

Our Witness among the World

1 Peter 2: 11-20

After revealing the need for believers to abide in the Word, growing thereby, and building their lives upon Christ, the Corner-stone of our faith, Peter reminded us of our standing with the Lord, being positioned in Christ. Those who abide faithfully in the Word and in Christ will naturally show forth the transformation that has taken place in their lives, revealing their faith for all to see.

Having provided sound instruction and guidance, Peter then addressed the life every believer is expected to live before others. Dr. Adrian Rogers said, “A faith that can’t be tested, can’t be trusted.” Peter knew the church would encounter difficulty and adversity along the journey. There will be times when our faith is tested; there will be times when we encounter situations that test our resolve to live committed lives unto the Lord. Even in the midst of these trying times, we must continue to portray a positive Christian witness. Our testimony is one of the greatest tools we have in reaching others for Christ. We must continually guard and display a Christian witness if we are to be effective in reaching those apart from Christ.

Our text today is not necessarily difficult to understand, but it can be difficult to put into daily practice. As we discuss the [virtues](#) every believer should possess and portray, I want to consider: [Our Witness among the World](#).

I. The Believer’s Personal Life (11) – [Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul](#). Peter offered a stirring reminder that believers are mere pilgrims and strangers in this life. This world is not our home; we are now citizens of another country, on our pilgrimage to that eternal land. Being pilgrims and strangers, the lure of this world and all it offers should not be desirable to believers. In fact, much of what we encounter is contrary to the Christian life, totally incompatible with a victorious, Christian life.

- We are challenged to abstain from fleshly lusts. We must refrain from such lusts, literally casting those aside and refusing to engage in such pursuits. Peter knew the danger of fleshly lusts, as these war against the soul, being detrimental to victorious life in Christ. Paul was aware of these dangers and warned of them as well. In fact, he provided a list of these lusts to the Galatians. [Gal.5:19-21 – Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness \(moral impurity,\) lasciviousness \(indecenty,\)^{\[20\]} Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance \(contention,\) emulations \(coveting,\) wrath, strife, seditions \(rebellion,\) heresies,^{\[21\]} Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings \(uncontrolled indulgence,\) and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.](#)

II. The Believer's Social Life (12-17) – Having shared a fundamental admonition regarding our personal lives, Peter then addressed the social life believers are expected to pursue. This regards:

A. Our Conversation (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.* Believers were to have an honest conversation among the Gentiles – they were to walk uprightly before the world. The word conversation refers to much more than the words we speak and the conversations we have. This involves our behavior among others, literally how we present ourselves on a daily basis. Although the believer may be spoken evil against initially, his good works and upright life would eventually be noticed and make a positive impact on those who watched his life. Simply, these were to live a life that honored Christ, bearing witness to the transformation they had received, before those they encountered. They were to walk and talk as becoming a believer.

B. Our Submission (13-15) – *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; ^[14] Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. ^[15] For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.* Bear in mind, Peter is writing to the strangers scattered throughout the Roman provinces due to persecution of their faith. They were now living in a hostile environment, governed by those who were not sympathetic to their faith. Peter does not encourage insurrection or rebellion against the authorities; in fact, he encouraged just the opposite – submission to those in authority. This included kings and governors, literally all who held a position of governmental authority. Their obedience to rulers would please God and put to silence those who spoke against them.

- Our current situation is much different than the environment these faced, and yet this principle and expectation remains. While we may not agree with everything those in government say or do, we please God when we submit to the authority above us. I fear that many Christians, and pastors, within our current political environment, fail in regard to this admonition. I am concerned with the direction and agenda many politicians pursue, but we have a biblical mandate to live according to the laws of the land. Clearly, we are not to abandon biblical convictions, but many are doing much harm to the church's witness with their radical, insensitive political rhetoric.

