

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com

www.lightfordarktimes.com

Living as Exiles in a Hostile World – The Epistle of 1 Peter

Part 18 – Elect Exiles in Caesar’s World: How Should We Live?

November 13, 2016

Sermon Text: *1 Peter 2:12-25*

Scripture Reading: *Romans 13*

1Pe 2:12-25 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (13) Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, (14) or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (15) For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (16) Live as people who are free, not using

your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (17) Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (18) Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. (19) For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. (20) For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. (21) For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (22) He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (23) When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (24) He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (25) For you

were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

It is very timely that we come to this portion of 1 Peter at this time when our nation is so divided and we live in a climate of increasing hostility toward God, toward Christ, toward Christians, toward any kind of authority or absolute truth.

How is the Christian to live in this world as an “elect exile”? We are exiles in exile. That means we are away from our home country and living in a world now foreign to us. We live in a fallen world that is in rebellion against God. And in particular, as Peter is addressing here in chapter 2, we live in a world where everything, including human government, has been twisted and tainted by sin. How is the Christian to live in relation to the governing authorities? We recall the Lord’s instruction to the Jews as they were in exile in Babylon-

Jer 29:5-15 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. (6) Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. (7) But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into

exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (8) For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, (9) for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD. (10) "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. (11) For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (12) Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. (13) You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. (14) I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. (15) "Because you have said, 'The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,'

False prophets were apparently telling the Jews to do otherwise. Perhaps they were trying to foment a rebellion against Babylon, claiming the Lord had sent them. He had not. Seek the

welfare of the city/nation where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. There it is. God's instructions to us for living in exile. And Peter concurs –

(12) Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (13) Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, (14) or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (15) For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (16) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (17) Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

You heard the same thing earlier as we read Romans 13. And remember in all of this that the “emperor” in Paul and Peter’s day was...Caesar!

This does not mean of course that the Christian must give absolute never-failing obedience to the governing authorities. We see many examples of civil disobedience in Scripture such as Peter’s own famous “We must obey

God rather than men” when the ruling authorities directly contradicted God’s command to preach the gospel.

Christians meet together to worship and we possess and read our Bibles and we tell others about Jesus Christ no matter if the government orders us not to do these things. God has commanded and we obey Him.

However, in all of this the Christian must always be careful of this...

“...not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”

The Danger to be Avoided

There is always a danger, and we see examples of it every day all around us, of using the name of Christ and the gospel as an excuse to be revolutionaries seeking to overthrow human government and institutions. To, in the supposed name of Christ, go around shouting “we serve Christ who is our only king” and being disobedient to human kings. That is absolutely contrary to the instruction God gives us in His Word –

Mat 22:17-21 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (18) But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? (19)

Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. (20) And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" (21) They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

To try to overthrow human rulers and authorities is, as Paul puts it in Rom 13, to be actively fighting against God Himself because ultimately it is the Lord who has instituted those authorities. And so, for example, it is true that God has placed Donald Trump in the office of President. BUT He also placed Barak Obama there! It is easy for us to submit, you see, to a ruler we agree with, but quite a bit more difficult to submit to and pray for the welfare of a ruler whose policies we disagree with. The Christian is an exile, living in a foreign land under the authority of a foreign king.

The danger Paul and Peter and the Lord Jesus consistently warn us about is that the Christian must take care to not behave in such a way that the world's ideas about Christians being people who are seditious, out to bring about the downfall of the nation they live in. The world will already tend toward that idea anyway and therefore we must be all the more careful not to encourage that thinking. It will

increase persecution against us and it is against God's commands to us.

In the first century, for instance, Christians would not worship the pagan Roman national deities. As a result, they were accused of being atheists and traitors, enemies of Rome. Some were put to death as you know. And that is the setting in which Peter and Paul were writing these things to us. "Don't make things worse. This world is not your home. You are exiles. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. We are not here to effect any kind of violent revolution, but only the revolution which the gospel brings."

A more contemporary example might be that of the protestors who took over the BLM refuge in Burns earlier this year. Now, I do not know if any of them claimed to be Christians or not, so my example here is just hypothetical. For myself, I have no doubt that many of their objections against the government were valid. But does the Lord want His people to take up arms and forcefully oppose the law as these people did? I can tell you plainly, the answer is absolutely not. No matter what you personally might believe about their cause and grievances, I have no doubt at all that in the way they went about it they ended up opposing the Lord Himself. The Christian must take care that his behavior does not portray Christ in

such a way. It does not help the cause of the gospel, but hinders it. We must not unnecessarily alienate the King, you see.

