

As Free -- Yet Slaves

1 Peter 2:11-17

Preface: Theological to Practical

It is thought by many that Peter, at this juncture of the epistle moves from a doctrinal theological focus (deep spiritual truths regarding the nature of our relationship with God) to a practical active focus of applying what we know to how we behave.

I. War Against the Soul

“Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11).

Soujourners & Pilgrims

With an endearing address, Peter beseeches Christians to recognize their alien status from the ways of the world. Sojourners and pilgrims can be rendered aliens and exiles. This likely not referring to the dispersion but the way Christians are to view themselves since their true citizenship is in heaven. We must keep in mind that an alien designates a person who lives in a foreign country but keeps their own citizenship.

Walking in the Spirit

Recognizing this alien status they are to function differently, namely to abstain from allowing fleshly, carnal, base instincts to be the controlling element in their thoughts and behavior. Christians are to walk in the Spirit. This is a very misused term in modern Christianity. People often say they are walking in the Spirit or singing in the Spirit¹ when they are responding to some type of visceral introspection (or what just feels right). That method may or may not yield good behavior but it certainly is not walking in the Spirit and is more akin to walking in the flesh since it is my flesh to which I am responding.

Paul, in Galatians 5, writes of walking in the Spirit and simply sets it against walking in the flesh. We are often driven to error and despair by a teaching which suggests that walking in the Spirit is tantamount to astro-planing and mystically leaving our physical bodies and responding to our pure spiritual self. When we do this, it is suggested, that we are more in touch with God and more productive as Christians. What walking in the Spirit genuinely amounts to is: 1) Knowing that we are saved by grace and not works and 2) in gratitude and with a renewed understanding of God’s righteousness, seek to be obedient to God’s law over our own carnal desires because we now, by His Spirit, recognize His law to be good.

¹ A man who once attended our church would sing his own songs during worship and considered it to be singing in the Spirit.

Warring Against the Soul

Human carnality wars against the soul. The soul here likely referring to the inward man. Giving into fleshly lusts has a price. It is a bombardment of the soul. For the saved, this bombardment (giving into lusts) inflicts harm making us spiritually weak and ineffective. But there is a greater danger. For those who are part of the church but perhaps are not yet genuinely regenerate the warring against their soul may find ultimate victory in the damnation of the soul. James, using the same word for lust writes,

“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15).

II. A Form of Evangelism

“having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12).

Acts

The covenant people of God should seek to have a good reputation among the world. In Acts we see this was a strong means of evangelism. The Biblical method of church growth looked something like this:

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴And all that believed were together, and had all things common; ⁴⁵And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. ⁴⁶And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, ⁴⁷Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

To the Glory of God and Blessing of Others

Evil speaking by unbelievers will come. But the goal seems to be that when they observe your good works it will ultimately result in their salvation and glorification of God on the day of His visitation (which likely means visited by the grace of God although some suggest judgment day). Either way, Peter instructs us that it will be to the glory of God and the blessing of others for us to conduct ourselves honorably even, and perhaps especially, in the face of evildoers. Peter will give an example of this in the beginning of verse three in the relationship of husband and wives. He writes, **“Wives, likewise, *be***

submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives” (1 Peter 3:1).

Is This the Method?

You can evaluate for yourselves whether or not our Christian culture views this as God’s method of saving souls and changing the world. It seems to me that there are many spouses who take matters into their own hands in bitterness and rebellion. It also seems that the method of fulfilling Christ’s great commission has become more corporate, programish and political than pure honorable conduct. Christians should be viewed as noble, faithful, and as we will see, law-abiding people.

III. Law-Abiding

“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme,¹⁴ or to governors” (1 Peter 2:13,14a).

The President Isn’t So Bad

Peter is informing us of one of the ways we can honorably conduct ourselves. We are to submit ourselves to governing authorities. Unless the law of man is in complete contradiction to the law of God, Christians are to put themselves under the jurisdiction of man’s law. It might be very instructive to point out that Peter was writing this letter during the reign of Nero. We think our president is bad but he is nothing compared to the Caesars over first century Christendom. The evil of these kings exceeded the worst slasher movie. Nonetheless the king is to be honored. Although we are called to vote and speak our conscience as dictated by the scriptures, Christians are to leave their judgments within the church.

Rebellious, Pious Moralists -- Two Year Olds and Physics

It is quite the opposite of what seems to be the common practice. We are not to go shoulder to shoulder and agree about how bad the world is. It is unfortunate that Christians in our society are viewed as a group of pious moralists who are in rebellion against the president and are incensed regarding the immoral judgments of an unregenerate society. This may all be true but for me to complain about the sinful judgments of the unregenerate is about as effective as me complaining that my two year old can’t solve a physics problem. It is simply not within the scope of her ability and my demanding it of her will simply embitter her and destroy our relationship. Paul tells Christians that they are to keep their moral and doctrinal judgments within themselves and that God will judge the world. Our relationship to the world is to do good.

