



Session 4

LIVING AS STRANGERS

Believers honor God through their good works.

1 PETER 2:11-20

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation.

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the Emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. ¹⁶ As God's



slaves, live as free people, but don't use your freedom as a way to conceal evil. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor. ¹⁸ Household slaves, submit with all fear to your masters, not only to the good and gentle but also to the cruel. ¹⁹ For it brings favor if, mindful of God's will, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if you sin and are punished, and you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.

Look for the reasons given by Peter for the course of action he called his readers to take. What are the connections between the reasons given and who the Christians were supposed to influence?

FIRST THOUGHTS

On a recent mission trip, a person who was traveling for the first time out of the United States experienced culture shock. He had gotten worked up about not knowing the language, not knowing the money, and not knowing the culture. The first night of the mission trip the group was in a hurry and decided to eat at an American hamburger place, even though they were in a country known for its own cuisine. The first-time missionary panicked when he approached the counter. Speaking very loudly and slowly, he said, "I would like a hamburger, and some fries, and a coke." In perfect English with a European accent, the counter worker said, "Would you like ketchup and mayo?" Culture shock took its toll. The missionary backed up slightly, raised his hands, and said slowly and loudly, "Whoa! We are not from here." A friend leaned over toward him and said, "Dude, he's speaking English." Sometimes new surroundings get the best of us.

What are some of the ways you have experienced culture shock when traveling to a new location? How did it make you feel?

Christians live as strangers in a foreign land. They are like diplomats living in an embassy in a foreign country. They represent their culture to a foreign culture that surrounds them. Living in a foreign culture, ambassadors abide by the laws of the country that they inhabit, as long as it does not cause them to break the laws of their own land. They are bound by the laws of their own country even though they are residing in another place.

Peter wrote to Christians who certainly must have considered themselves temporary residents in this world. Their government was growing more hostile to their faith. Persecution was not just a theoretical possibility; it was actually happening. Peter's counsel in this week's Scripture passage was for them not to withdraw but rather to be such exemplary members of their communities that they would have a positive influence.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and Social Order*

Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 PETER 2:11-25

The focus of Peter's letter now shifts from the relationship between believers (1:13–2:10) to their relationship with the unbelieving world (2:11–25). The world in Peter's day was suspicious and sometimes hostile toward those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. In the first part of his letter Peter dealt with theological concerns. The Christians who suffered persecution in Asia Minor needed a living hope in a resurrected Savior (1:3). Possessing this hope allowed them to live in obedience, reverence, and love toward others (1:13–25). As the Christians matured in their understanding of who they were in Christ, they would better understand how to deal with persecution. But how should they deal with their persecutors? This is what Peter explains in 1 Peter 2:11–20.



Peter encouraged believers in his day to be good citizens in the culture where they lived, but that did not include compromising their own convictions or embracing worldly values that caused them to lose their distinctiveness in Christ. He called them to a countercultural lifestyle that would display Christ to the culture (2:11-12). This would be reflected in the way they treated officials and leaders (vv. 13-17) and in their work (vv. 18-20).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

IN CULTURE (1 PET. 2:11-12)

VERSE 11

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you.

Peter encouraged his readers, as citizens of a different world, to ***abstain from fleshly desires***. The word *flesh* in the Scriptures has several different meanings. It can simply mean the physical body. But here the emphasis seems to be the natural desires human beings have apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact that Peter told them to abstain from these desires means they were tempted by them. Becoming a Christian does not completely eradicate fleshly desires. Rather, Satan uses them to wage war against believers. Some people have a problem believing Christians struggle with the same desires as those who do not believe in Jesus, but most people understand that from their own experience.

VERSE 12

¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation.

Many people in Peter's day viewed Christians with disdain and suspicion. Some accused the church of being disloyal to the state (see Acts 17:7). Some believers were accused of sabotaging business enterprises by their religious beliefs, and in Paul's case, on one occasion, that was actually true (see Acts 16:19).

