

Live Honorably 1 Peter 2:11-17

Peter has proclaimed the hope of the gospel, and reminded Christians of the call to holiness and the call to love within the Christian fellowship. Now, he shifts to how we live in relation to the pagan world, proving important counsel to us [Read/pray Ps 119.24].

Well this is a timely text, isn't it?

It's about how to live *honorably* and missionally in society that can be hostile, dishonorable, and unfair.

It addresses really important questions:

- How can we honor everyone made in God's image?
- How can we put the good news on display with good deeds?
- How can we honor those in leadership, even if we don't like their character or policies?

Peter doesn't tell Christians to retreat from the pagan world, nor does he tell them to rage against the pagan world, but rather, he tells them to live honorably in it, doing good deeds.

You could call this section of the letter "lifestyle evangelism."

Or "How honorable conduct is vital for Christian witness."

- This conduct is **the outworking of the gospel; and it gives credibility to our presentation of the gospel.**

The text breaks down in two parts.

1. **General instruction:** Live honorably among unbelievers (2:11-12)

- This passages prepares us for the whole central section of the book: how to testify to the gospel in the social order (2:13-3:12), though good deeds and honorable conduct.
- Take a moment and see this: Peter is talking about how to live the Christian life in a less than ideal situation.
 - Government in less than ideal situations (2:13-17)
 - Servant/Master relationship in an hard situation (2:18-25)
 - Marriage in a less than ideal situation (3:1-7)
 - A church in a less than ideal situation (3:8-12)
 - After this section, he begins his final section on suffering (3:13ff)
- So don't miss this: Peter envisions us living a faithful Christian life when times are tough.

You can live the Christian life in any circumstance!

That doesn't mean it's easy (trials, 1:7), but it does give us encouragement, and helps us see the relevance of this letter.

- At the heart of everything is the example of **Jesus** — who suffered unjustly (2:21-25), who through his redeeming work on the cross empowers us to live faithfully.

2. **Specific instruction:** Live honorably by submitting to governing authorities (2:13-17).

#1: Live Honorably Among Unbelievers (2:11-12)

11: Negative Exhortation: Abstain from the Passions of the Flesh

Urgency: “I urge you...” Do this now. Today.

Identity: “Beloved/Sojourners/Exiles”

- **Beloved** – We are loved by God. We are not earning his love through holiness; but pursuing holiness because we are loved. Before the exhortations, reminder of identity.
- **Sojourners/Exiles:** We're not home, friends. We belong somewhere else
 - “I am a sojourner with you, a guest like all my fathers” (Ps 39:12)
 - “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from a far, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (Heb 11:13)

Calling: Self-Control (“Abstain from the Passion of the Flesh”)

- “Abstain” means to hold back, to walk away from, to avoid these sinful desires, which war against your soul.
- “Passions” at war — James 4:1-3
 - This would involve sexual sins, or sins of appetite, or relational sins like those outlined in 2:1.
- Live differently than unbelievers (cf, 1 Peter 4:1-5)
- **Self-control is truly strange!**
- **Twilight movie: If a vampire is our model for self-control and honor, then we're in trouble!**

Becoming a Christian means life got more glorious to be sure (inheritance, hope, etc), but it also means you have a new battle.

- **76 anniversary of D-Day.** Those sights are unforgettable as soldiers got out of those boats and engaged in war.
- These sinful and selfish desires are mounting a full military campaign against your spiritual health and growth.
- Your heart is a high level target.
- We have a war with the flesh that must be put to death.

Don't treat temptation lightly; sin is coming to destroy.

- Sin never sleeps.
- Sin doesn't practice social distancing; temptation hasn't stopped in a pandemic.
- Be killing sin or it will be killing you (Romans 8:11)
- Don't entertain the thought of sin (Matt 5:27-30)
- Walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16ff)
- You can have observable and real victory over the flesh.

12: Positive Exhortation: Live a beautiful life

Holiness is not just about avoiding evil; but about doing that which is good.

