

*Respect*  
1 Peter 2:11-17  
3/6/16  
Randy Lovelace

Now, Lord, we pray that you would commit your Word to us as we seek to give ourselves to your Word, and may you make us a people who are changed by your Word. And may you help the teacher this morning by your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

We turn this morning to 1 Peter 2. I'll be reading 1 Peter 2. I'll be reading specifically verses 11 to 25, but I'm only going to be covering 11 to 17 this morning. And then this evening—we do have an evening Lord's Supper service—I'll be covering the rest of this passage, 18 to 25, tonight. So we'd love to have you join us tonight for our Lord's Supper service. Hear now God's Word, 1 Peter 2:11-25.

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin,  
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God.

I love cats, and they've taught me a great deal about respect. I'm not alone in this. In the famous children's book, *Alice in Wonderland*, tells how a particular cat taught her about respect. This is what it says—meaning the Cheshire cat: “The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured, she

thought: still it had *very* long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt that it ought to be treated with respect.”

I grew up with cats of all different kinds, most of which had claws but were also very furry, beautiful. I’d walk into a room, and they taught me how to respect cats even if I didn’t know a particular cat. I’d walk into the room, and my first inclination, because I loved them, I’d want to get their attention. But I learned through my first cat that you had to approach carefully. They come to you, not the other way around. And you learn just how complex they are. For if you’re not careful and you just see them as a ball of fur, you could go away with some scratches. If you think they’re just claws, you could miss out on having a really good friend. Yes, cats can be good friends. But it teaches you something, that if we’re willing to walk into a room—let’s say if some of you this morning, and don’t applaud—if you don’t like cats like I don’t like snakes, if you just can’t bear up with cats and you walk into a room, you recognize even if you don’t like them, and even if you do, you can’t just approach one willy-nilly. You recognize that they are a complex creature, and they decide. You don’t.

Isn’t it interesting that oftentimes we’ll show greater respect to the complexity of a dog or a cat than we will with respecting the complexity of other human beings? For we, like cats, have very long claws and a great many teeth. And sometimes we treat some people like a ball of fur, as if they can’t do anything wrong. Other times we treat people and only see them as purely claws. And it depends on the person. Sometimes it depends on their mood. But what does it mean to respect? To appreciate the complexity of another human being? And what connection does that have with the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is exactly this—that respect, in its most beautiful demonstration, is inherently attached to the gospel. Let’s look together. Two points: the ground of respect, the freedom of respect.

The ground of respect upon which we can talk about how we treat other people, and the only way we are to talk about treating other people. So here is the first line. If you don’t remember anything else that I say today, it is this. The only ground we who profess Christ have for how we treat other human beings is the example of Christ and how he bore up under his suffering for our salvation. The ground of respect is this: it is the submission and obedience of Christ.

I’ve preached this text a number of times, and oftentimes I’ve highlighted how he talks about exiles and strangers. When I realized after studying it a number of years, that in fact, in coming back to it this week, that indeed it’s not about actually exiles and strangers, because that is a consequence of a prior action of Jesus. It’s because of Jesus’s submission and obedience to the Father that has made those who profess Christ a new people. And what he says to these new people is really how we’re to live our lives. And it’s really the bottom line of this whole passage in many ways.

What he wants us to do is what he says in verse 17: show proper respect to everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers. Fear God and honor the King. Left to itself, that sounds really good. And yet also, if we’re honest, it sounds really difficult. Until we get to the actual ground, the motivation upon which we are to understand that instruction, that imperative, and it is this—when he describes, Peter does, in verse 21, what Jesus did.

Now, remember what verse 17 says. It says, “Show proper respect to everyone.” Meaning, consider others in their complexity, in their beauty, in their difficulty, in all that they are. Respect other beings. “Love the brotherhood of believers.” Love those who profess Christ with you. “Fear God.” Meaning, recognizing his authority and our submission to that authority. And then, “Honor the King.” Honor those and respect those whom the Lord has put in places of authority among men and nations.

So let’s look, then, at how Jesus is the ground for all of that. Because that’s exactly what Peter tells us in verse 21. “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you.” That’s the whole idea. What was his suffering? His suffering was an act of love to bring about for himself a people who would trust in him. It would be the church. So he shows his love for the brotherhood by laying down his life for others. He’s living out verse 17. He leaves you an example so that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin

and no deceit was found in his mouth. What did he do when he was before men and women? He lived such a good life that people were drawn to his light. He lived a good life among men, which is what Peter talks about earlier when he's instructing us.