Peter encouraged believers to ***conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles***. In 1 Peter 1:15, the word translated *conduct*

spoke of holiness in life. In 1:17-18, the same word encouraged believers to turn from the evil way of life from which they had been redeemed. In 3:1-2, it depicts the godly behavior of Christian wives, and in 3:16, it describes the godly lives of suffering believers. Overall, the term indicates the new way of life Christians are to embrace after our new birth.

Verse 12 suggests that those who *speak against* Christians will be convinced by believers' deeds, not by their words. In a world that is hostile to Christianity, it is easy to get into verbal sparring matches with people who have an ungodly worldview. Unbelievers will not be won by arguments about morality but by the quality of our lives.

Unbelievers will *glorify God on the day of visitation*. Two schools of thought exist concerning this phrase. Some believe *the day of visitation* means the return of the Lord, implying that one day unbelievers will see that the Christians were right. The other school of thought interprets this phrase as the time of God's gracious visitation in saving people who currently oppose the gospel. The latter seems to be more likely. It was Peter's desire that the nations come to faith in Christ, and he knew the witness of believers to be an instrument in the gospel's spreading to the nations.

Why is it important for Christians to be good citizens as much as possible without violating the ways of God? How have you seen a Christian impact a community simply by the way he or she lived?

TOWARD OFFICIALS AND LEADERS (1 PET. 2:13-17)

VERSES 13-14

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the Emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.

This is not the only place in the New Testament where Christians are urged to *submit* themselves to the *authority* of the government. (See also Rom. 13:1,5; Titus 3:1.) *Submit* refers to a willing submission, not to coercion. The same word is used in the



New Testament to exhort believers to be subject to God, Christ, church leaders, one another, husbands, and masters (Jas. 4:7; Eph. 5:21,24; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 3:1; 5:5). However, the early apostles faced difficult decisions when the law of God and the law of man conflicted. They knew they needed to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

The reason we can willingly submit to human authority is ***because of the Lord***, that is, because of His sovereign goodness in providing mankind with a structure of human authority. God causes kingdoms to rise and fall (Ps. 75:7; Dan. 2:21), and He has ordained political authority in the world (Rom. 13:1). These facts suggest two applications. First, God, in His sovereignty, gives the rulers the permission to rule. This means whether leaders are good or bad, we should see them as established by God to provide order. Second, since God has established government, then citizens should obey it unless it asks them to violate the law of God. The Bible contains several instances of civil disobedience. For instance, the Hebrew midwives allowed the male children to live in violation of Pharaoh's order (Ex. 1:17). Rahab disobeyed her king in not exposing the Jewish spies (Josh. 2:4). Saul's subjects refused to take Jonathan's life for violating Saul's command (1 Sam. 14:45).

BIBLE SKILL: *Analyze a biblical command for Christian living.*

Identify at least three biblical commands for Christian living found in 1 Peter 2:11-20. Express each command as briefly as possible. (Example: "Submit to the government," 2:13.) Develop a "path of obedience" for each imperative. That is, think of reasons God gave us these commands. Consider damage that might be caused by ignoring them and benefits generated by obeying them.

VERSE 15

15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.

The good lives of Christians should counter the false claims against them that lead to persecution. By remaining true to God and His ways, Christians *silence* their oppressors. By submitting to government, Christians prove that they are not anarchists who are disloyal to their leaders. They prove they are not anti-business and anti-progressive. They support the government in things that can be supported while still remaining true to the ways of God.

Peter made an important statement about their persecutors. They were ignorant and *foolish*. Because they did not know the Lord, they listened to foolish speculations about Christians and opposed them. Such behavior was not wise but foolish. Sometimes the persecuted need to hear they are on the side of knowledge and wisdom and that the behavior of their persecutors is foolish.

Why doesn't submission to government silence all persecution?