Beautiful conduct springs from godly desires! (See connection v. 11)

Unbelieving World: “Gentiles”

- He’s not speaking of **ethnic** Gentiles but as those **outside** the community of faith (“tax collectors and Gentiles”)
- **Peter doesn’t call them to cultural isolation.**
- **Avoid evil and do good!**
- **Now if you do this, you will be different!**

Honor:

- Not **retreat**, nor **rage**, but **honor**. “Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12)

Purpose: “so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Christians were “**being spoken against.**”

- **They were up against immense scrutiny and criticism.**
- **Slander was one of the first kinds of persecutions.**
- **There were all kind of rumors and false accusations about Christians.**
 - They were accused (for one thing) of being an enemy of the **state and of Caesar.**
 - They were accused of hurting businesses because of their refusal to buy idols.
 - They were viewed as strange and even cannibalistic for taking the Lord’s Supper.
 - They were accused of incest, as they called each other brother/sister/family.
 - Suetonius said that Xians were “a class of people animated by a novel and dangerous superstition.”

What should they do when slandered against? Return evil for evil? No! “Good deeds!”

It’s the word for “**beautiful.**” (kalos); **a lifestyle that attracts people to the beauty of the gospel.**

- Leave a generous tip; pick up the bill; treat servers with respect and dignity; open up your home to others; care for the elderly and the sick, the orphan and the refugee; the prisoner; the lonely.
- Listen to hurting people.
- Be a peacemaker; be humble; be joyful; gentle.
- Maintain a happy marriage.
- These are beautiful acts.
- **Right now we have a great opportunity to put the gospel on display, as everyone wants to spew and rant and go on and on; and while we must speak up for injustice, do not lose this emphases here on good deeds!**
- These noble acts can be very powerful before unbelievers.
- Peter says **live a beautiful life when you’re slandered or mistreated for your faith!**
- **Peter doesn’t tell them to go defend themselves** in light of every accusation.
- **Not complain; attack or self-pity; but live an attractive life.**
 - **At the baseball field**
 - **At the library**
 - **At work**

- At school
- At the gym
- “There’s something that draws me to that person” – would anyone say that about you.

- Often Christians complain about their current situation, but spend no time trying to bless their towns, cities, and nation.
- Jeremiah’s word to Israelites living in Babylon is very instructive for Christians living in a pagan world. They were to serve the king of Babylon and work for “the welfare of the city” (Jer 29:4-7).
- Similarly Peter does not say “Put a Don’t Tread on Me, Nero bumper sticker on your donkey” but “Go do good.”
- “Not: “Go on social media and do one of those threads, or argue with people on Facebook (because we know that always persuades people!), but go live a beautiful life!
- Not: “Be overly sensitive to every little thing that’s said, but rather, be very careful to live honorably and beautifully.”

“they will **see** your good deeds”

- This is not a casual observation, but it denotes careful study and consideration.
- This will dismantle the arguments of some, and even more importantly, will help us commend Christ to them.
- **Matt 5:16**
- This means our behavior needs to be **consistent**, as some will need to **analyze and ponder for a long period of time.**
 - **Ajith Fernando: Village converted after missionary’s death; “he said being a Christian means you don’t have to be afraid when you die; we watched him die without fear and believed.”**
- **“glorify God on the day of visitation”**
- This can be interpreted in a few ways but I side with Schreiner and others who take this to mean some will be won over by your good deeds (and your good news), and when Christ returns they too will praise God. (cf, **1 Pet 3:1, 4-5**)

#2: Live Honorably by Submitting to Governing Authorities (2:13-17)

Along with Romans 13, this is one of the main texts on the Christian’s relationship to governmental officials.

- Peter states the exhortation in 13-14.
- Then he gives the reason for it in verse 15.
- Then he gives the principles to keep in mind in verses 16-17.

It’s a relevant question as Peter advocates neither despair (“Christianity has no shot under this leader”) nor “flight” (If he/she is president, I’m moving to Sweden”)

So let’s go “What” “Why” “How”

A. What? (2:13-14)

Submit (“be subject to”) – this governs the paragraph. Follow those in leadership. Recognize their role in God’s world.

Why is respecting officials so disliked?

Because we’re sons and daughters of Adam!

- **Rebelling against authority is as old as the garden.**
- **We want to do our own thing - that's not just a Texas thing!**
- **That's a human nature thing!**
- **We don’t even want God to tell us what to do! “Who said?” “God?”**

Because [most of us, I assume] are Americans!

