

First Peter 2:11-17

Verses 11-12: Suffering Royalty

This is a key passage in 1 Peter. The believers of Asia Minor (see v. 1) were apparently being accused unjustly as this theme is brought out several times (cf., 2:15; 2:18-21; 3:13-17; 4:12-16).

Having exalted his readers' status to privileged royalty because of God's great mercy in salvation (2:9-10), Peter reminds them that their social plight ("aliens and strangers") makes them vulnerable to wrongful accusations in which they have little recourse. Consequently, their behavior must be exemplary in the secular world. While the expressions "aliens and strangers" (see also, v. 1) were terms of criticism in the secular world, they are a badges of merit in God's kingdom.

Verse 11

What are the "sinful desires" (NIV), "passions of the flesh" (ESV), "fleshly lusts" (NASB, NKJV), "evil desires" (NLT) that Peter has in mind which wage war against our soul? Are these limited to physical passions? If so, are all physical passions sinful? If not, then in what other areas of our "soul" are we attacked?

Does your reputation matter (see also Mt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:32; 2 Cor. 1:12; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Tim. 3:7; 5:14; 6:1; Tit. 2:5, 8, 10)? How does your life in a secular environment "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (2:9)?

Verse 12

What is the typical response of unbelievers to a Christian's good behavior? How will pagans/Gentiles, destined for destruction (2:8), glorify God "in the day of visitation"? How does ultimate judgment of unbelievers motivate you to live a holy life before them?

Verses 13-17: Kingdom Living as Citizens and Servants

God calls His church to submission (a form of "abstaining from fleshly lusts") whether in relation to the government (vv. 13-17), employer-employee (vv. 18-25), wives to husbands (3:1-6), or one to another (3:8-12). We are not called out of culture, but we are called to engage culture with a lifestyle of submission, honor, respect, and trust in God regardless of the consequences.

How does the notion of submission to government differ from submission to God (cf., Ex. 1:17; Dan. 3:13-18; Heb. 11:23)?

If Nero was the emperor at the time of Peter's writing, how difficult would it have been for the recipients to hear this injunction? What implications does this have for the Christian's attitude toward the state?

According to v. 15, the consequences of submission are favorable. What does Peter have in mind?

Because Christians ultimately belong to God (v. 16) how are they "free" to submit (see Mt. 10:28. For additional insight see Mt. 17:24-27)?

Are believers to submit unconditionally to governing authorities? Are there circumstances under which civil disobedience is required for the believer (cf., Acts 4:18-20)?

Verse 17 sums up our general ethical behavior in relation to everyone under the notion of "respect" (the first command is aorist (without relation to time) categorical imperative and the other three are present tense, expressing ongoing behavior in the community of faith).