



Ambassadors of Heaven

Living Hope Series

Sunday February 7, 2021

1 Peter 2:11-17 (ESV) Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. ¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Introduction: What does it look like to be a faith community that is surrounded by those who are opposed to the things of God? How should we, as Christ followers, live our lives and relate to a world that, many times, see us as enemies of their way of living life? A world and culture that sees human freedom as the right to behave independently and without fear or consciousness of accountability, to the Divine Creator of the universe?

This is what Peter addresses in this passage. In this passage he shifts his thoughts from how we should relate to God and to one another as a community of believers to how we should relate to those who are not followers of Christ (gentiles) and conduct ourselves in a fallen world.

Exhortation to live Godly

1 Peter 2:11 (ESV) Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Exhortations to live a godly life are usually communicated in the New Testament with the verb *“I urge”, “I beseech you”, “I plead with you”, “I beg you”, “I appeal to you”*.

For example, notice two exhortations on godly living from Paul.

Romans 12:1 (NLT) And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

Ephesians 4:1 (ESV) Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God.

Notice also that exhortations to live Godly are always grounded in the accomplished redemptive work of Jesus.

It’s only because of all that Jesus has done for us that we can live godly lives.

Because of His saving grace, we are not who we used to be.

1 Peter 2:9 (ESV) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

This is why Peter is exhorting the believers to abstain from the passions of the flesh.

Abstain from the passions of the flesh

1 Peter 2:11-25 (ESV) Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Passions of the flesh are the natural desires that human beings have apart from the work of the Spirit. These are the weaknesses of our humanness that go contrary to what God desires for our lives.

The Apostle Paul gave a list that describes some of these passions of the flesh in his letter to the churches in Galatia.

Galatians 5:19-21 (NLT) Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness,

revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

They are passions as these, that like in enemy of war, attempt to conquer and control the believer.

Peter makes clear that we are not exempt from the temptations of the flesh but we are called to resist and overcome them. This will not always be an easy thing as implied by the term Peter uses “war against our soul”.

Living a godly life is not a call to passivity but passionate and intentional resistance to anything that goes against the holy standard of God in scripture.

Why is this important? We are ambassadors of heaven and are called to represent Christ. Believe it or not, the world needs us to be different.

Peter goes from how we relate to God and each other to how we should relate to lost.

1 Peter 2:12a (ESV) Keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable

Let’s break this down a little so that we can understand what he is saying.

- **Keep your Conduct** – manner of life, actions, behavior
- **Among the gentiles** – This is our community outside the “church bubble”. This is the place where we interact and do business with those who do not relate with God or us as Christ followers. (neighborhood, the workplace, the marketplace etc.)

Authentic Christianity, like the light of a candle, stands out most in the darkest places.

How we live and conduct ourselves as Christ followers does make a difference.

- **Honorable** - We are called to live honorably or morally upright.

1 Peter 1:12a (ESV) Keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable

(AMP) Keep your behavior excellent among the [unsaved] Gentiles [conduct yourself honorably, with graciousness and integrity]

Living this way will not always be seen as a positive to those who do not embrace God and His standard of living.

People won’t always respond favorably to the way we live

Peter's says that there will be times that people will see our way of godly living as evil.

1 Peter 2:12 (ESV) Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Why did people speak against them as evildoers?

Part of the suffering Peter's original readers were experiencing was due evidently to slander from unbelieving Gentile pagans. This was because as Christ followers they fought against the social norms of their times, by abstaining and refusing to partake in their social activities.

What activities?

Peter describes the pagan behavior from which the followers of Christ had turned away.

1 Peter 4:3-4 (NLT) You have had enough in the past of the evil things the godless enjoy—sex sin, lust, getting drunk, wild parties, drinking bouts, and the worship of idols, and other terrible sins. ⁴Of course, your former friends will be very surprised when you don't eagerly join them anymore in the wicked things they do, and they will laugh at you in contempt and scorn.

The pagans in Peter's time found it strange that Christ followers did not join their pagan activities which they saw as normal and culturally acceptable practices.

At the same time, they would have seen the Christians as a threat to their way of life because they preached about the kingdom of God and proclaimed Jesus as the King of kings. The people would have seen this as dishonoring the emperor Nero and their way of life.

Christians who were out of step with the Romans world and culture were experiencing persecution of a counter culture within a prevalent pagan society. It's no different today.

Our goal should not be "to fit" in but to "stand out" so that those who are far from God can see the difference and eventually glorify God for the transformation in our life.

1 Peter 2:12 (ESV) Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Eventually all will see the truth when Christ returns and they acknowledge that He is Lord.

In the meantime, Peter writes that we are called to respond in Christlike manner, for the Lord's sake, to those around us who may not know or even acknowledge Christ.

He starts off by addressing what our response should be to those who are in authority.

We are to be subject for the Lord's sake to authorities

1 Peter 2:13-15 (ESV) Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

When Peter writes this, it is in context of the reign of Nero, the emperor of Rome.

Nero's name has become synonymous with evil, as historic accounts have accused him of killing his stepbrother, his wife and his mother, as well persecuting Christians and instigating the devastating Great Fire of Rome in AD64.

Nevertheless, Peter is stating clearly that we should do all that we can to obey civil authorities for the Lord's sake. However, this doesn't mean that we violate the "higher laws" of God nor the lordship of Jesus Christ.

When man's laws come into conflict with God's laws, we must always go with God. Jesus is our Lord and King. We are His servants.

As ambassadors of heaven, we are not called to arm ourselves and start a revolution against the government but we are called to dress ourselves in Christlikeness and spread the gospel of the kingdom. We are called to honor, obey and pray for those in authority. This is the will of God.

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1 Timothy 2:1-4 (ESV) First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Live as people who are free

1 Peter 2:16 (ESV) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

We must not use the liberty Christ gave us to do things that subvert and hinder the advancement of the gospel. We are first and foremost kingdom citizens, ambassadors of heaven who are called to effect change in the world by putting on Christ and employing ourselves to preaching of the gospel.

Conclusion: Let me conclude the question I opened up. How should we, as Christ followers, live our lives and relate to a world that, many times, see us as enemies to their way of living?

Here is the answer that the Apostle Peter gives us a summary of his instructions that he has covered thus far in this letter.

1 Peter 2:17 (ESV) Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.