

Honor the King (1 Peter 2:11-17a)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Background

- a. Peter's first letter focuses a great deal on suffering. He says we should not be surprised that we suffer in various trials. Throughout his letter he touches on several different types of trials that Christians face.
 - i. We will be refined through trials; they can produce a positive end result.
 - ii. The life of Jesus consisted of suffering in His life, followed by glory.
 - iii. If we are following Him, we should expect to see the same.
- b. Peter described the church with the same kind of language that the Lord had used 1400 years earlier, when God described His vision for Israel in the Wilderness, in **Exodus 19:1-8** and **Deuteronomy 7:1-11**. Peter said that Christians are:
 - i. A chosen generation;
 - ii. A royal priesthood;
 - iii. A holy nation;
 - iv. God's own special people; and
 - v. A people called out of darkness into His marvelous light.

II. We are Strangers in a Strange Land

- a. Read **1 Peter 2:11-12**.
- b. Here Peter continues with the imagery of the exodus journey in describing Christians. We are merely sojourners and pilgrims in this world, passing through it as strangers and aliens, just as Israel passed through the Wilderness on the way to their destination.
 - i. This world is not our home. We are merely passing through.
 - ii. Our home is beyond what we see all around us.

- iii. Let's not make the *mistake* of thinking this world is our home and that our job is to *set ourselves up here* as comfortably as possible.
- c. Peter's description here of the Christian life reminds me of a passage in an early Christian writing that describes the Christian life. The following passage is from *The Letter to Diognetus*. It is sometimes referred to as *The Letter of Mathetes to Diognetus*. However, 'Mathetes' is simply the Greek word for 'a disciple', so we don't know the actual name of the author. This letter likely was written sometime in the 125-200 AD timeframe.
 - i. "For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.
 - ii. "*They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.*
 - iii. "They marry, as do all [others]; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life.
 - iv. "They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened [= *enlivened, revived*] into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred."

1. (Source: *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, chapter 5; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 26–27)

v. I was struck by this early description of Christians as:

1. Dwelling in their own countries merely as sojourners (similar to what Peter said).
2. Feeling like strangers in their own native land (in one sense), yet also (in another sense) seeing every foreign land as their own native country.
 - a. Their national identity has nothing to do with political boundaries, nor their race or where they were born and grew up.
3. Superficially looking like the other people in whatever land they happened to live.
4. Hated by all other groups of people, but for no good reason.

III. Christians Called to Honor (and Submit to) the King

- a. Read **1 Peter 2:13-17**.
- b. The “Therefore...” that Peter begins with here (the *first reason* why we Christians need to submit to the governing authorities) is so that the Gentiles (unbelievers) who speak evil about us will be impacted when they see our lives. It is hoped that as a result, these unbelievers *will turn, and ultimately glorify God* on “the day of visitation”, the Last Day.
 - i. Peter says that by living this way (which is the will of God), we will silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.
- c. Although we are, in reality, free men (under God), we will nevertheless use our liberty to voluntarily live as *bondservants of God*.
- d. The focus here is on submitting to the government. The direction includes submitting to “every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake”, specifically including:
 - i. *To kings* as supreme authority; and
 - ii. *To governors*, who act as agents sent by the king (to punish the wicked and to praise those who do good).
- e. Let us not forget that Jesus, Peter and Paul all were *killed by the Roman government*!
- f. In **Romans 13**, Paul made a similar call for Christians to submit to the governing authorities. He makes similar points to Peter, but provides additional reasons.

- i. Read **Romans 13:1-7**.
- ii. Points that Paul makes:
 1. The governing authorities are *appointed by God*.
 - a. The governing authorities are *God's ministers*.
 - b. Resisting the governing authorities, therefore, is resisting God.
 - c. (I recall many years ago when I first read this chapter, I struggled mightily with it, since I really *did not like* the governing authorities in the US at that time.)
 2. The governing authorities *punish those who do evil*.
 - a. Therefore, we must pay taxes to support them and be subject to them.
 3. Therefore, we must render to all what they are due:
 - a. Taxes to whom taxes are due
 - i. I think of what Jesus said regarding paying taxes to Caesar when the Pharisees tried to trap him.
 - ii. Jesus told them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (**Matthew 22:21**, NKJV)
 - b. Customs to whom customs are due
 - i. A "custom" would include toll paid when traveling on a toll road, or a custom paid when importing goods from another country.
 - ii. For example, a 20% tariff on soft wood (shingles for my house) imported to the US from Canada, as a result of a trade dispute between the US and Canada.
 1. US homebuilders complain this can add \$9,000 to the cost of a new single-family home. These taxes are often hidden from view, since typically paid indirectly by consumers.
 - c. *Fear* to whom *fear* is due