- **Just ask the British how we feel about authority!**
- **“We don’t want your King or your Tea!”**

Because free speech tends to foster rebellion against authority

- **Free speech is a wonderful freedom, but some use this freedom to dishonorably.**
- **Trashing the authorities is a source of entertainment.**
- **It’s how many talk radio hosts and entertainers make a living!**
- **That kind of thing doesn’t happen in many other countries – imagine the Romans doing this with Nero!**

Because we have all had bad experiences with those in authority.

- **Who among us has not suffered from bad experiences, even traumatic experiences, with parental authority, authorities at school, teachers, coaches, the police, or some other form of authority?**
- **Many live with those wounds, and such experiences are in our mind when we read passages like this.**

So this is a very unpopular passage, given these reasons, and **the dislike is only intensified in the current political climate.**

We must remember that Peter was **NOT** writing in a perfect political climate.

- **Nero** was reigning!
- **Nero** was more sane early on, but grew progressively more maniacal.
- **He murdered his own mother**, the same crazy mother who helped him get to the throne, and of course Nero put many Christians to death.
- **But Paul** still wrote Romans 13 and Peter still wrote 1 Peter 2.
- **Their goal** was not to be political agitators but faithful missionaries, leading others to do the same

There are **exceptions** (“when the demands of society threaten to override the demands of the Lord”) but like in Romans 13, **Peter doesn’t mention exceptions here**

- **Acts 5:29**; “We must obey God rather than man” (**Peter said that!**)

- We are to engage in “civil disobedience” only when the government prohibits us from doing what the Lord commands, or when it commands us to do what the Lord prohibits.
- This is implicit in every exhortation to “submit.”
- Throughout Scripture we have various ways in which we are to submit *as unto the Lord* (eg., Eph 5:21, 22, 24; Col 3:22). That is, in a way that doesn’t violate Scripture or dishonor the Lord. It’s not blind submission.

Two Theological Truths to Remember Related to the Government:

1. All leaders will give an account to God for how they’ve used authority.

- This doesn’t mean we do nothing, when sin and injustice is being promoted; no, we work for justice, we lament over the lack of it, but it means we also take comfort in the fact that God will have the last word.

2. Rest in the providence of God.

- Many can’t see past the government to the government of God.
- Sometimes God gives authorities **as a blessing to a people**, and sometimes he institutes them as a means of **trial** or **judgment**.
- **God has His own purposes.**
- Many Christians lose their minds when it comes to politics.
- They fail to see the God who is over the government.
- **Engage in the process? Yes, of course. Speak truth to power? Yes, when possible.**
- **But freak out or make an idol of out a party or a system? No way.**

The Extent: Wide ranging – “every human institution”

- Literally: “every human **creature**”
- He’s drawing attention to **human authority** distinct from **divine authority**.
- **Human leaders are not creatures! God is Creator, so give human leaders their due, but assign glory and ultimate allegiance to God alone.**
- He has in mind leaders all the way to the top: **Emperor** as well as local leaders **governors**

Motivation: “For the Lord’s Sake”

- Or “on account of the Lord” – This is our **motivation, the glory of Jesus**.
- This is why **we** should be good citizens: **We have a higher motivation than simply obeying the law – we want to please God.**
 - o Have you ever thought of that?
 - **Keeping the speed limit honors the Lord.**
 - **Paying taxes honors the Lord.**
 - **Keeping your neighborhood clean honors the Lord.**
- Our primary motivation is to please the Lord, and so we honor him when we follow his word on these matters.

Charge to Those in Leadership: **restrain evil and encourage good behavior.** (“punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good” – Rom 13:3-4)

- **President, governor, mayor, city officials, police officers**

- Now if you are in a position of leadership or aspire to such positions, you should in one sense be filled with fresh motivation to do your job well in that you're not just fulfilling a job description, but you are contributing to the purposes of God, and you get to point people to God's goodness.
- God cares for his creatures, and the officials are to see to it that people dwell in a context where they can flourish.
- We are to pray to that end (1 Tim 2).

B. Why? (2:15)

God's Will and Our Witness

- "For this" is giving us the reason

A. "God's will."

- That should be enough.
- It's God's will that you do good.
- Peter is very mindful of *God's will*, later saying it may be God's will that you suffer (3:17), but if so, it is for doing good.
- Jesus' will for you and your enemies: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:27).
 - That's an astonishing exhortation.
 - You need more than a good mood to do this —you need to be moved by the reconciling love of Jesus, who loved us while we were his enemies.