Verse 23—when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He feared God. He trusted and submitted himself to the will of the Father who ordained all things to come to pass, and he submitted himself justly to the one who judges justly. So that enabled him with radicalness to submit to the taunts and threats and the death of other human beings. And he did not retaliate.

What's interesting is that when it says, "Show proper respect to everyone," meaning he didn't retaliate. Now here's the rub. Did Jesus have the freedom to retaliate? You bet he did. He was the Son of the Living God. Did he have the authority to retaliate? Yes. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus Christ. He could by his authority with a whisper of his mouth wipe everyone out. But rather, he laid down his glory, the glory of his authority, the glory of his freedom, and chose to submit himself even to the taunts and threats and death of others who would place him on the cross. Jesus did not use his freedom to indulge the flesh, but he used his freedom to give his life away to others because of his love, even to the point where he would even honor Pontius Pilate. He did not ridicule Pontius Pilate. He did not taunt him. He did not wag a finger in his face.

This is the only ground we as a people, if you profess Christ—and if you don't, you need to hear that this is the Christian message of the gospel. That we, as we treat one another, whether you're in the faith or not, the only ground is what Jesus Christ has done for us. So it isn't just that verse 17 hangs out there as a command that Peter just wants us to take up a smile and oh, isn't it easy. Rather, he draws us directly from the resource for how we are to live out our lives among others in the world.

And so when Jesus dies for us and when he laid down his life for the brothers and sisters, the body of Christ, he showed proper respect; he loved the church, the sheep; he feared God and submitted himself to the Father's will; he honored the ruling authorities even. And why? He did it all in the context of bitter and difficult suffering. For what end? To create for himself a new people. And when he was raised on the third day, he served as the first born among many brothers, among many people who would be drawn to himself through his death and resurrection to make a church of exiles and strangers.

What he means by that is not that these Christians to whom Peter is writing were exiles and strangers in the countries that they lived. It wasn't talking about their political status or their ethnic status. Rather, they were exiles and strangers to the way they once lived. Now they live as those who follow Christ in their home country, but in a radically different way than they used to. And so they were still living in the country of modern-day Turkey. They still had the same families. They still had the same relationships. Still lived in the same cities. But now they did so as those who have learned a new language and would refuse to put themselves back under the kind of lifestyle and the kind of things their surrounding neighbors and their surrounding culture gave themselves to. Jesus died to make a people for himself so that they would be, as Jesus would say, that your light may shine among men. That is the ground of respect—the work of Christ on our behalf to make us a people for himself in the world.

What is our lives in the world meant to do? Madeleine L'Engle puts it this way. She says,:

We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.

Meaning when you are reviled and disrespected for your faith in Christ, when you're diminished and made fun of because you're thought odd because of your practices of your Christian faith—you respond not with retreat or with retaliation, but with this: I understand exactly why you would think that, because

I used to think that. I can imagine what you would think, because I'm not doing these things because I suddenly thought them up; it's because Christ has changed my life. And that doesn't always happen in that crisp a way. It may happen in lots of little ways. People who shrug you off in your neighborhood or in your place of work or among your friend sets. Some who just know, perhaps, if you profess faith, think of you as odd and they give you the cold shoulder.

And regardless, have you thought about way—"Lord, how can I show an act of love to that person, that they may see not me, but they may see the light of Christ? Because that's precisely how I once treated you: with disregard, disrespect, and dismissiveness. But you showed your light upon me and gave me your grace. And if that is the ground for how I'm to treat others, then may the light of my life serve as a signpost to the source of the light of grace, Jesus Christ." That by his grace, we would not feel the need to point out the wrongness of others' beliefs or to judge them in what we believe according to the Scriptures is the way we're not to live—but rather, to love and walk among them. Yet without plunging ourselves back into the ways we once lived.

