

**Lesson 15 – 1 Peter:**

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Submission and respect toward others: 2:11 – 3:12

Peter now gives both general and specific guidance and exhortation concerning Christian behavior. These exhortations have universal application to all Christians concerning their manner of life in the world. Peter discusses the duties of Christians as citizens, as servants, and as wives and husbands. These principles cover the chief human relationships in life: one's relationship to the state (civil authority), to one's employer, and to one's home and married partner.

Peter presents Christ's patient submission to undeserved suffering as an example to us to imitate.

The general emphasis is on active and patient submission, on loyal and disciplined devotion, freely rendered, constrained by reverence for God, inspired by confidence in Him. Christians should acknowledge the sovereignty of God in ordering and overruling human institutions and relations for men's good. The way then to please God, to serve His will, and to experience His blessings, is for Christians not to be rebels against civil authority but rather positively, submissively, and dutifully discharge the various responsibilities we have in our normal relations of life.

Christians should be God-fearing, loyal, and obedient citizens, considerate neighbors, diligent and faithful employees, uncomplaining victims of unjust treatment, dutiful and devoted wives, and husbands, and be sympathetic and generous in our personal relations, using every opportunity to forsake evil and to do good.

- 1) Reasons for self-discipline, 2:11 – 12: “Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.”

These two verses are transitional. They can be viewed as the finale to the first section of the letter or as the opening statement of the second section of the letter. These two verses enunciate the letter’s central theme: Christians living in hostile territory need to live out the principles of the Good News so that they can win other people to the Lord.

There is a two-fold demand for disciplined and distinctive personal conduct as Christians. One half the demand is negative and private: a demand for abstinence in personal living. The other half of the demand is positive and public: a demand for behavior that is openly and recognizably virtuous in the eyes of others.

v. 11 - “Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.”

Peter gives three reasons why we should discipline and direct our lives, two of them are in this verse.

1. We are reminded of our heavenly citizenship. Once we become Christians, we are to think of ourselves as only temporary residents and foreigners on the earth. As such, as the Greek word ‘paroikoi’ describes those who have no rights or legal status in the place where they are pilgrims or foreigners. The second Greek word used ‘parepidemoi’ emphasizes that they are temporary residents only. As long as we (Christians) are in this world, there should always be a sense of detachment.
2. This discipline is in the best interest of our true well-being. Dangers or perils from our fallen human nature still beset our spiritual lives. Our flesh is a good servant but a bad master. The fleshly lusts because they are selfish, indulgent, and potentially vicious, are by their very nature rebellious, treasonous, disobedient, and seditious. They will wage war within against our true self. See Romans 7:23 and James 4:1:

Romans 7:22-23 – “I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.”

James 4:1 – “What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you?”

We must deliberately refuse to give them a foothold!

The third reason for self-discipline is found in verse 12:

“Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.”

3. The third reason for self-discipline is our influence for God on others. Our aim and prayer should be that our critics should come to see that our good works are made possible only by the gracious working of God’s Spirit, and that they be brought to acknowledge that God is the author.

Peter is deliberately repeating the teaching of Jesus as found in Matthew 5:16 – “In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

Peter notes that if we live as we should according to God’s Word, unbelieving neighbors will likely accuse you and throw fiery darts at you. These accusations are meant to tear down and destroy. However, the best answer or response to silence them is not by word but by deeds. See verse 15 – “It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you.”

Our “Christlike” conduct will show the accusers their need for forgiveness in Christ, and the “error of their way.” The accusers do not glorify God now but may be led to do so later when they recognize the real character of our works and that it is only God’s divine help that makes them possible.

The phrase “they will give honor to God when he judges the world” likely refers to the time in this life, when God may deal with this kind of people to bring them to repentance and faith. What He will then use to cause them to change their attitude will be the “good works” which they have seen and which they have deliberately misrepresented.

On the day when God judges the world either in mercy or in judgment, the accusers will have to give God glory and confess the truth of what they saw in us as we reflect God's character and nature.

- 2) Respecting People in Authority, 2:13 – 17: “For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority – whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.”

Peter will now deal with the application of verses 11 and 12 in specific life situations “among your unbelieving neighbors” (v. 12) beginning with 2:13 through 3:6. (Note the outline above on page 1 of this lesson)

Our proper recognition of civil authorities, is dependent on understanding God’s principle of submission. We must understand that civil authorities have a divinely-appointed responsibility to preserve law and order, to prevent anarchy and moral corruption, and to promote and encourage good conduct. This means that we (Christian citizens) ought to submit ourselves to the civil authority and to be warned or encouraged by what they do and say in the discharge of their public duty.

This loyal submission to civil rulers is plainly God’s will and such virtuous conduct may well serve to restrain the words and deeds of those potential law-breakers, who themselves have neither the will nor the mind to be reasonably law-abiding.