This, although being good for man, is primarily for the Lord’s sake. It is for the Lord’s sake because God has commissioned civil magistrates (governors and kings) for a specific purpose.

IV. The Job of Government

“as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good” (1 Peter 2:14b).

Punish Evildoers

Here we get a glimpse of what the job of the government is. It is not health care, welfare, building homes, lending money, etc. There are a few jobs, according to scripture, for which civil magistrates should take responsibility. Here we learn they are to punish evildoers. Punishment here means to vindicate or avenge. Although it may sound kind, the job of the government is not to rehabilitate criminals but to punish them. When man sins against man and God civil vindication is in order. In Romans 13 Paul, writing about civil government explains the nature of the institution:

“For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil” (Romans 13:4).

Not Personal Revenge -- Reward Good

There should be no confusion here with personal revenge. Christians, realizing that forgiveness that has been given to them, are to turn the other cheek. It is from God, working through civil authorities, that punishment for evil comes. Penal colonies have been replaced with correctional facilities. This is unbiblical and, as we have observed, is certainly ineffective.

Civil magistrates also praise those who do good by public commendation and demonstration of their appreciation of the good things they do. I am not sure what Peter had in mind here but Christian humanitarian awards presented by the government would not be out of line.

V. God’s Way

“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15).

Ignorance and Foolishness -- Answering Fools

Ignorance, in scripture often has a moral connotation as being a result of the blindness of one’s heart (Ephesians 4:18). Foolishness has the same connotation, e.g., the fool has said in his heart there is no God. These types of statements do not mean the person is not very smart. It does mean that he has suppressed the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1). Too often, I am afraid, we see in Christian circles, Christians answering fools according to their folly. We enter into the same battle ground with similar ammunition.

Stats and Polls -- Seeds on a Parking Lot

Again, to foist upon an unwilling society the law of God and then try to justify your position by claiming that, through stats, polls and census, it works better is a battle you may win or lose depending on who takes the polls and how well you can twist the statistics. When we engage this way, the battle is in our hands and not the Lord's. The way the ignorance of foolish men is put to silence is by doing good. This is not for a minute to suggest a gag order on Christians when it comes to proclaiming truth. But throwing the seeds of truth on cement parking lot will not yield fruit. It will simply be run over. Christians are to do good and pray that God grants knowledge and wisdom to those in darkness.

VI. Free Slaves

“as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.¹⁷ Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:16).

Martin Luther explained freedom thus:

“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”²

Giving Up Rights

The apostle Paul refused to receive financial help from the Corinthian church because of the sinfulness that existed in the church and the false accusations levied against him. He had a perfect right to receive those offerings yet refused. Peter cautions Christians. In Christ we have been (liberated) set free from the law of sin and death. This means that we are no longer under the legal terms of that covenant which says, ‘if you sin you die’.

Antimonianism

There is a temptation, and whole theologies built which cater to this temptation, to engage in our Christian life as if there is no longer a necessity to acknowledge the law of God in our lives. Because we have been liberated from the penalty of the law does not change what is righteous in the eyes of God. As bondservants, we are voluntary slaves giving our will over the will of God to advance His cause among men. It has been said that any understanding of grace which suggests that our behavior can be poorer than it was under the law is a misunderstanding of grace. When one does not serve God he will never be free. He will either serve others or himself. In both cases he is enslaved to sinful humanity.

² Simon Kistemaker's Commentary on 1 Peter, pp. 101.

VII. Loving Everyone

**“Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king”
(1 Peter 2:17).**

Peter finishes section with four admonitions: Honor all people. Christians should not be subject to the pressures of social status or outward appearance. We are called to honor everyone. Secondly, love the brotherhood. There is a special call for Christians to love one another. God has called us to himself as part of one family, one body. It is not an option to love only those to whom there is an outward attraction or those who we think offer us the most. Thirdly, fear God. There is much said on this subject and many efforts to change the meaning of the word. The word is fear. A good, healthy, reverent fear of God means that we are beginning to grasp His magnitude and holiness. Finally, and perhaps most difficult, honor the king. Peter uses the same word here as he does in the first admonition to honor all people. There can be a temptation to go too far in either direction. The king is to be honored but never placed in the same category of God, i.e. he is not to be worshiped or feared.

Conclusion

The theme of this section of Peter’s writing is for us to grasp that we are aliens in a foreign land. And as aliens we do not come into with a haughty, ill-tempered and demanding attitude. We come and bless this land, and in fact bring it back under its rightful leadership, when we acknowledge that God uses even godlessness for His own purposes. We are ambassadors for Christ and our dispositions should be sweet and our conduct should be good. I cannot think of many things more glorious than to contemplate the thought that God could and would use my conduct to bring souls to salvation and glory to His name. It is the Biblical method of evangelism. And as we pray for genuine Biblical church growth to take place in the world and in our own local body, let us remember the means by which this is to take place.