- i. *Paul says that if we do evil, we should be afraid of the governing authorities.*
 - ii. Peter says we should *fear God* (not the governing authorities).
 - iii. Putting both statements together, Christians should be obeying the governing authorities, and therefore not fearing them (but only *fearing God*).
 - d. Honor to whom honor is due
 - i. Peter says we should "*honor the king*".
- g. Let's run a few scenarios based on what Peter is teaching here regarding the government.
 - i. **Scenario No. 1:** 1775-1776, right here in Massachusetts.
 - 1. Colonists rebelled against taxation and against the rule of the king of England.
 - 2. Imagine you are here at the time, a Christian reading your Bible, and it is the ultimate authority in your life.
 - 3. Our group led by me (Chuck Pike) and David Adams. In both cases, our relatives were deeply involved in the rebellion.
 - a. *Adams:* related to Samuel Adams (the ultimate revolutionary) and John Adams (another rebel, who became the second US president).
 - b. *Pike:* My ancestors from Massachusetts (my family roots go back to Reading, Ashland and Framingham, Massachusetts).
 - i. Recently saw a house in Framingham built by a Jeremiah Pike (relative) in the late 1600s, lived in by the same family for 8 generations.
 - ii. Barn that was in the back has housed oxen that brought the cannons down from Fort Ticonderoga, with which the colonials threatened Boston.
 - iii. Some of my Pike relatives fought in the Revolutionary War on the colonial side (rebellious against the rule of the king). One died

in cannon fire at the Battle of Bunker Hill in Charlestown/Boston.

4. From the first lines of the *Declaration of Independence*:
 - a. "In Congress, July 4, 1776
 - b. "The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,
 - c. "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.
 - d. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.
 - e. "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security..."
 - f. **Question:** Your friends and relatives are organizing to break away from the rule of the king. You read the stirring words of the new Declaration. You also read the Bible. What would you do?

- i. **Questions:** Does the Declaration contradict the New Testament? Does the authority of rulers come from “the consent of the governed”, or from God? Should our allegiance be to the Bible or to the Declaration of Independence, when they conflict?
- ii. **Scenario No. 2:** Virginia, c. 1860
 1. You are a citizen of Virginia. When your state signed on to the US Constitution, it reserved the right to leave the union.
 2. Your state recently concluded that things were not working out well for them as members of the union (more involved than just the slavery issue) and decided to secede from the United States. It tried to peacefully work out arrangements with the central government to separate peacefully, but the US government would not tolerate that. A war ensued in which the central government’s aim was to force your state back into the union.
 3. **Questions:** How do you put the Scriptures into practice here? What do you do? *Which* government (Virginia and the new Confederacy, or the US) do you need to honor and pay taxes to?
- iii. **Other Scenarios:** Various countries throughout history that have persecuted Christians (Roman Empire, USSR under communism, Germany under Nazi rule, Iran today, China today, and many other countries in the world).
 1. Examples throughout history of countries that were anti-God, with wicked leaders, mass-murderers, liars, thieves, etc.
- iv. **Possible Near-Future Scenario Here in the US:**
 1. In the US we recently a disputed election, where about 40% of the people sincerely believe the recent election was stolen through blatant fraud.
 2. This week there likely will be several hundred thousand people gathering in DC to protest what they believe is a stolen election. There are many possible outcomes, including:
 - a. Widespread violence;
 - b. End of democracy (free and fair elections);
 - c. Martial law (suspending the Constitution in an emergency);

- d. Installation of a president that a large part of the country believes was not legitimately elected;
 - e. Highly corrupt top government leadership;
 - f. The breakup of the US;
 - g. Loss of sovereignty of the US; and/or
 - h. Loss of basic rights that have been protected for centuries under the First and Second Amendments of the US Constitution's Bill of Rights.
- v. **Question:** How do we respond under various scenarios, in view of what Peter and Paul taught?
 - 1. Honor the governing authorities regardless of how they got there (elected democratically, stolen election or otherwise).
 - 2. See the government as established by God, regardless of who is in charge – a tough pill to swallow for many people, including many Christians!
 - 3. Honor the king and the governor, regardless of who that is.
- h. **Question:** Any there *any limits* on the government's authority?
 - i. Tertullian, an early Christian writer who lived in Carthage, North Africa, addressed this question in a work called *Scorpiace (Antidote to the Scorpion's Sting*, written c. 213 AD):
 - 1. "No doubt the apostle admonishes the Romans to be subject to all power, because there is no power but of God, and because (the ruler) does not carry the sword without reason, and is the servant of God, nay also, says he, a revenger to execute wrath upon him who does evil. For he had also previously spoken thus: 'For rulers are not a terror to a good work, but to an evil. Will you then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and you shall have praise of it. Therefore he is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid.' (**Romans 13:3-4**)
 - 2. "Thus he bids you be subject to the powers, not on an opportunity occurring for his avoiding martyrdom, but when he is making an appeal in behalf of a good life, under the view also of their being as it were assistants bestowed upon righteousness, as it were handmaids of the divine court of justice, which even here pronounces sentence beforehand upon the guilty. Then he goes on also to show how he wishes

you to be subject to the powers, bidding you pay ‘tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom,’ (**Romans 13:7**) that is, the things which are Caesar’s to Caesar, and the things which are God’s to God (**Matthew 22:21**); *but man is the property of God alone.*

