

1 PETER 2:11-17

6: IN, NOT OF, THE WORLD



Historical Context & Background

The apostle Peter wrote this letter to the churches in Asia Minor, encouraging them as they faced persecution. Roman society did not hold Christians in high regard. Rather they saw them as strange and disloyal to the Roman way of life. Because of this, Christians were persecuted for their faith by being killed, having their morality criticized, and having their hope in God mocked. Rather than responding by fighting fire with fire, Peter encourages the church to respond with the grace of God. In this way, how they live could be a witness to the world around them.

Christians were not only tempted to respond violently to persecution, but because of the hardship they were facing they were also tempted to trade their countercultural lifestyle for a cultural lifestyle. One way that Christians were encouraged to witness to the culture they were in was by submitting to governmental authority. Peter saw this as a way to witness to a hostile world by respecting those around them, and hopefully by it they could alleviate some of the persecution the church was facing.



Related Passages

Matthew 22:21 – Christian's duty to both God and the government
Romans 12:2 – Do not conform to the world



Key Terms

'foreigners', 'exiles', 'aliens': This is the Greek word 'paroikos' which means "one who lives in a place that is not his true home." Peter is emphasizing that a Christian's home is in the Kingdom and is only a temporary citizen of this world.

'On the day of visitation': Visitation comes from the word 'episkope' which has two possible meanings: coming to bring judgement or coming to bring blessing. In this passage, it is thought to simply mean 'on a day when God visits.'

'King' or 'Emperor': It is believed that this letter was written during the rule of the tyrant emperor Nero who persecuted Christians gruesomely. Christians were suffering under their government but Peter still encouraged them to respect governmental authority.

'Show proper respect to everyone...': In verse 17, Peter encourages believers to respect everyone

while also giving a hierarchy of our call to love by his word choice. As we are to 'fear God,' He has our highest obligation, followed by our call to 'love the brotherhood,' or fellow Christians. Lastly we are called into a heart of honoring the emperor and mankind.



Key Themes

In the World, Not Of It: Peter was writing to churches who were attempting to live holy and honoring lives in a world that was hostile to Jesus' way of living. The way the world lives is often different than this way Jesus calls us to. And yet we cannot avoid it. As students living in the world, we are called to live in a culture without being assimilated to it. We are called to be in the world, but not of it. Peter commands that we should 'abstain from the passions of the flesh' and instead be set apart from unbelievers. The worldly desires and passions that people are giving into around us do not belong in our true home in heaven. Peter's hope is that our countercultural lives will serve as an evangelistic witness of God's grace, truth, and hope to everyone living in darkness.

A necessary part of this is refraining from indulging sinful desires. Since we have been raised and formed in a particular culture and society, what is right or wrong is often controlled by misleading feelings or earthly passions. To question these ways of living is often branded as intolerance. But as citizens in heaven, we must resist the temptation to give into the ways of this world because of how we feel about something and instead submit to the new way of life that God has called us to. Peter urges believers that true freedom is found only in God and not in living in the ways of the world. Paradoxically, our true freedom comes out of our submission to God. It not so given that we can do what we want, but instead it is a result of the joy of doing what is right in God's sight.

"Good" Teacher: In verse 13, Peter calls all believers to submit to imperial and local governmental authority. He expected the Christian to obey the authorities (unless that obedience required disobeying God's law). Not only are we to honor the government in this way, but to also do it 'for the Lord's sake'. But why are we called to be subject to something that was organized and run by men? There may be a few reasons:

1. Paul shockingly claims that government is instituted by God for carrying our justice (Romans 13). So we can't be anarchists. The impulse to rebel against authority because it's authority is an anti-Christian impulse. Christians have a duty to abide peacefully under the state, speaking out when necessary and suffering when necessary.
2. If Christians were to respect their leaders then they would hopefully endure less persecution. God can use their submission to silence the slander against His people because there would not be a reason to speak out against Christians.
3. Third, the way we live our lives is a witness to those around us. If we desire for nonbelievers to witness the true citizenship found in heaven, then must reflect it in our lives and that includes how we respect authority.

As we see over the story of scripture, we are called to be obedient to authority but only until we are told to sin. There are even places in scripture where we see God praising his people

for not obeying governmental authority because the people were being commanded into sin. Submission to government is secondary to our obedience to God. Living in compliance to the government is not an excuse to live outside of the nature of God's goodness. As Christians, we are called to pray for the improvement of our government and even be advocates for what God says is right. As believers, we are called to allow our faith to be a separate voice from the status quo of our culture. And we will run afoul of the government. But submission to authority also means submitting to the punishments (even when unjust) of the government. We don't obey unjust laws; but we also accept the consequences for that disobedience, even if it means death. The martyrs did it; the abolitionists did it; Martin Luther King, Jr. did it. That's how Christians change the world, not with the sword.

