

## OUR WITNESS

1 Peter 2:11-25

When we visit a foreign country for a brief period of time, we are constantly aware that we are different from those around us. Even if we were in Great Britain which is fairly close to our culture, the differences are very obvious. They talk funny. They also drive on the wrong side of the road. They eat and seem to enjoy some foods that are really bland. We really get the sense of being different if we visit places that do not speak the same language and really feel uncomfortable when we're in a place where the people do not have the same moral values that we think are important.

Not only do we notice that we are different, everyone around us notices that we are different and as a result they watch us closely to see how we behave. If they know we are an American, then they will use the information they gain from watching us to update their personal data bank as to what it means to be an American. Many times, the early Christians found themselves in situations that were "foreign" and the question for them was "do we try to adjust our behavior (or identity) to fit in or do we remain true to what, who, where, and whose we are?"

Peter advised them about the kind of responses they should have in such situations and these responses can be summed up in such words as abstain, excel, submit, and honor. As Christians, we can see the application to our present day and world situations in which we find ourselves as we examine our values versus the values of the world.

### Our Good Works – 2:11-12

<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:11-12 (NASB95)

It is difficult for most of us to keep in mind that we are really citizens of another Kingdom even though we live in the USA. It maybe even more difficult to realize that we are just passing through and the situation we are in is not permanent. Sometimes the question could be framed in terms of "to whom do you belong." This is a question of alliances and associations. We may belong to a local church group, a civic club, a supper club, a neighborhood group, a political party, or a government. In a list of priorities, the only one that really matters in the end is our relationship with the Kingdom of God that we have because we belong to Christ. The actions and attitude of some people seem to indicate that they think that even though we may be associated with different groups but we all belong to the government. Such thinking is elevating government to the role of God which is simply statist humanism. Unfortunately, many in our nation have this idea and this is a good reason for us as Christians to keep in mind that we are aliens from such thinking and we can thank God that we ARE passing through as pilgrims.

We, as Christians (both individually and corporately), are God's chosen people (the new Israel of God), and we are "on display" (walking advertisements for the Kingdom of God) before those who do not know God. In the previous part of his letter to the scattered saints living in Asia Minor, Peter reminded them of their role as "a royal priesthood" to live their lives in such a way that those who are in darkness would see their behavior in a way that glorifies God.

It is helpful to consider verse 12 as an introduction to the admonitions that follow in the remaining verses. Every translation I checked (except Young's Literal Translation) rendered the last word of this verse as "visitation." We naturally think of "visitation" as when the Lord returns. However, the Greek word used is episkope (ep-is-kop-ay') and is the root of such English words as Episcopal and is related the words translated as "bishop" or "overseer." The

term “overseer” could be translated as “inspector.” In fact, Young’s Literal Translation renders this verse as

12 having your behavior among the nations right, that in that which they speak against you as evil-doers, of the good works having beheld, they may glorify God in a day of inspection.

The way of life (conversation or behavior) to which Peter referred was being lived out among the Gentiles - the unsaved world. So, who is it who will be glorifying God as a result of what we do in our “good works?” The answer to this is pretty obvious: the Gentiles will be giving glory to God. What is the occasion of them seeing our “good works?” They see (or don’t see) our good works when they “inspect” us.

As Christians we are under constant examination (or inspection) by those who are still a part of the “fallen” world system. They are examining us to find an answer to the question “Is It Real?” “It,” of course, refers to the good news of “God’s Salvation” in and through the completed work of Jesus Christ.

The reasons people do examine (inspect) us are varied. Some will observe and perhaps even test us from **intellectual curiosity**. They just want to know. They don’t intend to do anything with the information but just seek “knowledge for the sake of knowledge.” There are many “informed” lost people in the world today who possess “head knowledge” about “religious things.” (Some professing Christians find themselves doing Bible study just to learn – they don’t do anything with the knowledge.)

