

1 Peter 2:11-17

At this point we come to the following point in our outline:

II. The Exhortations (1 Peter 1:13-5:11).

A. Section One (1:13-3:12).

1. Concerning the needs of individual believers (1:13-2:10).
 - a. To have hope and to be holy (1:13-25).
 - b. To grow spiritually (2:1-10).

And now we come to:

2. Concerning sin and the people of the world (2:11-17).

We are, as Peter emphasized in 1:1, “strangers,” in this world, and as he mentioned again here in 2:11, “strangers and pilgrims,” yet we have responsibilities regarding sin and regarding the people in this world, especially its governmental leaders. Our first responsibility is to the Lord, but that does not eliminate our responsibility in this world, but it includes it, as Peter here explains. But in doing so we are not to forget who we are and that we are called upon by the Lord always to conduct ourselves in a manner that is becoming to a child of God. Too often Christians are guilty of bringing reproach upon the name of the Lord because this is not clear in their minds. And so, for example, they will burn down abortion centers, and consider themselves persecuted because they are arrested, put in jail, and often prosecuted for what they have done. If we break the law, we deserve to be prosecuted. One of the main reasons we are left in this world after we are saved, is to be witnesses for Christ and the Gospel. If we are forbidden to speak of Christ, that is a different matter, and yet there are ways in which we can comply with the law without denying the Lord. Christian public school teachers are faced with this dilemma every day they are in their schools. But under no circumstances can there be a justifiable compromise with sin.

2:11 Note how tenderly the Apostle Peter addressed the believers to whom he was writing: “Dearly beloved.” See also 4:12. In both instances Peter wrote simply ἀγαπητοί, but “Dearly beloved” is a justifiable translation because it does express what a deep love Peter had for the Lord’s people to whom he was writing. Regarding love for the people of God, he practiced what he preached. Hated as they were by the world, and having suffered as they had by the people of the world, such an expression by Peter would in itself have been encouraging to the people of God.

“I beseech” does not have the word “you” after it in the original, although he was speaking to the people whom he had mentioned in 1:1. Hiebert says that the absence of the word “you” place more of an emphasis upon the exhortation which followed. The verb which people used was παρακαλέω which can be translated in different ways, such as, exhort, or plead, or urge, or, as it is in the KJV, “beseech.” It shows very clearly and strongly what Peter’s desire was for them. And he was saying it recognizing that they were “strangers and pilgrims.”

“Strangers” means that spiritually they were like aliens, or foreigners, who didn’t really belong. It meant, as we used to sing, “This world is not my home.” Our true and eternal citizenship is in heaven (see Phil. 3:20-21.) And yet at the same time we are citizens of the USA.

But we are also “pilgrims.” My Greek program on my computer suggested the translation, “resident foreigner.” It means that we are here now, but we are not going to be here forever. “We’re just a passing through.” It is very important that we know this, and that we remember it, and act accordingly.

But what was Peter’s exhortation to these believers? They were to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war

against the soul.” The verb “abstain” is in the middle voice, and so it speaks of what each of us is to do for ourselves. In our behavior we are to put a distance between ourselves and our fleshly lusts. We are to hold ourselves back and away from them. We are to stay out of those situations where we are going to be tempted. The idea in abstaining is that if we get involved in that from which we are to abstain, we are going to get hurt. We must be constantly vigilant with regard to our own fleshly lusts. We are in a warfare that will not end until we are with the Lord.

Being sinners by nature, we have a natural tendency to get involved in fleshly lusts. “Fleshly lusts” are desires that we have because we are still sinners. This is true of all people, but there is still this tendency in the heart of Christians. And we must be constantly on guard against this tendency. We have bodies that we need to take care of, but we also have souls that we need to take care of. “Lusts” are desires; “fleshly lusts” are evil desires. But Peter was telling the believers in his day to do something that they really could not do “on their own.” This is where we need to turn to what Paul wrote in Galatians 5, beginning with verse 16. Please turn to that passage with me.

The Galatian churches had been invaded by false teachers who taught that we overcome sin but putting ourselves under the Law. But the problem about dealing with sin by the Law, is that the Law is “weak through the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). This means that the Law tells me what to do, but the Law doesn’t help me do it. The Law addresses you and me. “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” We all agree that that is right. But “how to perform that which is good,” Paul said, “I find not” (Rom. 7:18). So, if we are fighting against our fleshly lusts in the temptations that come our way, we are going to lose the battle. This is one of the main reasons the Holy Spirit has come to live in us. By His power we are enabled to obey the Word, to please God, so that we will not do what our sinful natures will encourage us to do, and cause us to do.