VERSE 16

16 As God's slaves, live as free people, but don't use your freedom as a way to conceal evil.

Peter wanted his readers to know that submission to authority does not automatically diminish *freedom*. In fact, no political force can take away spiritual freedom. The ones being persecuted in Asia Minor were *God's slaves*, and they could live in the freedom He provided. With the freedom God provides, Christian citizens have an obligation to be responsible with that freedom. We do not have a right to do *evil* because we are free. We are free because we are slaves of God.

How have people used their freedom for evil? Why is it important for Christians to avoid this temptation?



VERSE 17

17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor.

This section ends with four rapid-fire commands. When it comes to the Christians' witness in society, they are to show respect to everyone. Everyone may not earn that respect, but Christians know the importance of respecting everyone. Second, Christians should show *love* to everyone who claims the name of Christ. Because they serve the same Father, they are brothers in Christ. The third command is to *fear God*, giving Him the respect that He deserves. The final command is to *honor the Emperor*. As long as honoring political leaders does not usurp fearing God, the Christian should prove to be one of the best citizens in his or her country.

THROUGH YOUR WORK (1 PET. 2:18-20)

VERSE 18

18 Household slaves, submit with all fear to your masters, not only to the good and gentle but also to the cruel.

When Peter turned from the Christian's responsibility toward government to the duty toward workplace authorities, he targeted a specific relationship—*household slaves* and their *masters*. Slavery was a huge institution in the days of Peter. People could be enslaved in a number of ways. They could be captured in war, kidnapped, born into a slave household, or experience economic hardships that required them to sell themselves into slavery. Some slaves held respectable positions in society, such as doctors, teachers, musicians, and secretaries, but many were assigned menial, harsh tasks.

Peter did not address whether slavery was immoral; rather, he offered wisdom for the immediate need. Slaves were to submit to their masters *with all fear*. Such submission was to be based on the workers' respect for God (see 2:17) rather than on a cringing dread of their supervisors. Peter was arguing that workplace obedience does not depend on the character of the master.

Masters ran the gamut, from *good and gentle* to *cruel*. The command to submit to one's master did not apply only to those who were kind, but it also applied to those masters who were unkind.

The word for *cruel* can be variously translated as crooked, dishonest, or morally evil. The name of Jesus was at stake, and Christians were to offer no fuel for further persecution by rebelling against their masters.

How does the way one treats his or her boss dishonor or honor God?

VERSES 19-20

¹⁹ For it brings favor if, mindful of God’s will, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if you sin and are punished, and you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.

Peter further explained the reason a slave should not disrespect a cruel master. The primary motivation for showing respect was that it brought *favor*. This is the usual word translated as “grace.” By modeling grace to those who wronged them, the persecuted in Asia Minor were demonstrating the way God treated them.

Note that Peter spoke of those who were *suffering unjustly*. Some people suffer because of their own mistakes and their own choices. They bring suffering on themselves, so their suffering is not commendable. However, the Christians who suffered in Asia Minor did not bring their suffering upon themselves. Therefore, they had the opportunity to relate to their persecutors with the grace of God. If they had suffered for their own sin, then their treatment would have been punishment, but if they did nothing wrong and suffered, then they brought *favor with God*.

How would you define the line between showing grace and standing up against abuse? Can a person do both at the same time? Explain.



IN MY CONTEXT

Believers are to be exemplary members of their community, having a positive influence. Believers demonstrate trust in God by respecting their local government leaders. Even when abused, believers can demonstrate God's character to those who abuse them.

Identify ways your group can make a difference in your community. As a group, select one action on the list and take steps toward completing that action. Ask God to give you opportunities to share about Jesus through this action.

List the names of local government leaders. Take time to pray for them, that God will use them for His purposes and to bring about good in your community. Consider ways of letting these leaders know you pray for them.

Reflect on your response to any recent personal injustices you experienced. How did that response reflect the actions and attitudes called for by Peter? How will you respond in similar situations in the future in a way that would reflect Peter's directives?

MEMORY VERSE

Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation. —1 Peter 2:12