

I Peter 2:16-17a
March 12, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Last week I asked you to name people groups here and abroad who feel targeted by a government authority or law enforcement, or anyone in authority. Groups who immediately came to mind were Black Lives Matter, illegal immigrants, Organizations providing Sanctuaries for Refugees, Muslims in America, Coptic Christians in Egypt under severe persecution, etc. We agreed that it is quite difficult to imagine what it would be like to live in a country where authorities are targeting me and appear “out to get me.” Yet, this is still going on in our own country and around the world.

Transition: The theme in this section of Peter’s letter reminds me of Michelle Obama’s speech at the DNC this summer. She offered a mantra for all to consider in light of all the political attacks on Hillary Clinton’s character. It was powerful and memorable. Can anyone quote it? “When they go low, we go HIGH.” All of us CAN go “high” when enduring persecutions by those in authority “for the Lord’s sake” BY heeding the ADMONITIONS that Peter offers in his letter. We will pick up where we left off, which means we will first re-visit verses 16-17. Let’s read it and begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.16:

- Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

V.17a:

- Show proper respect to everyone: Love (agapaō) the brotherhood of believers...

Process Questions:

Q V.16: What is an example of using freedom as a “cover up for evil?” That seems like an oxymoron. [X-REF Gal 5:13; Civil laws should be freely obeyed, not out of fear but because doing so is God’s will. Christian freedom is always conditioned by Christian responsibility (cf. Gal. 5:13) and must never be used **as a cover-up** (*epikalymma*, lit., “veil”) **for evil**. Christians enjoy true freedom when they obey God and **live as servants** (*douloi*, lit., “slaves”; cf. Rom. 6:22) **of God**. Though living **as free men**, they should also live as God’s slaves. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules.]

Q V.17: Peter finishes this portion of his letter with a 4-point summary of what our conduct should be as Christian citizens, whether we’re suffering or not. What is the first admonition we have as citizens? [Show proper respect to everyone. First, Christians are to **respect** (*timēsate*, “honor, value, esteem”; cf. *timēn*, “respect, honor,” in 3:7) ... **everyone** (cf. Rom. 12:10; 13:7).

Q: What does “respecting everyone” look like? [We value/esteem every human being. Believers should be conscious of the fact that each human has been uniquely created in God’s image. X-Ref Rom 12:10; 13:7]

Q: What is the second admonition we should heed as citizens? [Love (agapaō) the brotherhood of believers. Sacrificially love the people of God in the church. We are family!]

LOOK:

If we are sincerely submitted to authority “for the Lord’s sake,” then we will show honor to all who deserve it. We may not agree with their politics or their practices, but we must respect their position (see Rom. 13). We will also “love the brotherhood,” meaning, of course, the people of God in the church. One way we show love to the brethren is by submitting to the authority of the “powers that be,” for we are bound together with one another in our Christian witness.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 405). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Two phrases are important: “the will of God” (1 Peter 2:15) and “the servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16). When we do something in the will of God and as the servants of God, then we are doing it “for the Lord’s sake.” God has willed that we silence the critics by doing good, not by opposing the authority. The word “silence” in 1 Peter 2:15 is literally “muzzle,” as though the pagan critics were like a pack of yelping, snapping dogs!

Someone may argue, “But, as Christians, are we not free?” Yes, we are free in Christ; but we must never use our freedom for ourselves. We must always use it for others. Sad to say, there are “religious racketeers” who prey on ignorant people and use “religion” to veil their evil actions. A true Christian submits himself to authority because he is first of all submitted to Christ. He uses his freedom as a tool to build with and not as a weapon to fight with. A good example of this

attitude is Nehemiah, who willingly gave up his own rights that he might help his people and restore the walls of Jerusalem.

If we are sincerely submitted to authority “for the Lord’s sake,” then we will show honor to all who deserve it. We may not agree with their politics or their practices, but we must respect their position (see Rom. 13). We will also “love the brotherhood,” meaning, of course, the people of God in the church. This is a recurring theme in this letter (1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 4:8; 5:14). One way we show love to the brethren is by submitting to the authority of the “powers that be,” for we are bound together with one another in our Christian witness.

Raymer, R. M. (1985). 1 Peter. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, p. 847). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2:16. Submission to lawful authority does not negate Christian liberty (cf. Gal. 5:1, 18). Civil laws should be freely obeyed, not out of fear but because doing so is God’s will. Christian freedom is always conditioned by Christian responsibility (cf. Gal. 5:13) and must never be used **as a cover-up** (*epikalymma*, lit., “veil”) **for evil**. Christians enjoy true freedom when they obey God and **live as servants** (*douloi*, lit., “slaves”; cf. Rom. 6:22) **of God**. Though living **as free men**, they should also live as God’s slaves.

2:17. This section concludes with a four-point summary of Christian citizenship. First, Christians are to **respect** (*timēsate*, “honor, value, esteem”; cf. *timēn*, “respect, honor,” in 3:7) ... **everyone** (cf. Rom. 12:10; 13:7). Believers should be conscious of the fact that each human has been uniquely created in God’s image. Second, Christians are to **love the brotherhood of believers**, their brothers and sisters in Christ. God’s family members should love each other.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1852). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

2:16–17 Peter, like Paul in Rm 13:1–7, called upon believers to submit to the government. Do words like these support an evil structure such as the racist apartheid system formerly practiced in South Africa?

We need to recall what we noted above. Peter did not address believers who ran the government but believers who lived under the governing authorities. The few short verses here do not constitute a full-scale treatise on the Christian and government. Surely, Peter would have included other admonitions about the need for justice if he had directed his words to political leaders.

Neither should we conclude from these verses that governing authorities are to be obeyed without exception. Peter gave the general principle here, namely that believers should submit to the laws of the land and to the authorities enforcing those laws. But we know from the rest of the Scriptures that exceptions exist. Daniel refused to obey the law prohibiting prayer to Yahweh (Dn 6). The apostles rejected the words of those who tried to prevent them from preaching the gospel (Acts 5:29). Peter did not simplistically endorse whatever the government prescribes.