

# First Peter

2:11-25

## Introduction

You are being watched. "Observe[d]" is the word Peter used in verse twelve; it is from a root word meaning *to inspect*. You're being *inspected* by any unsaved people you have contact with. They expect you to conduct yourself as a Christian. You can object all you want... But the scrutiny of the unsaved comes with the territory.

Instead of objecting, you ought to embrace the idea that you're being watched. *It makes you an evangelist before you ever say a word!* Your conduct as a Christian is a kind of pre-evangelism that prepares people to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. You don't have to say a word for them to see the effect of the Word in your life.

If you are a Christian, then you are also observing Someone. You are observing Jesus as He is revealed in the pages of Scripture. He is your example. Peter said you should "follow His steps."

You're being watched; **get over it!** You're following Jesus; **get into it!**

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 The Unsaved Have You As Their Example Of Godliness And Good Works, and #2 You Have Jesus As Your Example Of Godliness And Good Works.

### #1 The Unsaved Have You As Their Example Of Godliness And Good Works (v11-20)

Christians desire that the unsaved hear the Gospel and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. We want others to be saved - especially our families and friends. Many struggle to find the words to evangelize. Without minimizing at all the importance of your words, your walk is an important pre-evangelism. Your unsaved families and friends are curious to see what difference it makes to follow Jesus Christ.

The difference Jesus makes in your walk ought to be two-fold - both internal and external. The internal change we will call "godliness." The external result Peter called "good works."

Verse eleven explains what is meant by godliness; then verse twelve introduces your good works.

1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

"Beloved" is a word rich in meaning. Jesus Christ is God's Beloved Son; when you become a Christian by accepting Jesus Christ, you are "beloved" by God to the same extent as He loves His Son!

Peter already called Christians "sojourners and pilgrims." We need constant reminding that this world is not our home. We are citizens of heaven. We're not on a camping vacation in the world; we're on a campaign as ambassadors.

Godliness involves your struggle against "fleshly lusts." The "flesh" is a reference to your physical drives and desires. They are not bad or wrong in-and-of themselves. They become sinful "lusts" when they are motivated by selfishness and you seek to satisfy them in ways that are contrary to God's Word.

The unsaved sometimes think that the Christian ought to act like a monk living a life of celibacy and silence! You're not obligated to live according to their unbiblical restrictions.

Still, there **are** some things in every society which you should "abstain" from because you are a Christian. Your abstinence becomes a pre-evangelism to the unsaved as they see God giving you power over the flesh in lusts that they are overcome by.

Peter said that they "war against the soul." This is military language. You are under attack and must maintain your vigilance.

The current ad campaign for the city of Las Vegas provides a good example. "What happens here, stays here" is how they hope to

attract more visitors. Underlying the words is the idea that you can indulge your lusts in secret with no lasting effect.

Even if you are never found out, there **is** an effect! Peter said there would be an effect in your "soul." "Soul" refers to the immaterial part of you - your soul and spirit. These will be weakened, compromised, and you will become ineffective as a Christian.

We should desire to live godly lives, overcoming our fleshly lusts. Godly living is a foundation for your good works:

1 Peter 2:12 *having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Peter used the word "Gentiles" as a synonym for the unsaved. The unsaved are going to "speak against you as evildoers." You're not one of them anymore! Your conversion to Jesus convicts them and they want to criticize it so they don't have to consider their own situation.

The answer to their criticism is not in words so much as it is in **works** - "good works." We will define them in a moment. Peter's point was that the unsaved are "observing" you, inspecting you, and should discover good works.

Then he said something remarkable: "that... they may... glorify God in the day of visitation." The day of visitation is the day God visits them with grace and mercy by bringing them the Gospel. They "glorify God in the day of visitation" if they receive Jesus and are saved. Your "good works which they observe" are a kind of pre-evangelism that prepares them to receive God's Word!

What are these good works? This whole section of Peter's letter - from here through verse twelve of Chapter Three - is about your good works. He will discuss the three key areas of your life: social, spousal, and spiritual. In each of them the unsaved should observe the good works that show you are a follower of Jesus.

Peter kept it simple. He gave you one word that will summarize your good works in society, as a spouse, and spiritually, in the Church. It's the second word in verse thirteen:

1 Peter 2:13 Therefore **submit** yourselves...

"Submit." It means *to rank under*. It means to recognize and follow the proper authority. The one, simple key to living a life of good works is to recognize God's authority in society, in your home, and in the Church, and to conduct yourself according to the counsel and commandments in His Word.

Peter began with your conduct in society - first as a citizen to your government, then in relation to your employment.

1 Peter 2:13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme,  
1 Peter 2:14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and *for the praise of those who do good.*

"Every ordinance of man" does *not* mean every law. It means every institution of government that is over you. You are to respect the authority of government "for the Lord's sake." Peter specifically mentioned "the king" and his "governors." The king he was speaking about was Nero; his governors were men like Pontius Pilate.

God has ordained that there be governments on the earth. Governments should do two things: punish "evildoers" and "praise... those who do good," which I take to mean that law-abiding citizens are protected and allowed to live peacefully.

1 Peter 2:15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men -

The believers Peter wrote to were being accused of treason. They would not acknowledge that the Caesar was a 'god,' so were considered traitors to the government. The spiritual strategy was to be the best citizens in the government so that they would "silence the ignorance of foolish men" who were accusing them of trying to overthrow the government.

1 Peter 2:16 as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

Submission to government does not eliminate true freedom. True freedom is spiritual. It is freedom from the ruling power of sin; it is freedom from the guilt of sin; it is freedom from the burden of achieving perfect righteousness by your own effort.

