

I Peter 2:11-15
March 5, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: If you had to name people groups here and abroad who feel targeted by a government authority or law enforcement, anyone in authority, who comes to mind? [Black Lives Matter, illegal immigrants, Organizations providing Sanctuaries for Refugees, Muslims in America, Coptic Christians in Egypt under severe persecution]

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/>

For example, *each month* Coptic Christians, who represent 10% of all Egyptians experience the following:

- 322 are killed for their faith
- 214 Christian churches and property are destroyed
- 772 forms of **violence** are committed against Christians

Christian persecution is any hostility experienced from the world as a result of one's identification as a Christian. From verbal harassment to hostile feelings, attitudes and actions, Christians in areas with severe religious restrictions pay a heavy price for their faith. Beatings, physical torture, confinement, isolation, rape, severe punishment, imprisonment, slavery, discrimination in education and employment, and even death are just a few examples of the persecution they experience on a daily basis.

According to The Pew Research Center, over 75% of the world's population lives in areas with severe religious restrictions (and many of these people are Christians). Also, according to the United States Department of State, Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

I can't even begin 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.

Q: If you belonged to one of these targeted groups, what would your attitude be toward those in authority who are inflicting injustices or being violent with you in some way? [Negative! We would probably have a low view of them and not feel safe in our homeland.]

Transition: I bring this to your attention because I want you to appreciate that Peter is writing to scattered Christians who were enduring injustices and hostilities and perhaps violence by those in authority. I hope I haven't painted them in any way to be a bunch of whiners or wimps. I think they were facing oppressions and being thrown into jail, enduring beatings, etc. But what Peter writes in today's study is going to challenge us. Some of you are going to read this and think "how inspirational!" Others of you are going to read this and think, "Peter, you have no idea what we're going through!" This lesson 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.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.11:

- Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

V.12:

- Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

V.13:

- Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,

V.14:

- or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

V.15:

- For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

Process Questions:

Q V.11-12: What is the first admonition Peter asks of his readers? [abstain from sinful desires, which war against our souls]

Q: How do you successfully abstain from sinful desires that war within you? If this were so easy, there wouldn't be so much sin! [Let people offer how they get to the place of choosing to abstain from leaning into a sinful desire.]

Q: What is the next admonition Peter asks of his readers? [Live such good lives among the pagans that they may see your good deeds and glorify God. How we live our lives before lost people matters.]

Q: What do you think he means by "good" life? [We must live "honest" lives. This word implies much more than telling the truth and doing what is right. It carries with it the idea of beauty, comeliness, that which is admirable and honorable.]

Q: Why do you think Peter suggested living good lives among the "pagans?" [Christians are to abstain from sinful desires not only for their own spiritual well-being, but also in order to maintain an effective testimony before unbelievers.]

Share Story: In the summer of 1805, a number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in council at Buffalo Creek, New York, to hear a presentation of the Christian message by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. Among other things, the chief said:

“Brother, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the Book?”

“Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again of what you have said.”

Q V.13-15: What is the next admonition we have as citizens? [Obey the law – we should “submit to every authority instituted by men.” The motivation for obedience is not avoiding punishment but is **for the Lord’s sake**. To honor God who ordained human government, Christians are to observe man-made laws carefully.]

Q: I’m guessing that some of you are bristling with the idea of submitting to “every” authority. What is he really saying? [It is our responsibility to “advertise God’s virtues,” It is important that we respect the office even though we cannot respect the man or woman in the office.]

What is the exception? [As much as possible, we should seek to cooperate with the government and obey the law; but we must never allow the law to make us violate our conscience or disobey God’s Word. Let me give you two examples from Scripture:

Examples:

#1: When Daniel and his three friends refused to obey the king’s dietary regulations, they disobeyed the law; but the *way* that they did it proved that they honored the king and respected the authorities (Dan. 1). They were not rebels; they were careful not to embarrass the official in charge or get him into trouble; and yet they stood their ground. They glorified God and, at the same time, honored the authority of the king.

#2: Peter and the other Apostles faced a similar challenge shortly after Pentecost (Acts 4–5). The Jewish council commanded them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, but Peter and his associates refused to obey (see Acts 4:19; 5:29). They did not cause a rebellion or in any way question or deny the authority of the council. They submitted to the institution but they refused to stop preaching. They showed respect to their leaders even though these men were opposed to the Gospel.

Q: For whose sake should we submit to every authority? [For the Lord’s sake! 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)]

Q V.15: When we live good lives before pagans, which is God’s will, what is the outcome that should come out of that? [When we’re above reproach, the hoped for outcome is to “silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.”]

Observation: Evidently Christians were being slandered and falsely accused of evil, for Peter stressed that **it is God's will** (*thelēma*, a term expressing the result of one's purpose or desire; cf. "God's will" in 1 Peter 3:17; 4:2, 19) that through excellent behavior they **silence** (*phimoun*, lit., "muzzle") **the ignorant talk of foolish men**.

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).