Dealing with Conflict: Christians in the ancient world were living in a hostile territory which led to conflict between believers and unbelievers (and even within the church). The clashing came from a differing of beliefs and lifestyles, and often an ignorance to one another's way of life. Sound familiar? A lot of the conflict we are met with today is a result of our being aliens in this world. Christians and our beliefs are often misunderstood and persecuted because they are countercultural. Peter advises believers who come across conflict to react with the grace of God as opposed to fighting against slander with more slander as this will be a powerful witness to the world. When in the face of conflict, Peter encourages believers by reminding them of their true residency. We live as aliens in this world, but our true home is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The type of conflict that Christians were met with during the time of Nero is a categorically different kind of conflict than the kind we are faced with today. But we still do have conflict, and Peter's encouragement to submit can still be helpful. Our society doesn't excel at conflict. Conflicts on social media frequently devolve into name-calling. Genuine, and even legitimate, disagreement just turns into cries of "racist!", "bigot!", "communist!", "Hitler!". The way Peter envisions Christians facing conflict is much different. We have respect and honor for everyone, including the emperor...or President. This is not always easy, but it is a radical way of living. Disagreements and conflict can actually be great things. They can challenge our way of thinking and cause mutual upbuilding. So when Peter says "submit," he doesn't just mean rolling over any time someone presents an opposing viewpoint. But it does mean engaging those disagreements with respect and submission. Which means we don't always have to be right, we admit when we're wrong, and we treat the other person like someone made in the image of God.

☪☪ Quotes & Illustrations

"This world and the next are two enemies. The one urges to adultery and corruption, avarice and deceit; the other bids farewell to these things. We cannot therefore be the friends of both; and it behooves us, by renouncing the one, to make sure of the other. Let us reckon that it is better to hate things present, since they are trifling and transient and corruptible; and to love those which are to come, as being good and incorruptible."

CLEMENT OF ROME

"What Peter wants from his churches (and what God wants from his people!) is a heart focused on him, a behavior focused on love and obedience, and a lifestyle impeccable in the sight of non-Christians."

SCOT MCKNIGHT

"Religion is, at its heart, a way of denying the authority of the rest of the world; it is a way of saying to fellow human beings and to the state those fellow humans have erected, 'No, I will not accede to your will.'"

STEPHEN CARTER, THE CULTURE OF DISBELIEF

! Three Main Points

1. As witnesses to the Gospel, we are called to live in the lost world; however, it is imperative that we are careful to not become of it. Our true citizenship is in the Kingdom of Heaven.
2. We are called to reflect the image of God by respecting and submitting to human authority, however this is not at the cost of our obedience to God.
3. Our true home is the Kingdom of Heaven and we live in the world as aliens which means that our beliefs and morals will be misunderstood or persecuted. In the midst of conflict, we are called to react with the grace of God and be witnesses through our response.

? Discussion Questions

- How is the relationship between CSF and campus similar or different to the Kingdom of Heaven and culture?
- If Peter were writing this letter specifically to CSF, what sins would he need to address? In other words, what sins do believing students conform to despite what the Word says?
- In what ways are you tempted to become of the world? Do you feel like an alien or a foreigner to this campus because of your faith? Should you?
- Christians at this time were suffering under the rule of Nero, a tyrant dictator, and were still called to respect him as the emperor of Rome. What does this mean for our own heart posture towards our presidential leaders? Are we supposed to accept and agree with everything he says? How do we respect our leaders while disagreeing?
- What does it look like to speak out against legislation that we do not believe to be honoring to God while also submitting to the authority of our government?
- Who are people of authority within your life that you struggle to submit to? In what ways do you dishonor them with your words or actions? How could you be a better witness to these individuals by how you treat them?
- Do you respond to political and legislative decisions in fear? How so? If God calls us into submission to human authority, is he afraid of these decisions?
- In verse 17, we are called to be respectful of all people. Do you respect people with different

beliefs or lifestyles than you? Do you affirm differing beliefs or lifestyles out of fear of conflict? What is the balance between respecting others while also not affirming them in their sin/lifestyle?

- Do you go out of your way to love those outside of your Christian community? How can you do this better?
- How do you respond to conflict? Do you respond out of anger or out of a compassionate knowing that none of us are fully separate from the sins of this world?
- Do you harbor resentment towards people you have conflict with? Is there anyone specifically you are harboring resentment towards because of a conflict? How can you go about seeking forgiveness or resolve?
- When was the last time you disagreed with someone? Reflect on this moment of disagreement through the lense of 1 Peter 2:11-17.
- Are you generally afraid of conflict in relationships or do you flock to it? How can you go about having healthier conflicting conversations with your friends?
- Does disagreeing with your friends/family seem easier or harder than strangers? Do these types of conflicts look different?
- How does living in the world but not of the world look? On campus? At home?
- How does living in freedom as a follower of Christ differ from the world's version of freedom? (freedom from vs freedom to)
- Does the idea of living as God's slave make you uncomfortable? If so, why? How can you press into this to discover more about the God we serve?

Application & Practice

News: Three days this week, watch the news, listen to a news broadcast, or read a news article and pray about what it looks like to live in the world but not of it. Pray about the discernment of how to live responsibly and respectfully while maintaining obedience to God.

Fast. One day this week, pick a meal to fast from and meditate on Romans 12:2. Ask the Lord how you have conformed to the ways of this world and invite him to transform you into a citizen of Heaven.

Outreach. Go out of your way this week to love someone outside of your believing community. Examples: take them out to coffee or lunch, help them with an assignment, or take time to listen to them.

Going Deeper

Book: *A Creative Minority* – Jon Tyson

Book: *How (Not) to be Secular* – James K. A. Smith

Podcast: *This Cultural Moment*