

Session 5

LIVING IN SUBMISSION

1 Peter 2:11-17

Memory Verse

Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

– 1 PETER 2:12, CSB



Living in Submission

THEOLOGICAL THEME: As citizens of heaven (not the world), we should resist sinful desires and live honorably, submitting to authority God has put in place.

CALL TO ACTION: Consider the places you need to fight against the flesh and submit to God's will.

Sometimes doing the right thing means going against human logic and conventional (human) wisdom. One example of this from Scripture is the story of Ruth.

After the death of her husband, brother-in-law, and father-in-law, when Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi encouraged her to go back to her family's home, Ruth refused:

But Ruth replied:


Don't plead with me to abandon you
or to return and not follow you.
For wherever you go, I will go,
and wherever you live, I will live;
your people will be my people,
and your God will be my God. —Ruth 1:16

Ruth went with her mother-in-law in faith, despite the uncertain and dangerous future ahead of them. She chose a path contrary to what many in her shoes would have done and contrary to conventional wisdom of the day.

Living among the Israelites, Ruth, a Moabitess, looked different. She was an outsider. But she humbly obeyed what her mother-in-law bid her to do, and in a miraculous string of events, Ruth ended up marrying an honorable, wealthy landowner named Boaz (Ruth 4).

Ruth and Boaz went on to have a son named Obed, who had a son named Jesse. And Jesse had a son named David, who went on to be a king of Israel. And down the line, another king—the true King—came from their line: Jesus.

Ruth made a choice that likely surprised those around her. It wasn't a safe choice, but it was an honorable one, made not out of regard for herself, but for others. In our reading today, Peter addressed a similar issue: combatting the desires of our flesh to live differently than those around us.

 Have you ever been in a situation where you made a godly choice that confused or surprised the people around you?

 What other examples do we see of this in Scripture?


Session Summary


God's people are "strangers and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11) on earth. Our true citizenship is in heaven, and our allegiance lies with Christ, not our culture. As such, this should inform the way we live. We should not give in to the sinful desires of the flesh, but rather live as God has called us.

Just like Christ, we should live honorably when we are wrongly accused (following Christ faithfully means we will face opposition). When we live honorably, people notice, and our behavior points toward Christ, honoring God.

Another way we live honorably is by submitting to authority. Ultimately, those in authority have been placed there by God, even when they do not honor Him, and He will use them for His purposes. Unless abiding by the law or submitting to authority causes us to disobey God, we should do so. We are to show honor and respect to everyone, love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and fear God.

1. Abstain from Sinful Desires (1 Peter 2:11)

 What does it mean that God's people are strangers and exiles in the world? Consider those who were literally exiles in the Old Testament. How might this inform our understanding of this idea?

 How is this connected to our calling to “abstain from sinful desires”?

In this new section of Peter's letter (marked by the opening of “dear friends,” v.11), Peter called his readers to good works, even when it doesn't make sense by human standards. This is exceptionally hard to do.

Just before this, Peter emphasized our status as believers:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. —1 Peter 2:9-10

Peter said one way in which we will “proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (v. 9) is by living honorably.

In this verse, Peter called his readers “strangers and exiles.” Strangers and exiles typically have less rights than people who are native to a land. Many of Peter's initial audience were living in the Roman empire and had less rights than a Roman citizen.¹

This status as outsiders (the NLT translates this helpfully as “temporary residents and foreigners”) was doubly true for Peter's initial audience. They were, in some cases, literal foreigners living under Roman occupation, and also spiritual

foreigners, living temporarily in this world. The same is true for believers today (Philippians 3:20).


Since we are citizens of heaven (followers of Christ), Peter advocated that we should “abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul.” This idea of struggle with sinful desires (and how these oppose the Holy Spirit) is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. But what types of desire was Peter referring to? Paul gave a basic list in Galatians:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. —Galatians 5:19-21

Submission to these desires is characteristic of a nonbeliever, a citizen of this world. But are not to be true of a citizen of heaven and follower of Christ. These “wage war against the soul.”

 How have you experienced the tension of the desires of the flesh warring against the desires of the Spirit in daily life?

2. Conduct Yourselves Honorably (1 Peter 2:12)

 What do you think it meant for Peter’s original audience to conduct themselves honorably among the Gentiles? What does it mean for us today?

 What was the goal of living this way among others? How does this still apply today?