Others will observe and perhaps even test us because they wish to “**disprove**” the claims of God on the lives of all people. What they are trying to do is to “justify themselves” and their behavior by gathering evidence that “God’s Salvation” does not work in the lives of those who profess to have it.

Still others will observe and perhaps even test us because they are seeking to **know the truth** and want to find something that provides true salvation from a system that is broken and failing; that is, the world system.

There is a fourth category and these are people who observe us **coincidentally** or “accidentally.” These are not curious; they are not trying to justify themselves and they are not necessarily seeking the truth. Some will take notice of Christians simply because there are those rare situations when a life is so radically different that the only explanation is that God is at work in that life. This fourth group may be the majority. They need the shock value of a radically obedient, self-sacrificing Christian life in order to wake up to the fact that their present life is not all there is to living.

Regardless of the reason, we must realize that “our lives” are on display to a lost world. Peter described several situations in which we find ourselves and he advised those early Christians how to behave in such a way that God is glorified by what people observe us doing in these various situations.

We could think of the job or calling of the church in the world as (1) to intercede for the world as a priest would do for the people and (2) to live holy lives so that our access to God is not hindered and (3) that we may live lives that result in people giving praise to God.

### Our Freedom – 2:13-17

<sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. <sup>15</sup> For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. <sup>16</sup> *Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.* <sup>17</sup> Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. 1 Peter 2:13-17 (NASB95)

Most translations omit the connecting “particle” which in the Greek is “oun” and is

typically translated “then” or “therefore.” Putting this into context, we would say, “Since we are walking billboards of the grace and salvation of the Lord, therefore, we submit ourselves (for the Lord’s sake) to various human institutions.”

Notice that I used the word “various” rather than “every” in my “interpretation” of this passage. All the translations I checked (except “The Message”) has the word “every authority” or “every ordinance” or “every creation” of man. We are probably thinking that “every” means every – all – entire. However, that is wrong!!

Let me share some examples that illustrate that “every” does not really capture the meaning of the Greek word *pas* used in the text. ... “then went all Judea, and were baptized of him in Jordan.” (Matt 3:5-6 and Mark 1:5) Was all Judea, or all Jerusalem, baptized in Jordan? What about “the love of money is the root of all evil.” (1Tim 6:10) Is every evil caused by love of money or is some evil caused by pride or by jealousy or by envy of status, etc.? The words “world” and “all” are used in some seven or eight senses in Scripture, and it is very rarely that “all” means all persons, taken individually but has a “collective” meaning that could be better rendered “some of all types” or “all sorts of.”

If we apply this logic to verses 13 and 14, then we see that Peter is saying that Christians should have respect to those in positions of legitimate authority regardless of whether the office is “the president” or “the dog catcher” or the “constable.”

One of the contentions against the early church was the claim that Jesus is Lord. To the civil authorities, this was a threat to their right to govern or to manage the affairs of the nation or the city or the village. The fact that we recognize Jesus as Lord does not mean that we disrespect all other authority. We are expected to observe the laws that do not conflict with God’s laws.

If we claim that we are responsible to a higher power (meaning Jehovah God) – which we are – and use that as an excuse for ignoring legitimate laws and disrespecting the positions of legitimate authority in civil government, then we are operating outside of the will of God. It is through obedience to God’s will (intent) for our lives that we can put a stop to criticism from those in the world system as they examine (or inspect) our lives.

With regard to the question of “who do we respect?” we have this paradox: A Christian has more freedom than anyone else in the world because he or she is a bond slave of God. If we recognize that our “freedom as human beings” is a result of our relation to Jesus as Lord of our life, then there will not be any evil to cover up and we live out who we are in Christ.

So, how do we actually put this concept into practice? The first part of the verse 17 sums up the answer in a short statement all of us can remember:

#### HONOR ALL or RESPECT OTHERS

In the remainder of this chapter and moving into the third chapter, Peter addressed specific ways in which such respect (or honor) should manifest itself.

