

1 Peter

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1 Peter 2:13-25

Vss. 13-15

- The second half of Ch. 2 is remarkable when we remember that the churches Peter is writing to are beginning to be persecuted by the state and that the persecution is about to get much worse, which is why Peter is writing. Here in the face of state-sponsored persecution, Peter tells the people of these churches to be the best citizens they can be!
- Peter is pulling from a tradition of good citizenship, beginning with Christ. See Matthew 22:15-21. Paul affirms this in Romans 13:1-7 and again in 1 Tim. 2:2. Indeed the rule of Pax Romana made the expansion of the church much more possible than at any other previous time in history.
- Peter began a train of thought in vss. 11-12 that by living exemplary lives the people of the church will defuse any criticism or slanderous charges. He continues that idea as he thinks about the church's relationship to the state. We are to submit to the authority of the national leader as well as the regional/local leader, for it is God's will that we should live so that no one on the outside can criticize.

Vs. 16

- Again though, Peter return to the idea that we are aliens. This is not our home. Think about Superman. He's not from this planet and as such has powers that he must restrain, control, and adapt to be able to live with peace here. Christians are the same in regard to our freedom in Christ, for our freedom is not of this world. So just as Superman cannot use his super powers to rob banks and make himself a rich king, so too can the Christian not use his freedom in Christ in the wrong way. Perverting our freedom has been a problem from the start. Paul says in Galatians 5:13 that we are not

to “turn our freedom into an opportunity for the flesh” and Peter revisits the idea in 2 Peter 2:19 that there are false teachers who are “promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption”.

- It’s the point I have made before on how both infant baptism and the Baptist doctrine of “Once saved, always saved” can be corrupted. “I was baptized into the church when I was born...” or “I was gloriously saved at 8 so now my ticket is punched and I can live however I want to live, do whatever I want to do. Bad or good, it makes no difference.” This is the heresy the church has always battled. In Peter’s time, being a good citizen often meant joining in the city-wide orgy the local pagan temple offered.
- I like the way William Barclay puts it: “We may put it this way. Christian freedom is always conditioned by Christian responsibility. Christian responsibility is always conditioned by Christian love. Christian love is the reflection of God's love...The Christian is free because he is the slave of God. Christian freedom does not mean being free to do as we like; it means being free to do as (God directs) we ought.”

Vs. 17

- Here Peter offers a 4-point summary of how we are to live as aliens in this world.
 - Honor all people: This is one of those points where we need a constant reminder. Who is my neighbor? The one who is in need. Doesn’t matter nationality. Doesn’t matter race. Doesn’t matter gender. Doesn’t matter class. Jesus treated everyone in need with respect – lepers, Romans, religious leaders who often hated Him, the poor, the hungry, the disabled. To love unconditionally as Jesus loves, which we are commanded to do, is to honor all people.
 - Love the brotherhood: “Love one another as I have loved you,” (John 13:34). “Beloved, let us love one another,” (1 John 4:7). Our unity and love for one another is at the core of message to the world, (John 17:20-21).

- Fear God: live with awe inspired reverence toward God. When we think of fearing someone or something it brings to mind a predatory evil. That is NOT what Peter has in mind here. God is love (1 John 4:8,16). But recall that God is so awesome that no one can even look on His face (Ex. 3:6). God is so awesome that the Jews would not even speak His name, but only descriptive names like “El Shaddai”, the God who is almighty. We would do well to remember that our God is indeed an awesome God.
- Honor the king/emperor: This is surely the most surprising point of the four, because the emperor was Nero, the very man who would be responsible for the deaths of both Peter and Paul, along with thousands of Christian men, women, and children. Christian and pagan alike knew he was dangerous, perhaps even a sociopath. He murdered his mother and many of his nobles who he believed were conspiring against him. His ego was fed by his public appearances as an actor, a poet, a musician, even as a racing charioteer. Nevertheless, if you trust God and His purposes, you know that God has a purpose for such rulers as Pharaoh and Nero and Pontius Pilate and King George III. History is always in God’s hands.

Vss. 18-20

- Depending on your translation, the word here may be “servants” or “slaves”. The word Peter uses is *oiketai*, which is not the common word for slave, but does refer to household or domestic slaves. This would have struck a nerve in many of the church. Slaves made up the majority of the population of the Roman empire, unofficially. Despite there being as many as 60,000,000 slaves, they were counted not as persons, but objects, things, simple instruments and tools of their masters. They may have been doctors, teachers, or accountants, but they existed solely to serve their masters. They had no rights, nor could they ask for justice. Aristotle said that “a slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave. The only difference between a plow horse and a slave was that the slave could speak.”

- Masters were....well....people. Some were good. Some were bad. Some could be generous to their slaves. Some could be horribly cruel. Some were saved, believers, followers of Jesus Christ, such as Philemon. So just as Christians are to be good neighbors even to their pagan neighbors, and good citizens of Rome, even honoring Nero, so too are Christian slaves to be good to their masters, submissive, honoring their masters, regardless of whether their master was good or bad. Paul says the same in Eph. 6:5-8. And it all harkens back to the Sermon on the Mount, (Matt. 5:39-48).

Vss. 21-25

- Peter reminds the church that Christ too suffered unjustly and how He handled that is an example to us all. Here Peter is not speaking to slaves only but to the whole church, who are slaves to Christ, for their unjust suffering has begun. In time, slave and master would suffer and die together as brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Just as Christ's suffering were for our sake, so too will our sufferings be for His sake. Christ had committed no sin but was still treated unjustly. Yet when He was struck, He did not strike back. As He suffered Christ trusted that the Father still had Him in His hands. So too, as we suffer, are to trust that God still has us in His hands. Quoting Isaiah 53:4-5, Peter reminds them that with God, no suffering is ever without meaning or purpose. Just as Christ's suffering was for our salvation, so too will God give meaning to our suffering.
- Christ is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. A) The idea of God as our Shepherd is ancient. You see it in Ps. 23:1 and Is. 40:11. Jesus claimed the title for Himself when He said "I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:1-16). In that day and in that part of the world, there were no fences nor large tracts of good green grass. Some sheep would be eating here, others there, scattered, always under threat of predators, or getting lost wandering down some ravine, but always under the watchful eye of their shepherd (Ps.100:3), whose voice they know. B) a literal translation of the Greek word *episkopos* might be "Bishop" rather than "Guardian". Guardian is the

word that is chosen by most translators today because it gets at the meaning of the word and because Bishop has come to mean something so very different. In Homer's "Iliad", Hector, the greatest of the Trojan warriors, is the **episkopos** of Troy because he is the guardian of the city and of its women and children. In Plato's "Laws", the guardian is one who supervises the games and oversees the care and education of the city's children as well as the overall behavior of the general population. In other Greek cities the guardian was to oversee good government administration and law and order. So for Peter to call God the **episkopos** of our souls is to say He is our guardian, our protector, our guide, our director. Put it all together and He is all those things because he loves us, He has the power to protect us, and in His wisdom He guides us in His paths all the days of our lives.