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The motif of these verses is that like Jesus, no matter how savagely others may treat you and provoke you — you never use the sinfulness of others as an excuse to sin against God.



The theme of Lesson Four is that God in His divine wisdom and love has made us His very special people and has given to us high honor and privilege (2:4–10). Along with the honor and privilege, there comes great responsibility. First Peter 2:11 marks the beginning of the second part of the epistle. He tells us that, even though we are only temporary residents on this planet, God expects us to be responsible and obedient citizens of the world in which we live.

OUR FIRST LOYALTY IS TO OUR HOMELAND

1 PETER 2:11–12

Peter’s special term of endearment “Beloved” and his impassioned “I beseech you,” give special urgency to the exhortation which follows. Peter reminds them that as they lived out their lives in a world that was in essence alien to them, they needed to be constantly on their guard against the “passions of the flesh.” This term includes any desires which are contrary to the will of God in heaven. (See Galatians 5:19–21 and I John 2:16). They would need to recognize these “passions” as part of a carefully orchestrated insidious campaign to destroy them spiritually — “they wage war against your soul.” See them for what they are and have nothing to do with them is Peter’s counsel.

On the positive side, Peter says how important it is for them to “maintain good conduct among the Gentiles” (2:12). Here Peter uses the term “Gentile” from the viewpoint of the Christians as the “True Israel.”

He means any non-Christian, Jew or Gentile. Christians are always to be on their best behavior, but even more so in the presence of non-believers.

The reason Peter gives for being especially careful about public behavior is that it could have eternal consequences. Take the case of non-believers who had accepted the “politically correct” stereotype of Christianity which characterized it as a weird and subversive movement which encourages lawlessness. On a “day of visitation” — a time in life when God would draw near to them (cp. Luke 19:44) — these same people might be more favorably inclined to open their hearts to God because they had observed the good conduct of their Christian neighbors.

DURING OUR SOJOURN, WE STRIVE TO BE GOOD CITIZENS

1 PETER 2:13-17

Here Peter zeroes in on specific areas in which they are to set examples of good behavior. Even though their primary loyalty was to a kingdom which was not of this world, Peter instructs them to submit voluntarily to the rules of the established social order where they lived.

In biblical Greek the word for “institution” (*ktisis*) is used exclusively of things and activities brought into being by God. Translating it this way, it would be “...every divine institution among men,” thus attributing the origins of human institutions directly to divine initiative. It also echoes Paul’s declaration in Romans 13:1. It is God’s will that there be order in society. “For the Lord’s sake” provides the motive for us to submit to them, and thus bring honor to God.

Peter singles out the institution of government for first consideration. The Christians of Asia Minor lived under the government of Rome,

which pretty much ruled the world at that time. The emperor was at the top of the governmental structure. He was assisted by governors who carried out the day-to-day routines in the provinces of the empire (2:14). The fact that the emperor at the time was the notorious Nero only serves to strengthen Peter’s exhortation, implying strongly that our “submission” does not hinge upon our personal opinion of the political system nor on the person in charge. We obey the “powers that be” because we are loyal to our Heavenly King.

Our submission to governmental authority not only gives glory to God, but it may accomplish something which fits in with God’s plan for the world. Peter says that when we are obedient citizens, we “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” — the slanderers of verse 12. God wants this kind of behavior to stop. God’s way for silencing those people who foolishly condemn Christians is for Christians to go on the offensive and live consistently as model citizens.

This section closes (v.17) with what some Bible students see as a motto for God’s people of all times. There are two pairs: (1.) “Honor all men — Love the brotherhood” and (2.) “Fear God — Honor the Emperor.” In the first pair, we are reminded to show respect for all human beings regardless of race, skin color, culture, etc. All of them are creatures of God and objects of His divine love. But, there is that special group of people who make up the brotherhood of believers. This fellowship calls for unique God-like concern and love (*agape*).

The second part of this motto tells us first to “Fear God!” We give God the highest respect. Our honor to the emperor takes its place second to our fear of God.

*Christ and His innocent suffering are
the pattern which we are to trace.*



WE ARE RESPECTFUL OF THE EXISTING SOCIAL ORDER

1 PETER 2:18–25

Peter next gives attention to the family. The family or household was (and is) perhaps the most common and most important social institution. The Greek word translated servants refers to domestic workers. It included freemen as well as slaves. The term indicates that in many cases masters gave privileges to their slaves which made them almost like members of the family. In fact, we are told that by the first century most slaves had been born into slave households.

