

1 Peter

Week 4: Living Honorably Among Outsiders -- 1 Peter 2:11–17

Imagine you are living in a country that is not your own. You speak with an accent. You keep different holidays. Your neighbors are not quite sure what to make of you, and some of them have decided, without really knowing you, that people like you are a problem. Every day you face a quiet decision: do you blend in and disappear, do you grow angry and combative, or do you live in such a way that, over time, even the suspicious neighbor has to admit there is something good about you?

That is almost exactly the situation Peter's readers were in. He calls them "sojourners and exiles," people whose true citizenship is in heaven but who must live, for now, in a watching and often hostile world. And the world was watching. These Christians were being whispered about, accused of being troublemakers, atheists (because they would not worship the Roman gods), even enemies of the state. Peter does not tell them to retreat into a holy huddle, and he does not tell them to fight the culture on its own terms. He tells them to live such good lives among the outsiders that the accusations simply will not stick.

There is a beautiful strategy in this. Peter says to keep your conduct "honorable," so that when they speak against you as evildoers, "they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." In other words, your ordinary, honest, generous, law-abiding life is itself a sermon. It can disarm a critic. It can soften a heart. It can, in the end, lead someone who once despised you to give glory to God. The way you handle your work, your taxes, your neighbors, and your government is not separate from your witness. It is your witness.

But living this way is a battle, and Peter knows it. He pleads with his readers to "abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul." The honorable life among outsiders begins with a quiet war waged within. So read this short passage slowly. It is about how a citizen of heaven walks through an earthly country: free, yet submitted; distinct, yet doing good; never at home, yet leaving every place a little brighter for having passed through.

Group Discussion: Peter urges believers to "keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable," so that those who accuse them may end up glorifying God because of their good deeds (v. 12). In a culture that is often suspicious of Christians, how can the ordinary goodness of a believer's life become a witness? Where have you seen a good life change someone's opinion of the faith?

Personal Reflection: Peter says to "abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (v. 11). What is one "passion of the flesh" currently waging war in you, quietly undermining your witness and your peace? What would it look like to actually abstain from it, starting this week?

Read 1 Peter 2:11–17

Study Questions

1. Peter appeals to his readers “as sojourners and exiles” to abstain from fleshly passions “which wage war against your soul” (v. 11). What does it mean that Christians are sojourners and exiles, and why does this identity change the way we view the desires that war against us?
2. Peter speaks of fleshly passions that “wage war against your soul” (v. 11). War is active, ongoing, and costly. Where are you currently losing ground in this inner war, perhaps treating a compromise as harmless? What would taking that battle seriously look like this week?
3. Peter says to keep our conduct honorable so that those who accuse us “may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (v. 12). How does the everyday good conduct of Christians function as a witness, and what does it mean that outsiders might one day “glorify God” because of it?
4. Peter assumes that outsiders are watching how Christians live (v. 12). Think about the people who watch your life most closely: coworkers, neighbors, family who do not share your faith. What are they actually learning about Christ from the way you live? What would you want to change?
5. Peter commands, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution,” whether to the emperor or to governors (vv. 13–14). What is the basis and the limit of a Christian’s submission to governing authorities, and what does the phrase “for the Lord’s sake” add to this command?
6. Peter calls believers to honor and submit to governing authorities, even authorities that were often hostile to them (vv. 13–14, 17). How do your own attitudes, words, and conduct toward government and those in authority compare to what Peter commands? Where might your speech or spirit need to change?
7. Peter says we are to live “as people who are free, and not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” (v. 16). How can a Christian be genuinely free and a servant of God at the same time, and how does this guard against both legalism and license?
8. Peter gives four crisp commands: “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (v. 17). Which of these four is hardest for you right now, and why? What would obeying it this week actually require of you?
9. Peter grounds the whole of this honorable living in the lordship of Christ, telling us to submit “for the Lord’s sake” and to live “as servants of God” who “fear God” (vv. 13, 16–17). How does the lordship of Jesus reorder all our other loyalties, to self, to culture, and to the state, and what does it mean in practice to do everything “for the Lord’s sake”?
10. Look back over the whole passage. Peter calls exiles to win the inner war, to live honorably before a watching world, to submit for the Lord’s sake, and to live as free servants of God. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Peter 2:11–17 you most need to carry into this week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 13:1–7, submission to governing authorities as God’s servants; Matthew 5:14–16, letting our light shine so others glorify God; Jeremiah 29:4–7, seeking the welfare of the city where God’s people live as exiles; Galatians 5:13, freedom that serves rather than indulges; Acts 5:29, obeying God rather than men when the two conflict