How do we do that? We've already read of it this morning. The only way we can do this is by the incredible, heavenly power and person of the Holy Spirit. For what I am speaking of in regard to respecting and loving others is the fruit of the Spirit. And it is not possible to do on our own flesh. Left to our own flesh, we retaliate, we dismiss, we shut people out, and we avoid them. "I'll show you for doing that to me." It is so common to us. And if it is not but for the Holy Spirit, we will walk in that flesh. But the Holy Spirit has been given to us so that the ground of our respect isn't just an abstract idea, but rather that the Holy Spirit would animate our speech and our tongues and our actions towards others—towards everyone, the passage says. Proper respect to everyone. That's a tall order, an impossible thing to do, except for the incredible power of the Holy Spirit.

So if this is the ground of respect, what is the freedom of respect? So this idea of respect, then, is understanding the complexity of our lives, the complexity of other peoples' lives, and that we are called to live as exiles and strangers in the world who follow Jesus Christ. That means we recognize that we are people who are called to Christ. We are under authority. The first authority that a Christian is under is not the Governor of this State or the leader of Howard County or the President of the United States. We're first under the authority of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As such, we live as a people who are under an authority that is above all authorities.

And because of that, that enables us, if we have submitted ourselves and respect the authority—as Christ did—of the one who judges justly, and we've submitted ourselves to him, then we can freely move out into the world among others who have been placed in authority over us temporally, horizontally in the world around us. In fact, the passage tells us that one of the things exiles are to do—he says, "I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, that they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation," is the way that that is actually to be translated.

The whole idea is this—that the ground of respect, the work of Christ, makes a people who then move out into the world, who are under authority, who then move out freely to live such good lives among other people that though they accuse us of doing wrong, meaning we don't plunge into the same practices that we once did or the surrounding culture—that though people make fun of you and may say you're doing something wrong or whatever ridiculous, that they will actually thank God when Jesus returns.

And this whole idea, by the way, of that phrase "thank God on the day of visitation" or "give glory to God on the day of visitation," that means that our lives will actually be used by God to bring others to salvation. This is the freedom of respect. Respect first to the one who judges justly that gives us the freedom to move out into the world and to live good lives—good lives meaning moral lives. Morality not in terms of legalism, but the ways in which Jesus has taught us to live from his Word and the gospels

which we hear his instruction. Again, aided by the Holy Spirit and only by his grace, we are called to walk and follow him.

He then says something interesting in verse thirteen, which is easy to misunderstand. He says, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men.” Now, that is a difficult Greek phrase to translate, but the idea is this. Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake. Notice the Lord is still the ground. For the Lord’s sake, to every person in authority—every human. Not to just an abstract idea of office or position, but to that human being who is in that office. To show proper respect, to submit.

Now, this idea of submitting carries with it the deeper meaning of the word “respect.” It isn’t servile servitude, if you will. I know that’s probably redundant, but it’s not servitude to that person to the point where we are willing to disobey God to please this person. Rather, we recognize because we’re under authority and he’s given us other authorities that we are to submit to, we seek to obey the authorities that have been placed over us. And we show them honor and respect when we do so.

And so this freedom of respect enables us to move out into the world, to live such good lives among those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Secondly, to learn how to obey the authorities, meaning submitting ourselves to those whom God has placed in authority. God’s Word—and I don’t have enough time to go over it this morning—the places where God clearly is the one who institutes authority among men and among women and among nations. He’s not somehow the clockmaker and then backs away from it all. Now, his ways are inscrutable. I can’t tell you why it is what it is. And he is not the cause of the sinful actions of leaders. Rather, he is the one who has allowed the institutions of these things to be in place. And he calls us under his authority to seek to obey those authorities he has placed over us.

The third thing is to live with freedom as those under God’s authority, to submit to them, which means this. He gets to this verse seventeen. He says to show respect, proper respect, to everyone. And we’re not to use our freedom as believers who are under a more ultimate authority to just disregard the authorities here or to ridicule them or to make fun of them or to dismiss them. We’re actually called to do something that is so profoundly gospel-oriented and yet so profoundly difficult, and that is to actually pray for those who are in places of authority among men and nations—even when we didn’t vote for them; even when we disagree with them.

That is so profoundly of the gospel, because it goes against every—most of the time, most of fellow Americans that I know—it goes against the grain of most American Christians that I have met, including myself. It is a difficult thing, whether they be an elected authority or they are in a place of work. How hard it is to submit to others in authority when you don’t respect them or you don’t like them or you disagree with them. But he doesn’t give us that out. The gospel calls us to live with something that is really underneath all respect towards others, and that is to live with love towards those who are in authority around us.

