’s day were slaves. Some were slaves because their native lands had been conquered by Rome; many were slaves because they had gotten into debt and had to sell themselves as slaves to pay for that debt; and some were slaves for other reasons. Does Peter’s counsel about dealing with slave-masters have any relationship to our working with bosses in our day?
6. Should Seventh-day Adventists join labor unions so as to bargain collectively against unfair labor practices? We know that labor unions in the past were often very corrupt. Is that still true? (See Luke 3:14.) Peter also talked about the relationships between husbands and wives. Unfortunately, divorce has become incredibly common in the United States—more than 50%. But, as disturbing as that is, divorce rates among Adventists are almost the same as those of the world! Why is that? (See Malachi 2:16.)
7. We also live in a world in which social upheaval has come to be the norm. How should we relate to hot-button political issues such as abortion, immigration, and illegal immigrants? Should Adventists be on the streets, demonstrating? Or, would our time be better spent warning people of what is coming and telling them what God is really like?
8. In the near future, Christians will be forced to choose between conforming with societal norms and obeying government decrees or obeying the Word of God.
9. Do you see ways in which the government is gradually encroaching on freedom of religion? We need to recognize that the Devil is too smart and subtle to suddenly suggest huge changes in peoples’ ways of thinking or acting. Changes will almost certainly come gradually. At what point in such a situation, should we begin to oppose the government?
10. Read 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7. We know that the Imperial Roman government in the days of Peter and Paul was very corrupt. It is quite likely that at the time when this letter was written, Nero was the emperor. A person could be tortured or put to death even by crucifixion for the slightest reason. The government was full of nepotism and corruption, and the emperor appointed governors to rule over various provinces; they were often as corrupt, or more so, than Nero himself.
11. Is there any risk of nepotism in the United States government at the present time?
12. Do civil authorities always punish those who do wrong? And, praise those who do right?

(1 Peter 2:14) Remember that at some point, current governments of the world are going to punish people for doing what is right. Look at the Middle East even today.

13. However, coincidentally, some of the Roman Empire's activities did facilitate the spread of the gospel. They built roads so their military could move around more easily. They enforced a common language—the *Koine* Greek language. We know that on several occasions, Paul's life was saved or his punishments were reduced because he was a Roman citizen.
14. So, is it our responsibility to be the best citizens we possibly can be?
15. Think of the conditions under which Jesus lived. Remember that we are looking for a more perfect world to come. In fact, we are citizens of heaven. (Philippians 3:20)
16. Read 1 Peter 2:18-23. Peter recognized that circumstances were/are not always going to be favorable for Christians. But, even if one is a slave, s/he is to faithfully serve her/his master so long as that does not involve violating the commandments or laws of God. If a slave has to endure beatings, s/he/we need(s) to remember what happened to Jesus.
17. There are two words for *servant* or *slave* in the *Koine* Greek language. First Peter 2:18 uses the word *oichetēs* which is specific to domestic slaves, working in a master's home. The more general term for *slave* is *doulos*, and Paul used that word in Ephesians 6:5. We need to remember, of course, that in the Roman world, a slave was considered to be the legal possession of his/her master who could treat him/her well or cruelly. Do we do our jobs as if we were serving Christ? On one occasion, an angry slave killed his master who was a prominent Roman citizen; 400 of his fellow slaves were killed in retaliation.
18. But, there were some slaves who were given very important responsibilities. Some managed their master's estate. Think of the early times of Joseph in Egypt. Some slaves were even teachers for their master's children.
19. Since many slaves were in that condition because they could not pay their debts, a slave could be redeemed by the payment of those debts either by himself or by a friend or relative. Paul used that language to talk about how Christians have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. (See Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:24; Colossians 1:14.) Is that an appropriate analogy for today?
20. Slaves were reminded that they did not get credit for being beaten for doing wrong; they only received "credit" if they were beaten even though they were doing right.
21. If we are to faithfully submit to those in responsible positions, is there ever a time for us to "stand up for our rights"? As Christians we are to stand for the truth and for God. Fighting for some selfish "rights" will often get us into trouble. But, standing up for God will put us in the company of the great men of the Bible like Joseph and Daniel and his three friends.
22. Read 1 Peter 3:1-7. Peter was speaking to Christians who were married to unbelievers. We can assume that those believers became Christians after they were already married. People who have recently become Christians are some of the best soul-winners among their friends. Longtime believers do not do so well at reaching out.
23. Both Peter and Paul advised believing spouses to stay with their unbelieving spouses if the unbelieving spouse agreed. Of course, the hope was that by his/her faithful, loving behavior, the believing spouse would eventually win his/her spouse to become a believer.
24. Wives in the 1st century in the Roman Empire did not have many legal rights. They were not allowed to own property; and they had few options for getting legal redress to problems

they endured. Peter urged them to live their lives in purity and respect before their spouses. He went on to say that the Christian wife should be more interested in her inward beauty than the adornment of fashionable hairstyles, jewelry, or expensive clothing. (1 Peter 3:3-5) Every Christian should conduct himself/herself in a manner that would recommend Christianity to anyone observing him/her.