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 403–405). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

For the Sake of the Lost (1 Peter 2:11–12)

As Christians, we must constantly remind ourselves who we are; and Peter did this in 1 Peter 2:11. To begin with, we are God's dearly beloved children. Eight times in his two epistles, Peter reminded his readers of God's love for them (1 Peter 2:11; 4:12; 2 Peter 1:7; 3:1, 8, 14–15, 17). In ourselves, there is nothing that God can love; but He loves us because of Jesus Christ. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17). Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

Our "love relationship" to Jesus Christ ought to be motivation enough for us to live godly lives in this godless world. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). There is something deeper than obedience because of duty, and that is obedience because of devotion. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words" (John 14:23).

Not only are we God's beloved children, but we are also "strangers [sojourners] and pilgrims" in this world. We are "resident aliens" who have our citizenship in another country—heaven. Like the patriarchs of old, we are temporary in this life, traveling toward the heavenly city (Heb. 11:8–16). If you have ever lived in a foreign land, you know that the citizens watch you and are prone to find things to criticize. (In all fairness, we must confess that sometimes we are critical of foreigners in our own country.) Some years ago, a bestselling novel called *The Ugly American* depicted the struggles of an American as he tried to meet the needs of a foreign people, and still maintain his credibility with his fellow Americans, who, unfortunately, completely misunderstood the situation.

We are also soldiers involved in a spiritual battle. There are sinful desires that war against us and want to defeat us (see Gal. 5:16–26). Our real battle is not with people around us, but with passions within us. D.L. Moody said, "I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know." If we yield to these sinful appetites, then we will start living like the unsaved around us, and will become ineffective witnesses. The word translated "war" carries the idea of "a military campaign." We do not win one battle, and the war is over! It is a constant warfare, and we must be on our guard.

Most of all, we are witnesses to the lost around us. The word "Gentiles" here has nothing to do with race, since it is a synonym for "unsaved people" (1 Cor. 5:1; 12:2; 3 John 7). Unsaved people are watching us, speaking against us (1 Peter 3:16; 4:4), and looking for excuses to reject the Gospel.

If we are going to witness to the lost people around us, we must live "honest" lives. This word implies much more than telling the truth and doing what is right. It carries with it the idea of beauty, comeliness, that which is admirable and honorable. To use a cliché of the '60s, we must be "beautiful people" in the best sense of the word.

We do not witness only with our lips; we must back up our “talk” with our “walk.” There should be nothing in our conduct that will give the unsaved ammunition to attack Christ and the Gospel. Our good works must back up our good words. Jesus said this in Matthew 5:16, and the entire Bible echoes this truth.

During my many years of ministry, I have seen the powerful impact Christians can make on the lost when they combine a godly life with a loving witness. I remember many instances of some wonderful conversions simply because dedicated Christians let their lights shine. On the other hand, I recall with grief some lost persons who rejected the Word because of the inconsistent lives of professed believers.

Peter encouraged his readers to bear witness to the lost, by word and deed, so that one day God might visit them and save them. “The day of visitation” could mean that day when Christ returns and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. But I think the “visitation” Peter mentioned here is the time when God visits lost sinners and saves them by His grace. The word is used in this sense in Luke 19:44. When these people do trust Christ, they will glorify God and give thanks because we were faithful to witness to them even when they made life difficult for us.

In the summer of 1805, a number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in council at Buffalo Creek, New York, to hear a presentation of the Christian message by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. Among other things, the chief said:

“Brother, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the Book?”

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For the Lord’s Sake (1 Peter 2:13–17)

Of course, *everything* we do should be for the glory of the Lord and the good of His kingdom! But Peter was careful to point out that Christians in society are representatives of Jesus Christ. It is our responsibility to “advertise God’s virtues” (1 Peter 2:9, author’s translation). This is especially true when it comes to our relationship to government and people in authority.

As Christian citizens, we should submit to the authority vested in human government. The word translated “ordinance” in our *Authorized Version* simply means “creation or institution.” It does not refer to each individual law, but to the institutions that make and enforce the laws. It is possible to submit to the institutions and still disobey the laws.

For example, when Daniel and his three friends refused to obey the king’s dietary regulations, they disobeyed the law; but the *way* that they did it proved that they honored the king and respected the authorities (Dan. 1). They were not rebels; they were careful not to embarrass the official in charge or get him into trouble; and yet they stood their ground. They glorified God and, at the same time, honored the authority of the king.

Peter and the other Apostles faced a similar challenge shortly after Pentecost (Acts 4–5). The Jewish council commanded them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, but Peter and his associates refused to obey (see Acts 4:19; 5:29). They did not cause a rebellion or in any way question or deny the authority of the council. They submitted to the institution but they refused to stop preaching. They showed respect to their leaders even though these men were opposed to the Gospel.

It is important that we respect the office even though we cannot respect the man or woman in the office. As much as possible, we should seek to cooperate with the government and obey the law; but we must never allow the law to make us violate our conscience or disobey God’s Word. Unfortunately, some zealous but ignorant Christians use these differences as opportunities for conflict and loud sermons about “freedom” and “separation of church and state.”