The various relationships we have in life require different expressions of respect. For our fellow believers, respect takes on an expression of selfless love as described in 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen. A distinctive of our respect for God is reverential obedience typically stated as “fear God.” There is no call for “reverential obedience” toward fellow believers or even toward the king. There is no call for expressions of selfless love toward the king; however, we are to show honor. Peter does not elaborate on these first two since Christians should not need someone to explain what is meant by loving our brothers in Christ and obeying God. He had already elaborated on the subject of honoring or respecting those in civil authority.

#### Our Work – 2:18-20

<sup>18</sup> Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to

those who are unreasonable. <sup>19</sup> For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. 1 Peter 2:18-20 (NASB95)

The next example is not quite so obvious as the example of “loving fellow Christians” and “obeying God.” So, Peter provides some explanation. The issue under consideration in this passage is NOT whether slavery (in this text the reference is to household servants – in the Greek - oiketes) is morally reprehensible or justifiable. Peter is addressing how Christians are to function in situations that involve various kinds of authority relationships. The thinking of the Jews was that because they were the seed of Abraham, they ought not to be the servants of anyone. Particularly those who were believers in Christ thought they ought not to serve unbelieving masters, nor even believing ones, because they were equally “brothers in Christ.” So Peter, in this passage, outlines the expectation of servants with regard to their masters. Paul addressed this same issue in several passages: 1 Cor 7:20,21; Eph 6:5; Col 3:22; 1Tim 6:1; and 2 Tim 2:9.

The manner in which they are to be subject to them is with reverence to the “master” as a human being and giving consideration to the existing relationship. Examples of how this was to manifest itself are: strict regard to their masters’ commands, faithfulness in any trust given to them, diligence in the discharge of their duty, and being careful to not be offensive to their master.

The part that becomes difficult to carry out is that such actions as just described are to be not only to the good and gentle (those who are reasonable in their expectations); but, also to those who are ill natured and “crooked” as is implied in the Greek word (skolios) translated as “froward” or “harsh” or “overbearing” or “cross” in various translations. Being able to respond as Peter has taught is possible only if we are focused on a bigger picture of what is happening and not on the immediate situation. We see the proper attitude or focus in verses 19-20.

There are two key elements in being successful in conducting life in this manner:

**First** is that we must maintain a consciousness of God: (a) He is in control; (b) He loves us supremely and wants what is best for us; and (c) He is resident in us and is going through the ordeal with us. (Do we live our lives as if we believe this?)

**Secondly**, in order to conduct life as Peter has described, we must maintain a clear conscience by doing what is right and avoiding doing what is wrong. If we are not positioned on the “moral high ground” in such situations, then we will have a lot of problems in avoiding adopting the “way of the world” and becoming a “survivor” rather than living life as a “sacrificer.” If we are not on the moral high ground then we may lie about what we did in order to escape punishment. Christ is the ultimate example of living sacrificially rather than in “survivor” mode.

The bottom line is that we live by the principles of the Kingdom of God since the source of the life that is in us is Jesus Christ and He is always true to these principles. It does not matter whether we are aliens and pilgrims because we are away from our home country or because the culture of those around us is contrary to Godly principle, we must remain true to the right values.

### Our Example – 2:21-25

<sup>21</sup> For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, <sup>22</sup> WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; <sup>23</sup> and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; <sup>24</sup> and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you

have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. 1 Peter 2:21-25 (NASB95)

The “this” to which we are called is not referring to our situation in life of being a slave or an employee or whatever. A clearer rendering would state “To this cause you were called. . .” The “cause” is the purposes of the Kingdom of God. The “cause” is the salvation of souls and the redemption of mankind. Our responsibility is to bear a faithful witness to this salvation in our role as “walking billboards” for the Kingdom of God. We are to be examples of the effectiveness of God’s salvation to the world around us in the same manner as Christ was and is our example. As Peter has clearly stated, we are to follow in His steps and do as He did.