May 15, 2006

And so what did the Apostle Paul tell the Galatian believers to do in order to live victoriously over the flesh? You see his answer in Galatians 5:16. (Read.) The whole passage down to the end of Galatians 5 is important to know and to act upon. To walk in the Spirit means that we are to walk with our dependence upon the Holy Spirit, not in ourselves, not in the time that we have been saved, not in our knowledge of the truth, nor in the verses that we have memorized, but “in the Spirit.” “Walk” is a present imperative which means that this is a command from God, not just a suggestion. Taking the whole verse together this is a sure promise from God. Being in the present tense it means that we must walk and continue to walk, walk all of the time, not just when some special temptation comes along. We are to live in dependence upon the Spirit. Often we will be careless about the way we live until some temptation arises, and then we turn to the Spirit. But that is not what the Apostle Paul was saying. We are to live continually in dependence upon the Spirit. Then we will be prepared when suddenly we are overtaken by temptation.

On the other hand, as Peter tells us here, we are to “abstain” from fleshly lusts. It takes both. We are to stay out of tempting situations while at the same time we are to be walking in the Spirit. And the reason that our walking and abstaining are to be constant, is because the warfare is constant. “War” is also in the present tense.

So this whole verse is in the present tense. It is for all believers all of the time. Those who have just been saved need to know this; those who are the most mature in Christ never can afford to neglect it. This is the Christian life.

But how do we walk in the Spirit? It is a life of obedience to the Word of God. Don’t look for some ecstatic experience as a demonstration of the presence of the Spirit in your life. The Holy Spirit is there if you are really saved. Depend upon Him day by day, and you will experience His delivering power, His strengthening

power, throughout the day. The attacks of our sinful nature are against our souls, the inner man. That is where the struggle is before it shows up in what we do, or in what we say. Know what the lusts of the flesh, and then be on the lookout for them to arise from within you.

2:12 This verse is a continuation of verse 11, not only as a part of the exhortation in verse 11, but in the same present tense, “Having,” ἔχοντες, *continuing to have*. And then we come to our old word, “conversation.” And what does it mean? *Conduct!* What about our conduct? It is to be “honest.” This is the common Greek word for *good*. It is καλῆν to agree with ἀναστροφῆν. In the KJV it is translated “honest.” Peter meant that their conduct should be what the Gentiles expect that it would be since you claim to be a child of God. It means that they don’t find you claiming to be one thing, but in your behavior showing that you are something else. Peter was warning them against hypocrisy. They may criticize you for being a Christian, but their criticism will be far worse if your conduct shows that you are not really what you claim that you are. It may be, as the word “honest” suggests, that if the Gentiles, the world, find that you are what you claim to be, that outwardly they will criticize you, but in their hearts there will be real admiration for you.

Charles Erdman, of the old Princeton Seminary, stated in his brief commentary what I believe was the message that Peter was giving to the believers to whom he was writing who were living under the constant scrutiny of an unbelieving and hostile world. I will read to you what he said:

The special motive given for honorable and consistent conduct is the effect it might have upon the unbelievers among whom the readers were sojourning. Christians were being slandered for being irreligious because not worshipping the heathen gods, as morose and ascetic because refraining from popular vices, as disloyal to the government because claiming allegiance to a heavenly King. Peter urges them to disprove such reports by their pure and noble lives, and so to conduct themselves that their very accusers might be won to the faith, and might thank God, in the day of Christ’s appearing, for the good deeds and saving influence of the Christian pilgrims who had sojourned among them (p. 66).

Eternity alone will reveal how many people have been drawn to Christ through the godly behavior of the people of God. The point that Peter was making here, was probably the major reason he wrote this epistle.

But even though they might never see the impact that their lives were having, what Peter was writing to them was the way they could bring glory to God. Our main purpose in life is not to please the world, not to become like them, but to please God and to seek in our behavior to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. It is one of the lies of the Devil that if we are going to win the people of the world, we must be like them. Just the opposite is the truth.

“The day of visitation” is a term which speak of the judgment of God upon men when He returns in His glory.

In verse 13 Peter got specific as to ways in which the believers were to live honestly before the people of the world.