When a local church constructs and furnishes a building, there is a local code that must be obeyed. (I have been through several building programs and I know!) The government has no right to control the pulpit or the business meeting, but it has every right to control matters that relate to safety and operation. If the law requires a certain number of exits, or fire extinguishers, or emergency lights, the church must comply. The state is not persecuting when it sets up the code, nor is the church compromising when it obeys the code. But I know some overly zealous saints who have disgraced the name of the Lord by their attitudes and actions relating to these matters.

Peter named the offices we are to respect. “The king” meant “the emperor.” In democratic nations, we have a president or premier. Peter did not criticize the Roman government or suggest that it be overthrown. God’s church has been able to live and grow in all kinds of political systems. The “governors” are those under the supreme authority who administer the laws and execute justice. Ideally, they should punish those who do evil and praise those who do good. This ideal was not always reached in Peter’s day (see Acts 24:24–27), nor is it reached in our own. Again, we must remind ourselves to respect the office even if we cannot respect the officer.

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, pp. 846-847). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

III. Challenged to New Behavior (2:11–3:7)

How can Christians, as a people belonging to God, declare His praises before others? In this section Peter answered this question by suggesting specific ways Christians can behave differently before the world, as citizens, as slaves, and as wives and husbands. Even in familiar situations, their conduct should be different.

A. *New behavior before the world (2:11–25)*

The world Peter had in view refers to the people his readers faced daily as witnesses, citizens, and slaves. Peter challenged Christians to take a stand against sin, to submit to lawful authority, and to endure harsh masters patiently. This kind of conduct would win others to belief, silence the tongues of foolish people, and bring commendation from God.

1. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT AS WITNESSES (2:11–12)

2:11. Peter warmly addressed his readers as **dear friends** or better, “beloved” (*agapētoi*). Those who are loved by God are exhorted to live **as aliens** (*paroikous*, “those who live in a place that is not their home,” used figuratively of Christians, whose real home is in heaven) **and strangers in the world** (cf. comments on “strangers” in 1:1). Just as their Christian values and beliefs are rejected by the world, so they are to live apart from the immorality and **sinful desires** that surround them. **Abstain** (*apechesthai*) is literally “hold oneself constantly back from.” Christians are to resist the sinward pull of those worldly desires **which war against** (cf. James 4:1) their spiritual lives. In this real spiritual battle a demonic strategy is to attack believers at their weakest points.

2:12. Christians are to abstain from sinful desires not only for their own spiritual well-being but also in order to maintain an effective testimony before unbelievers. The negative exhortation of verse 11 is now followed by positive instruction. A positive Christian lifestyle is a powerful means of convicting the world of its sin (cf. Matt. 5:16). Peter used the word **good** (*kalos*) twice in this verse to define both Christians’ **lives** and their works. A “good” life is composed of **good deeds** (cf. Matt. 5:16; Eph. 2:10; Titus 3:8; James 2:18). Before the critical eyes of slanderous people and their false accusations, the “good deeds” of believers can **glorify God** (cf. Matt. 5:16; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 6:20) and win others to belief. **On the day He visits** is literally “in the day of [His] visitation” (*en hēmera episkopēs*; cf. Luke 19:44). Some say this refers to God’s “visiting” or looking on the wicked in judgment, but it probably refers to their salvation (i.e., when God looks in on them in His mercy and brings them to conversion; cf. *epeskepsato*, Acts 15:14).

2. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT AS CITIZENS (2:13–17)

2:13–15. Christians are responsible to obey the law (cf. Rom. 13:1–7; Titus 3:1–2). Peter exhorted his readers to abide by governmental laws, **to submit ... to every authority** (*ktisei*, lit., “creation” or here “institution” or “law”) **instituted among men** (*anthrōpinē*, “made by man, human”). The motivation for obedience is not avoiding punishment but is **for the Lord’s sake**. To honor God who ordained human government, Christians are to observe man-made laws carefully as long as those laws do not conflict with the clear teaching of Scripture (cf. Acts 4:19). The general purpose of legal authority is **to punish ... wrong and to commend ... right**. Evidently Christians were being slandered and falsely accused of evil, for Peter stressed that **it is God’s will** (*thelēma*, a term expressing the result of one’s purpose or desire; cf. “God’s will” in 1 Peter 3:17; 4:2, 19) that through excellent behavior they **silence** (*phimoun*, lit., “muzzle”) **the ignorant talk of foolish men**. Each of the three Greek words rendered “ignorant talk of foolish men” begins with the letter alpha, as do the three Greek words in 1:4 rendered “never perish, spoil, or fade.” Apparently Peter enjoyed alliteration!

This section of Peter’s argument leads many to believe that the organized persecution through oppressive Roman laws either had not begun or had not yet reached the provinces of Asia Minor. Christians were then facing lies and verbal abuse, not torture and death. Christians were still enjoying the protection of a legal system which commended those who obeyed the law. So a believer’s best defense against slanderous criticism was good behavior.

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.

2:13–17 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.