3. “Peter, no doubt, had likewise said that the king indeed must be honored, yet so that the king be honored *only when he keeps to his own sphere*, when he is far from assuming divine honors; because both father and mother will be loved along with God, not put on an equality with Him. Besides, one will not be permitted to love even life more than God.”
 - a. (Source: Tertullian, *Scorpiace*, chapter 14; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 647–648)
- ii. **Questions:** What does Tertullian mean when he says we honor the king *only when he keeps to his own sphere*? Is that statement consistent with what Peter and Paul said?
 1. He says we are to honor the king just as we are to honor our parents, meaning that we can never be allowed to impair the honor we give to God.
 2. Recall the statement of Jesus: “He who loves father or mother more than Me *is not worthy of Me...*” (**Matthew 10:37**, NKJV)
 3. If the king (or some other earthly government authority) tries to compel us to disobey a command of God, we must disobey that order of the earthly ruler.
 - a. In Tertullian’s time, if the ruler called someone to worship the emperor, or offer incense to idols, or to kill someone else (in war or capital punishment), those would be examples of a ruler attempting to operate *outside his legitimate sphere*.
 - b. I think of the example of Daniel’s three friends, who refused the order to bow down to the golden image, in **Daniel 3**.
 - c. I think of the example of Daniel, who continued to pray three times a day in opposition to the king’s edict, in **Daniel 6**.
 - d. I also think of what Peter and John said when told to stop preaching and teaching about Jesus:

- i. “So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” (**Acts 4:18-20**, NKJV)
- iii. **Question:** What if the ruler (president or governor) says that we have a health emergency (virus spreading) and, therefore, non-essential meetings (church meetings) are banned?
 - 1. Consider this in the light of the commands of God. Would the governing authorities be operating *outside their legitimate sphere*?
 - 2. “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (**Hebrews 10:24-25**, NKJV)
 - 3. Consider again the actions of Daniel and his three friends.
 - a. Daniel *could have said to himself*, “Well, let me just stop praying for the next 30 days, to go along.” That would have spared him being cast into the lion’s den.
 - b. Daniel’s three friends *could have said*, “Well, we can bow down on the outside (physically), but we will not bow down on the inside (in our hearts).” That would have spared them the fiery furnace.
 - c. However, they did not cave in and make excuses. They obeyed God over the government and took the consequences. They all ended up being mentioned as examples of faith for us to imitate, in **Hebrews 11**. They are among the “cloud of witnesses” referred to in **Hebrews 12:1** that we are surrounded by.
 - i. (*Referring to heroes of faith in the past*) “who... stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire... of whom the world was not worthy.” (**Hebrews 11:32-38**)
 - 4. In dealing with current and future challenges from the governing authorities, let us remember the immortal words of Jesus:

- a. “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore *be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*” (**Matthew 10:16**, NKJV)
 - b. With that in mind, let us pray for wisdom that we can find the best ways to creatively meet the challenges ahead, showing respect for the governing authorities without compromising any of the commands of God.
 - c. The governments are established by God, as the Scriptures clearly state. However, sometimes the governing authorities go “out of bounds” and attempt to operate (as Tertullian expressed it) *outside their legitimate sphere*. In those cases, we need respectfully to make the “*out of bounds*” call, as a referee would in a soccer or football game.
- iv. It seems to me that the statement in the *Declaration of Independence* about the authority of government coming from the consent of the governed is *NOT* in line with the Scriptures.
 - 1. If I was living at the time of the American Revolution, based on what the Bible says, I believe I would have had to contradict my rebellious New England relatives, honor the king, and pay taxes to the crown.
 - 2. I certainly would not be throwing tea into Boston Harbor to participate in a famous tax rebellion!
- v. On the other hand, I do see something unusual in our government that is consistent with Scripture. It says in the *First Amendment* to the *US Constitution* that the government has no authority to interfere with the right of freedom of religion (in our case, the practice of the Christian faith) is, in fact, consistent with Scripture.
 - 1. It seems to me that this recognition that our right to worship God does NOT come from the government (and that the government has no authority to interfere in that area) is a wonderful thing that is a rare and good feature of the US Constitution.
- i. **Recap:**
 - i. We must treat the governing authorities with honor and respect. Governments are established by God. We cannot be a rebellious people. Peter calls us to be submissive and respectful toward the government, even if it is a foreign dictatorship (as it was at the time when Peter was writing).

- ii. At the same time, there are limits on the authority of the government. They have no authority to tell anyone to do anything that contradicts a command of God.
- iii. We are sojourners and strangers here. We have become bondservants of God, who voluntarily give up some of our freedoms to serve others and to shine as lights in a dark world.