Peter directs Christian domestics: “Be submissive to your masters with all respect” (v.18). They were not only to do what their masters told them to do, they were also to show due respect to masters for the position they held in the household. And this was to be the case not only for “kind and gentle” bosses, but also and especially for the masters with an “overbearing attitude.” The Greek word for “overbearing” is *skoliois*, which has the basic meaning of “crooked.” This probably refers to their dishonesty with regard to pay, working conditions, and a failure to live up to Roman regulations for slave owners and employers of “domestics.” Such masters could make life pretty miserable for them. In this connection, Peter (v.19–20) adds an encouraging word. The Christian domestic who maintains his respect and obedience in a spirit of submission, even when the master of the household is down-right nasty, can be assured that God is taking note of it and is pleased. The secret for maintaining respect and doing their duty is to be “mindful of God.” This means they consider God as their real master (2:16).

In addition, Peter reminds them that if they find themselves suffering unjustly, they should not be surprised: “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps” (v.21). The Greek word for “example” is *hypogrammon* which literally means something written under. It referred originally to a document which included all the letters of the alphabet, given to children as an aid in learning to draw them. Christ and His innocent suffering are the pattern which we are to trace. In the following verses, Peter delineates clearly the example of Jesus. Even though Peter had been an eyewitness to much of Christ’s suffering, he chose to use the grand words of Isaiah, chapter 53. It was a chance to show his reader the authenticity of the Old Testament prophecies. This is pure Gospel, set forth to motivate and empower not only the domestics, but the followers of Jesus — then and now!

The motif of these verses is that like Jesus, no matter how savagely others may treat you and provoke you — you never use the sinfulness of others as an excuse to sin against God. You remember that it was sin (yours included) that put Jesus on the cross of Calvary. Because he “Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” If they received wounds, remember Jesus did too — and His wounds brought healing to them. The slaves could identify with the crucifixion because “death on a tree” was the legal punishment for runaway slaves.

The example of Jesus not only gives us the pattern to follow in resisting temptations to sin, it shows us a very important mental step He took to help himself remain firm in His resistance to evil. He entrusted Himself “to Him who judges justly” (v.23), which is a very important point for us to remember when the going gets tough. In the same vein of thought, Peter quotes Isaiah again to remind us that we are in good hands “You were straying like sheep, but have now been returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.”

WIVES AND HUSBANDS AS SERVANTS OF GOD

1 PETER 3:1–7

The term “likewise” in both verses 1 and 7 ties Peter’s exhortation for wives and husbands to everything he has been saying to the domestics. Since the word was used as a lead-in to Peter’s instruction to husbands as well as wives, evidently Peter was not linking it with the idea of submission (2:18 and 3:1). Rather, Peter had in mind the bigger

picture of how Christians can and should carry out their role “as servants of God” in all of their relationships — in this case the intimate relationship of marriage. His word to wives was that they “be submissive” to their husbands. The very words tend to make many women of today bristle with resentment. Keep in mind, Peter is not addressing this to men, so that they might think they have a biblical mandate to make sure that their wives are duly submissive. Rather, it is an evangelical appeal to wives to voluntarily take their place in the social order, supporting their husbands as they carry out their responsibilities to provide for and protect wife and family. The word “submissive” in no way suggests that women are in any way inferior.

They too, are to remember at all times that their highest purpose in life is to be “servants of God” (2:16), doing what they can to further the rule of God in the hearts and lives of people and to win them for Christ. Just as servants were encouraged to be especially faithful to the masters who were “crooked,” so Peter here says his appeal to wives applies especially in the event that they are married to someone who does not “obey the word.” Without them saying a word, their “reverent and chaste behavior” could speak powerfully and might lead to the conversion of their mates.

This viewpoint will give direction to their lives as women. Many women make it their top priority in life to make themselves as physically attractive as possible. Fitness programs, the fashion industry, and cosmetic companies are making “big bucks” in our day as they respond to this. Ladies, don’t

misunderstand Peter's words here (v.3–5). He is not “putting you down” for wanting to be attractive, nor is he saying it is wrong for Christian women to want to keep fit, wear jewelry, or use cosmetics. He is saying that women of God will make it a top priority to do the things that will make themselves spiritually fit and beautiful. They will be more concerned about having a healthy “hidden person of the heart” which expresses itself in “a gentle and quiet spirit.” This is adornment of the best kind. Peter refers to it as “the imperishable jewel...which in God's sight is precious” (3:4). The Christian woman has an awareness that God is looking at her, too, and she is anxious to be beautiful in His sight.