25. The role and status of women through much of history has been bleak. Even in the days of the Protestant Reformation, the role of women was very low. Look at this note found in the 1549 reprinting of the *Matthews Bible* (1537) done by Edmund Beck. After reading Peter's counsel that wives "be in subjection to your own husbands... even as Sarah obeyed Abraham," (See 1 Peter 3:1,6.) Mr. Beck attached this note* in the margin to male readers:

He dwelleth wyth hys wyfe accordynge to knowledge, that taketh her as a necessarye helper, and not a bondeservant or a bondslave. And if she be not obedient and helpful unto him, endevoureth to beate the feare of God into her heade, that thereby she may be co[m]pelled to learne her dutie and do it. [Copied as close to the original spelling as possible; letter in brackets is added.]

26. Surely, we all recognize that Peter's words should not be taken by a husband as a license to mistreat his wife in any way.
27. Peter spoke about husbands living with their wives, understanding that they are the "weaker" sex. Notice these words from our *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 55:

The expression "weaker vessel" (*ESV, KJV*), in verse 7 of some translations, does not refer to physical or emotional weakness. It refers to finely made dishware. Very likely it is a reference to how men should treat women, behaving toward them as they would a valuable piece of china, which should be handled with great care and regard lest it be broken needlessly. The expression is a positive assessment of the value of the wife and the considerate and gentle manner in which she should be treated. How do we assess the value of women in our lives?

28. Bible-believing Christians should recognize that it was God's plan in the beginning to have husbands and wives live together as equal partners. The entrance of sin meant that God realized He would need to put one partner in charge over the other as the head of the household. Modern Christians should recognize that the closer we are to getting back to God's ideal, the closer to equal will husbands and wives treat each other.
29. Read Romans 13:1-7; Ephesians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 7:12-16; and Galatians 3:27-28. How do these words from Paul compare with Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:11-3:7? In these passages from Paul, we recognize that he was giving counsel which is very similar to what we have studied in 1 Peter. Instead of attacking social inequalities and problems such as slavery, both Peter and Paul felt that their work was to promote the gospel as opposed to attacking legally-mandated, culturally-accepted norms. They recognized that attacking the social system of their day would almost certainly have cut them off almost immediately from the work that God had given them.
30. What is our responsibility, living in our society in our day? Do we really think that society is going to make major changes in the direction of what is right? Or, instead, should we work toward hastening the second coming (2 Peter 3:10-12) which will, ultimately, solve

the problems permanently?

31. Read Galatians 3:27-29. We need to remember when reading this passage that a traditional Jewish male prayer that he would utter upon arising in the mornings was to say: "I thank God that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." Paul must have prayed that prayer many times in his earlier days. What a change came over him! As Christians, we should all think of our fellow believers as brothers and sisters in the Lord. None of us should consider ourselves superior to another.
32. So, how should Christians relate to government organizations? Read 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7. Peter and Paul both recommended that we should pay our taxes and contribute to society as good citizens. But, our first duty is to obey God.
33. Read Acts 5:27-32. What did Peter and his fellow apostles say to the Sanhedrin when they were absolutely forbidden to speak about Jesus? How does that passage relate to Peter's later statement recorded in 1 Peter 2:13-17? Obeying God is our chief obligation. God's commands are always the ones that will work out the best in the end. Peter was not being hypocritical in his statements about obeying the government, considering the fact that he had said earlier that we must first of all obey God. As far as possible, we need to live in harmony with those around us. But, if there comes a time when the choice is between obeying earthly powers and obeying God, we must, of course, obey God.
34. Read Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 22:39. Love for our neighbors obviously implies we should do what we can to befriend them and do what is good for them.
35. We have spoken briefly about what the Bible says about the future time of trouble. The only way we can prepare ourselves for that time of trouble is by studying the Bible until we can clearly distinguish between Satan's deceptions and the truth about God.
36. The future time of trouble is spoken about in very clear and distinct terms by Ellen White in the chapter "The Time of Trouble" in *The Great Controversy* pages 613-634.

The deepest poverty, the greatest self-denial, with His approval, is better than riches, honors, ease, and friendship without it. We must take time to pray. If we allow our minds to be absorbed by worldly interests, the Lord may give us time by removing from us our idols of gold, of houses, or of fertile lands.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy** 622.2.

