

LIVING LIFE IN A FALLEN WORLD

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.

I find it helpful to consider verse 12 as an introduction to the admonitions that follow in verses 13 through 25.

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (KJV)

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 word 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 refers is 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 them selves doing Bible study just to learn - they don't do anything with the knowledge.)

Other 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. He addressed issues regarding how we should relate to various authorities we encounter in our daily walk. He also had some comments about our general conduct in any situation. Finally, he addressed the situation of bondage relationships which he applied to the “servant-master” relationship that was prevalent at that time. Other examples he could have used might be “student-teacher” or “steward-owner” or even “employee-employer” relationship. Finally, Peter addressed relationships in the home between husbands and wives. The same principles apply in each of these situations.

Relating to Governmental Authority

13 ¶(Therefore,) Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every (all manner of) authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. (NIV)

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. You are probably thinking that “every” means every – all – entire. However, that is wrong!!

Let me give you 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 the "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.”

This idea is very applicable to modern day church life. In most medium sized churches, the typical member has respect for only one office of authority: that is, the Senior Pastor (and sometimes not even that). It doesn’t matter what the Deacons say, it doesn’t matter what the Minister of Youth says, it doesn’t matter what the head of the committee says, it doesn’t matter what the Sunday School Director wants to do: if we don’t agree, then we appeal to the pastor because he is the only one that has any respect.

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. There is no conflict with restrictions against spitting on the sidewalk with any law of God. There is no conflict with restrictions against jay-walking and any law of God. There is no conflict with obeying the speed limit with any law of God.

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 and put a stop to criticism from those in the world system as they examine (or inspect) our lives.

In a brief summary Peter uses a paradoxical statement of the Christian life.

16 Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. (NIV). Here's the 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 being" is a result of our relation to Jesus as Lord of our life, then there will not be any evil to cover up. Live out who you are in Christ.

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

HONOR ALL or RESPECT OTHERS.

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

17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

The various relationships we have in life require different expressions of respect. For our fellow believers, respect takes on an expression of selfless love (if you need an explanation of what this means, then it is time for you to exit the cave or just go read - maybe even memorize 1 Cor 13). A distinctive of our respect for God is reverential obedience. 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.

The next example is not quite so obvious as the example of "loving fellow Christians" and "obeying God." So, Peter provides some explanation.

18 Servants (slaves), submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. (Greek: oiketes - household servant or domestic)

The issue under consideration in this passage is NOT whether slavery 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; and 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's 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 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 the next two verses:

19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

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 and 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 was the ultimate example of living sacrificially rather than in “survivor” mode.

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

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 reading would “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 example 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.

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.

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

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.

The only way that can be right is to be a right relationship to God through the completed work of Jesus on the cross. If you have never taken that step of faith of putting your trust in Jesus for salvation, then today is the day of salvation. The steps are as simple as A, B, C.

A - admit that you are in need of a savior - this comes from a realization that all have sinned and the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.

B- believe in the very depths of your being that Jesus died for your sins and rose from death for your justification.

C- Confess with your mouth and your very life that Jesus is Lord.

You shall be saved.