Finally, Peter has a few well-chosen words for the Christian husband. The word “likewise” which begins verse 7 ties in with the thought that husbands can find in marriage some special ways to live as “servants of God.” His instructions are really quite simple and straightforward. “Live considerately with your wives,” he tells them. The original Greek says “...according to knowledge.” The knowledge referred to could mean the true spiritual enlightenment, which will be sensitive to the needs and claims of his wife, which he regards as a sacred obligation. Such a stance would be the opposite of a common attitude, which focuses upon “what my wife can do for me.” It could also refer to the knowledge of the Gospel, which calls for a love that is likened to the love that God has shown for us all.

Peter adds two very compelling reasons for the husband to be considerate to his wife. He should bestow honor upon her as the “weaker vessel.” The wife may be physically weaker. She may be weaker also in the sense that in that society she really did not have any rights. Because of this, he had the privilege of giving her honor in the home. Nevertheless, the greater incentive for such treatment was the fact that before God there is no inequality. They are “joint heirs.” There are dire consequences for the husband who fails to give honor and consideration to his wife. Their very relationship with God is in jeopardy. Their prayers would be “hindered.”

Have you been able to find things in this section of 1 Peter that can be of practical value for you as you seek to “flesh out” your Personal Mission Statement? Maybe you would like to compare notes with a fellow member of your study group. God bless your efforts to come up with some meaningful insights.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1 PETER 3:8–4:6

Thank You, Lord, for making me Your very own. Guide me every day of my sojourn on earth so that I, who have been so blessed, may be a blessing to all around me and even to those who sometimes make my life very difficult. Through Jesus Christ who made this all possible. Amen.

1 Peter 3:8–12

1. What is the number one virtue that Peter encourages his readers to cultivate? (v.8)

Which verse(s) in Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (John 17) express the same thought?

How would you describe "unity of spirit"?

2. Peter also lists four other qualities which Christians need. How does each of them contribute toward promoting a corporate "unity of spirit" among people with differing backgrounds and opinions?
Sympathy

Love of the brethren

Tender heart

Humble mind

3. In verses 10–11, Peter quotes Psalm 34 to remind us of three specific things that we need to keep in mind. Finish this sentence: "If I want to live a fulfilled life, I will need to

Put into your own words what you think verse 12 is telling you as an incentive to live the good life.

1 Peter 3:13–17

4. In verse 13, Peter says that people who strive to live decent lives don't get into too much trouble. Recall the Bible story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:7–23). What happened to Joseph?

Why can we still say that no harm came to him? (Luke 12:4-7)

Share a personal experience when you “suffered” because you tried to do the right thing.

What is Peter’s advice (v.14-15a) when that happens?

- 5. Peter (v.15b) states another very important mental preparation we should make. What should we do and how should we do it?

What is the one thing you should never allow the hostility of others to cause you to do? (v.16)

1 Peter 3:18-22

- 6. Verse 18a gives three statements about Jesus’ death for sins. What are they and what do they mean to you?

1.

2.

3.

- 7. According to verse 18b and 19, what else did Jesus have the opportunity to do after His sacrificial death on Good Friday and prior to His glorious resurrection on Easter?

Where were “the spirits in prison?” (The Creed)

What was the purpose of Christ’s “preaching”? (Catechism)

In the context of this discussion about the importance of being willing to suffer for the faith, what value does Jesus’ descent into hell have for you?

8. What significance might there be in Peter's report that only "eight persons" out of the thousands on earth were saved?

What was the physical "mechanism" that lifted the ark and its residents to safety?

Of what does Peter see this a "type?"

What does Holy Baptism do for a sincere believer? (v.21)

What other event (v.22) does Peter mention to give us consolation and courage in the face of life's difficulties?

1 Peter 4:1–6

9. What can we do to prepare ourselves mentally for suffering, according to 4:1?

What will govern our behavior? (v.2)

When we live this way, from whom (vv.3–4) will we likely feel resentment and abuse?

What thought (v.5) should bolster our resolve not to let anything pressure us to return to our former godless way of life?

What comforting thought does Peter offer (v.6) about the state of believers who have already experienced physical death?