Listen to chapter 24 of the London Confession of Faith-

Paragraph 1. God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates to be under him, over the people, for his own glory and the public good; and to this end has armed them with the power of the sword, for defence and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers. Rom. 13:1-4

Paragraph 2. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate when called thereunto; in the management whereof, as they ought especially to maintain justice and peace,² according to the wholesome laws of each kingdom and commonwealth, so for that end they may lawfully now, under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions.³ ² 2 Sam. 23:3; Ps.82:3,4 ³ Luke 3:14

Paragraph 3. Civil magistrates being set up by God for the ends aforesaid; subjection, in all lawful things commanded by them, ought to be yielded by us in the Lord, not only for wrath, but for conscience' sake;⁴ and we ought to make supplications and

prayers for kings and all that are in authority, that under them we may live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.⁵

⁴ Rom. 13:5-7; 1 Pet. 2:17
⁵ 1 Tim. 2:1,2

Keep in mind the context in which Reformers like this were writing. In this case, England where the king or queen was so often hostile to the gospel. In fact, one primary reason the confessions of faith were written in the first place was to show the king that Christians were not seditious rebels seeking to overthrow the king.

Here it is again in the Belgic Confession. This one is interesting in its concept of the role of the king, noting specifically that civil government was also to protect the nation from false religions (a notion quite foreign to us in this country today) -

Article 36: The Civil Government

We believe that because of the depravity of the human race, our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers.

God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be

restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings.

For that purpose God has placed the sword in the hands of the government, to punish evil people and protect the good. And the government's task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as he requires in his Word.

Moreover everyone, regardless of status, condition, or rank, must be subject to the government, and pay taxes, and hold its representatives in honor and respect, and obey them in all things that are not in conflict with God's Word, praying for them that the Lord may be willing to lead them in all their ways and that we may live a peaceful and quiet life in all piety and decency.

And on this matter we reject the Anabaptists, anarchists, and in

general all those who want to reject the authorities and civil officers and to subvert justice by introducing common ownership of goods and corrupting the moral order that God has established among human beings.

Notice how this confession specifically distances the faith it confesses from those who, in that day and in Christ's name, were rebelling against the king.

It is against God's command and it does great harm to the cause of the gospel when a Christian seeks to overthrow the government of the nation he or she lives in.

But What if....?

Now, we do not presume to think that decisions in these matters are always clear and easy. Was the American Revolutionary War, for example, in accordance with God's will? I imagine that there were Christians who came down on both sides of that question even in those days. If you had the means to fight against Herod's slaughter of the infants, would that have been justifiable in God's sight? What happens when the governing authorities oppress good people and become evil themselves, violating the very constitution and laws they are supposed to uphold?

I think a very important point to hold on to that helps answer such questions is this:

Individual scriptures must not be interpreted and applied as some absolute law/rule for every conceivable circumstance. “You shall not murder” does not mean, for example, “Human life is never to be taken.” Or “wives submit to your husband always no matter what he commands.” And here, “the Christian is never permitted to disobey or oppose the ruling authorities.”

Now, with all of this in mind, let’s go back and read Peter’s words again:

1Pe 2:12-25 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (13) Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, (14) or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (15) For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (16) Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (17) Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the

emperor. (18) Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. (19) For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

(20) For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

(21) For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. (22) He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. (23) When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (24) He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. (25) For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

We will have to continue looking at this passage in more detail next time, but let’s just sum up the principle point here:

“The Christian must always live his/her life in this world in such a way that the world realizes you are an honorable person, not an evildoer – even if they hate you and call you an evildoer! It is unprofitable for a Christian to behave as a rebel against the king, refusing to submit to the law or to grant the king the honor due him. This will only malign the gospel and increase the suffering of Christ’s people in this world.

1Ti 2:1-4 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, (2) for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. (3) This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, (4) who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

See it? There is a direct correlation between the Christian’s relationship to the king and whether or not we are able to live a peaceful, quiet life. Therefore we must never unduly alienate the civil authorities by abusing our freedom in Christ and claiming we need not obey earthly rulers.

At the same time, there are occasions such as this:

Exo 1:22 Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

Exo 2:1-3 Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. (2) The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. (3) When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank.

Heb 11:23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.