2:13 Number 1: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” This is the very point at which many present-day Christians have gone wrong. They are of the opinion that because they are Christians they don’t have to be submissive to the government. Peter, and Paul also in Romans 13, taught otherwise. We are not only to submit, but we are to submit “for the Lord’s sake.” We may feel that our taxes are too high, but we need to pay them anyway. We may believe that abortion is wrong, and it is! It is taking human lives (which it is), but that does not give us the right to stand in front of an abortion clinic to block the way so that people cannot go in, or to burn the place down. The government has legalized it. Those who have legalized it will have to face God on this issue. As will those who conduct abortions. People insist on their rights, but we have no rights that are in violation of the will of God. But the day is coming when God is going

to take care of all of this. Homosexuality is another issue that is condemned by God. We may believe that homosexual relationships are an abomination to the Lord (and they are), but that does not give us the right to attack them physically, or to kill them. We can vote against any or all of these things, and we should, but our responsibility is to be positive. If people want us to deny the Lord, we can't do that. But so far it hasn't come to that in our country. Our emphasis is to be on the positive side. Our Lord expressed it this way:

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

The Apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, said, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

What Peter said applies to all branches of government: "to the king, as supreme." And remember that this was Caesar when Peter wrote these words.

2:14 "Or unto governors," meaning those appointed by the king to see that his laws were being carried out. And their responsibilities were twofold: "For the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." This was what the king and governors were to keep in mind as well as for the people. It is not just for punishment, but for praise when people do what they are supposed to do.

Why did Peter say these things? In answering that question, Peter came back to the theme of his epistle. See verse 15.

2:15 The will of God may not be clear to us in every situation we face, but it is clear in this, and so is the objective that we need to keep before us at all times. Submission to those in authority over us, is the will of God. But why? "That by well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

I often wonder what ideas people have today of Christians. As a general rule people would rather not have anything to do with us. But it bothers me when we see people who claim to be Christians acting in violation of the clear teaching of Scripture. I knew a man who professed to be a Christian and who had been in and out of jails more times than he could remember for trying to block people from going into an abortion clinic. And he considered that he was being persecuted. He wasn't being persecuted, he was being arrested for violating the law. He was getting what he deserved to get. We make decisions for ourselves that the world doesn't like, things that we won't do, places where we won't go. Peter referred to this in chapter 4. (Read the first four verses.) If the government tries to force us to abort our children, or to teach our children to accept various lifestyles, of course we are going to refuse. But we do so prepared to suffer the consequences. That is another matter. But in most things we can submit, and that is what we need to do.

But notice an amazing word in verse 16.

2:16 I am referring to the words, "As free." How can Peter tell those suffering Christians to submit, and then tell them that they are "free." The world doesn't put those two words together. That is not the ACLU's idea of civil rights. They believe that you are free, and that because you are free, you don't have to submit. That shows how deceived they are. Nobody is free to do anything that they want to do and still expect that they can avoid the consequences. Freedom is not a license to do whatever we want to do. Freedom is never a permit to sin. A Christian is the only person who is truly free. He has been set free from divine condemnation. He has been set free from the bondage of sin. He is free to serve God and to do the will of God. As Peter said here, we are free to serve God. Unsaved persons do not possess any of those freedoms. They think that they are free, but they are in the worst kind of bondage. We are freed from sin, but not free to sin. We still can sin, and that is the reason that Peter said that while we are free, we are not to use our "liberty as a cloak of maliciousness." What did he mean? He meant that we are not to use our freedom as a coverup for doing sinful

things. We are free, “but as the servants of God.” And Peter here used the word for *bondservants* – δοῦλοι. In the context of NT life, a δοῦλος was one who was obligated to do the will of another. But what a glorious servitude this is. As Peter began his second epistle, he identified himself as “a servant (δοῦλος) and an apostle of Jesus Christ.” And it is significant that he put “servant” before “apostle.” When Paul began that marvelous book of Romans, he called himself “a servant of Jesus Christ” who had been called to be an apostle. And servant there is again the word δοῦλος. Both he and Peter considered that their title of the greatest honor.

The Lord Jesus said in John 8:32, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” And He also said, speaking of Himself as “the Son,” in John 8:36, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed,” that is, *really free, truly free*. Every child of God owes his or her freedom to His relationship with Jesus Christ in the Gospel. As the Lord’s bondservants we have the freedom, the liberty, to submit ourselves to the ordinances of men, and we do it “for the Lord’s sake” and according to the liberty that we have in the Lord. Lord, or Master, and servant, are words that go together. If the Jesus Christ is our Savior, He is also our Lord, and we are His unworthy servants. But even we are not free to do anything that we want to do. But, as Matthew Henry said, we are “free from Satan’s dominion, the law’s condemnation, the wrath of God, the uneasiness of duty, and the terrors of death.” But we are not free to use our liberty to engage in sinful rebellion against our government.