There are many difficult jobs in this world. Some things are hard to do. We send missionaries to remote parts of the world to try to help people with medical needs, teaching them how to grow food for themselves, and trying to enlighten them about God’s love for them. That, in and of itself, is a difficult job. In most places, the work is made even more difficult by people that oppose Christianity. In some of the African areas, the witch doctors stir up the people to avoid the missionaries and not accept help from them. In our own country, people have a lot of stress and many find that drugs are a way to escape from the reality of life. There are people who have devoted their lives to helping people to be rehabilitated and that too is a very difficult job. Just the addiction itself is hard enough to deal with and this situation is complicated by those who oppose rehabilitation – those who make a profit selling drugs. These that oppose may be the local pushers on the street corner or it may be the beer company that glamorizes the use of its products.

When we are in the midst of dealing with such situations, we may have a tendency to “fight fire with fire” and adopt the ways of the world in dealing with opposition. That is not what Christ taught us to do by His example. One of the things that Peter noted about Christ’s behavior was “lack of deceit.” We have heard the term “spin” applied to how people present the facts of a situation so that the story will favor whatever bias they may have. This is simply being deceitful. I read a quote years ago from someone that simply stated that “any form of deceit is a lie.” Sometime people want to avoid the “whole truth and nothing but the truth” because of having to face the consequences of errors. This type of avoidance actually causes more stress in a person’s life on a long-term basis than clearing the air and doing the right thing.

Another thing that we see in Christ’s behavior was that when people reviled or spoke ill of Him, He did not respond by speaking ill of them. Sometimes it is helpful in such a situation to simply say nothing. At other times, we might want to follow the admonition of pronouncing a blessing on the person when they are cursing you. In a similar vein, when He was treated improperly, He did not threaten those who were doing the harm to Him. His reactions have the effect of pouring water on a fire rather than adding fuel to the fire. This leads to less stress and restores peace rather than making things worse.

You and I have a tendency to think, “I can’t do that, that is beyond my capability, etc.” We are absolutely right! In our own strength we cannot do it. That is why Jesus went to the cross. That is why we need to go to the cross and die to self so that He can live in and through us. That is God’s provision for us.

The work of the cross puts to death the old nature that “cannot” function according to the example set by Jesus. The old nature is bound to sin and cannot (naturally) function in right living. The old nature is mortally wounded and it cannot recover from that wound. However, with the old nature having died, then the very life of Christ is functioning in and through us so that we can do all that God expects and we are able to follow Him as the Good Shepherd.

The world will examine and inspect our “actions” or good works; however, the Lord is the one Who cares for and inspects our souls. The world examines the outward appearance and

results, but God is interested in the inward, the source and root cause of all we do.

How do we put these truths into practice while we are aliens and pilgrims in this physical world? We are fellow citizens with the saints and we also have citizenship in a physical nation. There are times when we face choices regarding our citizenship. Sometimes that citizenship can be helpful when we have laws that protect the practice of our faith. At other times, we may find that the laws of the land are impediments to what God has called us to do. There are not clear cut rules that will apply in every situation. In the book *Community of the King*, H. A. Snyder comments: "But this will never be a neat clear-cut, triumphant road for the Church to follow. Obedience to the Gospel in a world in which Satan is still active means living with tension. We should be alarmed when we are at home in the world or have total 'peace of mind.' Christian life in a non-Christian world is tension, stress and at times even agony. The whole system of social techniques aims to adjust the individual to the world and eliminate tensions. Our Lord called and continues to call out a new society of persons unconditionally committed to exchanging the values of the surrounding society for the standards of Jesus' kingdom."

### Summary

The tensions of life are a result of things in our life being pulled in different directions. If you were to pull on a rope that was not tied down or did not have someone on the other end pulling on it, then there would be no tension or stress. If that rope is our life, then we see that we have things that try to pull us in one direction or another. Which direction will we be pulled? Will it be to becoming a better person and making the world a more pleasant place in which to live or will it be to becoming a bitter person and creating harshness wherever we go? The outcome is a result of how we respond to the stresses we encounter.