C. Our Discretion (16) – *As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.* Peter warned against using the liberties they enjoyed “for a cloke of maliciousness.” They were not use their relationship with Christ or affiliation with the church as a means to justify any sinful or irreputable activity. They were saved by grace, pardoned from their

sin, but their liberty in Christ was certainly not a license to sin or indulge the flesh. Consider the thoughts of William Barclay regarding this verse: *"Any great Christian doctrine can be perverted into an excuse for evil. The doctrine of grace can be perverted into an excuse for sinning to one's heart's content. The doctrine of the love of God can be sentimentalized into a defence for breaking the law of God. The doctrine of the life to come can be perverted into a reason for neglecting life in this world. And there is no doctrine so easy to pervert as the doctrine of Christian freedom and Christian liberty.*

*"There are hints in the New Testament that it was frequently so perverted. Paul tells the Galatians that they have been called to liberty, but they must not use that liberty as an occasion for the flesh to do as it wills ([Galatians 5:13](#)). In 2 Peter we read of those who promise others liberty and who are themselves the servants of corruption ([2 Peter 2:19](#).)"*ⁱ

D. The Expectation (17) – Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Peter summed up his instruction regarding the believer's social life with this simple and yet profound statement. Believers were expected to honor all men, showing them the dignity and respect they deserved. They were expected to love the brotherhood. This is in reference to the body of Christ. Their love and devotion were not to be reserved for those merely within their local fellowship; they were to love the body of Christ as a whole. Whenever and wherever they met fellow believers, they were to show love for them, regardless of race, gender, or nationality. They were expected to fear God, giving Him the reverence and devotion He deserved. Their commitment to the Lord and awareness of Him was to be central to their lives. Peter knew they could never honor and please the Lord if they failed to fear Him. Finally, they were expected to honor the king. This must have been difficult for many to embrace. Nero, the wicked emperor, ruled Rome at that time. Regardless, Peter demanded they show respect and honor to the position the king occupied. Although they disagreed with his views and manner of leading, they remained obligated to show honor to the king due to his office. Government was ordained of God, and believers are expected to honor those in positions of authority, if for no other reason, than for the position they hold.

III. The Believer's Professional Life (18-20) – Finally, Peter addressed how servants were to respond to their masters. Slavery was not uncommon in that day among the Roman empire. Many slaves had become Christians, and Peter sought to encourage their witness to the faith, even though they faced a difficult situation. The principles revealed to slaves in that day relate perfectly to an employee's relationship with his employer in our day. Consider:

A. Our Duty (18) – *Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.* The servant was expected to submit to the authority of his master, showing reverence and respect, not only to those who were kind and gentle, but also to those who treated

them harshly. Their submission in every situation would bear witness to the transformation they had encountered through their relationship with Christ. Peter knew this would not always be easy, but it was expected to maintain a positive witness for Christ.

- We share the same obligation today. Regardless of how we are treated by others, especially those with authority over us, we are to treat them with dignity and respect. This will not always be easy, but it is essential if we are to have any influence among those with whom we work. We must always display the love and grace of Christ, even to those who mistreat us or seek to take advantage. Peter reveals the great benefit of such submission in the closing verses.

B. The Display (19-20) – *For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.* ^[20] *For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.* Peter speaks of a simple principle that reveals profound truth. If we suffer for our commitment to the Lord, this honors Him and bears witness to others. There is really nothing to brag about when we endure suffering for wrongs we have committed. This is to be expected; we are reaping the consequences of bad decisions and behavior. If, on the other hand, we endure suffering when we have lived right before others, this is pleasing to the Lord. Our commitment to Christ is revealed when we respond to mistreatment with grace rather than bitterness and anger. Jesus was wrongly accused and condemned for crimes He had not committed, and yet He willingly endured the sufferings of the cross for our benefit. As believers, we must always bear witness to our faith in Christ, even when we deal with situations that we do not deserve. We must be consistent in our behavior with all men, those who treat us kindly, and even those who treat us poorly. Such consistency will be noticed by others, having a positive impact on their lives.

Conclusion: As I studied this passage, I was reminded that I am no longer my own. I have been bought with a price; I belong to the Lord. Every aspect of my life, personally, socially, and professionally should bear witness to my relationship with the Lord. That is not to say that I will always enjoy every situation, but I must maintain a consistent witness. Are you bearing witness of Christ in your life? Is it evident that you belong to the Lord and desire to please Him? If not, you need to address those areas and commit to walking with the Lord, while being an effective witness for Him in every aspect of life.

ⁱ Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - 1 & 2 Peter; 1, 2 & 3 John; Jude.