The "time of trouble, such as never was," is soon to open upon us; and we shall need an experience which we do not now possess and which many are too indolent to obtain. It is often the case that trouble is greater in anticipation than in reality; but this is not true of the crisis before us. The most vivid presentation cannot reach the magnitude of the ordeal. In that time of trial, every soul must stand for himself before God. "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job" were in the land, "as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son [623] nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." Ezekiel 14:20.—*Ibid.** 622.4.

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the

Revelation. Revelation 1:13-15. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: "Christ has come! Christ has come!" The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth. His voice is soft and subdued, yet full of melody. In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed.—*Ibid.** 624.2.

So closely will the counterfeit resemble the true that it will be impossible to distinguish between them except by the Holy Scriptures. By their testimony every statement and every miracle must be tested.—*Ibid.** 593.1.

Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. **None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great [594] conflict.** To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God's immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?—*Ibid.** 593.2. [Bold type is added.]

37. Ellen G. White recognized that there were and will be times when we must do what is right even though it may be in conflict with the commands and laws of local or national governments. Will our church compromise? Or, will it go "underground"?

38. Remember that when she was growing up, slavery was still very common.

When the laws of men conflict with the word and law of God, we are to obey the latter, whatever the consequences may be. The law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey, and we must abide the consequences of violating this law. The slave is not the property of any man. God is his rightful master, and man has no right to take God's workmanship into his hands, and claim him as his own.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 1, 201.2-202.0.

39. We all, in principle, recognize that it would be good for Christians to work for the betterment of society. Can you think of an example when Christianity has actually bettered society? Perhaps the best example would be the changes brought about in the Roman world by the work of the early Christians. Unfortunately, it was not long before Satan figured out how to corrupt early Christianity.

40. Can you think of a time when Christianity did not serve society well? Unfortunately, the Roman Catholic Church acquiesced to cooperate with the Nazi and Fascist governments during World War II. Perhaps, they felt they could not do otherwise.

41. Is God responsible for placing governments in power? (See Romans 13:1-7.) Or, does God

simply allow it even when He knows it is not for the best? When we are forced to live in an environment that is not ideal, we, nevertheless, should do our best to support the authorities unless they specifically insist that we violate the laws of God. (1 Peter 2:21-24) Certainly, no better example could be given for someone living a righteous life in an unjust environment than the story of Jesus with the Jewish leaders.

42. Read Romans 13:2 (*GNB**): Whoever opposes the existing authority opposes what God has ordered; and anyone who does so will bring judgement on himself.
43. How do you understand those words from Paul? Peter and Jude talked about what will happen to people who disregard or disobey human authorities. See 2 Peter 2:9-10 and Jude 6,8.
44. How would you compare the advice of Paul as recorded in Romans 13:1-5 with that of Peter in 1 Peter 2:13-15? Could we still say that authorities are put in place by God?
45. Read 1 Peter 2:16 and Galatians 5:13. We must never take passages like these to suggest that we are free to do whatever we want to do. Both Peter and Paul discussed the dangers of being slaves to sin or to destructive habits. See 2 Peter 2:18-20 and Romans 6:15-22.
46. Does it really seem possible that being a slave of God is the ultimate freedom? Or, is that a contradiction in terms?
47. Read 1 Peter 2:22-24. How do these words compare with Isaiah 53:4-9?
48. Would it ever be appropriate to interpret 1 Peter 2:18-20 to justify slavery? How do you think Peter and Paul actually felt about slavery? How do you think the early Christians meeting quietly in personal homes mixed together, considering that maybe half of them were slaves and the other half were free people? We know that there were problems in Corinth over some of these issues.

In Paul's discussion of submission to one another (*Eph. 5:21-6:9*), all four examples of how one submits involve relationships in which submission is one way and nonreciprocal: wives to husbands, the church to Christ, children to parents, and servants or slaves to masters. Husbands are never commanded to submit to wives, nor Christ to the church, nor parents to children, nor masters to servants. Authority and submission work only in one direction. This principle pervades Scripture, and it reaches into heaven (*1 Cor. 11:3*) and, in some ways, into eternity (*1 Cor. 15:28*).—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 56. But, what about Ephesians 5:21?

49. How do you feel about "one way" submissive relationships? Was that the way the relationship of Adam and Eve was in Eden? How does a wife submit to her husband as to the Lord? (Ephesians 5:22) What did Paul mean by Ephesians 5:25 (*GNB*): "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it." Do those verses really suggest a "one way" submissive relationship of a wife to her husband?
50. It is very helpful to understand what was going on in Roman society in Peter's and Paul's day when we try to interpret these passages. Are the lessons which we have learned appropriate in some ways for us in our day?

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