Following his previous guidance to “abstain from sinful desires” (v. 11), Peter said to “conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles” (v. 12). Living honorably here means to follow Jesus’s example and live as God calls us, regardless of what our culture deems appropriate or “good.” We are held to a higher standard.

Have you ever been in a scenario where you abstained from participating in an activity in obedience to God and others were thrown off or took offense to you doing so? Maybe they perceived you were judging them as you tried to do the right thing by your faith. In response, it is possible you might face slander or personal attacks in a moment like this.


If you have ever been unfairly accused of doing something, you know how difficult and frustrating this can be. Scholars believe at least some of Peter’s readers must have been enduring unjust slander and accusations of doing evil when they were actually trying to do the right thing according to God.² Jesus warned us that this would happen:

“If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they don’t know the one who sent me.” —John 15:18-21

It is helpful in times like this to remember and consider Jesus. He (the Son of God!), too, was unjustly accused of wrongdoing, and yet He consistently lived honorably. He understands the opposition we face, and He lived as the perfect example in these moments.


Peter noted that, though the situation is unfair, when we seek to live honorably as Christ desires, people will notice our “good works.” Peter said living this way will be noticed and it “will glorify God on the day he visits” (this probably in reference to the day of judgment³).

Don’t miss Peter’s point: When we behave honorably (even when the situation against us is unfair), we glorify God. This should be our aim in all our actions! Our lives should continually point to Christ. And when we live this way, people notice. The Holy Spirit can and does use this to draw people toward Jesus.

 How might godly living give you opportunity to point others to Jesus daily?

3. Submit to Authority (1 Peter 2:13-17)

 Peter wrote practically regarding the authority of the time in these verses. How might this translate to our lives today?

 What type of submission did Peter call for in this passage? How can we submit as free people?

In our current cultural moment, “submit” is a word many don’t like to hear. We embrace personal freedoms and buck against that inhibits our ideas of freedom. Peter told his readers to submit to human authority “because of the Lord” (v. 13). This may seem in conflict, but Paul taught the same thing in Romans 13:1-2.

Depending on how you date the letter of 1 Peter, the emperor Peter referred to may have been Nero, who was exceptionally vicious and cruel in his mistreatment and persecution of Christians. Still, Peter advised that Christians should strive to be good citizens even when their situations are particularly extreme.⁴

But didn’t Peter just bid believers to do the right thing even when others didn’t? Peter himself stood against the Jewish religious leaders when they were ordered “not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). Submission to earthly authorities doesn’t mean we should disobey God. We must first obediently submit to God’s authority and will, and then submit to earthly authority as long as it does not lead to disobedience before God.

Peter says we should submit “because of the Lord” (v. 13) and names this as “God’s will” (v. 14). Doing good in these scenarios silences “the ignorance of foolish people” (v. 15). One practical reason for this is that the government can mount less of a case against you when you are following the law (there was no

need to bring further negative attention to the newly growing church, it already had plenty of opposition!).



How does submission to Christ actually bring about true freedom?

Though we have freedom in Christ, our freedom is found in godly living, not doing anything we desire. Peter ends directly: “Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (v. 17). As fellow image bearers, all people (including nonbelievers who oppose God) are worthy of treating with respect. We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to fear God (living in daily submission to Him). As we live this way, God is glorified and others are pointed to Him.

Conclusion

Peter opened this section of his letter by reminding believers of their status as “strangers and exiles” (v. 11). This was doubly true for many of them, as foreigners living under Roman occupation, and believers in Jesus living as a temporary resident in the world. This is true for us today, too. Our true citizenship isn’t in America or anywhere else in the world, it’s in heaven.

As followers of Christ and strangers on earth, Peter instructed us to “abstain from sinful desires” (v. 11) like the ones Paul named in Galatians 5 as desires of the flesh. These are in direct opposition to the Holy Spirit, and we are called to live different from the world. One practical way we do this is by submitting to authority. We are to show honor and respect to everyone, love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and fear God.



Why is it tempting to live the way our culture does instead of the way God calls us to live as strangers and exiles on earth? How do we pursue this daily?

 How can our group seek to live honorably among others together? How does this build up the body of Christ?

 How might living honorably among others give you opportunity for gospel conversations this week?

Memorize

Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

- 1 Peter 2:12, CSB

References

¹NIV Life Application Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

²soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/1peter/1peter.htm

³Ibid.

⁴NIV Life Application Study Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.