In these verses from 11 through 17 Peter was addressing all of the people of God. Starting with verse 18 he began to speak with various groups in the church. See the outline. But before he changed from all of the Lord’s people, he gave them four brief, but very important exhortations.

2:17 These four exhortations out of what Peter had been writing from verse 11 to this verse.

First, “Honor all men.” Those we honor are those whom we place above ourselves, which needs to be our attitude toward those who are above us in government. This was Peter’s call for the people of God to humble themselves. Pride always produces sin. Pride is probably our greatest problem. Paul said in Philippians 2:3, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

Peter expressed this verb honor in a way as to indicate that this should always be our approach to all people, not only believers, but also people of the world. We are to look for things in their lives for which we can respect them, and perhaps from what we can learn something for ourselves. I once heard Dawson Trotman say that he never met a person who did not teach him something. We are often inclined to notice things in people which draw criticism from us, at least in our hearts. If we are to honor people, we are to look for the good, commendable things, for which we can really respect them. A verse that is very similar in the writing of the Apostle Paul to what we have here from the Apostle Peter, is Romans 13:7: “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due ; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.”

Second, “Love the brotherhood.” The brotherhood is a generic term for all of the Lord’s people. We are to have a special love for all of the people of God. Usually we don’t have to be told to love the people of God; it is just there when we are saved. This is one of the first evidences of true salvation that we need to look for. We may not agree on every point, but we do on the fundamentals. We can always find certain characteristics that we may not like, but these do not free us from our responsibility to love each other. The Lord prayed in His high priestly prayer (as it has been called), John 17, that we would be one. This calls for love. Peter said, “Love God’s people, love them with a special love, and keep on loving them.” Those we love, we are going to remember in prayer, and we are going to do anything we can to encourage them and to help them as we walk together in this wicked, fallen world.

Third, “Fear God.” Isn’t it interesting that Peter started here in this verse with the whole world, then to the Lord’s people, and third to God Himself. There is no greater subject for us to be concerned about in our relationship with God than that we learn to fear Him. The sum total of the Christian life is found in these words. To fear God, Solomon said is “the beginning of wisdom.” God’s people are to be God-fearing people. We are to love Him. We are to respect Him. We are to believe Him. We are to remember how much greater He is than we are. I would like to recommend a book on this subject to you. It is one of the best books that I have ever read, written by our dear friend and brother in Christ, Dr. Jerry Bridges. The title of the book is, *The Joy of Fearing God*. It will transform your life to read it. In your Bible reading notice the references that are made to the fear of God. This is a subject which is greatly needed in these days when we are inclined to have such low thoughts of our God. Robertson in his Word Pictures of the NT says that Peter expressed in these words, “Fear God,” that we are to do it now, and then “keep it up.”

Quoting Matthew Henry again, he said that “if this be lacking, none of the other three duties can be performed as they ought.” As believers in Christ we ought to be characterized as God-fearing people. Finally, “Honor the King.” With this Peter ends this brief section in his epistle as he began in verse 13. The verb is the same as in “honor all men” at the beginning of this verse. Our country would be a lot better of if the men and women in Congress, and all of us as citizens, would have this attitude toward our President. People start to tear him apart verbally before he even gives a speech. We forget what it is like when we have a President which we really cannot respect. I feel that we are in great danger of destroying ourselves as a nation. We don’t fear God as a nation, and so we don’t honor our President. Those who sow discord are an abomination to God, and just as a house divided against itself cannot stand, neither can a nation that is divided against itself. We are living in terrible times, maybe in the end times.

We are never going to see everybody turn to the Lord, but that was not Peter’s emphasis in the days when the people of God were under Roman rule. He was saying that we as the Lord’s people have a tremendous responsibility to exercise our freedom in living for the Lord more than we ever have. In many respects, we are the key. This first epistle of Peter is our chart for the direction in which we need to go today. Let’s make sure that we are living to please the Lord, that His will is the light for our paths. As we treat believers and unbelievers also the way the Lord wants us to treat them, blessing will come upon us and our nation. And as we give God His rightful place in our lives, we can once again see the mighty power of God changing lives, righting the things that are wrong, and turning the hearts of people toward God and His dear Son and our Savior. Let us pray for revival, and trust God to do His work in our hearts.