As Christians we are not to forget that we are free, and that we should not presume on that God-given freedom by using it as a cover for some sin. We are not to do as we please regardless of the demands of civil authorities, but to use it as willing bondservants of God, by giving every fellow human-being the due respect as God’s creature, deliberately engaging in acts of love towards our fellow believers and always to show reverence for God and respect for the powers that be.

v. 13a – “For the Lord’s sake,” This phrase stresses the fact that we must deliberately chose and voluntarily submit ourselves to the civil authority. God orders civil authority, He sets up kingdoms, power, authorities to bring

order to society. Because God, in His sovereignty has ordered human life, we, as Christians, are to fit into His into His divine arrangement. This phrase notes the proper Christian motive for our dutiful obedience or conformity.

There are three interpretations of this thought:

- a) Because by faith, Christians recognize such institutions as being divinely ordained, therefore they render their submission primarily to the Lord, compare with Hebrews 12:9.

Hebrews 12:9 – “Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (KJV) or as in the NLT – “Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn’t we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?”

- b) Because as Man, the Lord Himself was submissive, therefore Christians ought to follow His example.
- c) In order to commend to others Christ as Lord, and not to bring reproach on His name, as well as, on themselves by unruly behavior (conduct), therefore obedience is commanded and advised.

v. 13b – 14 – “submit to all human authority = whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right.”

The first example of this God commanded submission is to civil authorities, whether it be the supreme ruler (in this case the Roman Emperor Nero – who ruled from AD 54-68) or subordinate officials duly commissioned or appointed. This would mean that kings are to be regarded as being given their place and function by God. Also, the provincial governors and other state officials are to be regarded not merely as deriving their authority by commission from the king, but rather as sharing in the divine commission which in their case has been extended to them “through” the king.

As intended, these civil rulers are explicitly commissioned to represent God as the Judge. They give expression to God’s righteousness and His wrath by inflicting just punishment on wrongdoers and by publicly commending and rewarding those who do well. This means that all who act under this divine commission and authority should do so as God would act: they should love righteousness and hate iniquity. See Hebrews 1:8-9: “But to the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. You rule with a scepter of justice. You love justice and hate evil.

Therefore, O God, your God has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else.”

This implies that the civil government is responsible not only for the citizen’s material well-being, but also and most of all for their moral well-being. It is evident that this can only be promoted and preserved if vice (wrongdoing) is punished and virtue is encouraged.

v. 15 – “It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you.” Peter here notes that Christians should be subject to the civil government, and secondly, that by their law-abiding behavior they avoid the condemnation and win the commendation of the civil authorities. The practical consequence then will be that by such virtuous behavior they will silence, or prevent from speaking at all, those who, without proper thought or knowledge, are too ready to accuse and run down Christians. The verb – ‘phimoun’ is used to express what Jesus did when He ‘put the Sadducees to silence’ in Matthew 22:34; and what He said when He silenced an unclean spirit (‘Hold thy peace’) in Mark 1:25; and when He stilled the storm (‘Be still’) in Mark 4:39. The word can cover the idea of preventing someone from speaking as well as the idea of causing someone to cease from speaking.

The Greek word for ‘ignorance’ – ‘agnosia’ is a stronger word than ‘agnoia’ and indicates more of a lack of knowledge. It seems to indicate obstinate unwillingness to learn or to accept the truth. The foolish accusations in the Greek means “those without reason, who are senseless in what they are prone to say about Christianity. The whole phrase refers to the kind of talkers who run Christianity down without either reason or knowledge. Thus, what will silence them is law-abiding conduct by Christians.

v. 16 – “For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil.” We, as Christians, should recognize and enjoy the freedom we have in Christ, without abusing it. We should never use our freedom in Christ to cover or as an excuse for wrong-doing, particularly self-indulgence. Compare with Galatians 5:13 – “For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers, and sisters. But don’t sue your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.”

Nor should we forget that we ought to live as God’s “bondservants” or “slaves.” Bible Commentator John Brown, says it this way, “The only

true liberty, of which a dependent being like man is capable, is the free use of his faculties in the service of God.”

We are commanded to be in subjection to men (civil authorities), but it does not mean a denial of Christian freedom. Obedience should be rendered not out of necessity but by glad and willing choice, and a sense of obligation to God rather than to men. This is the governing idea: when you have been compelled to submit, you should openly show that you are still free to choose by engaging in more of the same service willingly and on your own initiative. See Matthew 5:39-41.

v. 17 – **“Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.”** We are to highly esteem all men. It is due equally to all as God’s creatures, and as the objects of His love and care. To love is the distinctive Christian attitude towards the Christian community. It is important here that Christians are particularly instructed to express love not towards one another individually, but towards the church as a distinct body or fellowship. We are to ‘fear’ or reverence God. This is the proper attitude toward God.

Peter here is reflecting on Jesus’ balanced statement about the Christian’s duty to both God and the government. See Matthew 22:21 – **“Caesar’s,” they replied, “Well, then, he said, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.”**