True freedom is *not* your "liberty" to practice all kinds of "vice." You are free to be God's "bondservant," God's slave. You are free to submit to God - and that includes submitting to the government He is allowing to rule over you.

1 Peter 2:17 Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

"Honor" means *respect*. A Christian is to respect all people and have a higher regard for Christian brothers and sisters. This is because you "fear God." The result is that you will "honor the king."

The Christian and government is a big topic. When is it alright to disobey? Well, *Peter himself disobeyed!* He obeyed all laws until he was told to disobey God. Then he said you must obey God rather than man, and he disobeyed the law - but he did so respectfully! You are to submit to the institutions of your society unless commanded to sin. Then you must disobey... **But do so respectfully!**

Peter moved from government to the workplace in the next few verses:

1 Peter 2:18 Servants, *be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.*

The word for "servants" is stronger than employee, but weaker than slave. I have nothing good at all to say about slavery in any form. However, you must understand that slavery in Roman society was very different than the kind of slavery we think of. Roman slaves were mostly household servants, and included professions like teachers, doctors, and other professionals. Still, they were not free to do as they pleased; and in a moment you will read about their being "beaten."

Nevertheless, they were to "be submissive," even to harsh "masters."

1 Peter 2:19 For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

1 Peter 2:20 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God.

Peter just said something we don't like! In fact, he said it twice. It is "commendable" to patiently endure "suffering wrongfully" if we do it for God. God commends you for it; He approves of it. We will see in a minute that the reason He commends you, that He approves, is that through patient endurance of wrongful suffering you are imitating Jesus. But before we look at Jesus, let's finish our thoughts about submission to masters.

In our society we would make application of this to your relationship to your employer. The workplace is often a trial; a place of intense pressure and hardship. **You should be the best employee at your place of business** - best both in terms of respect for authority and how you perform your duties. Period. Remember: Your conduct is pre-evangelism! Those you work with and for are observing you to see if being a Christian makes any discernable difference.

By now you realize you need some help. **You've got it!**

## #2 You Have Jesus As Your Example Of Godliness And Good Works (v21-25)

The unsaved are looking at you... You are looking at the Lord.

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

You were "called" to suffering. If Jesus is your Lord, and He suffered... Then you will suffer. The servant is not greater than the Master.

"Christ suffered for us" is a reference to His life as a man, not to His death on the Cross. His life left us an "example."

"You should follow His steps." With apologies to the famous *Footprints in the Sand* poem which tells of two sets of footprints when Jesus is walking with you, then only one when He's carrying you... Peter's idea was that Jesus walked ahead of you, then you put your feet in His steps. Maybe *Footprints in the Snow* would be a better picture?

The particular "footprints" of Jesus you are to follow are His godliness (v22) and His good works (v23-24).

1 Peter 2:22 *"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth";*

This is a summary of Jesus' godliness. He was sinless throughout His entire lifetime on the earth. Peter was looking at Jesus from the perspective of His humanness. Jesus was and is both fully God and fully human. In His humanness, He depended upon the Holy Spirit to live a life pleasing to God. In His humanness, He is an example we can follow. No, we will never be sinless as He was; but the same power is within us that we might sin-less.

Peter next looked at Jesus' good works:

1 Peter 2:23 *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*

Throughout His ministry Jesus was "reviled," especially by the religious leaders. It refers to insulting and abusive speech.

As His ministry drew to its conclusion, He "suffered" at the hands of both Jews and Gentiles. He did not "threaten," though all power was His to command and all heaven's forces His to control.

His spiritual strategy - **the steps you should follow** - was to "commit Himself to Him Who judges righteously." You recognize God remains in control and will one day sort everything out according to what is right. You will be rewarded for your obedience. Those who mistreated you will either get what they deserve... Or they will become Christians and *not* get what they deserve!

1 Peter 2:24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed.

Let's clear up two misconceptions within this verse before we comment on it:

1. Peter called the Cross "the tree." The Greek word he used was *xylon*, meaning *an object made of wood*. He was talking about the Cross at Calvary upon which your Lord was crucified. He used the broader word to refer his readers back to Deuteronomy 21:23. There you read that, even though Jews did not practice crucifixion, if a victim was especially evil, they hung the dead body on a tree as a mark of shame. It's a reminder that Jesus' death on the Cross was especially shameful.
2. "By whose stripes you were healed" is about your eternal salvation and is **not** about your physical healing! If you want to think this guarantees you health and healing... You will be at odds with the rest of the New Testament. Right here, in our passage, Peter said it was "commendable" to suffer. The Word-Faith movement that promises you health and wealth produces shallow Christians.

This is what Peter **was** saying: Jesus took your place on the Cross as your Substitute. He bore your sins in His body and gives you His righteousness. This exchange of sin for righteousness is the Gospel in a nutshell.

Once you are saved, you have "died to sins" and you can "live for righteousness." "Died to sins" means sin no longer need rule your life. You have God's power to say "*No!*" to sin and instead live in a manner pleasing to God.

1 Peter 2:25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

The people observing you are "like sheep going astray." Straying sheep have no hope of survival. What they observe in your life is the oversight of a Shepherd Who loves you and cares for you -

regardless your suffering at the hands of evildoers. Ultimately they see Jesus; your approach and response to life is pre-evangelism.

You are being watched... But you are also being watched-over! Those who are watching you can see there is One watching over you as you submit and as you suffer for His sake.

### Conclusion

There's another possible interpretation of verse twenty-five. It might be directed toward those who have drawn-back or fallen away due to trials and sufferings that accompany the Christian life. If that's you... "return."