B. Our Witness

- And "doing good" will "silence" (literally "muzzle") the critics.
- That is, live a joyful, generous, sacrificial, Christ-honoring life in order to silence accusations.
- Some were saying, "They're a sect ... They have plans to overthrow us... They have secret meetings teaching strange doctrines ... Their loyalty is to another kingdom"
- How should they respond? Doing good!

The government has no right to tell us what to preach/teach; if they do, we have the duty to rebel like the apostles in Acts 4-5.

- However, they do have a right to say (for instance) this is the fire code; don't break it or you will be penalized.
 - That doesn't violate Scripture and it's wise and safe for us to obey that rule.
- But submitting to basic laws we can silence any claims that we're some maverick group, doing whatever we please, thank you very much.
 - Such an attitude doesn't commend the gospel.
- You lose way more than you gain.
- Our witness must be protected.

C. How? (2:16-17)

Use your freedom correctly and give each relationship its due

A. Use Your Freedom Correctly (2:16)

- Peter says don't use your freedom in Christ as an excuse for disobeying the governing authorities.
- He doesn't tell them to be zealots, attacking Roman troops.
- Christian freedom means we have the greatest of freedoms: We are freed from condemnation; free from the law; but not free to be insubordinate!
- We're free to obey God.
- "God's servants" – We submit to them ultimately not because we are their servants, but because we are God's servants.
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B. Give Each Relationship Its Due (2:17)

Social: "Honor everyone" because everyone is made in the image of God!

- **Stott:** "The God of the biblical revelation, being both Creator and Redeemer, is a God who cares about the total well-being (spiritual and material) of all the human beings he has made.... God cares for the poor and the hungry, the alien, the widow and the orphan. He denounces oppression and tyranny, and calls for justice. He tells his people to be the voice of the voiceless and the defender of the powerless, and so to express their love for them."
- Citing prophetic texts he says elsewhere, "It is clear from these Old Testament passages that God hates injustice and oppression everywhere, and that he loves and promotes justice everywhere."

Ecclesial: "Love the Brotherhood"

- There is a special relationship we have with brothers and sisters in the faith.
- This picks up 1:22, and Peter emphasizes it later 4:8
- Romans 12:9; Eph 1:15; Col 1:3-5

Spiritual/Devotional: "Fear God" – Only He is to be revered and worshiped.

- "Render to Caesar what is Caesar, and to God what is God's."

Political: "Honor the Emperor"

- You don't have to agree with rulers' politics in order to honor them in a way that honors God.
- Respect the office, even when you disagree with leaders.
- Paul preached the gospel to Felix/Agrippa, but he respected them as leaders (Acts 24-26).

So then, how do citizens of heaven live as citizens of on earth?

Allow me to list some action steps:

- **Submit to governing authorities, acknowledging God's design for them, and thank God for all the good that is done through them.**
- **Pray for those in leadership (cf., 1 Tim 2:1-4).**
 - **Avoid being the kind of Christian that spends more time criticizing than praying.**
- **Be a good citizen.**

- **Pay taxes.**
- **Obey the law.**
- **Be respectful.**
- **Live with a clear conscious before God.**
- **Seek the welfare of your city.**
 - **Serve the city and your country for the common good.**
- **Engage the political process with truth and justice and the common good in mind.**
- **If you are a civil leader, lead with biblical values (cf., Prov 8:15; 16:10, 12; 29:4; 31:8-9), and bring your convictions into the public arena (cf., Prov 14:34).**
- **Rest in the providence of God.**
 - **Calm down.**
 - **God is sovereign.**
 - **No matter the circumstances, our testimony is “Our God reigns.”**
- **Make your ultimate allegiance to King Jesus.**

Jesus who had all honor before creation, but emptied himself, lived and suffered unjustly, died on behalf of his enemies, and who rose triumphantly as the vindicated and victorious Son of God; who has forgiven us our sins, given us new life, and new hope; He is worthy of all honor and glory.

Soon, Jesus will establish a one-party kingdom, in which he will rule with perfect peace of justice forever.

Kings and kingdoms fade away, but the kingdom of Christ endures forever.

Jesus Shall Reign (Isaac Watts)

1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run,
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

2 To him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head.
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.

3 People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song,
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.

4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
the prisoners leap to lose their chains,
the weary find eternal rest,
and all who suffer want are blest.

5 Let every creature rise and bring
the highest honors to our King,
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen.