

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1 Peter 1:3–5 ESV)

Be Subject For The Lord's Sake

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1 Peter 2:13-17

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 2:13; that's on page 1015 in your pew Bibles. While you find that let me remind you of where we left off in the text. 2 weeks ago we spoke how Peter was preparing his people to live their faith OUT in a hostile world. He said:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 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. (1 Peter 2:11–12 ESV)

And now in the section that we are entering here, Peter begins to explain in detail what that honourable conduct will look like in a variety of different social situations. He speaks first of all in a general way in verses 13-17 – we'll look at that today – and then he addresses certain situations in which it would be very difficult to apply this particular counsel. He talks about slaves who are believers and who find themselves serving under unbelieving masters. And he talks about wives who are believers who find themselves married to unbelieving husbands. Those would be difficult and perhaps even dangerous contexts in which to apply this general teaching – and we'll look at those situations next week and the week after that. This week, as I mentioned, we are looking at Peter's GENERAL counsel as to how live as a Christian within the various structures and institutions of a fallen and hostile world. Hear now the Word of the Lord,

beginning at verse 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. (1 Peter 2:13–17 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Well, as I mentioned in these verses Peter is speaking generally about our need to conduct ourselves honourably within a variety of normal human relationships. Listen again to verse 13:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to **every human institution** (v.13)

Wayne Grudem says helpfully here:

The inclusiveness of the word *every* makes it appropriate to apply this statement therefore to other legitimate human authorities (parents/children, church officers/members, and authority structures in businesses, educational institutions, voluntary organizations, etc.). God has established such patterns of authority for the orderly functioning of human life, and it both pleases and honours him when we subject ourselves to them.¹

So this first paragraph that we are looking at today is speaking IN GENERAL TERMS. He says a variety of things that I think we can organize usefully under 4 basic headings. He talks about:

- 1. The Goal Of The Believer**
- 2. The Purpose Of The Government**
- 3. The Power Of Public Righteousness**
- 4. The Right Use Of Christian Liberty**

Following that at the end of the passage Peter provides a summary and an application statement where he tells the believers to give to all people what is owed them and so we will work through this passage according to those divisions in the order that we find them.

First of all then we learn some things in this passage about:

¹Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 126.

The Goal Of The Believer

The text that we are reading this morning is very similar to some other passages that we find in the letters of the Apostle Paul. In Ephesians 5 and 6 for example he talks about the importance of conducting ourselves appropriately in a variety of different relational contexts. He talks about husbands and wives, he talks about children and parents and he talks about masters and servants. You can find a similar set of instructions in his letter to the Colossians. And what is interesting is that in none of these texts do we find the Bible telling Christians to advocate for the overthrow of social institutions. No Apostle of Jesus Christ ever says: we need to get rid of marriage! It is an out dated institution that is holding women down! In no text of Scripture do we ever read that. Rather we read:

Let marriage be held in honor among all (Hebrews 13:4 ESV)

Rather we read:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25 ESV)

and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:33 ESV)

Do you see that? The Bible NEVER tells us to ATTACK or DISMANTLE social institutions – rather it tells us how to CHANGE THEM FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

Are you hearing that?

It is so important that we hear that.

When we read texts like this we need to understand what they are saying about the goal and the mission of the believer in Jesus Christ. I think these passages make it VERY CLEAR what our GOAL IS NOT. Clearly, given what we find in these passages:

Our goal as Christians is NOT:

- A. The dismantling of social institutions**
- B. The control of political machinery**
- C. The overthrow of unjust government**

That is NOT what we've been called to pursue as followers of Jesus Christ – how could it be? Jesus was never interested in pursuing those things. When the crowds came to him in Galilee and tried to make him King by force – what did he do?

He ran away!

Why? Because he didn't want to save the world through social revolution. He didn't want to become the King of Israel by defeating the Romans in open combat. That is not the way of the Kingdom of God.

When he stood before Pilate, what did Jesus say?

“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” (John 18:36 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

If Jesus had wanted a political kingdom than he would have told you to be fighting against the political structures of the world – but he didn't want that – so he didn't SAY THAT. Which is why the Apostles never say that either.

Our goal is not to overthrow the structures of the world. Our goal is to conduct ourselves WITHIN those structures in such a way as to win a hearing for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because we believe that the Kingdom is built as people take hold of Christ!

We read about that a couple of weeks ago. Peter said earlier in this chapter that AS WE COME TO CHRIST – AS WE TAKE HOLD OF CHRIST – we are becoming a spiritual house, a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

Do you want Canada to BE A HOLY NATION, friends?

Then don't attack the structures, pursue the people.

Help men, women, boys and girls discover the life changing POWER of Jesus Christ.

That's how we change the world.

Secondly in this passage we learn something about:

The Purpose Of The Government

Look at verse 14. Peter says that we should submit to the King or the Governor as those:

sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (1 Peter 2:14 ESV)

Let's just pause there and notice that Peter says that the Emperor or the King is SENT BY GOD.

The King is ordained by God. The Apostle Paul says the same thing in Romans 13. He says:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. (Romans 13:1 ESV)

Are you hearing that?

According to the Bible God has ORDAINED GOVERNMENT and has given to the government TWO SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS.

The first one Peter mentions is:

A. To punish evil

And the second is:

B. To promote good

That's the job of the government! That is their legitimate scope of action and authority. The government can enforce laws. The government can fine, imprison or execute evil doers. And the government can do a variety of things that will promote good. That may mean everything from incentivizing charitable giving through the offering of tax rebates to paving roads to facilitate trade and commerce.

The government is a servant of God in order to restrain evil and promote good upon the earth. But that isn't to say that they are always godly or moral in the execution of their Divine Mandate. Nero was the Emperor of Rome when Peter and Paul said these things. Nero was evil – Nero was arguably the greatest tyrant in the ancient world and so that is why Peter goes on to talk about:

The Power Of Public Righteousness

There are going to be times when foolish, wicked or perhaps simply ignorant rulers are going to take an unhealthy interest in you. They are going to persecute you and treat you poorly – don't take up arms against them – rather overwhelm them, perplex them, astound them and win them through your witness of conduct and Christian charity. Look at verse 15:

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. (1 Peter 2:15 ESV)

The greatest argument for the Christian faith is supposed to be the transformed lives of Christian people. Our neighbours are supposed to look at our lives and SEE the power of God at work in us overcoming jealousy, anger, rivalry, unforgiveness, lust, fearfulness and self-centeredness. They are supposed to see kind people, civil people, generous people, gentle people, faithful people, and merciful people – and seeing that they are supposed to be drawn to the life changing power of the Gospel.

That's how it is supposed to work – and that's how it did work for much of our history.

The Roman people before they embraced Christianity, did not typically value things like mercy, generosity and charity. Historian Rodney Stark says here:

“In the pagan world, and especially among the philosophers, mercy was regarded as a character defect and pity as a pathological emotion: because mercy involves providing *unearned* help or relief, it is contrary to justice.”²

In contrast to that, historian Paul Johnson writes:

“The Christians... ran a miniature social welfare state in an empire which for the most part lacked social services.”³

Stark goes on to say:

“All congregations had deacons whose primary job was the support of the sick, infirm, poor and disabled..... nothing illustrates the immense benefits of Christian life better than responses to the two great plagues that struck the empire.”⁴

He tells the story of how the early church won the hearts of the Roman people. There were two great plagues – about 100 years apart – in the Roman Empire that effectively decimated the population. The death rate was about 30% in each case. Imagine that. Imagine a plague going through Orillia and killing 10,000 people. Then imagine that 100 years later it happened again. In both cases, each time the plague struck, every Roman with a horse made haste for the countryside and for the coast and there were massive traffic jams on the roads as all the Christians from surrounding communities came marching into the cities to care for the sick and the dying.

At the end of the second plague the pagan priests came back into the city and tried to resume serving in the local temples but they were dragged out into the streets and beaten to death by the people. You abandoned us when the plague hit our city. But the Christians came to our rescue – so now we worship Jesus.

Now, beating pagan priests to death in the streets is NOT the right way to express your new found Christian piety – but I think the point is that there is POWER in PUBLIC RIGHTEOUSNESS.

We will never argue our way back into the centre of Canadian culture.

But we might love our way – we might MERCY our way – we might SERVE our way back into

² Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 112.

³ Paul Johnson as cited in *The Triumph Of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 112.

⁴ Stark, 114.

the heart of Canadian culture. The Lord has his ways; His timing and His means. And while we wait for our opportunity, let us invest in our infrastructure of love and mercy. Let's figure this deacon thing out. Let's figure this kindness, sacrifice and service thing out and let's make sure that we are prepared to offer a compelling witness of PUBLIC RIGHTEOUSNESS should the opportunity arise in our generation.

That's how you win an Empire.

And fourthly, that is the right use of Christian liberty.

The Right Use Of Christian Liberty

Look at verse 16:

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. (1 Peter 2:16 ESV)

In the early church there were at least 3 heresies that we can identify that are being addressed already within the canon of the New Testament. The first heresy was the idea that you had to believe in Jesus AND obey certain Old Testament ritual laws in order to be saved. You see that heresy being addressed by Paul in his Letter to the Galatians. The second heresy was the idea that Jesus was fully God but NOT fully man. Sometimes that heresy is called "proto-gnosticism" or "proto-docetism" – it doesn't really matter what you call it – what matters is that there were people who doubted that Jesus had ever come in the flesh. The Apostle John addressed that one. He said:

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 1:7 ESV)

The third heresy appears to have been the most common. It was addressed by Paul in his first letter to Timothy and by Jude in his letter and TWICE by Jesus in The Book of Revelation in the 7 letters to the churches. It is the heresy of antinomianism. Antinomianism is the idea that because we are saved by GRACE the law has NO VALUE and Christians can do pretty much, whatever they like.

Peter addresses that heresy explicitly in his second epistle to these people. In 2 Peter 2 he talks about false prophets who:

indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. (2 Peter 2:10 ESV)

They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, while they feast with you. 14 They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. (2 Peter 2:13–14 ESV)

These are those, he says, who have:

followed the way of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15 ESV)

Balaam you might remember was the prophet that was hired by the Moabites to CURSE the people of God. Balaam replied that he couldn't curse what God was blessing but he did know how to get the people of God to curse themselves. Just send some of your beautiful young women into their camp to invite the young men to come to their local festivals. Those local festivals were basically just drunken orgies dressed up as worship to the gods of fertility. You ask the gods to bless your harvest seed by having sex with temple prostitutes – it was a very popular religious event in the ancient world as you can well imagine. If you can get the young men to go to those festivals then you won't have to worry about them anymore, Balaam says, for they will have made themselves the enemy of God.

It was a good strategy – and it would have worked if not for the zeal of Phinehas.

That's the heresy of antinomianism. Antinomianism is the belief that you can worship God WHILE PARTICIPATING in all the sin and smut of the local culture.

And it was by far the most common heresy in the early church.

Isn't that interesting?

Now you can see how this could have been a bit confusing. If the Bible is clear about anything it is clear that we are saved by grace and NOT by keeping the law. So it isn't terribly surprising to learn that some new Christians made the leap to thinking that if the law doesn't save us then

obviously God doesn't care about law.

NO.

The law doesn't save us but it does point us in the direction of wisdom, love and righteousness – so it's a good thing if used properly.

But keeping all of that straight was one of the major pastoral concerns in the New Testament era. So here in 1 Peter we see the Apostle trying to head that particular error off at the pass. He says **YOU ARE FREE**. You are saved by the **FREE GRACE** of God – but not so that you can go home and smoke pot and watch porn and have a week long nap in your momma's basement. **NO!**

You are free so that you can **SERVE GOD**.

You are **FREE** and **FILLED** with the Holy Spirit so that you can **RESEMBLE** and **REPRESENT** **GOD** before all creation as you were originally created and designed to do.

That's the **RIGHT USE** of Christian liberty. That's what it means to live free! Christian liberty doesn't mean: I'm saved by grace therefore I can do whatever I want. Christian liberty means I'm saved by grace therefore I can give my life in service of God and other people.

The Christian life is a suicide mission – but it makes sense – perfect sense – because our life – our real life – our eternal life – is safe with God in Christ.

Verse 17 then is both a summary and a statement of application. Peter rounds off this section of general teaching by saying:

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:17 ESV)

You'll notice that the word "honour" is used in the first and last command – that is what scholars refer to as an "inclusio" – it's like a set of book ends that mark of a unified set. So Peter is telling us here to give what is owed in every relationship that we as Christian people find ourselves in.