I’ll finish this morning with this quote, and then I’ll wrap up the sermon, because I can’t wrap it up any better than this. I came across this, this week, and it cut directly to the core. It cuts directly to the core of where our nation is and the historical moment that we find ourselves in. The good news is, everybody here falls under the umbrella of what this man says. His name is David Dark. He was a high school literature, English teacher. Went on to get his Ph.D. Taught at Belmont University in Nashville, and now serves and teaches at a women’s correctional facility for Tennessee. In his new book called *Life’s Too Short to Pretend You’re Not Religious*, he says this:

When I label people, I no longer have to deal with them thoughtfully. I no longer have to feel overwhelmed by their complexity, the lives they live, the dreams they have. I know exactly where they are inside—or forever outside—my field of care, because they’ve been taken care of. The mystery of their existence has been solved and filed away before I’ve had a chance to be moved by them or even begun to catch a glimpse of who they might be.

They've been neutralized. There's hardly any action quite so undemanding, so utterly unimaginative, as the affixing of a label. It's the costliest of mental shortcuts.

Of course we get to call it like we see it. What else can we do? But when we do so with undue haste, when we're neither remotely inquisitive nor especially curious in our regard for other people, we may find that a casual demonization comes to pepper our conversations. This is why it often seems to me that calling someone liberal, conservative, fundamentalist, atheist or extremist is to largely deal in curse words. It puts a person in what we take to be their place, but it only speaks in shorthand. When I go no further in my consideration of my fellow human, I betray my preference for caricature over perception, a shrug as opposed to a vision of the lived fact of somebody in a body. In the face of a perhaps beautifully complicated life, I've opted for oversimplification.

I don't care where you fall on the political spectrum. Even if you are so disinterested, surely you've heard of all the hubbub. I have not watched one debate, except my family was away on Tuesday night, and I watched about fifteen minutes. You can imagine the thoughts that ran across my head. And I'm a registered independent. And yet I need to elect someone, and somebody's going to be there for me to write in. And I'm watching all of this. It is so easy to deal in labels. It is so easy to oversimplify someone as a buffoon or an extremist or a liberal or a conservative or a Christian or an atheist. And we put people in these boxes, and when we do, I find in my own heart that I just put them in that box and I put that box away, and I'm tempted to not go to that box anymore unless I absolutely have to. And I'll confess to you, one of the biggest temptations is most of the time, when I go back to that box, it's not to pray for them, but it's to deconstruct them, perhaps to ridicule them. Full-out honest confession to you this morning.

And yet as I prepared for this passage, I could not do so and preach this Word unless I was honest from my own heart of how difficult it is to live under submission to authorities on this earth whom I may agree or disagree with, like or dislike. And yet that is precisely what this passage calls us to, but not as an end in and of itself, but as a response to the work of Jesus Christ who died that we might have life, who submitted himself even to the point of death into the hands of those who would hate him. And yet no deceit was found in his mouth. And he submitted himself to the Father, and he was raised to life. And he's called those who believe in him to faith and to a new life, to lives of respect towards others.

And I recognize this as so much more application than politics. It has application in personal relationships. How often you and I put each other in our boxes. Extravert. Introvert. Oh, that's just their personality. Oh, they're cranky. Oh, they're this. Oh, they're that. And what we're doing is we're not loving and we're not respecting, because we have forgotten how profoundly loving our Savior is who gave himself for us. I can't do this unless his Holy Spirit works it in me. And I believe the only way that we can become a people who open our doors to anyone who will come is because the Holy Spirit has made us a people who seek to respect everyone, because Christ has died for us.

May the Lord enable us to do this. May he move us into confession and repentance, into seasons of prayer for those who are our bosses, those who are our governors, those who are our legislative leaders and elected leaders in this season, in this time, and those who we call neighbors and coworkers, lovers and friends. May the Lord enable us, motivated and animated by the Spirit, through the work of Christ, to respect one another. Let's pray.

Now, Lord, by your grace and mercy and Spirit, make us this kind of people. Lord, begin with me. And I submit to you that it is hard. And yet it feels so easy and shorthand just to put people in boxes. But that is not what you've called me to. That's not what you've called your people to. But, Lord, unless your

Spirit works in us, pointing us to the light of Christ, we can't do it. But it's what you want us to do. Now, Lord, with open hands, we ask you, help us. In Jesus' name. Amen.