

# Living Honorably in the World

1 Peter 2:11-17

As Peter begins his letter to Christians in Asia Minor, he addresses them as “exiles” (resident aliens, foreigners, sojourners) (1:1). He later addresses them as “a holy (set apart) nation” (2:9), and again “as foreigners and exiles” (2:11). As “citizens of heaven” (Phil.3:20) believers are “foreigners and strangers on earth” (Heb.11:13). As a result, they may face misunderstanding, disapproval and accusation. So how should Christians live in a society that is opposed to them?

## Live Honorably

❑ Read 1 Peter 2:11-12. Peter instructs his readers to “Live...good lives.” Other translations say, “Keep your conduct... honorable” (ESV) or “Conduct yourselves honorably” (HCSB).<sup>1</sup>

1. According to verse 11, what do Christians need to do to “live honorably?” How can we do it?<sup>2</sup>
2. According to verse 12, why should Christians “live honorably” among unbelievers<sup>3</sup> who may oppose them?<sup>4</sup>

📖 *Jesus said, “...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, NIV).*



❑ In verses 11-12, Peter exhorts his readers to conduct themselves honorably in the societies in which they live. In verse 13, Peter begins to apply this exhortation to different relationships within society, including the following relationships: citizens to governing authorities (2:13-17); household servants to masters (2:18-25); wives to husbands/ husbands to wives (3:1-7).

## In Relation to Human Authorities

- ❑ Read 1 Peter 2:13-17. Peter writes, “Submit yourselves... to every human authority” (2:13). This includes the emperor (*basilei*), the governors under his authority, and extends to all legitimate human authorities.
- ❑ Peter says the governing authorities “punish those who do wrong” and “commend those who do right” (2:14). In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he says these are God-given functions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *kalēn*, translated ‘good’ in the NIV, can mean ‘morally good, noble, praiseworthy, or beautiful.’

<sup>2</sup> We must ‘abstain from (continually avoid) sinful desires’ (*sarkikōn epithymōn* – fleshly desires) – human desires that are contrary to God’s Spirit (*Galatians 5:16-17*). How can believers abstain? We must continually submit our lives to God and ‘walk by the Spirit’ (*see Galatians 5:13-25*). We must continually ‘put to death’ whatever belongs to our earthly nature and ‘put on the new self’ which is being renewed by the Holy Spirit (*see Colossians 3:1-17*).

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word *ethnesin* is translated ‘pagans’ by the NIV and ‘Gentiles’ by ESV and HCSB. ‘Gentiles’ is a more literal translation, but the term typically refers to non-Jewish people. In this context, however, Peter probably means people outside the Christian faith (that is, unbelievers), who have different beliefs, values and lifestyles, which may result in misunderstanding, disapproval, accusation and opposition toward Christians.

<sup>4</sup> ‘glorify God on the day of visitation’ (ESV). ‘Day of visitation’ may refer to the day of judgment, or to the day of initial conversion. In either case, to ‘glorify God’ probably means unbelievers will turn to Christ, influenced by a form of ‘lifestyle evangelism’ (Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005], 167). Of course, living honorably among unbelievers does not always result in positive response but it helps remove unnecessary obstacles.

3. Why should Christians submit to the governing authorities? (2:13-15)<sup>6</sup>



4. How can we apply this teaching to our lives today? What are specific examples?<sup>7</sup>

5. Do you think Christians should obey the governing authorities under *all* circumstances? If not, under what circumstances would the requirement for obedience be excluded? Explain.<sup>8</sup>

- ❑ Earlier in Peter's life, he and his fellow apostles were arrested for proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. When they were brought before the Jewish authorities, the high priest said...
  - 📖 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in [Jesus'] name..." But "Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than human beings!'" (*Acts 5:28-29, NIV*)
- ❑ Peter concludes this section with four commands: "Show proper respect to everyone (honor everyone), love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor" (2:17, *NIV*).

### Reflection & Application

- Do you submit yourself to human authorities? If so, do you think that is "good enough?" Who or what is the ultimate authority in your life? The Bible says God is the ultimate Authority in the universe. Have you submitted yourself to Him through faith in Jesus Christ?
- As a believer, are you "living honorably" among the nonbelievers in your society, including submitting to human authorities? Are you trying to "live honorably" for the right reasons, and according to the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit? Review this lesson, ask God for his empowerment, and make specific commitments to "live honorably in the world."

<sup>5</sup> According to Romans 13:3-4, God established (ordained, instituted, appointed) governing authorities to promote and reward the good, and restrain and punish the evil. This is the divine ideal. Of course, history has shown that many governing authorities have failed in this function, and have instead misused their authority.

<sup>6</sup> Most importantly, 'it is God's will' (2:15a). It is 'for the Lord's sake' (2:13a). Our primary motivation should not be fear of human punishment, or even human praise (2:14), but rather a desire to do what is right according to God. That said, submitting to authorities also serves the purpose of 'silencing the ignorant talk of foolish people' (2:15b). This is consistent with Peter's instruction in verse 12. While 'citizens of heaven,' Christians should be honorable participants in the societies in which we live. Otherwise, accusations of wrongdoing or hypocrisy may be justified. Romans 13:1-6 gives additional reasons to submit to governing authorities. God has established them (*Romans 13:1b, 1c, 2a*), and rebellion against God-instituted authority will bring judgment (13:2). The governing authorities are God's 'servants' or 'ministers' (13:4, 6). This does not mean that God is morally responsible for, or approves of, the bad behavior of evil rulers and governments. However, all human authority is derived from God's authority.

<sup>7</sup> Submitting to human authorities includes obeying rules and laws. Many of us can say we obey the 'major' laws. But what about things like traffic violations (e.g., speeding), plagiarism, copyright infringement, software theft, etc.?

<sup>8</sup> Consider Peter's example in Acts 4:18-20 and 5:28-29. Also consider Exodus 1:15-17 and Daniel 3:4-18, 6:7-13. Our accountability to God supersedes our accountability to human law and authorities. Thus if human authorities command the Christian to disobey the revealed will of God, the Christian must disobey the human command. (Robertson McQuilken, *Biblical Ethics* [Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1989], 484.) It should be noted that this subject can become very complex as we consider applying the general principles to particular situations. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to address this subject thoroughly. If you are interested in further study, ask Jay.