Let's quickly look at the four categories that he mentions.

Application: Give To Everyone What Is Owed

1. What Is Owed "To All People"?

He says first of all that Christians have an obligation to honour everyone – be they believers in Christ or not. Wayne Grudem says here:

Christians should be courteous and respectful to all people.⁵

There is of course never a good reason for a Christian person to be RUDE or disrespectful to anyone. All people have been created in the image and likeness of God and therefore all people should be treated with dignity, kindness and respect. That is a DUTY which we owe as God's people to EVERYONE – irrespective of their belief or unbelief in Jesus Christ.

Secondly; Peter says that we should give what is owed to the church.

2. What Is Owed To The Church?

He says specifically that we should LOVE the church – well does that entail? Let me suggest a few things. First of all I would say that Christians owe their ATTENDANCE to the church. When you aren't here it affects us as a community. We can't BE a community if you aren't here. A large part of the magic of the church is you. You speaking kindly to newcomers. You inviting a new family over to your home. You helping a new believer make sense of the message in the lobby after the service. You adding your voice to our collective praise. All of that presupposes your attendance.

Now, of course, there will be weeks when you are on vacation, there will be weeks when you or your kids are sick, and weeks when you might be travelling to a job interview or taking a course or whatever. But all of that probably only adds up to 10 reasonable absences per year. So 42

⁵Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 130.

weeks of the year, loving the church means being at church. I think that is fair to say.

Secondly and thirdly – we’ll do them together - you owe the church the full use of your talent and treasure. This church can’t be the church without those things. This church is the sum total of your time, talent and treasure – humanly speaking. Now obviously the real power is when God sends his Spirit to ANIMATE your time, talent and treasure – but we know that God generally works through ordinary means. So the more of our time, talent and treasure you make available the more there is for God to animate by his Holy Spirit.

Now again Peter is saying all of this under the heading of LOVE not LAW. So I’m not going to throw out a percentage here and bind your conscience to that – Peter just said we aren’t SAVED by keeping laws or by giving certain amounts – but he also just said that we aren’t FREE from the law in order to DO whatever we like. The law isn’t our Saviour but it remains a helpful GUIDE in terms of how to live lovingly before God and others so I think we would search the Scriptures for GUIDANCE on all those “how much” questions.

However you slice it – good church is expensive and it requires massive investments of time, talent and treasure so loving this place means giving those things.

Thirdly, Peter says that we are to FEAR GOD.

3. What Is Owed To God?

To fear God – doesn’t mean to be afraid of him – it means to ESTEEM HIM CORRECTLY. Simply stated, it means to PUT GOD IN THE CENTRE OF YOUR LIFE. It means to have Christ as your cornerstone.

That is the MOST IMPORTANT thing – but it also the thing we have already talked about the most so given the time then I think we’ll move directly to the last thing that Peter says here; he says that we have an obligation as Christians to honour the Emperor.

4. What Is Owed To The State?

Christians owe the state certain things. Let me list 4. We owe the state:

- A. Limited Obedience**
- B. Taxes**
- C. Respect**
- D. Conscientious Objection**

The first and the last are obviously related. We owe the state obedience – but we also owe the state periodic protest and refusal. We think of Daniel’s refusal to worship the King as if he were a God – and of course he was cast into the Lion’s Den for so doing. But he OWED that to the King and if you recall, it made quite an impression on the King.

We think of Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego. They also made peaceful protest and they also suffered formal punishment – they were thrown into the fiery furnace. But they too made quite an impression on their earthly Sovereign.

In the New Testament we think of Peter and John’s refusal to leave off preaching about Jesus – despite being commanded to do so by their human authorities. They suffered a beating but they rejoiced for having been counted worthy to suffer on behalf of the Name.

Sometimes the thing we owe the state is our conscientious objection.

Sometimes the best thing we can do is remind the king that he is NOT GOD.

He has the right to our respect. He has the right to our taxes. He has the right to punish our disobedience but he does NOT HAVE THE RIGHT to our worship and he does not have the right to define right and wrong.

Sometimes serving the Lord and loving the King will require us to say NO.

This is what it means to be salt and light – this is how we win a hearing for the Gospel – and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.